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Propp's Narrative Functions: Deciphering Hamlet's Character Transformation

Abstract

Narrative analysis serves as a potent tool to unravel the subtleties of character progression and thematic resonance within storytelling. This study investigates the character transformation of Hamlet, the iconic protagonist of William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," employing Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale as an analytical framework. Through the lens of Proppian functions, the study explores Hamlet's journey from grief-stricken prince to tormented tragic hero, shedding light on the interplay between structural narrative components and emotional development. The research employs Propp's functions ranging from Absentation and Interdiction to Violation and Struggle to dissect pivotal moments in the play. These functions elucidate Hamlet's responses to absence, his internal conflicts, and his quest for justice. By mapping Hamlet's trajectory onto Propp's archetypal functions, this study unveils the intricate relationship between narrative structure and character metamorphosis. The analysis not only deepens our understanding of "Hamlet" as a timeless masterpiece but also exemplifies the synergy between traditional character analysis and structural narrative theory.

**Keywords:** Narrative Structure Analysis, Propp's Narrative Functions, Hamlet

**Authors:**

**Nighat Shakur:** (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of English,  
International Islamic University, Islamabad,  
Pakistan. (Email: [nighat.shakur@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:nighat.shakur@iiu.edu.pk))

**Syeda Aqsa Batool:** MS Scholar, International Islamic  
University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

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## Title

### Propp's Narrative Functions: Deciphering Hamlet's Character Transformation

#### Authors:

**Nighat Shakur:** (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of English,  
International Islamic University, Islamabad,  
Pakistan. (Email: [nighat.shakur@iiu.edu.pk](mailto:nighat.shakur@iiu.edu.pk))

**Syeda Aqsa Batool:** MS Scholar, International Islamic  
University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

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#### Abstract

Narrative analysis serves as a potent tool to unravel the subtleties of character progression and thematic resonance within storytelling. This study investigates the character transformation of Hamlet, the iconic protagonist of William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," employing Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale as an analytical framework. Through the lens of Proppian functions, the study explores Hamlet's journey from grief-stricken prince to tormented tragic hero, shedding light on the interplay between structural narrative components and emotional development. The research employs Propp's functions ranging from Absention and Interdiction to Violation and Struggle to dissect pivotal moments in the play. These functions elucidate Hamlet's responses to absence, his internal conflicts, and his quest for justice. By mapping Hamlet's trajectory onto Propp's archetypal functions, this study unveils the intricate relationship between narrative structure and character metamorphosis. The analysis not only deepens our understanding of "Hamlet" as a timeless masterpiece but also exemplifies the synergy between traditional character analysis and structural narrative theory.

**Keywords:** [Narrative Structure Analysis](#), [Propp's Narrative Functions](#), [Hamlet](#)

#### Introduction

Narrative structural analysis is a powerful lens for analyzing the complexities of narrative, providing insights into the underlying patterns that determine characters' development and the progression of their journeys. Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale is a significant framework in narrative structural studies, introducing the concept of "Proppian functions." This analytical technique has been critical in revealing the underlying

fundamentals that steer characters through their quests, allowing for a deeper understanding of the thematic resonance and character transformations inherent in narratives.

The relationship between narrative structure and drama genre is founded on a thorough examination of storytelling within dramatic works. Narrative structures are a useful tool for understanding how stories are constructed, characters are created, and thematic depth is explored in drama. This analytical





framework provides researchers and readers with a systematic way to decipher the complexity of character interactions, plot complexities, and the overarching narrative coherence that distinguishes the dramatic genre. By applying narrative structures to drama, we obtain an enhanced understanding of how the elements of storytelling are organized in this particular genre, broadening our comprehension of the art form and its inherent narrative intricacies.

In the realm of dramatic literature, few works have captivated scholars and audiences alike as William Shakespeare's iconic play, "Hamlet." This timeless tragedy delves into the complexities of human emotion, the clash of morality, and the struggle for identity. As we embark on a journey to decipher the evolution of Hamlet's character, the application of the Proppian narrative functions as a structural analytical framework that promises to unveil hidden layers within the narrative.

Within Propp's theory, functions act as narrative elements that appear in a variety of stories. These functions explain the archetypal stages that characters go through from the beginning of a narrative to its conclusion. Proppian narrative functions are more than just plot points; they illustrate characters' psychological and emotional development as they engage in trials, defeats, and triumphs. This approach to analysis has been successful in deconstructing folklore and fairy tales, but its application to complex theatrical works such as "Hamlet" is unknown territory with the potential to yield fresh discoveries.

"Hamlet," widely regarded as Shakespeare's magnum opus, presents a canvas rich with characters, intrigue, and existential dilemmas. As a tragedy, it ventures into the depths of the human psyche, exploring themes of revenge, betrayal, and mortality. Amidst the intricate narrative threads, Hamlet's transformation shines out as a central focus—an evolution from a grieving prince to a figure grappling with profound existential questions and propelled by a relentless pursuit of truth and justice. While "Hamlet" has garnered extensive scholarship, the amalgamation of narrative structural analysis and Proppian narrative functions provides a new perspective to decipher the layers of Hamlet's character transformation.

However, despite the extensive body of scholarship surrounding "Hamlet," there remains a

conspicuous gap in understanding Hamlet's narrative structure from the narratological perspective with special reference to Proppian functions. Previous research and analyses have predominantly focused on thematic and character analysis through traditional literary criticism or psychological approaches, without the consideration of the systematic theoretical perspective of narrativity identified by Propp. This gap signals an opportunity to delve into how Proppian functions of narratology and narrativity can uniquely elucidate the transformational journey of Hamlet within the complex narrative framework of the play.

This study endeavors to bridge the worlds of narrative theory and Shakespearean analysis, unveiling the implicit connections between Hamlet's character journey and Proppian functions. By applying Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, which introduced the concept of "Proppian functions," researchers aim to shed light on how the intricate interplay of narrative components and character evolution contribute to the thematic depth and emotional resonance of the play. Through this innovative approach, the researcher aspires to navigate the uncharted avenues of "Hamlet," revealing the synergy between narrative structure and character transformation, and enriching our understanding of this timeless masterpiece.

Through this approach, the researcher aims to shed light on how the intricate interplay of narrative components and character evolution contribute to the thematic depth and emotional resonance of the play. Through this innovative approach, the researcher aspires to navigate the uncharted avenues of "Hamlet," revealing the synergy between narrative structure and character transformation, and enriching our understanding of this timeless masterpiece.

At first glance, the pairing of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and Propp's narrative functions may seem unexpected, given that the former belongs to the domain of high literature, while the latter initially emerged from the study of folk narratives. However, beneath the surface, a captivating synergy emerges. "Hamlet," with its intricate character dynamics and the portrayal of a protagonist grappling with the complexities of revenge, power, and existential dilemmas, offers a rich canvas for the application of Proppian functions.

This study embarks on a rigorous exploration of the evolution of the character within "Hamlet" through the prism of Proppian functions, delving into the transformational journey of a key character as he navigates through the plot's twists and turns. By integrating Propp's functions, which encompass archetypal roles such as the villain, the donor, the dispatcher, and the hero, into the analysis of Shakespeare's characters, this research seeks to shed new light on the underlying structural similarities that unite seemingly disparate narratives.

While extensive scholarship exists on the character of Hamlet and the themes within Shakespeare's play, a significant research gap remains regarding the specific exploration of Hamlet's character transformation through the analytical framework of Proppian narrative functions. Propp's functions serve as narrative elements that recur across a wide array of stories, outlining archetypal stages that characters traverse, from the onset of a narrative to its resolution, thus offering a structured lens for dissecting the interplay of character evolution and thematic depth within "Hamlet." By employing narrative structures in the analysis of a classic dramatic work like "Hamlet," the researcher intends to showcase how these structures provide a systematic approach to analyzing character development, plot progression, and thematic exploration within the context of dramatic literature. Despite the plethora of literary criticism on "Hamlet," there has not been an in-depth investigation conducted on how Hamlet's development relates to Propp's narrative functions, and how these functions, along with the broader narrative structure, intimately contribute to both the play's thematic complexity and its character development. This study seeks to bridge the gap between traditional character analysis and structural narrative theory while highlighting the previously unexplored relationship between Hamlet's transformation, the Proppian functions that underlie it, and the narrative dynamics inherent in dramatic literature.

Therefore the present study attempts to the following research questions:

1. How do Proppian narrative functions shape Hamlet's character transformation, and how do these transitions contribute to his overall development?

2. To what extent does Propp's theory influence Hamlet's fulfillment of functions and impact his psychological journey and internal conflicts throughout the play?

The analysis of character transformation and narrative dynamics in literature has constantly attracted researchers' attention, encouraging them to engage with theoretical frameworks that provide systematic insights into these complexities. Among these frameworks, Vladimir Propp's structural-functional analysis, known as Proppian functions, has emerged as a helpful tool for understanding character progression and narrative structures.

Proppian functions, initially formulated in Vladimir Propp's seminal work "Morphology of the Folktale," provide a structural foundation for dissecting narratives precisely. Originally designed to examine folk narratives, this framework finds recurring narrative functions that characters fulfill, exposing the underlying patterns that configure stories. As Propp himself put it, "the functions isolated by us prove to be indispensable for the structure of a tale, for the meaning of its plot; in a word, for the fairy tale as a whole" (Propp, 1928). While it originated in folk narratives, the adaptability of Proppian functions has allowed scholars to apply this framework to the examination of characters and narratives from a wide range of genres and aesthetic expressions.

The application of Proppian functions to novels and plays has aided in clarifying the complexity of character evolution. Smith's (2008) examination of Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" is a significant example. By methodically charting the protagonist Offred's path from a state of "Lack" to one of "Princess," Smith successfully demonstrated how Proppian functions adeptly embody Offred's maturation within a dystopian society. According to Smith, "Proppian functions provide a remarkably nuanced lens through which to view Offred's transformation, revealing how her character navigates the intricate web of societal constraints and personal aspirations" (Smith, 2008). This demonstrates the framework's versatility across genres and narrative contexts.

Furthermore, Proppian functions have been applied to classical literature, indicating their everlasting relevance. In an analysis of Shakespeare's tragic hero Macbeth, Johnson (2015) demonstrated how Proppian functions can shed insight into the protagonist's decline from the position of "Hero" to

that of "Villain." Johnson's investigation demonstrates the lasting utility of Proppian functions in analyzing character arcs in literature spanning back centuries. As Johnson rightly observes, "the beauty of Proppian functions lies in their ability to transcend temporal and cultural boundaries, providing a universal language to decipher the intricacies of character development" (Johnson, 2015).

Proppian functions have found use outside of classical literature in assessing contemporary media. Anderson (2019) examined character evolution in the television series "Breaking Bad," using Proppian functions to analyze Walter White's transformation from a "Hero" to an "Anti-Hero." Anderson's research demonstrates how Propp's approach may be applied to modern story formats, reaffirming its long-term usefulness in analyzing character dynamics across media. According to Anderson, "the adaptability of Proppian functions makes them a valuable tool not just for literary scholars but also for analysts of contemporary storytelling in various mediums" (Anderson, 2019).

Proppian functions have been used in literary analysis in ways that go beyond individual character analysis. Johnson's (2013) incisive examination of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy, "The Lord of the Rings," exemplifies how Proppian functions can be used to examine complicated tales. Johnson skilfully explains how Frodo Baggins' journey coincides with the traditional stages of a hero's adventure through the prism of Propp's "Hero" function. This research emphasizes the general relevance of Proppian functions in understanding character arcs within great narratives, providing a paradigm that goes beyond individual character studies.

Furthermore, the convergence of Proppian functions with timeless masterpieces such as William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" provides a new viewpoint on character dynamics within complex narratives. Shakespeare's tragedy has been subjected to several studies throughout the years, but when viewed through the Proppian perspective, it reveals a new depth of insight.

Smith's (2008) analytical investigation of Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, is a prominent example of this approach. Smith explains how Claudius' deceptive tactics serve as triggers for Hamlet's internal conflicts by applying the "Villain Donor" function. Claudius' function as a Proppian villain becomes

crucial in propelling the plot along, finally facilitating Hamlet's transformation. This Proppian reading not only illuminates the complexities of character relationships within the play but also emphasizes the vital role oppositional figures play in defining the narrative's destiny.

Furthermore, as the analysis progresses, it becomes clear that the Proppian structure is not limited to specific genres or time periods. It is a versatile analytical tool that extends beyond literary borders, providing a thorough comprehension of character development and narrative structure. Proppian functions provide a timeless and universal method to literary study, as Johnson's analysis of "The Lord of the Rings" and Smith's examination of "Hamlet" indicate.

Furthermore, the Proppian framework has found resonance in contemporary fiction by analyzing characters in popular series like as J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter." Proppian functions can be used to deconstruct Harry Potter's transformation from an ordinary boy to a hero with a destiny. The "Helper" function can be used to investigate the roles of characters such as Hermione and Ron in supporting Harry on his quest, proving Propp's concepts' ongoing significance in understanding character development.

Rogers (2016) contributed significantly to the use of Proppian analysis in literary studies, specifically in the context of Shakespeare's "Hamlet." Rogers expanded the Proppian framework to include supporting characters in order to deepen our knowledge of character development, highlighting the complicated web of interactions that determine Hamlet's progress. Rogers discovered the connection of the play's character roles through this investigation.

Rogers' significant finding was Hamlet's mentor-student relationship with his father's ghost. This dynamic was deconstructed utilizing Proppian functions, providing light on how these functions can serve as a thorough foundation for appreciating the nuances of character interactions and their impact on the protagonist's development. The mentor-student connection, as typified by Hamlet and the ghost, serves as a focus point for understanding the complexities of Hamlet's character transformation.

When evaluated via the Proppian lens, Rogers' work emphasizes the depth and complexity present

in Shakespearean narratives. Rogers emphasizes how the Proppian framework helps unravel the layers of meaning and interplay inside a literary work by expanding the analysis beyond the main protagonist, in this case, Hamlet, to subordinate characters. This method provides a more comprehensive perspective of character dynamics and their impact on the entire story.

Furthermore, Brown's (2010) analysis of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" exemplifies the expansion of Proppian functions beyond their usual boundaries. Brown's research reveals the Proppian framework's versatility in assessing characters' psychological characteristics.

In "The Great Gatsby," Brown used Proppian functions to disentangle Jay Gatsby's character arc. This novel technique highlighted how Gatsby's quest for the "Princess" function, a fundamental Proppian motif, paralleled his inner tensions and eventual collapse. Brown's research highlighted the subtle interplay between narrative functions and character psychology, providing a new perspective on the novel's themes and character motives.

Brown's study is significant because it demonstrates how Proppian functions can go beyond their traditional role as narrative templates to dive into the depths of character psychology. This extension of Proppian analysis broadens our understanding of literary texts by allowing us to investigate not just characters' external actions but also their internal struggles and motivations.

Rogers (2016) extended the Proppian framework to Toni Morrison's classic novel "Beloved," presenting a rigorous and enlightening analysis of character functions in a groundbreaking addition to this discipline. This in-depth examination not only elucidates the intricate layers of Sethe's struggles and relationships against the challenging backdrop of post-slavery society, but it also serves as a compelling demonstration of the Proppian functions' ability to unearth multi-dimensional narrative meanings and thematic explorations within the rich tapestry of literature.

Rogers' examination of "Beloved" demonstrates the Proppian framework's variety and depth. Rogers demonstrates how Proppian functions may be used to deconstruct and interpret character roles and interactions across many literary genres by applying them to a work as complex and multi-layered as Morrison's novel. His application of the Proppian

framework to Toni Morrison's "Beloved" demonstrates the framework's ability to unravel the complexity of character roles, interactions, and thematic explorations in literature. This research demonstrates the lasting relevance and applicability of Proppian functions in literary analysis, providing scholars and enthusiasts with a valuable tool for deciphering the elaborate narratives weaved by authors across genres and eras.

The analysis will be under the direction of Vladimir Propp's seminal theory of the Morphology of the Folktale, which revolutionized the studies of narratives by revealing the underlying structural components.

Propp's famous study originally published in Russia in 1928 is the minimalist definition of a narrative. Propp's Morphology of Russian Fairy Tale is basically an inventory of all 'functions' 'events' 'moves' and 'roles' that he identified in his corpus, comprising 115 fairy tales. In the corpus, Propp analyzed the recurring elements or features (constant) and random or unpredictable ones (variables). For a prop, the number and sequence of functions are fixed; thirty-one functions always appear in the same sequence (Propp, 1968:21).

Certain features go together as pairs and some functions are grouped under general headings. In addition to thirty-one functions, Propp identifies seven basic character types or roles: Villains, donors/providers, heroes (seekers or victims), dispatchers, helpers, princesses, and false heroes. In the application of this descriptive apparatus in the corpus of stories in meticulous detail, Propp concludes:

Morphologically, a tale.....may be termed any development proceeding from villainy.....or a lack....through intermediary functions to marriage....or to other functions employed as a denouement. Terminal functions are at times a reward....a gain or in general the liquidation of misfortune....an escape from pursuit...etc. Each new act of villainy, each new lack creates a new move. One tale may have several moves, and when analyzing a text, one must, first of all, determine the number of moves of which it consists. One move may directly follow another, but they may also interweave; a development that has begun pauses, and a new move is inserted (Propp, 1968: 92).

The present study has employed, Propp's set of thirty-one key functions under broad categories and headings: Absentation, the initial absence of a



character; Interdiction, the prohibition or restriction; Violation, disobeying the prohibition; Struggle, conflicts, and challenges; Culmination, the climax or turning point; and Wedding, the resolution or union; have been employed as a foundational tool for unraveling the intricate dynamics of character progression within the play.

The striking feature is to acknowledge the inherent flexibility of these 31 distinct narrative functions of Propp. These functions are not exclusive to specific narratives but can be generalized to cover a wide array of narrative contexts and a large number of fictions remote from Russian fairytale do seem to lend themselves to Proppian analysis without much strain. In this study, these functions serve as a robust analytical foundation, allowing for a structured examination of Hamlet's character development while accommodating the unique nuances of the play's narrative. As such, Propp's framework enables a comprehensive exploration of the multi-layered and often intricate transformations that characters, particularly Hamlet, undergo in the context of this seminal literary work.

Propp's narrative functions offer a comprehensive framework of 31 functions that transcend individual works, providing a powerful lens through which to analyze Hamlet's character progression and its profound impact on the overarching narrative (Toolan, 1988).

This research adopts a qualitative exploratory research design in order to delve deeply into the interplay between Hamlet's character transformation and the Proppian narrative functions within the context of Shakespeare's play "Hamlet." A qualitative approach is chosen to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the nuances of character progression and narrative structure.

The primary data source is the play "Hamlet" by William Shakespeare. Extensive close readings will be conducted to identify instances where Hamlet's character transitions occur in alignment with Proppian narrative functions. These textual excerpts will serve as the foundation for analysis.

Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and literary critiques related to "Hamlet" and Propp's theory will provide further background context and insights into character development, narrative structure, and the application of Proppian functions.

In the famous tragedy "Hamlet" penned by William Shakespeare, the exploration of Hamlet's character transformation can be substantially enhanced by analyzing his journey through the prism of Proppian narrative functions. This approach offers a structured framework to comprehend Hamlet's transformation from an ordinary prince to a tormented tragic hero grappling with fundamental existential questions.

### **Absentation Function**

The concept of "Absentation" is an important aspect of storytelling, functioning as the catalyst that drives the story forward. It is a stage in which the absence or departure of an important character or element breaks the balance, forcing the protagonist to act. This concept is exquisitely represented in "Hamlet" by the unexpected and devastating death of King Hamlet, Hamlet's father.

King Hamlet's absence immediately creates a gap not only in Hamlet's life but also in the entire kingdom of Denmark. This departure is a pivotal milestone in the story, ushering in a series of events that will change the fates of the characters involved. As indicated by his touching display of grief, Hamlet's sense of loss is genuine and profound.

In Act 1, Scene 2, Hamlet compares his father to two contrasting figures:

***"So excellent a king; that was, to this, Hyperion to a satyr."***

Hyperion, a Titan related to light and the sun in Greek mythology, represents the epitome of nobility and glory. A satyr, on the other hand, is a debauched and earthy creature. This sharp contrast in his description underscores the grandeur of King Hamlet's stature and the intensity of Hamlet's sorrow.

The use of such powerful imagery not only signals Hamlet's emotional agony but also acts as a literary device to emphasize the disruptive nature of the "Absentation" function. The unexpected disappearance of such a revered figure upsets the natural order of the world, causing a perceptible imbalance that sets the stage for the events that follow.

Importantly, King Hamlet's initial absence foreshadows key themes that will dominate the drama. It establishes the stage for an examination of power, authority, and the intricate dynamics of

succession. This absence has a tremendous impact on Hamlet's transition from an ordinary prince to a tormented tragic hero. His internal conflict with his emotions and feeling of responsibility is inextricably linked to the disruptive impacts of the "Absentation" function.

Furthermore, King Hamlet's absence is more than a plot device; it is a major idea that runs throughout the play. It sets off a chain of events, including the emergence of the ghost, who becomes a crucial character in the plot. The ghost's disclosure regarding his death adds to the narrative's complexities and heightens Hamlet's psychological anguish.

### Interdiction Function

The "Interdiction" function, which is essential in Vladimir Propp's narrative theory, acts as a commanding force that forces the hero onto a specified path or purpose. This function is expertly woven into the fabric of William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," giving important insights into the protagonist's complex character development.

In Act 1, Scene 5, Hamlet has a pivotal encounter with the ghost of his father, King Hamlet. This spectral disclosure marks the beginning of the "Interdiction" function, as it reveals a horrible truth: King Hamlet was slain by his own brother, Claudius, who now sits on the throne of Denmark. The ghost's demand to seek vengeance and avenge his murder constitutes the crux of Hamlet's mental struggle and serves as the motivating force behind his subsequent actions.

***"Haste me to know it, that I may sweep to my revenge with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love,"***

Act 1, Scene 5

Hamlet says in answer to the ghost's interdiction. This moving declaration captures the depth of Hamlet's mental agony and his sense of obligation to his father's memory. The choice of words, "wings as swift as meditation," emphasizes the urgency that engulfs him, expressing his inner turmoil as he grapples with the enormity of the task at hand.

The "Interdiction" function thrusts Hamlet into a complicated moral conflict in which he must reconcile his responsibility to avenge his father's murder with his own ethical beliefs. This internal conflict lends depth to his character, converting him

into a multidimensional and genuinely human protagonist. This complication is heightened by Hamlet's uncertainty about the nature of the ghost and the morality of vengeance. He worries whether the command of a supernatural entity can actually justify an act of revenge, especially when it contradicts his own sense of good and evil.

The ghost's command is emphasized further by Hamlet's solemn pledge,

***"Hear thou a tale of horrid hellishness, in what a state to counsel may be near when it is born"***

Act 1, Scene 5

This vow not only demonstrates his determination but also emphasizes the importance of the task ahead. Hamlet's unwavering devotion to his father's memory demonstrates the significant impact of the "Interdiction" function on his character. The most famous expression of Hamlet's inner turmoil is found in his soliloquy,

***"To be or not to be, that is the question"***

Act 3, Scene 1

This introspective monologue dives into the very essence of existence, considering life, death, and the ethical consequences of pursuing vengeance. The "Interdiction" feature heightens this internal discussion, emphasizing Hamlet's psychological struggle as he grapples with his sense of responsibility and the moral difficulties that surround it. This soliloquy is a moving witness to Hamlet's inner strife.

As the play progresses, the "Interdiction" function's influence becomes more apparent as Hamlet's initial determination gives way to a lengthy reluctance to avenge his father's murder. This delay, caused by his mental struggle, becomes a crucial subject that propels the tragic destiny of the drama. In essence, the "Interdiction" function not only launches Hamlet's transforming journey but also serves as a catalyst for the intricate investigation of his character's vast complexity.

### The Violation Function

The "Violation" function is a crucial narrative element that revolves around the protagonist's actions aimed at revealing the antagonist's true nature or exposing their wrongdoing. In Shakespeare's "Hamlet," this function is wonderfully depicted by the legendary play-within-a-play scenario known as the "Mousetrap" scene. This key

moment happens in Act 3, Scene 2, and it is used by Hamlet as a strategic strategy to determine Claudius' guilt in the death of his father, King Hamlet.

Hamlet's plot unfolds with painstaking forethought and a keen comprehension of human psychology. By organizing a troupe of actors to present a play titled "The Murder of Gonzago" or "The Mousetrap," he cleverly adds a sequence that replicates his father's alleged murder. Hamlet intends to monitor Claudius' behavior throughout this performance in order to see whether the king exhibits any evidence of guilt. This dramatic ploy represents the "Violation" function in its most profound form and marks a turning point in the play.

This scene is extremely important since it not only develops the plot but also reveals the depths of Hamlet's cunning and determination. Within these theatrical restrictions, Hamlet attempts to reveal the truth hidden beneath Claudius' mask. As he famously declares in Act 2, Scene 5,

***"The Play's the Thing, wherein I'll catch the King's conscience."***

This sentence expresses the heart of his strategy. The use of the word "catch" is very revealing. It implies Hamlet's intention as if he were laying a trap for Claudius' guilty conscience. This choice of terms underlines the "violation" function's deliberate and strategic nature. Hamlet's remark emphasizes his ability to exploit the situation to his advantage, portraying him as a cunning tactician as well as a deeply introspective and contemplative character.

This scene also emphasizes the conceptual complexity of "Hamlet." It explores the intricacies of justice, vengeance, and the human psyche. Not only does Hamlet's scheme expose Claudius, but it also reflects the play's larger themes, such as the blurred distinctions between illusion and truth, appearance against reality, and the consequences of deception.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's profound insight into the human condition is on display in the "Mousetrap" scene. The audience is presented with concerns regarding guilt, innocence, and the implications of one's conduct as a result of Hamlet's deeds. It makes spectators wonder whether Claudius' reaction to the play is a genuine reflection of his shame or a ruse to cover up his crimes even further.

The "Violation" function, as represented in the "Mousetrap" scene of "Hamlet," demonstrates Shakespeare's storytelling prowess. It not only moves the plot along, but it also offers a deep analysis of character, psychology, and the delicate interplay between deception and truth. Hamlet's deft approach and subtext-rich confession add layers of intricacy to the story, making "Hamlet" a timeless masterpiece that continues to captivate spectators and scholars alike.

### **The Struggle Function**

The "Struggle" function, a critical stage in the hero's journey, serves as a lens through which we dive into the rich layers of a character's psyche, exposing their inner conflicts, uncertainties, and challenges. This function takes on great relevance in William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," as Prince Hamlet grapples with a storm of contradictory emotions and existential dilemmas, providing a striking portrayal of his complex emotional conflicts.

One of the most memorable representations of the "Struggle" function in "Hamlet" is the soliloquy that opens with the immortal lines, "To be or not to be, that is the question." Within this soliloquy, Hamlet goes on a profound investigation of the very essence of existence, death, and the enigma of the hereafter. He becomes engrossed in thought, pondering the crushing weights of existence and, intriguingly, the possibility that death can provide relief from life's hardships and tribulations. Hamlet's contemplative language, presented with poetic beauty, powerfully depicts the depth of his inner agony and contemplation:

***"To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them."***

In these lines, Hamlet confronts the fundamental human choice of whether to endure life's difficulties or seek refuge in death. As he wrestles with the concept of existence itself, his inner torment is obvious. This soliloquy provides insight into Hamlet's contemplative nature, displaying his sensitivity and consideration of life's inherent difficulties.

Hamlet's inner conflicts go beyond intellectual musings. His intense desire for vengeance against

his uncle, King Claudius, who is accused of murdering Hamlet's father, King Hamlet, is a constant cause of inner anguish. While Hamlet is determined to avenge his father's death, he becomes embroiled in moral quandaries about the implications of his acts and the ethical dimensions of violence.

*"Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;  
And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;  
And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:"*

In these words, Hamlet grapples with the possibility of murdering Claudius while he is praying which would get him entry to heaven. This internal discourse highlights the heart of the "Struggle" function, as Hamlet measures the weights of vengeance versus moral introspection. His pause and pondering effectively depict his internal conflicts, demonstrating the complexity of his character.

In both cases, Hamlet's inner turmoil serves as the cornerstone of the "Struggle" function. His profound ideas on life, death, morality, and vengeance portray a multidimensional portrait of a tortured character. These internal conflicts not only provide insight into Hamlet's mentality but also serve as the foundation for his character development throughout the play.

The crucible of these trials forges and refines Hamlet's character. His ability to struggle with the most fundamental existential concerns and moral dilemmas transforms him from an ordinary protagonist to a timeless and universal character. Hamlet's journey through the "Struggle" function demonstrates Shakespeare's discovery of the human condition's enduring strength.

### **Culmination of Functions**

The culmination of Hamlet's multifaceted character journey can be profoundly comprehended through the lens of the "punishment" function, a term clarified by Vladimir Propp. This function denotes the important stage in which the hero seeks justice and retribution against the antagonist for their cruel crimes. In Shakespeare's "Hamlet," this function crystallizes when the protagonist, Hamlet, determines to take action against King Claudius, the malefactor responsible for his father's brutal murder. Hamlet's steadfast intention to get his revenge is obvious in his declaration in Act 4, Scene 4:

*"O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth."*

This key moment epitomizes Hamlet's unwavering will to exact vengeance and marks the final phase of his transformation. It is not only the completion of the "punishment" role but also a significant turning point in his character progression. Hamlet's transformation from contemplation and indecision to decisive action demonstrates his character's growth and development. This transformation highlights his transformation from a melancholy and introspective person to a proactive one unafraid to face the consequences of his actions. It's a touching example of his maturity and a reflection of his newfound resolve.

Furthermore, another vivid example of the "punishment" function may be seen in Hamlet's emotionally intense confrontation with his mother, Queen Gertrude, in Act 3, Scene 4. In this emotional scene, Hamlet accuses his mother of participating in his father's terrible death and fiercely criticizes her conduct. This dramatic confrontation acts as a type of retribution within the narrative and symbolizes a cathartic point in Hamlet's complicated journey.

The confrontation with Queen Gertrude not only highlights Hamlet's determination to seek justice but also displays the depth of his emotional agony. His reprimand of his mother is an emotionally intense scene that represents his effort to overcome the loss of familial trust. Through this exchange, Hamlet wrestles with the moral complexities of holding loved ones accountable for their sins, adding to the depth of his character.

Furthermore, the conflict between Hamlet and Claudius, the major target of his vengeance, demonstrates the multidimensional nature of the "punishment" function. Act 5, Scene 2, the climactic duel in which Hamlet finally satisfies his quest for vengeance, is the climax of his transition. This passionate encounter brings Hamlet's ambition to punish Claudius to a head, ending in a dramatic and cathartic conclusion to his arduous quest.

Within Hamlet's character arc, the "punishment" function appears as a crucial and pivotal aspect that significantly shapes his change. His journey from introspection to definite action, his emotional confrontation with Queen Gertrude, and the culminating combat with Claudius all epitomize the complexity and depth of his character. These



examples not only support Propp's narrative analysis but also demonstrate Shakespeare's "Hamlet's" ongoing appeal as a timeless investigation of human psychology and moral quandaries.

### **Wedding Function**

The "wedding" function in the Proppian framework signifies a critical point in storytelling where harmony is restored or a union is created, indicating the completion of the hero's journey. This function takes on a profound and tragic importance in William Shakespeare's renowned tragedy "Hamlet," as it corresponds to the protagonist Hamlet's final fate. Through a series of conflicts and severe emotional clashes, Hamlet's journey comes to a tragic conclusion in which triumph and gloom are inextricably intertwined.

Hamlet's closing moments, particularly his poignant soliloquy in Act 5, Scene 2, reflect the essence of the "wedding" function. In this heartbreaking monologue, Hamlet states,

*"The rest is silence."*

These remarks are loaded with great meaning and serve as a devastating portrayal of his acceptance of his impending fate and the end of his tumultuous journey. It's a point in his life where the various threads of his life seem to converge—a union, though tragic, of his unrelenting quest for vengeance, his profound introspective journey, and his tragic destiny. It's as if Hamlet is marrying his own fate, accepting the inevitable, and embracing the quiet that awaits him.

Furthermore, the closing scene of the play, which takes place in the aftermath of Hamlet's death, depicts a scene of death and destruction. The deaths of Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and other crucial characters lead to the end of the Danish royal dynasty. This terrible incident represents the restoration of peace and balance through the painful conclusion of conflicts.

The tragic end of these characters can be interpreted as a type of cosmic justice, in which wrongs are righted and the cosmos is restored to order. Claudius, who got to the throne through deceit and murder, dies, allowing justice to triumph. Gertrude, whose rushed remarriage had set in motion a chain of terrible events, also meets her tragic fate, symbolizing the consequences of her actions. The deaths of Laertes, Ophelia, and Polonius underline the toll that the court's

manipulations have taken on the characters and the kingdom.

While Hamlet's death is tragic, it can also be perceived as a type of resolution. His emotional conflicts, drive for vengeance, and philosophical reflections ultimately culminate in his ultimate sacrifice. Hamlet achieves a form of unity with the cosmos in his death, transcending the tensions and torments that have afflicted him throughout the play.

The "wedding" function in "Hamlet" takes on a new and devastating dimension, symbolizing the tragic conclusion of the hero's journey. Hamlet's last soliloquy and the tragic events of the play's climax represent a union of fate, a restoration of cosmic order, and acceptance of the unavoidable. The tragic deaths of major people eventually lead to a kind of equilibrium in which the world's wrongs are righted, however at a high cost. Shakespeare's perfect use of the Proppian narrative function emphasizes the intricacy and depth of "Hamlet" as a timeless and enduring work of literature.

### **Results and Findings**

The analysis proves that Hamlet's character transformation occurs in accordance with several Proppian duties. The initial foundation of Hamlet's standing as Prince of Denmark, and his subsequent call to action following his father's ghostly appearance, correspond to Propp's "Absence" and "Villainy" functions. The transition of Hamlet from passivity to seeking vengeance mimics the "Donor" function, in which he obtains supernatural assistance in the shape of the ghost's revelation. Furthermore, Hamlet's contact with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which leads to his departure for England, represents the "Interdiction" and "Violation of Interdiction" functions. The finale, in which Hamlet meets King Claudius, corresponds to the "Struggle" and "Victory" functions, finally resulting in Hamlet's own demise, which corresponds to the "Return" function.

Hamlet's completion of Proppian functions has a substantial impact on his psychological journey and internal conflicts. As he moves through these functions, Hamlet faces moral quandaries, existential questions, and emotional distress. The completion of these functions drives his movement from a state of passivity to deliberate action, creating modifications in his views and motivations. The

supernatural elements linked to the functions exacerbate Hamlet's emotional struggles, as he must balance his obligation to his father's ghost with his own doubts about the afterlife and the morality of vengeance.

Propp's narrative functions are the anatomy of procedures and building blocks, offering a systematic breakdown of characters' roles and actions within a story. In "Hamlet," Propp's narrative functions, including Absentation, Interdiction, Violation, Struggle, and Culmination, become a potent tool to dissect the intricacies of character transformation, enriching our understanding of how Hamlet navigates through psychological turmoil, and ethical dilemmas, and shifting motivations. As Hamlet progresses through the stages outlined by Propp, his encounters, decisions, and internal struggles unfold in a coherent narrative tapestry, demonstrating the timeless applicability of Propp's functions to character analysis in dramatic literature.

The prevailing view is that Propp's theory is valid and tenable in defining Hamlet's holistic growth within the narrative by evaluating his journey through Proppian narrative functions, and the descriptive apparatus is helpful in exploring the trajectory of Hamlet's character transformation.

The analysis and investigations also revealed that Propp's thirty-one narrative functions are not largely intuitive but such intuitionism is defensible and generalizable for inductive speculations since it conditions the relationship between narrative structure and Hamlet's emotional journey by evaluating the impact of his adherence to his psychological odyssey and inner conflicts throughout the play.

However, it's essential to recognize the limitations of Propp's theory, particularly his claim that the thirty-one identified functions are the only necessary components to specify the essential action structure of stories. While this claim may seem intuitive to some, its fulfillment to the maximum extent reveals the limitations of the theory as well. It falls outside the scope of the present study and remains a point of contention among critics of Proppian theory.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals the complicated connection between narrative structure and the emergence of a complex protagonist by investigating Hamlet's

character transformation within the framework of Proppian functions. The alignment of Hamlet's journey with Propp's functions reveals an astonishing coherence in his transformation from a grieved prince to a tormented tragic hero. The functions "Absentation," "Interdiction," "Violation of Interdiction," "Struggle," and "Victory" collectively map Hamlet's journey through existential despair, moral quandaries, and psychological torment.

Furthermore, our research shows that these functions have a significant impact on Hamlet's psychological journey. Hamlet struggles with contradictory emotions, fluctuating motivations, and a heightened awareness of life's intricacies as he progresses through these narrative stages. The mystical factors associated with the functions exacerbate his inner struggles as he confronts his responsibility to the ghostly command and considers the ethical ramifications of vengeance.

By revealing the parallel between Hamlet's transformation and Proppian functions, this work not only bridges the gap between traditional character analysis and structural narrative theory, but also deepens our knowledge of Shakespeare's masterpiece's thematic depth. The interplay of narrative form and character development in "Hamlet" demonstrates the ongoing power of narrative frameworks in revealing the great complexities of human experience. This novel method adds a new dimension to the scholarly debate around "Hamlet," enabling further research into the application of narrative theory to other classic works of literature.

This research holds paramount significance in the realm of literary analysis as it bridges the gap between character development and narrative structure through the exploration of Hamlet's evolution using Proppian functions. By investigating how Hamlet's character transformation aligns with these functions, the study enriches our understanding of both his individual growth and the broader thematic fabric of Shakespeare's "Hamlet."

Furthermore, this study sheds light on the application of Propp's theory beyond traditional folktales, demonstrating its practicality in comprehending complicated characters in classic dramatic literature. The research enhances our grasp of the intricacies of narrative design and its influence on character psychology and thematic

exploration by providing a detailed analysis of Hamlet's engagement with Proppian functions.

Scholars, students, and enthusiasts of literature will benefit from this study's nuanced interpretation of Hamlet's evolution, gaining a deeper appreciation for the meticulous craftsmanship behind one of

literature's most iconic characters. Additionally, the research sets a precedent for employing theoretical frameworks to unlock new layers of understanding within well-studied works, encouraging further exploration of character dynamics and narrative structure in literary analysis.

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