Gothic Horror and The Folktale

- A Formalist Approach to Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto

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Abstract
This essay examines the structural relationship between the folktale and the gothic novel with focus on characterization. This study will present a clearer definition of the now problematized gothic genre and show how newer genres are influenced by the older ones. This examination is done by doing a close-reading of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, which is generally known as the first gothic novel, and comparing it to formalist Vladimir Propp’s findings on the functions of the Russian folktale. Walpole’s novel is used as primary source of data and the key works by Propp is utilized as the theoretical framework. In addition, a couple of critical essays have been looked upon in relation to the previous works. This study finds that there are apparent similarities in structure and narrative in the gothic novel in relation to the folktale such as the presence of the same essential characters and functions. This proves the overlap between the two genres and it would be reasonable to conclude that the gothic genre consists of a part folktale. By the revelation of this previously unknown relationship between the folktale and the gothic genre this essay opens up for further research on the origin and influences of gothic fiction.

Keywords: Vladimir Propp, Gothic, Horace Walpole, Formalism, Folktale
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1. Introduction

“The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear” (Walpole 5). These are the first lines in the first preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole, as it would turn out, in 1764. In the second edition of this book Walpole added the subtitle “A Gothic Story”, which would lead this work of fiction to later become considered as the birth of the gothic novel. One of the characteristics of the gothic novel is its static and stereotypical characters. As E. J Clery explains it, “identity is not determined from the inside out, but from the outside in” (Walpole *Introduction* xviii). But could the stereotypical nature of the characters in *The Castle of Otranto* be related to Walpole’s fictional claim for authenticity, to his intention of making the reader believe they are reading an actual folktale? Therefore, the topic of this essay will be the characters in *The Castle of Otranto* and their functions.

Since this novel is the first one in the genre of gothic fiction, it has been analysed a multitude of times as a foundational text in the genre. Furthermore, a lot of subsequent works of gothic fiction like the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe have been compared to the works of Walpole. Therefore, Walpole can be regarded as the forefather of gothic literature. Inevitably, though, Walpole himself must also have been influenced by something or someone else. The problem with finding the influence of gothic is that there is not a generally clear concept of what Gothicism actually is.

Russian formalist Vladimir Propp has done extensive studies of the Russian folktale, or wondertale as he also describes it, where he presents a theory on how a story is constructed, what functions it consists of and which characters are relevant to represent these functions. Although Propp’s theory puts focus on the folktale and is not meant to be applied to other genres by its full extent, it can be argued that parts of his research can be functional in analysing other kinds of literature and therefore create a bridge between genres. Propp presents seven characters, or “spheres,” which are essential for the functions of the folktale and the question is if these characters can be found and if they can, do they have the same function in *The Castle of Otranto* as in the wondertale. The question is: how do they correspond to the theory introduced by Propp?

The folktale is one of the oldest kinds of fiction and because of its similar structure and simplicity in form it would be reasonable to assume that it the younger genres and can
thereby be viewed as foundational. The aim of this essay is to examine the structural relationship between the folktale and the gothic novel with a focus on characterization. I argue that the characters deemed essential by Propp in the folktale can also be found in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and that by placing them in a new environment, Walpole evolves them into something more – something beyond the tradition. This essay will thereby also with the help of Propp show the overlap between the two genres and give a clearer definition of what gothic fiction consists of in concern of form.

2. Theory and Background

2.1 Vladimir Propp and the Folktale

Vladimir Propp is a well known name in the studies of form in Russian folktales. The Russian formalist published his first book, *Morphology of the Folktale*, in 1928 but its significance was not discovered until the book was translated into English three decades later (Propp Theory xvi). His theory means that the structure of the folktale’s storyline consists of 31 functions and that these functions are the same in every tale in the genre. A story can not only consist of a sequence of events, but there must also be someone acting them out. In every story there are a fixed number of stereotypical characters that are represented in these functions. Propp explains these characters in relation to the functions as “spheres of action”. There are seven of these essential dramatis personae and in the classical folktale they are not hard to recognize (Propp *Morphology* 79-80).

2.1.1 Terms

2.1.1.1 Function

Propp’s usage of the term “function” does not correspond to its conventional meaning when talking about an object is or an action’s function. He limits it to the representation of narrative, meaning that you do not focus on the action taking place in a concrete way but what function the action is of to narrative (Propp *Theory* 74). For example, the hero receives a magic cloak from a witch. The function of this cloak is not simply to keep the hero warm or make him look good, but it fills the function of enabling him to perform a difficult task or maybe return home in disguise etc. The function of the narrative is what is at the centre of everything. Structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss has criticised Propp for the use of this term in such a constrained way by saying that by indicating that function only should be determined by the content of the function, or the action, the function itself become ambiguous since you
have to look at the context where it is found and thereby determine the function according to its relation to other functions (Lévi-Strauss in Propp Theory 172).

2.1.1.2 Dramatis Personae
Dramatis personae means characters whose actions constitute the function. They are not the only characters in a saga but they are the ones who bring the narrative forward. These essential characters are included the villain, the helper, the donor, the princess and her father (constituted as one), the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero. (Propp Morphology 79-80).

2.1.1.2.1 The Seven
- The villain: Someone who get in a fight or a struggle of some kind with the hero followed by a pursuit.
- The dispatcher: Someone who notices the absence of the princess, or some other sought after object, and dispatches the hero on his mission.
- The (magical) helper: Someone who aids the hero in some way, for example helps him with a difficult task, saves him when in distress or helps him with transportation.
- The princess or prize and her father: The princess is someone who is in distress and therefore need to be saved by the hero. Her father is often the one who sends the hero on his mission and is the one who presents the award after the quest is completed, the reward being his daughter’s hand in marriage.
- The donor: Someone who the hero encounters and receives a helpful object from, preferably a magical entity.
- The hero or victim/seeker hero: The hero is someone who goes on a quest or a mission, receives help from others and finally defeats the false hero and saves the princess.
- False hero: Someone who tries to portray them self as the hero and steal the princess and take credit for the hero’s actions.

2.1.1.3 Sphere
The concept of a sphere is how multiple functions create one unity centred around one of the specific dramatis personae, also called a sphere of action. Since there are seven dramatis personae, there are seven spheres. It is notable that each sphere is not restricted to one dramatis persona so they can exist in another one’s sphere, even if they are not the main actor (Propp Morphology 79-80). Lévi-Strauss claims that this definition is very unclear since it
enables the different characters to represent several dramatis personae in one character since all the character has to do is share attributes with the personae to adapt its function in the story (Lévi-Strauss in Propp *Theory* 173). This would lead to a lack of necessity of seven characters. Professor Terence Murphy’s analysis of three tales supports the idea of one character taking on the role of several dramatis personae and means that this opens up for a more intricate plot with mistaken identities and would create a greater uncertainty when the clarity of what/who is evil and what/who is good is disturbed (Murphy 13). This would be excellent for gothic horror.

2.1.1.4 Composition
The term composition is by Propp defined as a concept, something that only exists in our minds. It is described as the skeleton of a story. According to him, all wondertales share the same skeleton, the same composition that is, constituted of functions although the plot of the story may vary. It is the plot and the composition together that creates the structure of the story (Propp *Morphology* 74-75).

2.2 *The Castle of Otranto*
As mentioned earlier, *The Castle of Otranto* is viewed as the first gothic novel. Although the novel has received a lot of negative criticism, about the stale characters among other things, it is still a well-discussed piece of work and read all over the world. If it were not for the status the novel has received in the history of literature it would probably not be as famous as it is today (Clery ix). There is a multitude of different characters, all possessing traits of certain stereotypes that are easily recognized in modern literature, but it is also important to acknowledge that it is not only the characters of flesh and blood that are vital but the castle itself is an actor in the plot (xv). This makes this particular piece of work interesting to look at since is has all these characters which are today regarded as classic but at the time of publication represented something almost completely new.

2.2.1 Plot
The story of *The Castle of Otranto* begins on the wedding day of Isabella and Conrad but the wedding comes to an abrupt end when Conrad is found crushed under a giant helmet. After this, Conrad’s father Manfred realizes that his one chance to procure an heir is to obtain another wife for himself to conceive a male child because his daughter Matilda is planning to
become a nun and his current wife Hippolita is deemed useless in the act of child making at this time. Meanwhile, a peasant from the city arrives and recognizes the grand helmet to be the one worn by the statue of Alfonso, the previous owner of the castle. The peasant connects this to an ancient prophesy about the ownership of the castle coming to an end when the real owner of the castle “should be grown too large to inhabit it” (Walpole 17). The peasant, called Theodore, is imprisoned inside the helmet. After this, Manfred conducts a chase leading Isabella to flee through the hallways of the castle finding her way towards a secret passage leading to the monastery and aided by the successfully escaped Theodore. Theodore himself is caught once again and set to be executed. Only seconds before the deadly strike Jerome, the friar, recognizes Theodore to be his long lost son and as a result narrowly saves him from death. Theodore is instead locked up inside the castle. When the commotion of the day has settled, a group of knights arrive at the castle claiming to have been sent there by the marquis of Vicenza, who also happens to be Isabella’s father Frederic. When the knights learn that Isabella is on the run, one of them sets off to find her. At the same time, Theodore is freed from his imprisonment by Matilda and after having escaped the castle he finds Isabella in a cavern. When the knight arrives there is a struggle between the two men and the knight is wounded and discovered to be no one less than Frederic himself. They all go to the castle and when Frederic sees Matilda, he instantly falls in love with her. This leads him to make a deal with Manfred: Manfred will marry Isabella and Frederic will marry Matilda. Matilda and Theodore, who share a mutual love, sneaks off to meet each other in the church but Manfred, who believes it to be Isabella that Theodore is meeting, follows them and stabs Matilda resulting in her death. Theodore is then revealed to be the true heir of the castle and ends up marrying Isabella, thus becoming king of the castle.

2.2.2 Main Characters

2.2.2.1 Manfred

Manfred is the father of the family and the usurper of the castle of Otranto. He is married with Hippolita whom he has two children with, Conrad and Matilda. He is obsessed with receiving an heir and after the death of his only son, and therefore his only opportunity for a new heir, he becomes fixated on the mission to make this happen on his own, leading him to discard his wife and forcefully try to marry his son’s bride.
2.2.2.2 Hippolita
Hippolita is the wife of Manfred and described as an “amiable” (Walpole 17) lady. She is opposed to the marriage of Conrad because of his youth and his history of illness and after his death she is devastated. She is sheltered from the events following Conrad’s death and she is immediately willing to surrender to her husband’s demand of divorce.

2.2.2.3 Matilda
The daughter of Manfred is by Walpole described as “the most beautiful virgin, aged eighteen …called Matilda” (17). In the beginning of the novel she appears to be as sensitive as Hippolita and her chore is to take care of her heartbroken mother, but later on she becomes more important to the plot since she helps Theodore escape and aids him further in the saving of Isabella. Her intentions is to become a nun but then she falls in love with Theodore which is not appreciated by Manfred and when she encounters Frederic he falls in love with her, making her own happy ending impossible. She is accidentally killed by her father in the end.

2.2.2.4 Isabella
Isabella is the daughter of Frederic and resides at the castle as the soon-to-be wife of Conrad. She becomes the victim of Manfred in his chase to produce an heir after her fiancé is killed and is forced to flee through the castle, during which she obtains help from Theodore and manages to escape. Like Matilda, Isabella falls in love with Theodore.

2.2.2.5 Theodore
Theodore is first presented as a peasant who by curiosity arrived to the castle after Conrad’s death but is accused of sorcery and imprisoned. He manages to escape where after he helps Isabella in her escape from Manfred and is again caught and after almost being executed imprisoned once more. His identity is revealed as the son of Jerome and the heir of Alfonso. With the help from Matilda he flees outside the castle where he meets Isabella, who is hiding. He is in love with Matilda but in the end he marries Isabelle after Matilda’s death and takes his place as the true heir of the castle.

2.2.2.6 Jerome
Jerome is the friar at the monastery and later revealed to be the father of Theodore. He finds Manfred’s actions preposterous but tries to play along with them to save the life of his son and he gives Isabella a sanctuary in her flight.
2.2.2.7 Frederic

Frederic is the father of Isabella and the marquis of Vicenza. He arrives at the castle after being told a prophecy by a dying hermit. He finds his daughter Isabella in distress and immediately develops distaste for Manfred. This disliking takes a turn when he meets Matilda and makes a deal with Manfred: if Frederic gets Manfred’s daughter’s hand in marriage, Manfred will get Isabella’s.

3. Analysis

When first reading *The Castle of Otranto* you get the sense that all characters are very predetermined because of their static and stereotypical portrayal and that it is clear who is supposed to be a “good guy” and who the “bad guy” is. When looking closer at the characters one discovers that while a part of the characters’ place is obvious there are others that are a bit harder to decide on when looking at them on a deeper level. Adding the fact that one character can play several roles makes these static characters very dynamic instead but on a synchronic level rather than a diachronic one. More on this problem will be discussed later on.

The first character to be presented in the novel is Manfred and that he is the villain of the story is indicated early on. Already on the first page it gets known that people are displeased with Manfred’s decision to rush his son’s marriage. Conrad seems to be the trigger for Manfred’s villainous actions since it is during Conrad’s rather forced marriage he is killed, leading his father to misery. If Conrad was still alive, Manfred would not have committed his cruel actions since he then could rely on his son for an heir. His actions are only of selfish content and he appears to do anything to get his will through. He imprisons Theodore when being accused of foul play and pursues Isabella very aggressively in order to make her his new wife only within hours of his son’s death. Thus, he is clearly considered to be the Proppian villain in this story because his actions fill the function of the villainous sphere.

For the villain to be a villain there must be someone exposed to his malice. The character that is most affected by the actions of Manfred must be Isabella because she is the one being chased around the castle and flees for her life. None of the other female characters are in the disposition of immediate danger which would require someone to save them. Therefore Isabella is the only one who could be filling the function of the Princess.
Propp presents that the dramatis personae of the princess and her father is counted as one persona and in this case the part of the father is represented by Frederic, the Marquis of Vicenza. Although Frederic has his role as Isabella’s father and, after he has arrived at the castle and discovered his daughter in distress leading him to attempt to save her from Manfred, he seems to have a shift of loyalty. After discovering Matilda and his affection for her he suddenly seems to become very friendly with Manfred, the villain, and instead uses his own daughter as trade goods. According to Propp, it is the function of the action performed that is of significance and Frederic’s actions in the later case is to gain happiness for himself without caring about who is affected by it and on the scale of good and bad these actions and their function correspond more to the ‘bad’ side. Therefore it is possible that the character of Frederic fills the function of several dramatis personae.

The other role of Frederic could be proposed the role of the false hero. The sphere of the false hero is not something that is visible from the start of the story and as Murphy explained, this creates uncertainty. It would be a probable assumption to say that when the father who is supposed to be the one who wants to save his daughter and reward the hero turns out to be on the side of the villain creates a greater insecurity within the story when the reader no longer knows who to rely on. Consequently Frederic can fill both the function of the father and the false hero, thereby incorporating a more horrific motif in the plot.

Frederic might not try to take credit for the hero’s actions as one of Propp’s criteria are but what he does is trying to portray himself in a heroic way while what he is doing is actually not valiant at all. His loyalty shifts and he get in collusion with the villain causing him to act against the given task of the hero, saving the princess from the villain. Because of this it would be agreeable to say that Frederic fills both these functions.

The hero would be argued to be someone whose sole mission is to save the princess but this is hard to find in this story. The one whose only ambition is to save Isabella with no ulterior motive is Theodore although it was not his intention to be a part of this event from the beginning, he just happened to end up in the middle of it. He is a peasant who arrives at the castle and is exposed to Manfred’s wrath. Theodore is a side-character in the sphere of Manfred and Manfred is a side-character in the sphere of Theodore, meaning that their existence in each other’s spheres increase their function as the villain/hero. If there were no villainous character in the hero’s sphere, then the hero would not fill the function of the hero. Theodore fits into the story as the victim presented by Propp as well as the hero.
Although one often refers to the hero specifically when it comes to this dramatis persona, there is a distinction made by Propp that this character fills the function of the hero or the victim. In this case it is possible, as mentioned above, that Theodore is both filling the function of the hero and the victim of the story - a victimized hero so to speak since he is also in distress for the most part of the story and almost constantly needs to be saved. He is trapped under the grand helmet, imprisoned in the castle and almost executed. As a result of this the hero of the story is not portrayed as the strong dominant male as opposed to Manfred who rules with an iron fist over the women of the castle. His heroism is more of a comical kind although it fills the correct functions. This leads him to be at least one of the heroes of the story.

The helper is supposed to be someone who helps the hero when in need and the most concrete example of this is Matilda. She frees Theodore from his imprisonment and therefore fills the function of helping the hero to pursue his mission. She also advises him of where to hide when freed and thereby fills the function of transportation from one place to another and in this particular case it is the transportation that leads him to the distressed princess since he finds Isabella after this. The character Matilda is a bit ambiguous when it comes to roles because she fits in several but not enough for it to be comfortable to solely place her within that function. In the latter part of the plot she becomes a female in distress when encountering Frederic and also when becoming the object of affection of Theodore she also becomes the prize of the mission although this criteria is credited the function of the princess. This is an argument for why it is Isabella who is the true folkloristic princess since she ultimately becomes the one who marries the chivalrous man and he marries her although he is not even in love with her but it is just how it is supposed to be according to the folkloristic structure presented by Propp.

It is not necessary to limit the dramatis personae to only one character each in my opinion. The role of the helper is one that can be credited another character in the story and that is Jerome. If Jerome would not have revealed the true identity of Theodore he would most likely have been executed and thereby ended the story leaving Isabella to her own device in the claws of Manfred. Jerome also works to mitigate Manfred’s behaviour against the women. He tries to save the marriage of Hippolita and gives Isabella a sanctuary so although he might not appear to play a big part in the plot the character is vital for the outcome of the story. Therefore I would argue that this function is filled by more than one character.
The donor would be someone who the hero encounters and receives something from but in this story the hero does not travel far and does not really encounter new persons. You can look at this problem from two directions. Either you can purpose that Matilda is the helper as well, since she “gives” him his freedom or you can go in to complete opposite direction and look at the helper as someone who is not directly connected to the hero but instead someone who helps the story as a whole. My suggestion would be to use the second theory because then one could see the hermit encountered by Frederic as the donor. The hermit instructs him to dig at a certain spot where he finds the giant sword which has the inscription that leads him and his knights to the castle where Isabella is. Therefore it is reasonable to claim that the hermit is the donor in this story since he is the one who offers an object to pursue the operation and render the significance of Frederic’s arrival at the castle since the gift, in this case a sabre, carries an inscription which almost directly mentions Isabella’s misfortune and foretells her father that she is in need of salvation. The gift given was specifically aimed at Frederic as well with the inscription particularly mentions “thy daughter” (Walpole 82). In this case the donor would be contributing to the sake of the mission instead of the hero specifically and would be filling the function of bringing the father towards the princess.

There is one role left to cast and that is the one of the dispatcher. This part is a bit tricky to pin down since there is not an abduction of some kind as suggested by Propp; instead it jumps directly to the chase. The catalyst for the chase is the giant helmet of the previous ruler of the castle, Alfonso, crushing Conrad. Throughout the story there is the presence of Alfonso manifesting in different objects but also in the appearance of Theodore and this spirit of Alfonso makes it clear that he is not pleased with Manfred and his usurpation of his castle. Propp has presented the prospect of animals taking on the role of the donor (Morphology 80) and thereby expanding the possibilities of other roles appearing in different forms. Therefore it would be reasonable to claim Alfonso the role of the dispatcher.

This kind of novel also has a difference in structure concerning the disposition of roles. Instead of the classic folktale beginning, this novel begins more suddenly and instead of abduction and a dispatching there is more a catalyst that sets off a sequence of events. To adapt the Proppian theory and make it run more smoothly with the novel one can choose to exchange the role of the dispatcher with that of the catalyst.
As presented here all essential seven personae dramatis constructed by Propp are present in the novel even though there are some differences. There is a difference to speculate on when it comes to structure in folktales and in the gothic novel which would enable this interpretation above. The classical folktale appears to have a very linear temporal structure when looking at the functions and their order as presented by Propp and because of this there is no room for parallel stories such as the ones in *The Castle of Otranto*. The novel on the other hand has at least one parallel sequence of events even if you get them as flashbacks retold by Frederic of what events led him to the castle. This difference in structure is very likely to have effect on the importance of certain characters and enables the possibility of doubling the dramatis personae since there can be several spheres of action which contain the same acts which is of magnitude for different parts of the story taking place at the same time. This narrative technique of using flashbacks and side-by-side storylines is not something generally observed in folktales but very common in ordinary novels which would explain this occurrence of double functional characters. This means that there are more than seven essential characters in this novel although their individual importance might be slightly less significant but together create a greater coherence.

The role of the dispatcher in the novel can be a bit doubtful and one can question the necessity of it for this particular story. It does not really seem to fill a concrete function since the story does not have the same structural build-up as the traditional fairytale. The hero of this story is more victim than a hero and instead of being dispatched it is his own flight that leads him to cross the path of the distressed princess making him sort of an involuntary hero guided more by his conscience than by his loyalty to the mission no one gave him. Consequently, the dispatcher has no function to fill in this story.

There are of course other characters in this story than those mentioned above but although they might fill a function to the depth of the plot and make it more diverse they fill no narrative purpose to the story. Despite this, there is one thing worth taking a closer look at and that is the role played by the actual castle in this story. Before you even open the novel the title will reveal that the setting is of importance. The castle works as a living organism controlling its inhabitants and pushing them in different directions. Firstly, it is the castle which kills Conrad setting the whole sequence of events in motion. Secondly, the castle haunts its tenants with living paintings and ghostly beings occupying the hallways. This increases the fright and invites the characters to irrational thinking leading way for the actions
pursued. This reasoning would lead the term “castle” to include everything slightly superstitious in the setting inside the castle and not merely the physical walls.

It is known that there is a prophecy about the castle and its future (Walpole 17). This prophecy basically reveals what the book’s plot is about and the function of the castle would then be to make sure that this comes true by pushing the plot towards its resolution. Imagining that the plot would be put in another setting would show the significance of the factors pointed out earlier, and without the castle there would be no prophecy psychologically pushing the characters and no Alfonso to haunt them since he is a part of the setting more than a physical character. However, for these reasons I would not count the castle as persona of Propp’s because it performs no action except the crushing of Conrad and is therefore not included in a sphere.

It is necessary to return to the role of Frederic after concluding the other characters’ roles. One argument to put Frederic in the place of the original hero can be apparent when taking a closer look at the 31 functions presented by Propp. Frederic is already out of the picture at the beginning of the novel and unexpectedly returns to the plot at the middle of the book, kind of in the same manner as Homer’s Ulysses’ return to Ithaca at the end of the Odyssey. The Marquis is presented as an anonymous knight and his identity is therefore unknown to the castle’s inhabitants and it was he who received the aid of the helper. One could even say that he enacts the function of being put to a difficult task when rushing away to find Isabella and is wounded by Theodore leading to his true identity being exposed. When looking at Propp’s definition of the characters, he does not mention anything about the false hero being an honest person from the start and then go rough but only as someone who tries to take credit for the true hero’s actions. This might be a difference in genres when it comes to novel versus folktale. As argued earlier Theodore can not really be considered a hero in the heroic sense but more as a victim with a chivalrous conscience. Although Propp has chosen to see it as a fact that there is only one of the victim/seeker/hero that can be found within one folktale, there is a possibility that there might be both a victim and a hero in the same novel.

It is worth considering the change from good to bad that Frederic experiences. If one chooses to see him as the hero in this story it is obvious at the end that he is not a hero any longer and it is valuable to notice the difference in the definitions of Propp’s versus what is really going on because what makes Frederic the false hero in this story may be
contradictive to the theory. If one looks at the spheres of action with the character is the centre of it is noticeable that the actions performed up to the encounter with Matilda does not fill a function of evil or to hinder the hero, as the Proppian false hero is described. Instead he becomes a ‘false hero’ in the sense of beginning as a true hero and then falling to less heroic level in the end.

Murphy refers to similar events in his essay when talking about how a character “falsely” can assume the role of another (13). This theory is surely applicable to the novel in question although I would not say that it is as adaptable to Propp’s opinions. My interpretation of Propp is that characters gain their roles through their actions and that the actions that constitutes the function are not planed by the characters to work as this particular functions but something subconsciously created by the structure of writing. What can be understood from Murphy is that the characters feign these other roles than their own on purpose with criminal intent, so to speak. The theory presented by Murphy would therefore fit better in relation to the novel as I have already presented the shift in roles by Frederic. Though the difference would be that Frederic’s change is from the beginning unintended by the character himself and the actions presented in the shift is not essentially of evil intend but of selfishness. This reasoning would go against the claim that the characters in gothic fiction is static and unchanging but if you would compare them to characters within novels of a different genre one would notice the difference. One could put the genres on a scale of static-dynamic and the gothic fiction would be nearer the static side the folktale would be even closer, while for example the romantic novel would be close to the dynamic side. Therefore it would still be agreeable to call the gothic characters static although they show more traits of being more to the dynamic side.

The effect of the false role-taking is to procure insecurity for the reader but if one already at the beginning can foresee the events and actions of malice the insecurity would be dissolved and the result would be that the element of horror would evaporate and only create a slight discomfort for the inattentive reader. In the gothic novel here however, the uncertainty remains strong since this role changing is unforeseen making it excellent for gothic horror. By modernising the concept of Propp, Murphy has created a model to explain more recent folktales, if one would call 17th century literature recent, and it is this alternative model of Propp that can be applied more accurate to the novel in consideration with the genre.
4. Conclusion

The question to answer is whether the characters in *The Castle of Otranto* correlate to what Propp presents or if they do not. The simple answer would be: yes, they do, but there are exceptions. It is not possible to draw a straight line from Propp’s theory and match it identically to the structure of the gothic novel but if you stretch the terms a bit and use some imagination it is possible. The more intricate answer would be that one can establish that all dramatis personae given are present in the story but that the amount of significance their roles actually play can vary. It is ascertained that the structural build-up of the two different forms of literature is not the same. The foundations are the same but because of the plot’s ability to have parallel story-lines, the existence and need of a double set of roles increases which is what has happened in the novel. Therefore the roles are spread out over several characters, which extends the characters’ dynamic traits.

The conclusion is that the theory of Propp can be adapted to fit several genres but with some effort. Propp has laid the foundation of this kind of structural analysis based on pre-decided characters and instead of trying to fit other genres of literature, or more specifically the novel, into it one could instead use these guidelines set by Propp to develop a theory about gothic novels and take into account the structural factors that create a difference, these factors being for example temporality and events (or functions as Propp would have called them). Although these essential characters can be found they are not necessarily of as great importance within the novel as in the folktale since the function they fill is not always of the same magnitude.

Another difference in the gothic novel is the fact that functions are no longer limited to human beings. In this story, the castle becomes animate and controls part of the storyline, starting a new narrative technique within horror fiction in general. This is something noticeable in horror fiction of the centuries following the year of publication of the Walpole novel.

In short, the characters in *The Castle of Otranto* do not correspond to Vladimir Propp’s theory of the essential seven spheres. The folktale consists of a different structure concerning plot and functions which contradicts the usage of the same functions in this novel but which ultimately increases the dynamic level of the novel. Instead of a chronological storyline the novel also has flashbacks leading it to have two parallel events at the same time which amplifies the need of a double set of spheres. These double spheres in combination
with the possibility of dynamic characters that either switch roles or have the depth to possess other roles over time creates a greater layout for horror than is necessary in the folktale. The gothic novel brings out a need that did not exist in the simpler of stories which is fulfilled by a greater development of Propp’s theory, this need being to have a double set of Propp’s essential characters. Without this is would not be possible to create the ghastly emotional setting needed in gothic fiction. If the novel would be constructed in the exact same way as the folktale it would not be either gothic or a novel of larger extent since would be predictable and rather flat so the need is of more characters to expand the plot. The depth of a novel is created by this parallelism in events and the changeability in characters.

These findings give a new perspective on both genres concerned since there is a visible overlap between them. The clear distinction of the structure of the gothic novel, as proved above, shows great similarities with the Proppian folktale and its functions and in combination with the similarities found in narrative. Therefore is would be a reasonably conclusion to claim the gothic genre to be classified as part folktale.
Works Cited


