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| Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) |
| Владимир Яковлевич Пропп |
| Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (Владимир Яковлевич Пропп) was a Russian philologist and folklorist who ranks among the most penetrating, original, and influential of modern narrative theoreticians. His 1928 work *Morphology of the Folk Tale* laid the groundwork for many important developments in later narratology, from the formalist/structuralist movements mainly active in Eastern Europe during the pre-World War II period to the heyday of French structuralism in the 1960s. Propp’s approach was rigorously formal, highly systematic and based on well-tried analytic techniques of segmentation and recomposition derived from structural phonetics. Taking a hundred tales as his sample corpus, Propp showed that their apparent (surface) diversity of theme and content masked an underlying narrative grammar that consisted of certain strictly invariant roles, functions and formal constraints. Thus the modal function of *prohibition* was invariably such as to produce or entail a *transgression*, while the function of *lack* was to provoke or inaugurate the protagonist’s subsequent *quest*. This approach followed Aristotle’s proto-formalist precept that ‘character’ was a merely by-product of plot, which meant that critics should avoid the subjectivist temptations of character-based or psychological interpretation. Thus it focused not so much on particular tales/stories but rather on the underlying structural repertoire of narrative functions as a whole. Only thus could narratology and formalist poetics be placed on a properly scientific, methodical, progressive and evidence-based footing. It is this aspect of Propp’s work that has exerted such a deep and lasting influence. |
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| Further reading:  (Gilet)  (Lane) |