Plot Patterns in Manga Based on Propp's Narratological Elements

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Abstract: This article considers how Vladimir Propp's structuralist approach to narratological elements can also be applied to the narrative strategies of manga. Through a generalization of Propp's scheme, an in-depth explanation of how these elements interact with one another, and the addition of new functions where needed, this work demonstrates that these categories are functional for the study of plot patterns found in manga. Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* has been chosen as a basis for this study not only because of the particular versatility and adaptability that it possesses, but also because as Propp himself states, his work may also be applied to genres beyond folk tales: manga proves a particularly apt demonstration because most such works are similarly addressed to a younger demographic. For the purpose of this project, most of the examples provided derive from *shônen* manga, in order to provide for a clearer and singular point of analysis, rather than comparing manga subgenres too. In undertaking this analysis, the work also strives to emphasize that there is room for critical analysis in manga, not purely as a visual medium, but also as a literary one. An analytical approach, such as Propp's framework makes possible, thus becomes a valuable means of discussing this rich body of work.

Keywords: Comparative analysis, formalism, manga, narrative arcs, narratological elements, Vladimir Propp

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Introduction

The purpose of this work is to analyze the narratological aspects of Japanese manga, particularly focusing on their use of certain comparable plot points. To do so, this work uses Vladimir Propp's elements and his work on folk tales as a basis for comparison and primarily focuses on examples of *shônen* manga for this preliminary discussion. For the purpose of this research, said term will be used mainly – and admittedly, technically improperly – to indicate a genre, one that may be also called "battle manga"; to clarify, *shônen* in its most proper translation does not actually refer to a type of manga but rather to the demographic of readers (i.e., young teen males between 12 and 18), even if it is often used this way.

The expected result of this analysis is that a generalization of Propp's indicated elements will provide a scheme that will encompass most, if not all, narratological elements in *shônen* manga. The final objective is hence to delineate a new type of scheme, using Propp's work as a basis and either modifying certain elements or creating others *ad hoc* when needed; with this newly revised scheme, it will be possible to better and more formally analyze the development of manga plots. Various examples from manga will be provided to exemplify the narratological aspects being named and expounded on. Future work may also consider how the criteria of the narratological scheme could also be applied to the study of more purely visual forms, especially when considering that in recent decades most anime based on manga follow a more step-by-step serialization of the original source material.

The inspiration for this type of approach, combining a scholar such as Propp and cross-referencing his work on the Russian folktale with Japanese manga, derives from Marcello Ghilardi's argument that:

> The comic strip (manga in this case), is to be interpreted as a point of encounter, a terrain that has to be discovered, a place of intertwined

dialogue. It represents a cultural crossover, of stylistic and integrative exercise, and a usage of points of view that complete one another because isolated would not be able to render the object in its entirety. Japan, as any other cultural reality, is never an object that may be observed neutrally or dissected with scientific method.[1]

Despite other points of difference, the cultural crossover and the point of encounter of an intertwined dialogue that Ghilardi mentions here can also serve as a reminder regarding the nature of this work. That is, this project will strive to bridge two different cultures and branches of knowledge and strive to demonstrate that, although divided by geographical and temporal boundaries, they in fact share many productive similarities. A certain validation of such an approach is also provided by Alan Dundes' statement when utilizing Propp's elements to analyze yet another genre:

> clearly, the game of "Old Witch" contains a number of Propp's functions and, in one sense, the game appears to be a dramatized folktale. Moreover the "Old Witch" game bears a superficial resemblance to the Aarne-Thompson tale type 123, "The Wolf and the Kids." But what is important here is that the morphological analysis of folktales appears to apply equally well to another genre of folklore —traditional games, thereby providing further confirmation of the validity of Propp's analysis.[2]

A final encouragement for the ambitious work undertaken here derives directly from Propp's own words, as he states upfront that "non-fairy tales may also be constructed according to the scheme cited. Quite a large number of legends, individual tales about animals, and isolated novellas display the same structure."[3] While Propp's statement here encompasses only a small portion of other narrative genres, this research will attempt to go beyond said boundaries and demonstrate the continued versatility of Propp's work.

Brief annotations on Vladimir Propp

Before beginning, it should also be noted that Propp's work is not an isolated case; indeed, it draws heavily from Russian Formalism and this movement's particular interest. Russian Formalists, such as Propp and his peers, attempted to demonstrate the presence of a common scheme throughout a vast majority of novels and written works in literature, despite some of these works being considered groundbreaking. By doing so, Russian Formalists partly undermined the importance of the author, since they shifted their attention from the novelist to the text itself. By analyzing literary works through a more scientific method, less importance was given to the significance of who wrote the texts; more importantly, even a masterpiece was seen as an elaborate scheme of motifs and elements. The importance of Formalists derives from the desire to break a traditional and established method used by other literary critics and to approach literature form a different perspective, basing their analysis on categorization and on the denial of everything else except the form. From this particular perspective, the implication is that every literary work may be placed in a certain category, and by extension, that perhaps it should be.

Building from this precedent, the present work focuses on locating and discussing the formal connections among various manga and the iterations of certain narratological patterns therein. While manga are more frequently considered closer to a form of visual representation rather than literature, this may be a mere preconception; for instance, we might consider Italian Futurism, where written words were intertwined with graphical art even outside of regular sentence patterns. Examples such as this demonstrate that a truly clear-cut distinction can be difficult to be made. Thus, by focusing on manga, the present work highlights how different forms of art – which also contain written text – may be considered part of literature

or studied accordingly, despite differing purpose(s) or varying 'quality,' as this nebulous term is thrown around. Following this reasoning, this research considers whether and how manga can be considered a form of literature, and therefore Propp's Russian Formalist scheme may be applied to several indicative texts.

Also worth noting is how, upon preparing his research, Propp begins with something like a literature review: noticing a severe lack of logical order in the contemporaneous study of folk tales, he opens his *Morphology* by quoting various studies and pointing out why they are not satisfactory. For instance, Wilhelm Wundt (*Völkerpsychologie*) subdivided the folk tale into seven classes; however, Propp poses objections to this approach given the way Wundt employed semantics and the fact that categories and themes were tangled together. Likewise, Vólkov's studies indicated fifteen themes but to Propp these were not scientific and functioned more like an index; on a similar note, he considers Antti Aarne's analysis as meant to be merely a geo-ethnographically index. Overall, Propp notes the common issue that themes are often intertwined with one another, and also that even the simple definition of "theme" is perceived both in a broad sense and as an indefinite concept. To Propp, this is a foundational issue, since "if a division into categories is unsuccessful, the division according to theme leads to total chaos."[4] Veselóvskij's work on the *motif* as the "simplest narrative unit" and Bédier's analysis of the folk tale constants (or elements) he considers more useful to his research. In the first case, though, Propp's main objection is that the motif could have been reduced to a mere sentence, and for the second, he maintains that it was hard to separate the elements and pinpoint what they were. Despite their other shortcomings, though, Propp still names these two scholars as historians of the folk tale and acknowledges that they helped lay the foundation for his own work.

Still, in the absence of a truly satisfactory approach, Propp emphasizes the need for an accurate and rigorous classification of the folk tale. He notices how up until that moment, classification constituted the beginning of the research and that it was subsequently forced on existing material; his solution is to reverse what he saw as a problematic process, instead starting with the study of source material and then establishing a classification schema from there. His main difficulty then becomes the choice of said material; for instance, in their *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, Bolte and Polívka indicate a list of more than a thousand variants of folk tales known in the world[5]. Given this challenge, Propp chooses to confine his study to one hundred Russian folk tales out of the four hundred texts that Aleksandr Afanás'ev had gathered and published in his *Rússkie naródnye skázki* between 1855 and 1864: specifically, he chooses the range from tale 50 to tale 151. In making this selection, Propp reports, he was not interested in the quantity of the material so much as in the quality of the analysis made possible by it.

If for Propp a larger quantity of folk tales became problematic, then for a research regarding manga this difficulty increases tenfold, especially considering that this is a medium in constant evolution and new works are published continuously. To give an estimate and a limited sense of scope: in 2013 manga in Japan held a market share of one third of the printed publications, with 276 manga magazines[6]; these magazines are the serialization on a weekly or monthly basis of graphic narratives, many of which also have their own individual *tankôbon* (volume) editions. As of 2020, there are 172 manga series that span for more than 40 *tankôbons;* each one of these volumes is on average two hundred pages long. In addition to these, there is also an overwhelming quantity of manga only serialized for several volumes, manga that are meant to be *one-shots* (works published as stand-alone stories) and manga

that have ended by this point but that have historically defined manga as a genre (i.e., authors such as Osamu Tezuka and Go Nagai).

For the purpose of this work, then – and similarly to Propp's approach – the research will employ several major manga titles of the specific genre previously mentioned as examples. The main difference between this project and Propp's will be constituted by the fact that instead of creating a narratological scheme *ex novo*, this article will use Propp's research as a basis and focus more on adjusting functions or even suggesting new ones when needed.

Propp's elements applied to manga

One preliminary observation to be made when cross-referencing the vast quantity of manga with Propp's studies is to define what the narratological whole consist of – and hence, what the object of the analysis will be. While in the case of folk tales it may seem that the story itself comprises the nucleus that will be studied, Propp actually has a minor reservation on the topic. In his own words,

> many tales are composed of two series of functions which may be labelled "moves". A new villainous act creates a new "move," and in this manner, sometimes a whole series of tales combine into a single tale. Nevertheless, the process of development which will be described below does constitute the continuation of a given tale, although it also creates a new move. In connection with this, one must eventually ask how to distinguish the number of tales in each text.[7]

In other words, Propp indicates that a complete narrative may be divided into smaller whole stories and those will be subsequently analyzed in a separate manner. A similar difficulty arises when dealing with manga, where it is possible to find stories that evolve for many volumes, have different subplots, feature flashbacks and flash-forwards, and follow different characters. Nevertheless, many such manga – and especially *shônen* – also follow a certain pattern wherein the series is divided into sagas or narrative arcs. Due to these characteristics of manga, the narrative arc

will hence serve as the constituent narrative unit considered in this analytical approach.

A further important clarification to be made here relies upon the fact that folk tales are usually centered around a single protagonist, thus enabling Propp to analyze the tale's hero as an individual. While this may also occur in manga, though, it is more frequent that such texts feature a larger cast of protagonists. In these cases, the collective group acts similar to how an individual fairy-tale protagonist would, such as following a set adventure or storyline; even in the cases where the main characters are separated, in the majority of scenarios they will then regroup for the next phase of the story. With this in mind, we may note that Propp's elements follow the same principle and thus they can still be applied to such a group rather than just to an individual; this creates an overlapping effect where the same function is applied to all of the main characters rather than just the individual, as shall be explained subsequently.

One feature that Propp did not include in his study, but that is recurrent both in fables and also in literature in general, is the uniqueness of the main character; while subtler in folklore, this could be represented by the hero's strength or determination, and as such, does not have a direct impact in Propp's elements. In manga, however, this feature is much more easily recognizable. The manga's main character has either a willpower that is greater than that of the other protagonists or else the strength of determination to surpass the obstacles they have to face; such is the case of Goku's power level in *Dragon Ball*[8], Ichigo's spiritual pressure in *Bleach*[9], and Naruto's charisma in the homonymous series[10], to quote but a few. These traits usually have an appealing effect not only on the secondary characters, but also on the antagonists in certain cases, and to some extent, even on the reader. Considering

their recursivity for the purpose of this article, this intrinsic characteristic will create a new element; this ad hoc added function will be referred to as "untapped potential." It is a quality that the main character possesses and either learns how to use or "taps into it" only under particular circumstances, and this project will expound upon it in further detail later, alongside several other elements. It should be also noted that these changes and addendums were made with the intent of adjusting to the modernizing context in which manga take place, thus serving to separate it from the different historical and cultural environment in which the Russian Formalist movement originated.

The following section of this work will focus on each of the elements that Propp indicated, providing examples taken from particularly recognizable *shônen* manga; a summary of these elements is provided at the end of the article (see *Appendix 1*)[11]. The designation of the functions that Propp originally provided shall be maintained for clarity and immediacy except in instances where alterations are needed; for the purpose of immediacy, an apex letter shall be used associated with the modified function (i.e. **A** becomes **A^M**) in order to highlight the elements that have needed adjustments. The following paragraphs will hence begin with the designation of the element, followed by its description and further explanations and examples. The name of the series will be mentioned in parentheses and a list of the manga mentioned will be provided in an appendix at the end.

Elements in manga

Designation α – this represents the initial situation and for Propp at least, it does not constitute an element.

While it is less common for folk tales, it is useful to underline that manga may start *in medias res* and this may impact the resulting scheme. There are, however, examples where that *in medias res* beginning is functional only to introduce the character and the subsequent flashback constitutes the beginning of the first narrative arc on its own[12].

Designation β – a member of the family or known to the protagonist absents themselves.

Propp also notes that the loss of a family member is also counted as a particular type of departure. This element may constitute a motivation for the hero of the folktale, whereas in manga this is not necessarily the case. For instance, the departure of the father in *Fullmetal Alchemist*[13] is an important plot point mentioned in the beginning of the story, whereas the death of Naruto's parents is explained later on[14].

Designation γ – an interdiction is addressed to the protagonist.

Unmistakable examples of this element include Naruto being told not to read the Scroll of Seals[15], Luffy being told not to eat the Devil Fruit[16] and the taboo of Human Transmutation in alchemy[17]; these instances also represent an important plot point for the development of the character. The interdiction may also be given in form of an admonition.

Designation δ – the interdiction is violated.

In every one of the examples mentioned in the previous element, the interdiction or warning was not regarded, resulting in a drastic change for the protagonist; this function is vastly recursive.

Designation ε – the antagonist makes an attempt at reconnaissance.

One example of this is Raditz who arrives on Earth before Vegeta and investigates on the threats of the planet before preparing the invasion[18]. In another instance, Itachi Uchiha and Kisame Hoshigaki, on behalf of the Akatsuki, go on a reconnaissance mission in the Hidden Leaf Village long before trying to capture Naruto[19].

Designation ζ – the antagonist receives information about his victim.

This element is connected with the previous one as well as the two that follow. Since they are closely intertwined, they usually work as a group of functions rather than isolated ones.

Designation η – the antagonist attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.

Likewise, this element is closely connected with those before and after it.

Designation θ – the victim submits to deception and unwittingly helps his enemy.

A helpful example of the three previous elements derives from the first volume of *Naruto*: Mizuki knows about Naruto's need of approval (designation ζ), and he then tricks Naruto into thinking that the Sacred Scrolls contain useful and important techniques (designation η). Naruto end up believing Mizuki, who only wanted them for himself all along (designation θ).

Designation A^M – the antagonist causes harm to a member of the family or someone who is intertwined with the protagonist.

An example may be Raditz forcefully kidnaping Gohan[20]. In a broader sense, the family may also be considered as the people the protagonist holds dear; a clear application of this amplified meaning can be seen in *Naruto* when Orochimaru attacks Hidden Leaf Village[21].

Designation B^M – misfortune, lack, or personal ambition is made known.

In *shônen* this lack may also be of a physical nature. In *Dragon Ball,* Goku frequently faces antagonists that overpower him; in other words, he lacks the strength to defeat them. The solution to overcome such a difference in power level becomes training. In these cases, the solution is personal training, as it will be explained with designation D.

Propp also suggests that in this function, a solution for the lack is also provided; in manga, this solution coincides better with designation D, the test or training. However, it is important to divide this from a task that is given to the protagonist, which in fact will be interpreted as a lack, or something he has not done yet. Propp also distinguishes the heroes as one of two types. This categorization has been eliminated, given the generalizing nature of this work; as such, Propp's designation C has been also removed given that it refers to "seeker-heroes" and is superfluous.

The words "personal ambition" have been added to Propp's design because this concept represents a goal that the main character sets for themselves, and as such, it may also be interpreted as a lack. It marks the passage from the internal dimension of the character to the external one of the story, and as such it has a central importance. For example, in the cases of Luffy and Naruto, they want to become respectively the king of the pirates and the Hokage, whereas Goku simply wants to become stronger.

Designation ↑ – the protagonist departs.

While this is more common in folk tales given their nature, in manga this is not always the case. However, the departure can be also be interpreted in a metaphorical way, hence the beginning of any type of journey.

Designation D^M – the protagonist is put to the test or undergoes training.

This constitutes the preparation for acquiring the power-up. In manga, this type of test is frequently used to verify the capabilities or determination of the main character; sometimes this results in acquiring a physical object, but more often it results in training or a type of aid. For instance, to inherit All Might's power Izuku Midoriya must clean a large amount of garbage in an allotted period of time and by doing so, All Might decides to become his mentor[22]. Similarly, Kakashi Hatake decides to become the leader of Squad 7 only after putting the combined abilities of three members of the group to the test[23]; here the element of trial is still present, although the function of magical agent or power-up is lacking. For the purpose of generalization, this scheme assumes that if the trial function is accomplished, even if the second part may be lacking, it could also translate to a more symbolical dimension: in *Naruto,* for instance, this would mean that forming Team 7 is sufficient.

Other examples of personal training or preparation for acquiring a power-up include Goku training on King Kai's planet or in the hyperbolic time chamber[24], Ichigo Kurosaki regaining his powers before entering the Soul Society[25], and Luffy training for two years with Rayleigh[26].

Designation F^M – the protagonist acquires the power-up.

As previously mentioned, the power-up may in fact be an object – much like in the folk tales Propp analyzed – but more frequent than not in manga, it stems either

from training or directly through a fight with the antagonist. Examples of this include Goku ending his training in the hyperbolic time chamber[27] or Luffy learning to use *haki* after two years[28]. Acquiring the power-up is not necessarily subordinated to the previous designation, as it may be the result of the untapped potential of the main character, such as when Luffy uses the Second or Third Gear[29].

Designation Up^M – the protagonists' untapped potential.

As previously explained, the protagonist may have a personal feat that is translated into physical strength, charisma, intelligence, or any other outstanding quality that surpasses those of the other characters. In certain situations, this element will function as a turning point, either to face an antagonist or surmount an obstacle. This feat has subtle differences from its counterpart, the acquiring of a power-up (F). Although in many cases they function together, one important point of divergence might be considered the fact that where the power-up is a consequence, either of a donor or of personal training, the untapped potential is intrinsic to the character. In certain cases, it is through the untapped potential that the power-up stems from within the main character.

Designation Con^M – the consequences of the untapped potential.

As its superscript indicates, this is another element that has been added to Propp's scheme and that does not appear in folk tales. Frequently in manga, the untapped potential or the use of an ability that the protagonist possesses also take a physical or mental toll. This may be seen, for instance, in the case of Izuku Midoriya, where the usage of his ability hinders parts of his body[30], or in the case of in the case of Naruto, who may be possessed by the Nine-Tails if he uses too much of its chakra. It is also recurrent that the consequence is known by the protagonist, who usually is reluctant to use said technique or ability because of it. Due to these characters, this

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element also leads to further development of the plot and gives a deeper insight into the protagonist's mindset.

Designation G^M – the protagonist is transferred, delivered, or led elsewhere.

It could be argued that the element of journey is more important in manga than in folk tales; whether or not that is taken, though, it is still important to underline that in this case the transferal derives from an external force or character. The distinction here is that in most cases this element occurs in the middle of the action, whereas the departure element (designation ↑) is easier to find in the first or final stages of the narrative arc of a folk tale. In *shônen* the object of search may also coincide with the location of the antagonist.

There are examples where this relocation serves the plot and is not correlated with the object of search, as Propp had pointed out. One such instance may be considered when Bartholomew Kuma protects the *One Piece*[31] protagonists by sending them all off in different directions.

Designation H – the protagonist and the antagonist join in direct combat.

This element is central in all battle manga, although it may be also found in other genres in a more metaphorical form.

Designation Hp^M – one of the protagonists has a fight with the main character.

This added element is more unique than simple combat between the two opposing parts of the story, since it features a fight between two or more protagonists who were previously on the same side. Usually it represents an instance that serves to enrich the plot and show the dynamic of the cast of main characters. It rarely divides the group of protagonists, such as when Usopp fights Luffy because of their unrepairable ship[32], but it may also create a breaking point where a new antagonist is

created; a partial example of the latter could be considered Sasuke's departure from the Hidden Leaf Village[33].

Designation J – the protagonist is branded.

The brand or mark may be in fact physical, as in the case of Guts being marked with the Brand of Sacrifice[34] or Naruto having the Eight Trigram Seal placed on him at birth[35]. It may also be less visible, as for instance in the case of Edward Elric who sees The Gate of Truth upon attempting forbidden alchemy[36]; his brand will manifest as the ability to perform alchemy without using a transmutation circle.

A more metaphorical branding can be extrapolated from the consequences of a certain action on behalf of the main character; in many cases this is a consequence of violating the interdiction element previously explained (δ). For example, this becomes clear upon considering Luffy eating the Devil Fruit[37]; his "brand" as such becomes not being able to swim.

Designation I – the antagonist is defeated.

This is a counterpart of function H. However, it is also important to reiterate that this confrontation is not represented exclusively by battles. The defeat of the antagonist may not always happen, and in fact it may provide a forking path in the analysis of the narrative structure of the manga. This may result in a repetition of the element of lack (B), for instance if the main protagonist not being strong enough to face the antagonist, and in turn this could lead to a cyclicality of the previous elements of training and power-up (D - F). In some cases, this might also coincide with the ending of a narrative arc and the beginning of a new one. One such example may be found in the Golden Age arc in *Berserk[38]*, where the protagonist is defeated by Griffith.

Designation K – the initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.

In *shônen* manga, this element coincides with the defeat of the antagonist because of the fact that the initial lack was represented by the inadequacy of the main character to face him. However, it is also important to underline that this liquidation differs slightly from Propp's designation W, or the ascension of the hero, that in this article has been renamed as "the protagonist receives a new status". For example, if in *Naruto* the initial lack of the protagonist is considered his alienation from the rest of the village and his ambition translates into Naruto wanting to become Hokage, then it stands to reason to consider the moment he gains such a title as a new status and not a liquidation of a lack. In other words, the liquidation is more frequently associated with intermediate points in narrative arcs.

Designation ↓ – the protagonist returns.

Similarly to what has been said about the protagonist departing from home, this element also may be interpreted in a metaphorical way and symbolize the end of the journey. A further clarification consists in the fact that this ending does not necessarily coincide with the ending of the manga, but rather with the ending of the narrative arc.

Designation RePM / ReAM – the protagonist/antagonist retreats.

Propp combines this element with the following one, considering that a pursuit also implies a retreat. In manga, though, there are several cases where either the protagonist retreats and there is no pursuit or where the antagonist retreats and this in turn leads to other turning points in the plot. Because of this, the present project proposes to divide the retreat into two instances, one for the protagonist (RePM) and one for the antagonist (ReAM). Examples include when Zabusa is helped to retreat by Haku[39] or Goku's retreat after his fight with captain Ginyu[40].

Designation Pr – the protagonist is pursued.

This element is typical in *shônen*, especially when the protagonist is losing against a powerful antagonist and must retreat, which is usually connected with the following element. The function of this element is mostly to create suspense where the main character may hypothetically, in peril, suffer defeat.

Designation Rs – the protagonist is rescued or rescues himself from pursuit.

This is also a frequent element in battle manga; examples include Naruto being protected by his teacher Iruka Umino[41], Izuku Midoriya being saved by All Might[42] and so forth. There are instances where this element might coincide with designation G, the transferal of the protagonists, as previously explained for Bartholomew Kuma in *One Piece*.

Designation L^M – a false protagonist presents unfounded claims.

In manga this element acts as a deconstruction of a trope and, when present, is usually placed at the beginning of the manga or of the narrative arc either to introduce the real protagonist or for comical relief. For example, consider the case of Lucy Heartfilia searching for Natsu Dragneel[43] or Luffy's return to Sabaody after two years and encountering his counterfeit[44].

Designation Ex – the false protagonist is exposed.

This is directly connected with element L, and because of its comical nature in manga, the protagonist is usually immediately exposed.

Designation T – the protagonist is given a new appearance.

Cross-dressing in many cases is also used for comic relief, for instance when Luffy returns to Sabaody and simply wears a fake mustache. However, this may also be used by the protagonist to escape from the antagonist or from a threat.

Designation U – the antagonist is punished.

While this element may be present in manga, there are different possible outcomes. In many cases, by being defeated, the antagonists are eliminated from the story and their punishment becomes the defeat itself.

Designation W^M – the protagonist receives a new status.

Similarly to what has been explained when considering designation K, this element will more frequently coincide with the final point of a narrative arc or of the manga itself. Propp described this element as "ascension to the throne and marriage" given the nature of folk tales; here, it has been decided to simply refer to this element as the "protagonist receiving a new status," because such a wording generalizes the concept and provides a simpler classification.

For instance, a new status may be found in examples such as Luffy gaining a higher bounty[45] or by Naruto becoming Hokage[46].

Designation Z^M – the antagonist helps the protagonist or becomes part of his team.

This element has been added to Propp's scheme, as in manga, it frequently occurs to constitute a bridge between various narrative arcs or sagas. There are many examples that can be analyzed: both Piccolo and Vegeta were first and foremost antagonists who ultimately join Goku after fighting him[47], while both Nico Robin[48] and Itachi Uchiha[49] both act as antagonists until it is revealed that they were not villains in the typical sense to begin with.

Conclusions

In regards to Propp's original scheme, for this study it has been chosen to modify and add several new functions as they generalize the whole concept as it has been previously explained. In other cases, additional elements have been removed. For instance, designations M and N from Propp's scheme have been

eliminated as they involve a task facing the protagonist and its eventual resolution; this decision has been made due to the fact that frequently the task coincides with the trial of the protagonist or his training. This will further simplify the generalized elements. Similarly, designations O and Q – which involve the protagonist arriving unrecognized in another country and subsequently being found out – have also been removed, given their circumstantiality; while they could be correlated with designation T, the protagonist being given a new appearance, O and Q remain less frequent in manga and ultimately unimportant for the development of the plot. Designation E has also removed because it only implies a reaction and is not functional for the plot.

With these revised elements it is possible to build a scheme of the different narrative arcs in the manga that have been used as examples as well as others, similarly to what Propp had done. This analytical approach that would visually represent though a list or string of functions the plot of the manga will not be expanded upon in this work, tough, because it would entail explaining the entire story of the examined narrative arcs and at this early stage, would uselessly weigh down on the overall project. A more in-depth study following this schematic explanation of the narratological elements, however, would help visualize how different *shônen* manga actually use a similar basis for their plot; this would equally emphasize the cyclicality of several functions within the same manga. Another possible point of study, then, could be to analyze how these narrative arcs taken from *shônen* actually differ from the folk tales that Propp had analyzed and examine if there are similarities.

As briefly mentioned earlier, it may be added that the elements analyzed in this article are equally applicable to anime. The manga that have been referenced

here have all been adapted and animated; however, for the purposes of this work, manga were treated as source for the subsequent animation. Analyzing the manga version is somewhat similar to analyzing its animated counterpart; there are, however, exceptions if considering original animations or anime that divert from the original content.

As this project also demonstrates, there is room for critical analysis in manga that it is more directly correlated with literature. This medium combines elements of both literature and art, other than having its own history, has evolved along the decades and adapted. As Itô Gô[50] points out in an analysis of *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*, the former did not present the "inner voice" (or *naigo*) while the latter did. For him, this symbolized an evolution in manga and an important repercussion on the ability of the reader to empathize with the main character. This in turn may even lead to the analysis of the interior monologue found in literary works.

Itô Gô's critical approach to manga is based on the perception it has on the readers: as he puts it, "I am interested in capturing the genre of manga as a higher-level "environment" (*kankyô*) that includes various works and authors, and I treat panel construction and stories as lower-level subsystems specific to particular authors and works."[51] Applying a generalized version of Propp's scheme to manga, this article has aimed to be a complementary study to that higher-level "environment" that Gô emphasizes. By understanding how the narratological elements function in manga and how they develop in similar patterns, this work has attempted to demonstrate that manga, at their core, behave and are produced comparably to other literary works, such as folk tales, even if here the written word is also accompanied by visual representations of the story.

Appendix 1 - Propp's Scheme

α represents the initial situation and does not constitute one of the elements.

1. ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY ABSENTS HIMSELF FROM HOME (Definition: absentation. Designation: β) – the absentee may be of an older or younger generation and accepts even the loss of a family member as an exception.
2. AN INTERDICTION IS ADDRESSED TO THE HERO. (Definition: interdiction. Designation: γ) it can even be an order or a suggestion
3. THE INTERDICTION IS VIOLATED (Definition: violation. Designation: δ.) works as a pair with the second function γ, but sometimes the second half can exist without the first.
4. THE VILLAIN MAKES AN ATTEMPT AT RECONNAISSANCE. (Definition: reconnaissance. Designation: ε.) the reconnaissance may be also accomplished by a third party.
5. THE VILLAIN RECEIVES INFORMATION ABOUT HIS VICTIM. (Definition: delivery. Designation: (ζ.) the information may be received directly or from a third party.
6. THE VILLAIN ATTEMPTS TO DECEIVE HIS VICTIM IN ORDER TO TAKE POSSESSION OF HIM OR OF HIS BELONGINGS. (Definition: trickery. Designation: η.) in folktales the villain usually achieves this through disguise or metamorphosis, but he may also persuade, lie, coerce or take by force or magic what he wants.
7. THE VICTIM SUBMITS TO DECEPTION AND THEREBY UNWITTINGLY HELPS HIS ENEMY. (Definition: complicity. Designation: θ) deceitful proposals are always accepted and fulfilled. – plot-based compliancy 7.5 preliminary misfortune. (Designation: λ, differentiating between this and other forms of deception.)
8. THE VILLAIN CAUSES HARM OR INJURY TO A MEMBER OF A FAMILY. (Definition: villainy. Designation: A.) The above functions prepare the territory for this primary function and therefore act as the preparatory part of the tale. Here Propp expands on all the possibilities in the material he has on which he did his research and enumerates nineteen cases, from the kidnapping of a person to other transgressions. He also says that other cases may be added given different folktales and will not be taken into account one by one.
9. MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS MADE KNOWN; THE HERO IS APPROACHED WITH A REQUEST OR COMMAND; HE IS ALLOWED TO GO OR HE IS DISPATCHED. (Definition: mediation, the connective incident. Designation: B.) Function that brings the hero into the tale and the hero may be either a seeker-hero if he is sent on a quest or a victimized hero if the structure of the tale demands that the hero leave home at any cost.
10. THE SEEKER AGREES TO OR DECIDES UPON COUNTERACTION. (Definition: beginning counteraction. Designation: C.) – only in the case of seeker-heroes
11. THE HERO LEAVES HOME. (Definition: departure. Designation: ↑.) //thus enters donor or provider
12. THE HERO IS TESTED, INTERROGATED, ATTACKED, ETC., WHICH PREPARES THE WAY FOR HIS RECEIVING EITHER A MAGICAL AGENT

OR HELPER. (Definition: the first function of the donor. Designation: D.) – the test of the donor

13. THE HERO REACTS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE FUTURE DONOR. (Definition: the hero's reaction. Designation: E.) In the majority of instances, the reaction is either positive or negative. – coupled with the previous function

14. THE HERO ACQUIRES THE USE OF A MAGICAL AGENT. (Definition: provision or receipt of a magical agent. Designation: F.) – may be of different natures

15. THE HERO IS TRANSFERRED, DELIVERED, OR LED TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF AN OBJECT OF SEARCH. (Definition: spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance. Designation: G.)

16. THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN JOIN IN DIRECT COMBAT. (Definition: struggle. Designation: H.) – not to be confused with function D where the hero receives a magical agent and not the object of his research

17. THE HERO IS BRANDED. (Definition: branding, marking. Designation: J.) – Propp speaks of a physical branding, as a wound.

18. THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED. (Definition: victory. Designation: I.) – not necessarily in combat, Propp proposes also cards, but others may be the possibilities.

19. THE INITIAL MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS LIQUIDATED. (Designation: K.) This function, together with villainy (A), constitutes a pair. The narrative reaches its peak in this function.

20. THE HERO RETURNS. (Definition: return. Designation: ↓)

21. THE HERO IS PURSUED. (Definition: pursuit, chase. Designation: Pr.)

22. RESCUE OF THE HERO FROM PURSUIT. (Definition: rescue. Designation: Rs.) – the hero may rescue himself or may be rescued by others.

23. THE HERO, UNRECOGNIZED, ARRIVES HOME OR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. (Definition: unrecognized arrival. Designation: o.)

24. A FALSE HERO PRESENTS UNFOUNDED CLAIMS. (Definition: unfounded claims. Designation: L.)

25. A DIFFICULT TASK IS PROPOSED TO THE HERO. (Definition: difficult task. Designation: M.)

26. THE TASK IS RESOLVED. (Definition: solution. Designation: N.)

27. THE HERO IS RECOGNIZED. (Definition: recognition. Designation: Q.) – recognized by a mark, a brand or an object that had been given him or by his performance on a task.

28. THE FALSE HERO OR VILLAIN IS EXPOSED. (Definition: exposure. Designation: Ex.)

29. THE HERO IS GIVEN A NEW APPEARANCE. (Definition: transfiguration. Designation: T.) – magical means, garments, constructs a palace

30. THE VILLAIN IS PUNISHED. (Definition: punishment. Designation. U.)

31. THE HERO IS MARRIED AND ASCENDS THE THRONE. (Definition: wedding. Designation: W.) – sometimes only marriage, sometimes only ascension.

Notes

[1] Ghilardi Marcello, *Filosofia nei manga* (Milano: Mimesis edizioni, 2010), pp. 62-63. Translated from the original text in Italian.

[2] Alan Dundes, "On Game Morphology: A Study of the Structure of Non-Verbal Folklore" in *The meaning of folklore* (Utah: Utah university press), p. 160.

[3] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 99.

[4] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 7.

[5] J. Bolte and G. Polívka*, Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, I (1913), II (1915), III (1918).

[6] Based on AJPEA Reaserch Institute for Publications – 2013 as reported by Jaqueline Berndt in *Manga: Medium, Art, and Material* (2015).

[7] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 59.

[8] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru* (Dragon Ball).

[9] Tite Kubo, *Bleach*, 74 vols.

[10] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, 72 vols.

[11] The Appendix represents a summary of the elements taken directly from *Morphology of the Folktale* (pp. 25-65); the list however does not include all the variations as explained by Propp himself and should be used primarily as a basis to cross-reference with the revised version.

[12] Kentarô Miura, *Beruseruku* (Berserk), vol. 1.

[13] Hiromu Arakawa, *Hagane no Renkinjutsushi* (Fullmetal Alchemist), vol. 01.

[14] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 53.

[15] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[16] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 01.

[17] Full metal 01

[18] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 01.

[19] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 16.

[20] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 01.

[21] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 13-16.

[22] Kôhei Horikoshi, *Boku no hiirô akademia* (My Hero Academia), vol. 01.

[23] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[24] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 02, 15.

[25] Tite Kubo, *Bleach*, vol. 07-08.

[26] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 61.

[27] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 15.

[28] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 61.

[29] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 40, 44.

[30] Kôhei Horikoshi, *Boku no hiirô akademia* (My Hero Academia), vol. 01-02.

[31] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 53.

[32] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 35.

[33] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 20.

[34] Kentarô Miura, *Beruseruku* (Berserk), vol. 12-13.

[35] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[36] Hiromu Arakawa, *Hagane no Renkinjutsushi* (Fullmetal Alchemist), vol. 01.

[37] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 01.

[38] Kentarô Miura, *Beruseruku* (Berserk), vol. 13-14.

[39] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 02-03.

[40] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 08.

[41] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[42] Kôhei Horikoshi, *Boku no hiirô akademia* (My Hero Academia), vol. 01.

[43] Hiro Mashima, *Fearii Teiru* (Fairy Tail), vol. 01.

[44] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 61.

[45] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 25, 46.

[46] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 72.

[47] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 01, 05.

[48] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 24.

[49] Nar 43

[50] Itô Gô, 2018, *Particularities of Boys' Manga in the Early Twenty-First Century: How Naruto Differs from Dragon Ball.*

[51] Itô Gô, 2011, *Tezuka is Dead.*

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