Meaning of Folklore

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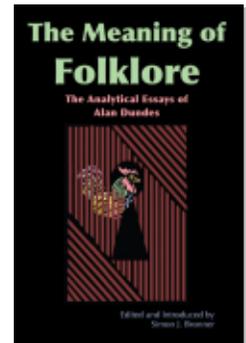
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Structuralism and Folklore

(*Postscript*) Binary Opposition in Myth:
The Propp/Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect

Introduction

Dundes used structuralism to define and compare folklore genres, and, methodologically, as the key element of an analytic step—deriving cultural meaning—in an objective science of folkloristics. He defined structuralism as the "study of the interrelationships or organization of the component parts of an item of folklore," and was especially drawn to Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp's morphology, which designated functions of dramatis personae within a linear plot sequence. He also was intrigued with French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's non-linear idea of binary opposition as a reflection of universal mental processes, and used it as a basis for his reflections on trichotomy as a primarily Western cognitive pattern. Dundes interacted with the French scholar when they were colleagues in anthropology at Berkeley in the fall of 1984. The kinds of questions they discussed, which drove the use of structural analysis, concerned thinking and learning processes revealed by folklore. An example is the issue of how folklore, like language, is acquired in childhood, and the ways in which structures are learned that allow the generation of variations. Dundes presented further goals for structural analysis: predicting culture change, examining cultural determination of content, and making cross-genre comparisons. As a philosophy, Dundes's version of structuralism allowed for human agency and cultural determinism, often denied in anti-humanistic structuralism, although Dundes adhered to the structuralist principle that meaning derives from causal relationships within a structure.

Dundes was introduced to Proppian theory and Russian formalism through two of his instructors at Indiana University, European folklorist Felix Oinas and Hungarian-born semiotician Thomas Sebeok, and he completed his dissertation, which he refers to in this essay, on the morphology of American Indian folktales. Dundes made a lasting contribution by revising Propp's long and rigid sequence of thirty-one functions in the folktale into a body of ten functions, grouped into five motifemic pairs. He discerned elementary sequences that are the basis of what people think of as "story": assignment of task to accomplishment of task, and lack to lack liquidated. The two sequences can combine to form a single, complex one: lack, to assignment of task, to accomplishment of task, to lack liquidated. Comparing Native American tales to European narratives, he found cultural differences in

the way that the stories were separated by intervening pairs of lacks and liquidations of those lacks. He explained what he called the greater "motifemic depth" in European tales by their cultural context of deferred gratification or reward. Dundes's use of cultural psychology and functional revision has been instrumental in a number of structural analyses (including Bar-Itzhak 2005; Azuonye 1990; Bremond 1977; Turner 1972; and Skeels 1967). He also applied structural analysis to tales outside of North America (1971c).

Dundes was instrumental in expanding Proppian analysis to the English-speaking world by introducing a translation of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* ([1928] 1968). There, he iterated the distinction between Propp's "syntagmatic" analysis, borrowing from the notion of syntax in the study of language, and Lévi-Strauss's "paradigmatic" one, which seeks to describe a pattern or paradigm (usually based upon an a priori principle of binary opposition) underlying the folkloric text. Dundes praised paradigmatic work for relating the schematic structure to worldview and cultural context. He pointed out that Lévi-Strauss's approach facilitated the modern synchronic reconceptualization of myth (and other forms of folklore) as *models*, replacing the diachronic notion of myth as a charter set back in primeval time. Yet Dundes had methodological concerns, since, in contrast to syntagmatic approaches, paradigmatic analyses were "speculative and deductive, and they are not as easily replicated." Although praising Propp for developing a syntagmatic method that was empirical and inductive, he worried that the resultant analyses considered the text alone, in isolation from its social and cultural context. This observation led him to frequently write, in explanations of structuralism, that "structural analysis is not an end in itself." For Dundes, it was an analytical task, following identification, that led to interpretation.

The structural analytical step in Dundes's folkloristic method, occurring between identification and interpretation, typically comprised (1) discovery of a minimal unit, (2) investigation of the relationships between different minimal units in combination, and (3) cross-cultural comparisons to determine the spread or particularity of the structure. Interpretation typically discerned psychoanalytical or symbolist meanings (in this essay he mentioned examples of customs, such as bullfights and weddings, in addition to narratives and proverbs), and the determination of "worldview," that is, general outlooks, values, and beliefs that drive human action and inform ethical judgments. A structural analysis of these interpretations need not follow only Proppian or Lévi-Straussian lines. Under the category of structuralism, which Dundes identified as an evolving philosophy, he included widely known perspectives for the tripartite (syntagmatic) ordering of "rites of passage" introduced by French folklorist Arnold van Gennep, and British social anthropologist James George Frazer's paradigmatic division of homeopathic and contagious magic in the early twentieth century.

In this essay, Dundes criticized the idea of the "superorganic," which he finds pervasive both in many anthropological treatments of custom, and in literary searches for origins using the Finnish or "historic-geographic" method. This idea was introduced by evolutionist Herbert Spencer, and articulated by Berkeley anthropologist A. L. Kroeber (1917). It is a structural argument about the Western binary of social and organic forces, expressed, Kroeber stated, in other oppositions, such as body/soul, body/mind, and physical/mental. The superorganic idea implied that culture was above the level of the human organism and had a force of its own, rather than being constructed by social or individual forces. Dundes (in this essay), and others (such as his anthropological teacher David Bidney) railed against this idea, preferring the philosophy that culture involved human volition and emotion. Dundes's structuralist goal was to find minimal units of cultural

expression to demonstrate this individual and social agency. Dundes criticized the historic-geographic reduction of narratives to tale types as representing a superorganic assumption, since they suggested that tales diffuse without human agency, and, as invented units, existed as ontological entities. Dundes delivered his criticism directly to the brain-center of the historic-geographic method, since he delivered this essay in Finland in 1976, home to the legacy of twentieth-century folklorist Antti Aarne and the "Aarne-Thompson" system of classification ("Thompson" refers to American folklorist Stith Thompson, who was greatly influenced by Finnish folkloristics).

In his postscript published thirty-one years later, Dundes reflected on the lasting influence of Propp and Lévi-Strauss on the structural analysis of narrative, and attempted to mediate what had been seen as opposition to their structural approaches. Dundes used the occasion to comment on the difference between how folkloristics and anthropology dealt with myth, since he took Lévi-Strauss to task for not being folkloristically aware of folklore genres. Similarly, he questioned the interpretations of psychoanalysts because of their lack of a folkloristic differentiation between tale and myth (see 2005c). In contrast, folkloristic analysis was privileged, because its structural assumptions were based upon a comparative, wide-ranging knowledge of the genres of folklore. Dundes also made other contributions to structural analysis, using it to define genres and apply cross-genre interpretation, such as in "The Structure of Superstition," "Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle," and "On the Structure of the Proverb," included in *Analytic Essays in Folklore* (1975b), and "On Whether Weather 'Proverbs' Are Proverbs" and "April Fool and April Fish: Towards a Theory of Ritual Pranks" in *Folklore Matters* (1989d).

Structural analysis is not restricted to verbal genres; it has also been applied to non-verbal material (see, for example, Glassie 1975 and Bronner 1992, 2006a). Comparing games to narratives as an example of cross-genre analysis, Dundes structurally examined play in "On Game Morphology" (1963a; see the next chapter of the present volume). For further discussion of the structuralism of Propp and Lévi-Strauss, see Propp (1984) and Segal (1996).

By the time Dundes wrote his postscript, a "post-structuralist" movement held sway in folkloristics that was characterized by microanalyses of folkloric performances as distinct events. An open philosophical question is whether this big tent of post-structuralism runs counter to the principles established by structuralism, or if it is an outgrowth of it. Dundes's explication of modern terms of analysis in his essays "Texture, Text, and Context" and "From Etic to Emic Units in the Structural Study of Folktales" (see chapter 4) are often viewed in folkloristic historiographies as precursors of poststructuralist approaches (1980g, 1962g). Dundes's structuralist concern for the social and cultural context of lore, synchronic treatment of models (deriving from the distinction between signifier and signified), the creative generation of expressive variations, and the structure of native performance (which he called "emic" in contrast to previous, text-centered "etic" approaches) echoes through many contemporary post-structuralist analyses. Yet Dundes also expressed dismay at the lack of hypothesis building and symbolist generalization in the prevalent post-structuralist microanalysis, which implied the non-comparable uniqueness of each performance, and restricted meaning to the consciousness of the actor in a performance (see Dundes 2005c; Bronner 2006c). He adhered to uncovering underlying cognitive structures in folkloric texts, in order to explain the acquisition and generation of folklore as a renewable resource across cultures. He championed the view iterated in this essay that in revealing "patterns of metaphors," structuralist analysis "should provide unrivaled insights into the worldview and behavior of peoples everywhere."

Structuralism and Folklore

IN THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, there is no theoretical trend which has had more impact upon both the humanities and the social sciences than structuralism. The scholarly discussions of structuralism in literature, in anthropology, and in general are part of a rapidly burgeoning bibliography.[1] There are even historical studies of the development of structuralism from Russian formalism among other intellectual precursors.[2]

The field of folkloristics is no exception and in fact the growth of structuralism in folklore scholarship has been so enormous competing schools or methods in carrying out structural analysis have emerged. Thus there are followers of Lévi-Strauss as opposed to followers of Propp to name two of the major contributors to the structural approach to folklore. Lévi-Strauss brand of structural analysis has been applied with equal fervor to the story The Three Bears[3] and to classical and Sumerian myths.[4] Propp's methodology has inspired analyses of American Indian tales,[5] African tales,[6] and Sicilian puppet plays.[7]

It is not my intention to survey all the structural studies in folklore which have been undertaken thus far. For one thing, the bibliography has become almost unmanageable. A case in point is the long list of surveys and critiques of Lévi-Strauss's narrative analysis.[8] For another, there are already useful, fairly comprehensive surveys of the folkloristic structural scholarship available in print.[9]

Nor shall I be concerned here with unraveling the influences of one structuralist upon another or with identifying early anticipations of structuralism in folklore. It is nevertheless interesting to see the suggestion in Jason's notes to her recent translation of Nikiforov's 1927 essay *On the Morphological Study of Folklore* that Propp may have borrowed several concepts central to his own morphological study from Nikiforov. Similarly, it would be interesting to know whether Lévi-Strauss was influenced directly or indirectly by French philosopher-sociologist Gabriel Tarde's ambitious attempt at the turn of the century to describe oppositional paradigms as one of the important organizing principles of both the natural world and human society. Though Tarde lacked Lévi-Strauss's cross-cultural anthropological sophistication, he does speak of such matters as the question of the reversibility or irreversibility of social facts[10] and he does suggest that the middle term of an oppositional pair can combine with one of the members of the pair to form a new opposition,[11] a proposal which seems strangely akin to Lévi-Strauss's statement about myth structure: "We need only to assume that the two opposite terms with no intermediary always tend to be replaced by two equivalent terms which allow a third one as a mediator; then one of the polar terms and the mediator becomes replaced by a new triad and so on."[12] However, questions of precursors and influences belong to the history of structuralism and this is really not my topic. Rather I should like to consider briefly some though by no means all of the theoretical issues of the application of structuralism to folklore.

First, it should be understood that structuralism, the study of the interrelationships or organization of the component parts of an item of folklore, is not limited to narrative analysis. Because of Lévi-Strauss's concern with myth and Propp's with Märchen, structural analysis is sometimes wrongly thought to be limited to folk narrative materials. This

is definitely not the case. Structuralism can be applied to any genre of folklore. There are already a number of structural studies of such genres as proverb, riddle, and superstition.[13] One can argue that there is a decided advantage to applying the techniques of structural analysis to so-called minor genres. If structural analysis works at all, then it should work as well with minor genres as with major genres. As a matter of fact, the minor genres are obviously much easier to investigate inasmuch as the texts are relatively brief. Thus it would appear to be easier to attempt a structural analysis of curses or blessings or toasts than to seek to discern the structure of an epic consisting of thousands of lines.

The problems of structural analysis are approximately the same no matter what the genre. The problems include discovering or defining a minimal structural unit, and understanding how these minimal units combine into traditional patterns. Perhaps the most difficult task is the discovery of a minimal structural unit. What, if any, are the minimal units of proverbs or of riddles? Without a minimal unit, it is almost impossible to undertake structural analysis. It is true that structural analysis is more concerned with the relationships or organizational patterns of the units than with the units per se. But how can one discuss relationships intelligently without specific reference to the terms or units which are presumed to be related?

Let me give an example of a minimal structural unit from my investigations of proverbs. From an analysis of English proverbs, I have proposed the following tentative definition: "A proverb is a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment." The minimal unit is the descriptive element, although to be sure there are two component parts: the topic and the comment. It might be mentioned at this point that the critical question of precisely where to make one's "cuts," that is, where to subdivide what may well be a continuum, is not easy to settle and the answer as often as not is admittedly somewhat arbitrary. In theory, one can always divide any proposed minimal unit into still smaller units (just as molecules yield atoms which yield protons, neutrons, and electrons, etc.). My suggestion of the descriptive element as the basic minimal unit of proverbs[14] is thus not meant as necessarily being any ultimate or absolute unit. On the other hand, I believe it is a heuristic unit. For it can help to explain why there can be proverbs in English consisting of as few as two words. Examples include: Time flies; Money talks; and Opposites attract. In "Time flies," there is only one topic: time, and only one comment: flies. This proposed unit of analysis also explains why there cannot be any one-word proverbs. There may be plenty of traditional single words in slang and folk speech, but such items would not be considered proverbs if my basic unit were accepted as a valid definitional criterion. And this brings us to one of the important purposes of structural analysis in folklore: the definition of genres.

Inasmuch as structural analysis is essentially a form of rigorous descriptive ethnography, it is potentially of great interest to those folklorists concerned with genre theory. It is almost impossible to define an item of folklore in terms of origin (especially since origins are almost always unknown despite the centuries of speculative historical reconstruction efforts). It is equally unsatisfactory to try to define a genre in terms of function for it is not uncommon for different genres of folklore to fill the same functional slot. A traditional gesture may serve instead of a proverb, for example, in summing up a situation or recommending a course of action. Functionally, the gesture would be equivalent to a proverb, but not all gestures function as proverbs. So function (and context) alone are not always sufficient to determine genre. Since structural analysis is concerned with the item itself rather than factors external to the item (factors such as its origin or function), it is more likely to

be of assistance in determining the morphological characteristics of that item, characteristics which may be criteria to be used in defining a genre.

Once having proposed the descriptive element as the minimal structural unit of the proverb, I was able to see proverbs with two or more descriptive elements in a new light. Proverbs with two descriptive elements might have these elements in opposition (although there are also nonoppositional proverbs). In oppositional proverbs, either the topics can be in opposition, or the comments can be in opposition, or *both* topics and comments can be in opposition. Examples of the latter case would be "Here today, gone tomorrow," "Last hired, first fired," and "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Without recapitulating my entire analysis of proverb structure, I hope it is nevertheless clear what the initial steps in structural analysis were, namely the discovery of a minimal unit, followed by an investigation of the relationships prevailing between different minimal units in combination. Note that if a given instance of structural analysis is valid, then it ought to be possible to replicate the analysis. Thus if my analysis of English proverb structure is sound, then other researchers ought to be able to duplicate my findings. If my analysis were applicable to non-English proverbs, then that too is testable. This is surely one of the great advantages of structural analysis. To some extent, it is always empirically verifiable. A structural analysis of a game or of a riddle can always be tested against the original data with which the analysis was made. So much of previous folklore research has been totally unverifiable whether it was a matter of some supposed chronological or evolutionary (or devolutionary) sequence or whether it was a matter of "reading in" some interpretation albeit solar, historical, or psychoanalytic. It has always been difficult to verify interpretations of folklore and more often than not, it comes down to a matter of accepting one interpretation rather than another on pure faith. In marked contrast, structural analysis, at least in theory, offers the possibility of some objectivity rather than subjectivity. Of course, it is perfectly true that there may well be subjectivity and more than a little interpretation involved in the initial selection of a minimal unit (or even in the whole notion that there is such a thing as a minimal constituent unit). Still, no matter how speculative the units may be initially, they can be tested. One can take Propp's function or what I term motifeme and check it against a corpus of folktales.

While on the subject of minimal units of analysis, I might mention the issue of whether such units truly represent the nature of the compositional structure of the folkloristic item under investigation or whether the units are nothing more than hypothetical though heuristic constructs created by imaginative researchers. This theoretical issue has been described previously as the God's truth position versus the hocus-pocus view. God's truth, of course, implies that the units and patterning of these units actually are inherent in the data whereas the more skeptical hocus-pocus alternative suggests that the proposed units and unit patterns are only figments of an analyst's fertile imagination. In other words, a God's truth folklorist might argue that folktales have structure; a hocus-pocus folklorist might contend that the various structural schemes proposed by Bremond, Greimas, Propp, Lévi-Strauss, etc. have been imposed upon folk narratives. The crucial question is then: does a folklorist *discover/describe* the existent structure of folkloristic genres or does he or she *invent/create* structural schema? Most practitioners of structural analysis assume that they are discovering, not inventing, the patterns they discuss. Lévi-Strauss, in referring to the code he is studying in mythology, makes an unequivocal statement: "This code . . . has neither been invented nor brought in from without. It is inherent in mythology itself, where we simply discover its presence."[15] I too would agree generally with such a

God's truth position, that the materials of folklore really are highly structured, but I would also suggest that the various structural schemes proposed by analysts are only "manmade" approximations of God's truth. Although the structural schema almost invariably purport to be God's truth itself, it is probably much more intellectually honest to admit that structural analysis thus far has consisted largely of hocus-pocus. Ideally, each succeeding generation of structural folklorists will substitute a more accurate and refined version of structural analysis for any given genre, with each new analysis coming ever closer to describing the underlying structural pattern. On the other hand, if one assumes that there is such an underlying pattern, one must in theory admit the possibility of discerning that pattern at any point in time and consequently that any one particular analysis could be accurate enough so as not to require further refinement. In any event, the methodological implications are simply that each proposed hocus-pocus scheme must be tested and retested . . . against the empirical reality which is the subject of structural analysis. God's truth in this metaphorical sense is not necessarily unknowable.

The question of whether structure is "knowable" raises yet another important theoretical issue in structuralism. Structural analysts claim that they have identified structural patterns in myth, fairy tale, or some other genre. In short, they say they "know" what the underlying structural patterns are and that they can articulate them. But what about the informants who tell the tales? Do they "know" the structural patterns which underlie the tales they tell? Lévi-Strauss contends that as a rule they do not: "Although the possibility cannot be excluded that the speakers who create and transmit myths may become aware of their structure and mode of operation, this cannot occur as a normal thing, but only partially and intermittently. . . . In the particular example we are dealing with here, it is doubtful, to say the least, whether the natives fascinated by mythological stories, have any understanding of the systems of interrelations to which we reduce them."[16] It is true that speakers of a language are perfectly well able to speak that language without being able to articulate the rules or grammatical principles which linguists have described in considerable detail. Propp too suggests that storytellers are constrained insofar as he claims they cannot depart from the overall sequence of functions in fairytale structure,[17] which may imply that storytellers do not know the superorganic structural patterns which limit their creativity.

I wonder if it is not possible that storytellers in some sense do "know" the structural patterns which underlie their narratives. I suspect that children do in fact extrapolate folkloristic patterns such that they are well able to pass judgment as to whether a given folktale or riddle is being properly told. Even if individuals cannot articulate the patterns—and why, after all, should the creators of hocus-pocus schemes attach any significance to whether or not informants can articulate the analysts' particular brands of hocus-pocus—that does not necessarily mean that the informants are not aware of the underlying patterns. The incredible and brilliant *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* show pretty clearly that the blind hunter Ogotemmêli knew infinitely more about the structural patterns underlying Dogon culture than did professional ethnographer Marcel Griaule who had been searching for such patterns for more than fifteen years. One might here object that there is a distinction between native categories and analytic categories.[18] This is true. Native categories, from inside a culture, are always worth studying; but they may or may not constitute accurate empirical descriptions of data as sought by objective analysts from either inside or outside that culture. On the other hand, there is something unpleasantly patronizing and condescending about statements which deny natives any insight into the mechanics of their folklore. In this context, I might cite Lévi-Strauss's boast in which he states: "I therefore claim

to show not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."[19] This view is strikingly similar to Jung's position as stated in his essay *The Psychology of the Child Archetype,* where he claims that "primitive" mentality differs from the civilized in that conscious thinking has not yet developed. In his words, "This shows itself in the circumstance that the primitive does not think *consciously,* but that thoughts *appear.* The primitive cannot assert that he thinks; it is rather that 'something thinks in him.'"[20] With this superorganic notion of abstractions operating independently in men's minds, one is not surprised to find Jung claim "The primitive mentality does not *invent* myths, it *experiences* them."[21] The human in this view is merely a passive unthinking vehicle through which archetypal myth material is transmitted. Frankly, it is extremely difficult to imagine any folklorist who had ever collected folklore in the field arguing along these lines. Informants certainly vary with respect to sensitivity and to the amount of insight they may have into the nature of their folklore, but it is surely an error to assume that folklore is learned and passed on in a totally mechanical, unreflective manner. By the same token, it is probably fair to say that, the majority of taletellers have not ever bothered to articulate the structural rules or epic laws governing the composition of their narratives. It is not so much that they could not do so, but more likely that they have little interest in doing so. It is enough to tell and enjoy a folktale without speculating at length about its compositional (and psychological) devices. Finally, since structural analysts are themselves humans and hence members of one or more folk groups, it is clear that humans are capable of selfconsciously examining the structure of their folkloristic creations.

The idea that myths and other genres of folklore can operate in men's minds without humans being aware of the fact is part of a much larger unfortunate tendency in folkloristics. I refer to the pervasiveness of superorganic thinking in folklore theory. In essence, this tendency divides folklore into folk and lore with the emphasis decidedly upon the lore. As a result, the folk are ignored. Folklore is studied as though it has little or nothing to do with people. Such notions as automigration in which tales (rather than people) migrate or the law of self-correction (that tales correct themselves), or the concept of *zersingen* according to which the very process of folklore performance is deemed destructive which is thought to result in the eventual degeneration of folklore over time, are all examples of superorganic principles or laws of folkloristics which are presumed to operate independently of human emotion and volition.

I am convinced that it is this unmitigated penchant for superorganic, "folk*less*" theory and methodology which has led to the great interest in structuralism in European folkloristic circles. With structuralism, folklorists are free to continue to concentrate upon text and text alone. Just as the comparative method treated texts wrenched from contexts, so structuralism could be applied to these same texts. Although old fashioned comparativists may have initially distrusted structuralism because of its synchronic bias (and its apparent cavalier disregard of diachronic factors), it soon became obvious to text-oriented folklorists that structuralism was a method which could be applied to the same kinds of archive materials previously utilized in comparative studies. Instead of determining subtypes and plotting charts of tale diffusion, researchers could begin to chop up texts into their supposed component parts. With structuralism as with the comparative method, it was not necessary to consider the storytelling process, or the relationship of tale content to the personalities of tale tellers and their audience.

If we think of the taletelling process as involving 1. a tale teller, 2. the tale text, and 3. the audience, we can see that both the comparative method and structuralism tend to

disregard everything except the tale text. This is too bad inasmuch as it is clear that folk-lorists need to study the performance aspects of tale telling, the personal esthetics of the tale teller, and the nature of the understanding of the folktale by different members of the audience. There has been little concrete discussion in the folkloristics literature on pre-cisely what different members of an audience understand by a given item of folklore even though it is clear that the same item of folklore may mean very different things to differ-ent listeners. In terms of a simple communications model, the scholarship has been largely concerned with the encoding of the message so to speak by the sender or originator (e.g., the oral-formulaic theory) and the message itself (e.g., all the text-oriented theories and methods). Relatively little research has been devoted to the process of decoding the mes-sage, that is, the intricacies of the listener's perceptions and understandings of the mes-sage. One would think that the investigation of audiences and their different understand-ings (and misunderstandings) of folklore communication events is a likely area for future research. If Lévi-Strauss is correct when he says that myths (and by implication other folk-lore genres) operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact, then it is obvious that the central question of what a tale-teller and his audience *consciously* understand when a tale is told could not possibly be answered by structural analysis.

A related theoretical issue in considering structuralism and folklore concerns uni-versalism. Are there universal structures? Or are structures limited to particular culture areas or individual cultures? Or are there structures peculiar to one particular folklore item? One finds studies labeled structural in which there is a single text analyzed. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss speaks of mythical thought in general which he claims "always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation."[22] The implication is clearly that this alleged characteristic of mythic thought is as widespread as myth itself. Propp's morphological description of the fairy tale is based upon Russian materials, but since most if not all of the tales in the corpus are international tale types, one may well assume that Propp's analysis holds (with some variation) for at least all Indo-European Märchen. Part of the difficulty here is really a question in genre theory. Are folklore genres universal or at least cross-cultural? Is there a riddle structure which will be manifest wherever riddles exist? Or are there different riddle structures for different riddle traditions in different cultures?

This brings us to the role of structuralism with respect to identifying oicotypes. Either there will be locally popular structural patterns and thus structural oicotypes or the iden-tification of cross-cultural structural patterns will greatly assist researchers in concen-trating upon local oicotypical content differences within a common structural frame. In other words, there may be types of a structural nature or oicotypes of content. The point is that whether a folklorist employs the comparative method or structuralism, he or she is concerned with 1. defining similarities, and 2. delineating differences. I should like to stress that it is possible to discover hypothetical oicotypes through either the comparative method or structural analysis. Ideally, both methods should be employed. If one under-takes a full-fledged historic-geography study of a single tale type, one could well discover a subtype or form of the tale peculiar to a given cultural area. However, on the basis of a single local form of only one tale type, one would not really have sufficient evidence to support a claim of having isolated an oicotype. One would need to have historic-geo-graphic studies of other tale types which showed the same or similar local forms of those tales before one could comfortably assume that an oicotype had been discovered. The dif-ficulty is that not that many tales in the Aarne-Thompson canon have been subjected to a

comprehensive historic-geographic monographic treatment. Thus a cautious scholar committed only to the comparative method in folktale studies might feel it was premature to search for potential oicotypes by making a "comparative study of comparative studies" of folktales. Here is where structural analysis can be of considerable assistance. If a folklorist undertakes a structural analysis of even a single text from a given culture, and if he or she is successful in articulating the structural pattern, he or she may in fact have isolated a pattern which is oicotypical. For a structural analysis, one does not need the thousands or at any rate hundreds of versions of a single tale type so essential for a historic-geographic study. So long as the one text were representative (and admittedly some additional texts of the tale would be necessary to determine this), the structural analysis might be useful. If a structural pattern were discerned, one would then seek to discover if the identical pattern were to be found in other tale types. This could be accomplished in a matter of days rather than the years it takes to complete even a single historic-geographic study. If a consistent structural pattern were identified in this way—as I believe I have demonstrated in the case of the Unsuccessful Repetition pattern in Lithuanian folktales—then an oicotype may have been discovered. If the delineation of a hypothetical oicotype is accurate, then it should be theoretically possible to predict in advance what will happen to tales which are borrowed by the culture in question. I have tried to show, for example, how European tales have been recast into American Indian structural patterns[23] and into African structural patterns.[24] Comparative studies and structural studies are thus hardly mutually exclusive. To the contrary, these often opposed methods are highly compatible and they may be mutually supportive. If one located a hypothetical oicotype, one might wish to see if the same or similar local form were found elsewhere. If it were, this would not necessarily destroy the value of the initially discovered oicotype. If there are other cultures with a penchant for unsuccessful repetition, that would not invalidate the discovery that Lithuanians have such an oicotype.[25] Admittedly, it is more likely that content rather than structure will be oicotypical. Structures appear to be cross-cultural (though not necessarily universal) whereas content seems to be more often than not culturally relative.

   I should like to indicate my conviction that structures are not necessarily limited to single folklore genres. This is not to deny that structural analysis may be useful in defining genres. Rather it is a question of the possible arbitrariness of genre definitions as well as of the entire subject matter of folklore itself. If structural patterns are culture-wide phenomena (leaving aside the question of possible universality of such patterns for the moment), then it would be folly to assume that structural patterns are limited to single genres of folklore. In this sense, it is misleading for Olrik to claim that the "Law of Three" (*das Gesetz der Dreizahl*) is strictly an epic law peculiar to folk literature.[26] I have attempted to show that such a pattern is characteristic of American (and Indo-European) thought in general.[27] This in no way minimizes the value of undertaking structural analyses of folkloristic materials. It is precisely because general cultural patterns are so explicit in folkloristic materials that makes structural analysis of folklore so important. If we are successful in isolating and describing a structural pattern present in an item or genre of folklore, we may have provided a useful aid to understanding the nature of the culture at large as well as the cognitive categories, ideological commitments, and concrete behavior of the people sharing that culture. For surely one of the goals of structural analysis of folklore or any other variety of cultural materials (language, written literature, etc.) is to afford insight into worldview. It is difficult to gain access to the worldview of another culture (or even to one's own worldview). But if the identification of structural patterns in folklore

can be of service in articulating the basic nature of one's own worldview and the world-views of others, then the study of folklore would be absolutely indispensable to a better understanding of humanity.

In evaluating the achievements of Lévi-Strauss and Propp with respect to the above mentioned issues, we find that Lévi-Strauss is very much concerned with relating structural patterns to worldview. Propp in contrast, admittedly working at an earlier period and from more of a literary than an anthropological perspective, tended to study structural patterns as ends in themselves. To be sure, Lévi-Strauss and Propp are not concerned with the same types of structural patterns. Propp was primarily interested in identifying the sequential, continuous or syntagmatic structure of Russian fairy tales. Lévi-Strauss on the other hand wishes to identify oppositional patterns of discontinuities, or the paradigmatic structure of myth in general. Lévi-Strauss is perfectly well aware of the sequential structure of myth; he just doesn't consider it very important. It is the underlying "schemata" rather than the "sequences" of myth which interest him. In his words, "The sequences form the apparent content of the myth; the chronological order in which things happen."[28] As sociologists seek latent as opposed to manifest function and as psychoanalysts seek latent as opposed to manifest content, Lévi-Strauss seeks underlying paradigmatic patterns rather than what he considers to be the apparent, manifest sequential structure. Lévi-Strauss's goal is analogous to Chomsky's search for deep structure as opposed to superficial surface structure (and perhaps also to Jung's search for universal archetypes). In his early essay on "The Structural Study of Myth," Lévi-Strauss states (my emphasis), "The myth will be treated as would be an orchestra score *perversely* presented as a unilinear series and everywhere our task is to re-establish the correct disposition."[29] The "perverse" sequential or syntagmatic structure, that is, the narrative structure studied by Propp is clearly not the object of Lévi-Strauss's type of structural analysis.

In my opinion, Lévi-Strauss is not analyzing the structure of myth narrative, that is the compositional structure of myths as narrated, but rather he is analyzing the structure of the world described in myths. This is a perfectly legitimate intellectual enterprise. It is simply a different intellectual enterprise from Propp's attempt to analyze the sequential structure of Russian fairy tales. The difference is thus between the structure of myth as a narrative genre and the structure of the image of reality depicted in the world defined by the myth. Propp is concerned with the structure of a continuum, of continuities; Lévi-Strauss is concerned with the structural pattern of discontinuities. Since Lévi-Strauss is trying to identify oppositional paradigms in the world described in myth, he does not choose to be limited by the chronological order in which elements of the paradigm occur in a given narrative. If high/low, night/day, male/female, etc. instances occur anywhere in the narrative, Lévi-Strauss feels free to extrapolate them and re-order them in his delineations of the paradigm. Moreover, since it is the world described in myth rather than any one myth itself which is of interest, Lévi-Strauss is not limited to the data contained in a single myth (or even of myths of a single culture). Any data in any myth can be used *comparatively* to illuminate different exemplifications of the oppositional paradigm. In effect, Lévi-Strauss's methodology in *Mythologiques* is as much a tour de force of the comparative method (though not exactly the historic-geographic variety!) as it is of structuralism. In any event, whether one prefers Lévi-Strauss's paradigmatic brand of structural analysis to Propp's syntagmatic or not, one must applaud his attempt to relate the structural patterns he discerns to the society (and world) at large. For instance, Lévi-Strauss often tries to show how the pattern he finds in myth is isomorphic with kinship among other patterns in the culture.

For all Lévi-Strauss's interest in demonstrating the widespread nature of binary oppositional structures, he makes relatively little use of the total range of folklore genres. Here one must keep in mind that despite Lévi-Strauss's extended analyses of myth, he is really not a folklorist. Rather, he is like so many anthropologists and philosophers inasmuch as he tends to restrict his research with folkloristic materials to myth alone, or any rate to folk narrative since some of the items he treats are folk-tales rather than myths. It was Köngäs and Maranda in *Structural Models in Folklore* who first drew attention to the possible extension of Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myth to other genres of folklore. On the other hand, the notion of the centrality of opposition to folkloristic genres was quite clearly stated by Danish folklorist Axel Olrik as one of his epic laws, namely the Law of Contrast (*das Gesetz des Gegensatzes*) in the first decade of the twentieth century. The point is that it would appear that oppositions are just as important in the structure of riddles and proverbs as in the structure of myth. Oppositions are equally prominent in other genres.

In some cases, actual oppositions in nature or at least what is perceived as an opposition may be the subject of folklore. For example, Kuusi has masterfully demonstrated the vast distribution of traditional descriptions of what various peoples say on those occasions when sunshine and rain occur at the same time, e.g., the devil is beating his wife. The simultaneous occurrence of sunshine and rain is surely understood as an instance of opposition. Sometimes, oppositions in nature are imagined as is commonly the case in locutions for never such as "When water runs uphill."[30] Consider the following autograph book verse:

> When roses bloom in winter,
> And the snowflakes fall in June;
> When the sun shines at midnight,
> And the moon shines at noon;
> When the waters cease their flowing,
> And two times two are ten;
> When joy is sorrow and today is tomorrow,
> Maybe I'll forget you then.

There is surely no dearth of examples of opposition in folklore. Sometimes an opposition in nature, so to speak, is used as a model for a would-be opposition in culture. For example, the fact that hens occasionally crow like roosters has been used by the folk in the following way:

> A whistling maid and a crowing hen
> Are neither fit for gods nor men.

In this instance, we find male chauvinism making use of the opposition to recommend that women restrict themselves to socially defined women's roles and behavior. A maid who whistles (like a boy) is by analogy depicted as being as unnatural as a hen which crows (like a rooster). I might mention parenthetically that male chauvinism in folklore is not limited to denying women the right to assume male roles or practice activities normally associated with males. Male chauvinism also includes men usurping roles or activities normally associated with women. These oppositions are not challenged. The most obvious example concerns the ability to bear children. From the creation of Eve from Adam's rib and Noah's building his ark to float around for approximately nine months right down to modern folklore, we find countless instances of males denying female procreativity and in fact

appropriating such activity for themselves. Patriarchal societies evidently needed male creation narratives to bolster their sense of male superiority. Modern examples might include a male rotund Santa Claus who delivers packages clown the chimney, the male stork who explicitly delivers babies down the same chimney, and finally the male easter bunny who brings eggs—eggs being clearly associated with females. Whereas the would-be attempt of women to act like men (as in whistling) is singled out for scorn, there is no comparable conscious criticism of men's usurpation of the female childbearing role in either narrative or custom (e. g., couvade).

It is easy to think of hundreds of examples of the occurrence of oppositions in folklore for as Olrik observed such opposition constitutes a major rule of epic composition.[31] Hero-villain, trickster-dupe would be examples of individual characters in opposition, but sometimes the opposition is contained in a single character. Half-man/half-animal, e.g., a mermaid, or similar combinations of god and man or god and animal would be examples. The wise fool who commonly combines folly and wisdom and who may confuse the literal and the metaphorical would be another. Indeed, a wise fool of the Hodja variety is a veritable walking oxymoron. Perhaps the prime illustration of the centrality of opposition or paradox in folklore would be virgin birth.

In view of this, it is tempting to argue that all folklore, not just myth, consists of forming and attempting to resolve oppositions. The oppositions may concern life/ death, good/ evil, truth/falsehood, love/hate, innocence/guilt, male/female, man/god, large/small, child/adult, etc. If pleasure truly does depend upon the reduction of tension, then one of the reasons why folklore gives pleasure is because it reduces the tensions it creates by resolving oppositions. In folk-tales, the paradoxical tasks, e.g., carrying water in a sieve, are invariably solved by the hero or heroine. The apparent contradiction in oppositional riddles is always resolved by the answer to the riddle. In proverbs, the formation of the opposition may itself be an answer or response to a question posed in life, e.g., "The longest way round is the shortest way found" suggests that what appears to be the longer path may in fact be the most direct and efficient. This is analogous to the modest choice motif (L 211) in which the worst looking casket proves to be the best choice. The same opposition between appearance and reality is common in proverbs, e.g., "Good things come in small packages" or "Never judge a book by its cover."

A recognition of the oppositional structure of so much of folklore makes it easier to understand the different functional contexts of folklore. Van Gennep in his classic *The Rites of Passage* made one of the first structural studies of folklore. One does not always think of Van Gennep as a structuralist, but his own statement of purpose clearly identifies him as such. "The purpose of this book is altogether different. Our interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes—that is, their order." As all folklorists know, Van Gennep identified a syntagmatic structural pattern of separation, transition, and incorporation. In his words, "The underlying arrangement is always the same. Beneath a multiplicity of forms, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: *the pattern of the rites of passage.*"[32] This is unquestionably a structuralist perspective. I would add that changes of state or status imply transition between two opposed categories. Thus funerals are transitions from life to death; weddings are transitions from unmarried to married (and also resolutions of oppositions between two family units, one of the bride and one of the groom). Giving birth to a child makes one a parent. All these critical life crises are marked by folklore. Folklore tends to cluster around times of anxiety be it in the individual life cycle or

the calendrical cycle of the entire community. (The transition from winter to spring of course involves another opposition, from death to life). In view of this one might go so far as to argue that it is in part the oppositional nature of much of folklore which makes it so appropriate for such critical times. For example, I have suggested that one reason why riddles might be told at wakes is that answering oppositional riddles might provide a microcosm of the desire to resolve the opposition between the living and the dead at a funeral rite.[33] Similarly, I have suggested that one reason why riddles are used so often in courtship rituals might be because of their oppositional structure.[34] In exogamous societies, the bride and groom must be unrelated. The marriage qua ritual essentially relates two individuals who were previously unrelated. Riddles, structurally speaking, may provide a model for this event. The descriptive elements in opposition make it appear that the elements are unrelated. The answer to the riddle succeeds in eliminating the apparent contradiction and unites the elements in harmony. If this explanation is at all valid, then structural analysis can be seen as a useful tool for anyone who wishes to explain *why* a given genre or item of folklore is used precisely when it is. If the structure of an item of folklore can be shown to be isomorphic with the structure of the specific context in which that item occurs, then we may have advanced considerably in our understanding of folkloristic phenomena and how such phenomena function.

The point which is crucial is that structural analysis is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end, that end being a better understanding of the nature of human beings, or at least of a particular society of humans. The possible if not probable universality of binary opposition in folklore may suggest that structural analysis may not, after all, be very useful in defining genres or revealing cultural differences. That is a legitimate criticism of any universal principle. It is equally true of Frazer's laws or principles of sympathetic magic. If homeopathic magic is universal, then it cannot be used to differentiate one culture from another. However, by the same token, the existence of universal structural principles would in no way preclude culturally relative content analyses. The universal principle is one thing; its concrete manifestation in one or more specific cultural contexts may be another. For example, in American wedding ritual, the bride throws a bouquet of flowers to her bridesmaids. This can be understood as a homeopathic articulation of her willingness or wish to be deflowered. (The bridesmaid who catches the bouquet is said to be the next to marry which would be an exemplification of contagious magic.) The issue here is not necessarily the validity of this interpretation so much as the fact that it was the application of a universal principle, that of homeopathic magic, which provided the clue for a symbolic explanation of why a particular item of folklore, in this case, a custom, was appropriate in a given context. In the same way, the slipping of a circular ring over an outstretched finger provides a homeopathic model for the sexual consummation of the marriage. (The fact that it is the groom who places the ring on the bride's finger suggests that marriage provides sanctioned access to or control over the genitals of one's spouse.) Some conservative folklorists may object to such symbolic interpretations of wedding customs, but whether it is throwing rice (seed, semen) to wish homeopathically (and contagiously) the newlyweds a fertile union or whether in Jewish weddings it is the groom's breaking a glass (virginity) with his foot, the appropriateness of such ritual behavior in such a context seems clear enough. Again, the correctness or incorrectness of the interpretation is not the issue. Rather it is the possibility of utilizing a universal organizing principle, in this instance, homeopathic magic, to explain a particular piece of folkloristic behavior. (In this context, we can understand the outbreak of "streaking," running naked, that is, uncovered,

in a public place as in part a symbolic statement of social protest against the "cover-up" of the Watergate political scandal of the early 1970's.)

Not all structural analysis claims universality. Propp's morphology used only Russian materials and there is no reason to assume universality without so much as testing a given structural formulation against materials from a large sampling of cultures. But even if Propp's morphology applies only to Russian culture (or to Indo-European cultures as it most probably does), the question of the meaning of Propp's analysis remains unanswered. Propp convincingly demonstrated the syntagmatic structure of European Märchen, but he did not say very much about the meaning of the pattern he delineated. Admittedly, structural analysis is objective or at least it is supposed to be whereas the interpretation of a structural pattern is subjective. Yet without interpretation, structural analysis can be just as trivial and sterile as motif and tale type identification. It is not enough to identify or describe, though description is a necessary first step. Structural analysis without interpretation is little more than a form of academic gamesmanship in which the construction of some more or less abstruse model is seen as the ultimate goal. What then is the significance of Propp's morphology? How does the pattern he described in such exemplary detail relate to Russian or European culture as a whole?

If we apply Van Gennep's structural pattern to Propp's morphology, we can see that functions 1–11 constitute a sequence of separation. Function 1, One of the members of a family absents himself from home, to function 11, The hero leaves home, seem to describe the break up or departure from one's natal family. Function 15, The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search, to function 31, The hero is married and ascends the throne, might be said to constitute a sequence of incorporation. The incorporation involves the formation of a new family unit (through marriage). In terms of Van Gennep's scheme of analysis, the crucial transitional sequence would be Propp's functions 12 through 14, the donor sequence. It is the donor, often encountered in an area between the hero's homeland and the other land, who makes it possible for him to succeed in his quest. If the fairy tale is in part an account of a marriage quest, then the donor figure may be serving the role of a matchmaker.

The difficulty the hero or heroine has in leaving home may reflect the comparable difficulties one encounters in life in leaving home. Similarly, the even greater obstacles encountered in the other land from the eventual spouse's family may also be accurate in terms of the problems which need to be solved whenever an individual moves in to live with his or her in-laws. The transition from childhood to adulthood and its successful completion through marriage may thus be one of the primary subjects of fairytales. From tales, children may be expected to learn that one must leave the security of one's initial home to find a suitable spouse. Whether one brings a spouse home or stays on to live in the spouse's land would simply reflect the different possibilities of postnuptial residence, e.g., patrilocal or matrilocal.

I do not wish to be misconstrued as believing that fairytales reflect only normal everyday ordinary life. Fairytales are fantasy, one must remember. They are very much analogous to dreams. If being asleep and being awake are in opposition, then dreams are intermediate. One is asleep, but one imagines one is awake. So in a similar manner, the fairytale takes place once upon a time, outside of normal time and space, but it is told as though it were reality, in real time and space. (To the extent that dreams are inevitably narrated, they often take on the appearance of folktales. Whereas some scholars have argued that dreams are the source of folktales, I see no reason for assuming that any one clement of culture is

necessarily logically prior to any other element of culture. It is equally possible that patterns of dream narrative are in fact derived from folktales. It would be interesting to apply Propp's morphology, for example, to dreams of individuals from Indo-European cultures to see the extent, if any, to which dream structure resembles fairytale structure.)

My own view of fairytales is that they express child-parent conflicts and also sibling rivalry. Boys conquer large male rivals (giants, dragons) while girls outwit large female rivals (stepmothers, witches) as well as evil brothers or sisters. Ambivalence towards parents is suggested by the fact that the donor figure and the villain may be the same sex. In Cinderella, the heroine may be helped by a cow or fairy godmother while she is hindered by a wicked stepmother. Similarly, in male centered fairytales, the donor figure and the villain may both be male, suggesting a son's ambivalence towards his father. To the extent that the so-called Freudian family romance may be reflected in fairytales, I believe it would be a mistake to think that fairytales were no more than fictionalized accounts from the old, natal family to the new, conjugal family. The point is simply that Propp's morphology makes it possible to speculate about the significance of fairytales in new ways.

It is precisely this possibility of seeing folklore in new ways which makes structural analysis worthwhile. Let me give another example. In comparing the morphology of North American Indian tales and European tales, I drew attention to the number of motifemes which intervened between the members of a motifeme pair such as Lack and Lack Liquidated.[35] Specifically, I suggested that American Indian folktales had a lesser *motifemic depth* than European tales. In Propp's morphology, there arc many functions which may occur between 8a and 19, Lack and Liquidation of the Lack. Cumulative tales[36] also reflect comparable motifemic depth insofar as the initial lack may be separated from final liquidation by a whole series of intervening pairs of lacks and liquidations of those lacks. I failed to say, however, that the greater motifemic depth of European tales might reflect an important principle of European culture and that is the whole notion of deferred gratification or reward. I have since analyzed the future orientation in American worldview in these terms and I even suggested that the popularity of the shaggy dog story in which an excessively long buildup to what is usually regarded as a disappointing punch line is essentially a metacultural parody of this worldview principle.[37] The practice of living for the future either the immediate future or for life in the next world is made fun of in the shaggy dog story insofar as it is implied that the reward is never worth the long wait. The shaggy dog story builds expectations only to deny them in contrast to fairytales and cumulative tales in which expectations are almost always fulfilled. What is important in the present context is that the structure of narrative is closely related to principles or elements of world-view.

We may hope that the rewards of structural analysis will not be long deferred. As more and more structural analyses of folklore genres and items are undertaken, we stand to gain more and more insight into both folklore and folk. It is not enough to collect and classify folklore. Nor is it sufficient to carry out structural analyses without interpretation. Structural studies, like comparative studies, should be the jumping off points for interpretation. For example, it is not enough to analyze the structure of the game of Chinese chess or even to compare its traits with European chess. What folklorists should be interested in is establishing the existence of oicotypes and the relationships of oicotypes to such matters as national character, ideology, and worldview. Thus in Chinese chess, it is such details as the lack of a queen among the chess pieces which is of particular interest. The male bias in Chinese social organization (where women are expected to be servile, obedient, and to stay

out of men's way) is clearly reflected in Chinese chess. Actually, Chinese chess is almost certainly an older form than European chess. So the addition of the powerful queen and the presence of a relatively weak king in European chess should be of interest to students of European family structure, especially in view of the psychoanalytic interpretation of chess according to which the object of the game is to put the opposing king (father) in jeopardy/ check so that he cannot move (impotence?), often by using one's own queen (mother) effectively.[38] Regardless of whether or not the term "checkmate" does derive from the Persian words "shah" "mat" (the king is dead), it is curious that the English words strongly suggest suppressing a "mate," perhaps the mate of the opponent's queen. The relevance of checking a queen's mate in the light of the Oedipus complex according to which one wishes to eliminate the father in order to have one's mother to oneself ought to be obvious enough. It is probably no accident that the addition of the queen in chess occurred at approximately the same time in history (eleventh or twelfth century) as the emergence of the Madonna complex in southern Europe.

The interpretation of the structural features need not, of course, be psychoanalytic. That is simply my own personal bias. I believe that structural analysis can facilitate all kinds of different modes of interpretation. Again, in Chinese chess, the equivalent of pawns, that is, soldiers, can move to the eighth rank at the opposite end of the board. However, whereas pawns in European chess can be transformed into queens or other powerful pieces, the pawns in Chinese chess must remain pawns. The possible implications with respect to differences in patterns of social mobility are clear. The analogy for folktale study is simply that we must go beyond the comparative listing of motifs and traits in different cultural areas. We must not stop with structural descriptions of Russian fairytales. We must make attempts to interpret the meanings (and I use the plural advisedly) of folklore. It is not enough to say that folklore is a mirror of a culture. We must try to see what it is that folklore reflects.

I believe it is through structural analysis that we may best view the reflection afforded by folklore. First we need rigorous structural descriptions of the kind provided by Bouissac for the lion tamer's act in the circus, but we also need interpretative studies showing how the structural patterns provide metaphors for the culture at large, studies such as Geertz's brilliant analyses of Javanese shadow puppet plays[39] and the Balinese cockfight.[40] It would be possible, for example, to describe the structure of a Spanish or Mexican bull fight in a manner similar to Bouissac's superb account of circus acts, but if the analysis failed to relate the struggle between man and bull to Spanish and Mexican norms of masculinity, it would be insufficient. In the bullfight, there is a battle to see who penetrates whom. The matador tries to place his sword in the bull (after allowing the bull to make many passes) while the bull presumably is trying to gore the matador. The loser, the one penetrated, is emasculated or feminized. If the matador is particularly brilliant, he may be awarded various extremities of the bull, e.g., the ears, hooves, tail, etc. which suggests the complete humiliation of the bull. Whether the bull is a father symbol or simply another male, the battle represents the matador's attempt to demonstrate in public his masculine prowess at the expense of another male, a pattern which is also to be found in verbal dueling among adolescent males throughout the Mediterranean area.[41]

In sum, I would say that structural analysis is but one of the methodological techniques available to folklorists. In combination with the comparative method, it can be used to define genres and identify oicotypes. After rigorous structural descriptions, the folklorists may be better able to see how folklore contains and communicates the central metaphors

of a society. The analysis and interpretation of these patterns of metaphors should provide unrivalled insights into the worldview and behavior of peoples everywhere.

Notes

1.   Cf. Bastide 1962; Gardner 1972; Parain-Vial 1969; Piaget 1970; Scholes 1974; Viet 1965.
2.   Cf. Ehrlich 1955, and especially Jameson 1972.
3.   Hammel 1972.
4.   Kirk 1970.
5.   Dundes 1964b.
6.   Paulme 1972.
7.   Pasqualino 1970.
8.   E.g. Boon 1972; Geertz 1967; Leach 1970; Scholte 1969.
9.   Cf. Dundes 1964b; Hendricks 1970; Maranda 1972. Meletinsky 1970, 1971 and 1973; Pop 1967a, 1967b, and 1968; Teneze 1970; Voigt 1969 and 1972; Waugh 1969; for bibliography Breymayer 1972b.
10. Tarde 1902, 69.
11. Tarde 1897, 292–293.
12. Lévi-Strauss 1955, 40.
13. For proverb, see Dundes 1975; Greimas 1970, 309–314; Kuusi 1966 and 1972; Milner 1969a, 1969b and 1969c. For riddle, see Georges and Dundes 1963. Köngäs-Maranda 1971; Scott 1969; Todorov 1973. For superstition, see Dundes 1961.
14. and riddles, cf. Georges and Dundes 1963.
15. Lévi-Strauss 1969, 12.
16. Ibid., 11–12.
17. Propp 1968, 112.
18. Ben-Amos 1969.
19. Lévi-Strauss 1969, 12.
20. Jung 1963.
21. Ibid.
22. Lévi-Strauss 1955, 440.
23. Dundes 1964b, 99–100.
24. Dundes 1971, 179–180.
25. Dundes 1962.
26. Olrik 1965, 133–134.
27. Dundes 1968.
28. Lévi-Strauss 1967, 17.
29. Lévi-Strauss 1955, 432.
30. Cf. Taylor 1948/1949.
31. Olrik 1965, 135–136.
32. Van Gennep 1960, 191.
33. Dundes 1963, 217.
34. Dundes 1964b, 257.
35. Ibid., 94.
36. Cf. Propp 1973.
37. Dundes 1969.
38. Cf. Reider 1959.
39. Geertz 1957.
40. Geertz 1972.
41. Cf. Ingham 1964, Zurcher and Meadow 1967.

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Postscript

Binary Opposition in Myth:
The Propp/Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect

In 1928, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp published his pathbreaking *Morphology of the Folktale* in a limited printing of only 1600 copies (Bravo 1972:45). In his *Morphology*, Propp delineated a syntagmatic sequence of thirty-one functions which he claimed defined the Russian fairy tale (Aarne-Thompson tale types 300–749). Unfortunately, the few Western scholars who read Russian and Propp's important monograph had little impact upon the direction of folk narrative study. Only famed linguist Roman Jakobson in his 1945 folkloristic commentary for the Pantheon edition of Afanas'ev's *Russian Fairy Tales* referred to Propp's research in a brief summary of his findings (1945:640–641). It was not until Professor Thomas A. Sebeok of Indiana University arranged for an English translation of Propp's *Morphology* in 1958 that Propp's remarkable analysis became accessible to Western folklorists (cf. Breymayer 1972; Bremond and Verrier 1982; and Cardigos 1996:33–36, but see Chistov 1986:9).

Three years earlier, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss had responded favorably to an invitation issued by the same Professor Sebeok who was then the editor of the *Journal of American Folklore* to participate in a symposium on myth. (Among others in that symposium were David Bidney, Richard M. Dorson, Reidar Th. Christiansen, Lord Raglan, and Stith Thompson.) Lévi-Strauss's paper, entitled "The Structural Study of Myth" which initiated a veritable flood of "structural" enterprises, was written without any knowledge of Propp's *Morphology.* The 1955 JAF issue was published as a separate book under the title *Myth: A Symposium* in 1958, the same year Propp's *Morphology* appeared in English.

In his essay, Lévi-Strauss contended "that mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation" and further that "the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" (1955:440, 443). Lévi-Strauss has persisted in his "definition" of myth or mythical thought. In *The Naked Man,* the final volume of the four-volume *Mythologiques,* in a chapter entitled "Binary Operators," he has this to say of "mythemes," his neologism intended to refer to basic units of myth: "Of course, all mythemes of whatever kind, must, generally speaking, lend themselves to binary operations, since such operations are an inherent feature of the means invented by nature to make possible the functioning of language and thought" (1981:559). To be sure, Lévi-Strauss is well aware that he has been "accused" of "overusing" "the notion of binary opposition" (1995:185).

Like Propp, Lévi-Strauss had proposed a formula for the structure of narrative, but unlike Propp, his formula was totally algebraic involving "functions" and "terms" (1955:442; for a discussion of the formula, see Mosko 1991). Whereas Propp had extrapolated his

thirty-one function sequence from the linear order of events recounted in his 100 fairy tale corpus, Lévi-Strauss sought to discover what he felt was the underlying paradigm (of oppositions). Lévi-Strauss did recognize the "order" of events as presented in narrative as told, but he elected to ignore that "order." In his terms, "The myth will be treated as would be an orchestra score *perversely* presented as a unilinear series and where our task is to re-establish the correct disposition" (1955:432, my emphasis). The use of the descriptive label "perversely" seemed to suggest that the linear sequential order (utilized by Propp) was an obstacle to be overcome by Lévi-Strauss in his efforts to arrive at the supposed underlying paradigm. As Champagne puts it, "Lévi-Strauss regards such linear, sequential forms as obvious and superficial" (1995:42).

Lévi-Strauss is certainly cognizant of the difference between syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure (1988:205). Moreover, throughout his four volume *Mythologiques* series, Lévi-Strauss repeatedly denigrates the sequential syntagmatic while at the same time praising the virtues of the paradigmatic. In *The Raw and the Cooked,* the first of the *Mythologiques* volumes, Lévi-Strauss claims that a detail of one myth which is "absurd on the syntagmatic level" becomes "coherent from the paradigmatic point of view" (1969:253). Again and again, the syntagmatic context is summarily dismissed. In speaking of another myth, Lévi-Strauss argues, "If we consider only the syntagmatic sequence—that is, the unfolding of the story—it appears incoherent and very arbitrary in construction" (1969:306), and he proceeds to generalize, "Considered purely in itself, every syntagmatic sequence must be looked upon as being without meaning," and the only solution involves "replacing a syntagmatic sequence by a paradigmatic sequence" (1969:307). Interestingly enough, although Lévi-Strauss's methodology wears the trappings of structuralism, his actual method is a form, an idiosyncratic form to be sure, of the *comparative method.* It is through comparison with one or more other myths (not always cognates!) that the elusive meaning of a myth text can be "revealed." Lévi-Strauss is explicit on this point: "Finally, one detail in the Bororo myth that remained incomprehensible when viewed from the angle of syntagmatical relations, becomes clear when *compared* to a corresponding detail in the Kayapo myth" (1969:210, my emphasis). In this case, it is a Kayapo text which purportedly illuminates a Bororo text, but the comparison can go either way: "The Kayapo-Kubenkranken version (M8) contains a detail that in itself is unintelligible and that can only he elucidated by means of the Bororo myth, M55" (1969:131). So although Lévi-Strauss is essentially known as a structuralist, the empirical fact is that he is much more of a comparativist than a structuralist.

Lévi-Strauss's methodology is consistent and explicit: "By dividing the myth into sequences not always clearly indicated by the plot, and by relating each sequence to paradigmatic sets capable of giving them a meaning, we eventually found ourselves in a position to define the fundamental characteristics of a myth . . ." (1979:199). Sometimes the comparative paradigm could come from within the same culture as the original myth; sometimes from without. "While the episode of Moon appears to be nonmotivated in the syntagmatic chain of the Thompson myth considered alone, it finds its place again in a paradigmatic ensemble as a permutation when related to other myths of these same Indians" (1955:140n) but alternatively the range of Lévi-Strauss's comparative method can be large, so large that he is willing to compare a South American Indian myth with possible cognates in North America to find meaning. Speaking of an episode in his "Tucuna reference myth," Lévi-Strauss has this to say: "This episode which cannot be interpreted according to the syntagmatic sequence, and on which South American mythology as a whole fails to

shed any light, can only be elucidated by reference to a paradigmatic system drawn from North American mythology" (1979:17).

In 1959, Lévi-Strauss was appointed to the prestigious chair of Social Anthropology at the College de France and for his inaugural lecture, he chose a Tsimshian narrative reported by Franz Boas to analyze. His analysis of "La Geste d'Asdiwal" was a brilliant tour de force revealing four distinct levels of binary oppositions: geographic (e.g., east vs. west), cosmological (e.g., upper world vs. lower world), economic (land-hunting vs. sea-hunting), and sociological (e.g., patrilocal residence vs. matrilocal residence). Again, there is no reference to Propp in his Asdiwal essay which was published in the *Annuaire, 1958–1959, Ecole pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses.*

By 1960, Lévi-Strauss had definitely read Propp's *Morphology*. We know this because in that year, he published an extensive review of it. Appearing initially in the *Cahiers de l'institut des Sciences Economiques Appliquées* as "La structure et la forme. Rélexions sur un ouvrage de Vladimir Propp," it was also printed as "L'analyse morphologique des contes russes" in volume III of the *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics.* In his review, Lévi-Strauss duly praised Propp for being an innovator ahead of his time, but he also criticized Propp's analysis. A sample of the praise reads: "The most striking aspect of Propp's work is the power with which it anticipated 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. . . . [There] 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" (Lévi-Strauss in Propp 1984:175). However, it is with one of the primary criticisms of Propp by Lévi-Strauss that we are presently concerned.

Lévi-Strauss faults Propp for analyzing wondertales. For, according to Lévi-Strauss, "Tales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myths" (Propp 1984:176; cf. Cardigos 1996:34). In this context, Lévi-Strauss claims that "the tale lends itself imperfectly to structural analysis. . . . Should he [Propp] not rather have used myths" instead (1984:177)? Lévi-Strauss then goes on to give his guess as to why Propp did not use myths. "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" (1984:177).

The idea that a professional folklorist, a professor of folklore, did not know enough about myths to analyze them is, of course, preposterous, and it should come as no surprise to learn that Propp upon reading Lévi-Strauss's review was insulted by the insinuation that he knew nothing about myth. Stung by Lévi-Strauss's criticism, Propp wrote a strong rebuttal which appeared first in the 1966 Italian translation of his *Morphology* immediately following the Lévi-Strauss review. (Propp's *Morphology* has had an enormous impact in Italy [cf. de Meijer 1982].) Lévi-Strauss, however, was given the last word in the form of a brief postscript in which he expressed or perhaps feigned surprise at Propp's anger. He had meant, he averred, only to offer "a homage" to a pioneering effort—although it is noteworthy that Lévi-Strauss has continued to avoid making any mention of Propp in any of his many writings on myth and structure. Lévi-Strauss's original review, Propp's rebuttal, and Lévi-Strauss's postscript are available in English translation in Propp's *Theory and History of Folklore,* a selection of Propp's essays published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1984. (It is a pity that Propp's footnotes to his rebuttal did not appear in the

Minnesota Press translation, especially the one that referred to *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales!*)

In his rebuttal, "The Structural and Historical Study of the Wondertale," Propp first thanks the Italian publisher Einaudi for inviting him to write a rejoinder to Lévi-Strauss's review. He then observed that Lévi-Strauss has an important advantage inasmuch as he is a philosopher whereas Propp is merely an empiricist (1984:68). Propp replies that he will not dwell on the logic of such an argument as "since the author does not know myths, he studies wondertales," but it is clear that he does not think much of it. "No scholar can be forbidden to do one thing and urged to do another," he comments. The interested reader should consult the full texts of the debate for all the nuances and facets of the arguments on both sides. Here one may note that Propp in turn critiqued Lévi-Strauss's "re-write" of Propp's thirty-one function scheme by saying, "My model corresponds to what was modeled and is based on a study of data, whereas the model Lévi-Strauss proposes does not correspond to reality and is based on logical operations not imposed by the data . . . Lévi-Strauss carries out his logical operations in total disregard of the material (he is not in the least interested in the wondertale, nor does he attempt to learn more about it) and removes the functions from their temporal sequence" (1984:76). As we have already noted in some detail, Lévi-Strauss would make no apology for "removing" functions from their temporal sequence. In part, we have the two scholars talking past one another: Propp is concerned with empirically observable sequential structure whereas Lévi-Strauss is interested in underlying paradigms, typically binary in nature. (My own view is that Lévi-Strauss is not so much describing the structure of myth as he is the structure of the world described in myth. That is a significant distinction.)

There is other evidence of Lévi-Strauss's rather Olympian posture with respect to his version of "structure" in myth. In the first volume of his magnum opus, *The Raw and the Cooked,* he doubts that the natives of central Brazil would have any understanding of "the systems of interrelations" he finds in their myths. Moreover, he adopts a truly superorganic position when he says, "I therefore claim to show not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact" (1969:12), a statement strangely reminiscent of Jung's equally mystical claim in his "The Psychology of the Child Archetype" essay, ". . . the primitive cannot assert that he thinks; it is rather that something thinks in him! . . ." (1963:72). Lévi-Strauss appears to reject the Jungian universalistic "archetypal" approach to myth (1969:56; 1995:188), and most writers comparing Lévi-Strauss and Jung tend to see more differences than similarities (cf. Chang 1984 and Messer 1986). However, readers can judge the possible parallelism between the two statements cited above for themselves.

In any event, Lévi-Strauss never repudiated his superorganic statement. Indeed, he is well aware of the Anglo-American attitude towards it. In his 1977 Canadian CBC series of talks, published as *Myth and Meaning,* Lévi-Strauss begins by referring to this very statement: "You may remember that I have written that myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him. This has been much discussed and even criticized by my English-speaking colleagues, because their feeling is that, from an empirical point of view, it is an utterly meaningless sentence. But for me it describes a lived experience, because it says exactly how I perceive my own relationship to my work. That is, my work gets thought in me unbeknown to me" (1979:3). Were one to object that Lévi-Strauss's own thought should not be compared to myth, one would be obliged to recall Lévi-Strauss's unabashed comment about *The Raw and the Cooked* that ". . . this book on myths is itself a kind of

myth" (1969:6) which upon reflection is entirely consistent with Lévi-Strauss's contention that the Freudian reading or interpretation of Oedipus "should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth on a par with earlier or seemingly more "authentic" versions" (1955:435).

But this inquiry is not intended to be a full-fledged discussion of either Lévi-Strauss's or Propp's methodologies. (For an initial entree into Lévi-Strauss's voluminous writings on myths and the criticism of them, see Lapointe and Lapointe [1977]; for Propp, see Breyrnayer 1972, Liberman 1984, and Ziel 1995). The aim is to consider only the issue of binary opposition in myth. Let us assume for the sake of argument that Lévi-Strauss is correct in his assumption that myths reveal binary oppositions more clearly than do folktales and that "Tales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myths."

In his 1955 essay in JAF, what narrative does Lévi-Strauss choose to demonstrate his version of "structural analysis?" He chooses the story of Oedipus. Now since Lévi-Strauss is an anthropologist and not a folklorist, he is evidently not all that familiar with the standard genre definitions of myth, folktale, and legend, distinctions which have been observed for nearly two centuries ever since the times of the brothers Grimm who devoted separate major works to each of these three genres. (For definitions, see Bascom 1965 and Bødker 1965). Suffice it to say that if a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form," then it is perfectly obvious that the story of Oedipus is NOT a myth. As folklorists very well know, it is in fact a standard folk-tale, namely, Aarne-Thompson tale type 931. (The number was assigned by Aarne in his original *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen,* FFC 3, published in 1910.) So it turns out that Lévi-Strauss, like Propp, began his analysis of "myth" with a folktale! In the same essay, after discussing one actual myth, that of the Zuni emergence, he proceeds to talk about "the trickster of (native) American mythology" and refers to "the mythology of the Plains" citing "Star Husband" and "Lodge-Boy and Thrown-Away" (1955:440). But these latter allusions are all to folktales, not myths. At least Lévi-Strauss is consistent, that is, consistently mistaken. In *The Origin of Table Manners,* the third volume in the *Mythologiques* series, he devotes no less than two chapters to the "Star Husband" myth (1979:199–272), this even though he had read Stith Thompson's classic study "The Star Husband *Tale"* (my emphasis). No serious folklorist would label the Star Husband story a myth, but then again Lévi-Strauss is no folklorist. He refers to Stith Thompson, by the way, as "the eminent *mythographer"* (1979:19) (again, my emphasis). The fact is that Stith Thompson wrote very little about myth, preferring instead to concentrate on his beloved folktale! One might well argue that if Lévi-Strauss insists upon calling folktales such as Star Husband "myths," he is perfectly justified in reclassifying Stith Thompson, an acknowledged specialist in the folktale, as a "mythographer" or "mythologist."

What about the subject of Lévi-Strauss's inaugural lecture, the story of Asdiwal (which he cautiously labelled "geste")? This is not a myth either. If it were believed to be historically "true" by the Tsimshian, then it would be a legend. If not, it would be a folktale, a fictional narrative not believed to be any more historical than such Western folktales as Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood. In no way is the geste of Asdiwal an account of how the world or humankind came to be in their present form. It is not a myth by folkloristic standards.

And what about the texts, the hundreds of texts, analyzed in the four-volume *Mythologiques* and the two later sequels (1988, 1995)? Are they all myths? The initial narrative discussed, "The Macaws and their Nest" is a Bororo version of the "bird-nester," a

narrative which Lévi-Strauss (arbitrarily) labels M1 (key myth). But the narrative is not a myth at all in the technical sense of the term. It is a straightforward folktale! This is not to say that Lévi-Strauss does not analyze some myths in *Mythologiques.* The important point is that he analyzes *both* myths and folktales indiscriminately.

If the Oedipus, Asdiwal, and bird-nester narratives are all folktales rather than myths, then we might pose to Lévi-Strauss the same question he addressed to Propp: if folktales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myths, why did Lévi-Strauss choose folktales rather than myths to demonstrate his theory of binary oppositions? It seems to me that Lévi-Strauss is hoist by his own petard! The obvious answer is that binary oppositions are just as strong in folktales as they are in myth. Lévi-Strauss's own insightful analysis of Asdiwal is a perfect case in point. The fact that Lévi-Strauss, like the majority of anthropologists, doesn't know the difference between a myth and a folktale should not be a factor. Most anthropologists use the term "myth" when the narratives they discuss are unmistakably folktales or legends. The appalling ignorance among anthropologists and others concerning such standard folk narrative genre distinctions as myth and folktale might account for why despite a deluge of critical writing on Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques* and other studies of "myth" by anthropologists and sociologists (cf. Thomas et al. 1976; Carroll 1978, and Mandelbaum 1987), no one seems to have noticed that Lévi-Strauss was analyzing folktales more often than myths. Even those critics who have commented specifically on the Propp/Lévi-Strauss debate (e.g., Bravo 1972, de Meijer 1970, Janovic 1975) failed to remark on this matter.

So if Lévi-Strauss has analyzed folktales rather than myths, what happens to his notion that "mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation," and "the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction?" Clearly, the notion needs to be amended. But there is more.

One could well argue that binary opposition is a universal. Presumably all human societies, past and present, made some kind of distinction between "Male and Female," "Life and Death," "Day and Night" (or Light and Dark), etc. Certainly we can find binary oppositions in genres of folklore other than myth and folktale. Take the proverb genre, for example. Some proverbs have both topics and comments in opposition: "United we stand; divided we fall" (united vs. divided; stand vs. fall); "Man proposes; but God disposes" (Man vs. God; proposes vs. disposes); "Last hired; first fired" (last vs. first; hired vs. fired) etc. (Dundes 1975). The same kinds of binary opposition also occur in traditional riddles (Georges and Dundes 1963). Examples of oppositional riddles include:

> I am rough, I am smooth
> I am wet, I am dry
> My station is low, my title high
> My king my lawful master is,
> I'm used by all, though only his. (highway)
> Large as a house
> Small as a mouse,
> Bitter as gall,
> And sweet after all. (pecan tree and nut)

And what about the curse genre? There are traditional Jewish-American curses which are clearly based on binary oppositions:

You should have lockjaw and seasickness at the same time.
May you eat like a horse and shit like a little bird.

Could we not assert on the basis of the above examples that a proverb (riddle, curse) can serve as " a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction?"

If binary opposition is a universal—or even if it were confined to folklore genres as diverse as myth, folktale, proverb, riddle, and curse—the question is: how can binary opposition be used to define the nature of myth? This is not to deny that binary oppositions can be found in myth. The critical point is that binary opposition is in no way peculiar to myth. If this is so, then what Lévi-Strauss has isolated in his analysis of "myth" tells us precious little about the nature of myth in particular. To be fair, since Lévi-Strauss is actually interested in the nature of human thought (rather than myth per se), perhaps it doesn't matter that binary opposition as a distinctive feature is not confined to myth. Quite the contrary. If binary oppositional thought is a pan-human mental characteristic, that is well worth noting. But then we must not pretend that the presence of binary oppositions in a narrative necessarily identifies that narrative as a myth. Although Lévi-Strauss occasionally actually cites an Aarne-Thompson tale type number (1995:181), the truth is that for the most part he totally ignores the basic "myth-folktale-legend" genre categories. From a folkloristic vantage point, it is the height of hubris to write a four-volume (plus two sequel volumes) introduction to a science of mythology without even recognizing or knowing the difference between a myth and a folktale!

Finally, we are obliged to remind the reader that the presence of binary opposition in folklore is hardly a new idea. One of Axel Olrik's epic laws proposed in the first decade of the twentieth century was *Das Gesetz des Gegensatzes,* the Law of Contrast. "This very basic opposition is a major rule of epic composition: young and old, large and small, man and monster, good and evil" (Olrik 1965: 135; cf. 1992:50). Furthermore, the principle was beautifully illustrated by another Danish folklorist, the late Bengt Holbek in his three-dimensional paradigmatic model for Danish folk-tales: low vs. high, young vs. adult, and male vs. female (Holbek 1987:453), a conceptual model borrowed from Elli Köngäs Maranda (Maranda and Maranda 1971:23). The wheel may have been re-invented but it also comes full circle, inasmuch as Maranda was inspired by none other than Lévi-Strauss!

To the extent that the debate between Propp and Lévi-Strauss itself constitutes a kind of academic binary opposition, we earnestly trust that this essay will be understood as a form of constructive mediation.

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