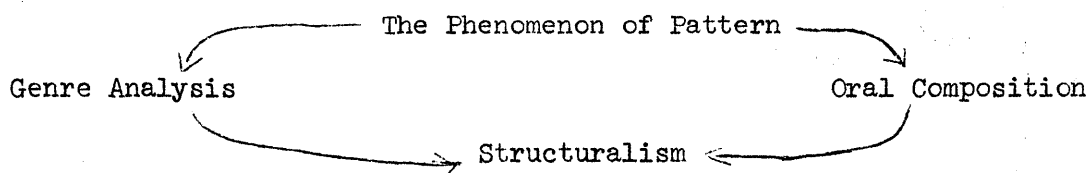


STRUCTURALISM AND THREE FINNISH RUNES

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ABSTRACT -- As a way of dealing with the phenomenon of pattern, structuralism can offer a specific kind of analysis useful to scholars working with the problems of genre analysis or the theories of oral composition. Propp's earlier concern with separating the variable from the constant can be redefined as a concern with generalizing the content, thus allowing for the fact that form cannot exist entirely devoid of content. Using Claude Brémond's model in a slightly modified form, the structure of three Finnish runes is charted, moving through successive stages of generalization to the most generalized and hence most representative illustration of the structure. The dominance of structural demands over the demand for content consistency is demonstrated in the analysis of the third rune.

Structuralism has been variously employed as a theory and/or method in various disciplines related to folklore, both in the social sciences and in the humanities. Common to all such studies and analyses is a recognition of the phenomenon of pattern. Doubtless there are as many paths from the point of recognition of pattern to the drafting of a structural study as there are individual scholars moving from the first point to the second. However, one can generally discern two separate directions which seem to be drawn toward the vague poles of discipline emphasis, that is, social sciences or humanities. Perhaps one particular emphasis along each path can be used to define the path. For example, I would suggest that along the social sciences path the defining point might be genre analysis, and along the humanities path, the defining point might be theories of oral composition. Thus:



To back up a bit, perhaps we should consider the phenomenon of pattern and the necessary recognition of this phenomenon on the part of the scholar. In the first place, this recognition can be a very exciting personal revelation for the scholar. Just as the early historic-geographic researchers' hope to find an ur-form was a kind of religious quest in a secular world, so recognition of the phenomenon of pattern in all things could offer some meaning to the generally godless world of the modern scholar. In any event, whether excited or not, the scholar must come to some understanding of the concept of pattern, particularly if he is to deal with man's creativity and creations.

Creativity in the form of thought is dependent upon language,¹ and the formation of all new thoughts must "already have been anticipated in

existing grammatical elements and words."² Thought thus exists only through grammar and words; other forms of creativity are equally dependent upon patterns similar to the grammar of language. In particular, all narrative contains pattern or reveals pattern. No narrative is ever the truth-told, but always the truth or falseness after processing by the form-giving imagination.

All knowing and all telling are subject to the conventions of art. Because we apprehend reality through culturally determined types, we can report the most particular event only in the form of a representational fiction, assigning motives, causes, and effects according to our best lights rather than according to absolute truth.³

A recognition of such patterning in the narrative genres easily stimulates interest either in the theories of oral composition or in the processes of genre analysis. The oral-formulaic theories of Parry and Lord grew directly out of the recognition of repeated patterns. Lord, particularly, was interested primarily in what might be called surface patterns (formulas and themes). The abstract patterns of the tradition itself do not interest him; he is content to define a theme as "a recurrent element of narration or description"⁴ and does not in any way intend to suggest that an arrangement of themes defines the plot of a song. In this way, his use of the word "theme" is similar to the term "motif" as employed by followers of the historic-geographic school. And just as such men as Stith Thompson and Antti Aarne saw specific tales as consisting of motifs clustered around recognizable content, similarly Lord states that to the singer "the formulas and themes are always used in association one with another; they are always part of a song. To the singer, moreover, the song has a specific though flexible content."⁵

Because Lord insisted that a unit be repeated to be considered a formula or theme, he avoided the path that would carry him on to an interest in structuralism. Other researchers dealing with the oral formula have more openly moved toward structuralism in an effort to deal with the relationship of the formulas and themes to the song itself and the tradition from which they come. For example, Scholes and Kellogg state:

The basic entities of an oral poetic tradition will not be the fixed formulas....They will be instead the abstract patterns in accordance with which singers can produce new phrases. On this level the tradition is seen to consist rather of a 'grammar' than a set of fixed elements.⁶

Such a statement recognizes the singer's dependence on structure at the formula level. Another researcher, Michael Nagler, has tried to move from the level of theme (as a unit) to a recognition of structural pattern in oral poetry. His problem is that although he extends the "list" of themes or motifs (he tries to bridge the gap by calling them allomorphs) to include all possible themes, that is, including those unrecorded, he is still hampered by the fact that "theme" is not a pure structural unit, but a unit combining structure and content. Thus, as he himself admits, definition of the structure (Gestalt is his term) by such a unit "would not really be a definition at all."⁷

Such studies, then, demonstrate the need for a recognition of the structural pattern which defines the song itself, both for the researcher and for the singer. As Lord pointed out, the singer intuitively senses something behind the formulas and themes that defines the song as a specific song; this is the specific content of the song, but content known or presented in a definite pattern. It is with the hope of discovering this pattern that many oral composition theorists move toward structuralism. Perhaps further research along these lines will develop in the future.

In contrast to theories of oral composition, genre analysis might appear to be a reaction against or movement away from the narrower concepts of structuralism. Lauri Honko, for example, argues that "it hardly seems right to consider genre analysis as merely the out-come of formalistic studies."⁸ Bertel Nathhorst suggests that structural analysis may be important to genre analysis but simply as one distinguishing criterion:

There may be certain typical structural or other 'objective' differences between the genres. Such distinguishing features would presumably be of a statistical nature, i.e., it could perhaps be proved that a certain structure is employed more frequently in narratives used as myths than in narratives used as fairy tales.⁹

Describing a kind of analysis which seems to be suggested in Nathhorst's statement, Honko substitutes the phrase "term analysis," perhaps hoping to stress the "objective" definition of terms rather than the traditionally "intuitive" definition of genres. For Honko, a scholarly study using term analysis should include "at least" the following criteria: content, form, style, structure, function, frequency, distribution, age, and origin.¹⁰ He does not necessarily suggest that structure need always be considered as a criterion. However, it is my opinion that at least for those genres normally termed "narrative," the criterion of structure is absolutely necessary if the study is to be considered complete. Conclusions drawn on the basis of other criteria, particularly content, origin, and distribution, would certainly be less accurate, or at least less meaningful, without a structural analysis to show what is "typical" for the genre and/or cultural area.

It seems, then, that genre analysis must involve structuralism, not, of course, as the only or even most important area of analysis, but certainly as one of the necessary criteria in any complete study. Honko suggests that through genre analysis a researcher can approach "pure genres," but only approach; he points out that pure genres can exist only as ideal types.

The primary function of the ideal type need not be considered the most exact description of the reality; it should rather provide the opportunity for understanding the reality better. From this point of view one determines the instrumental value of the ideal type, which is the main criterion of its usefulness.¹¹

Honko insists that the scientific accuracy demanded by genre analysis nevertheless does not produce an exact description of reality, but rather something like a scholar's model. This assumption is shared by many researchers working within the narrower criterion area of structuralism. They feel that a structural study offers a way of seeing a genre in terms

of a logical model, but they do not necessarily accept this model as a description of the structure.

Bertel Nathhorst suggests that the question of whether or not a structural analysis is "really a structural description" should not be asked.¹² Unfortunately, every researcher must at least subconsciously ask this question in order to establish his own position in relation to his material and his study. Basically, he must decide whether he hopes to discover the structure within the material or to construct a structural model from the material. This decision will, I think, influence the method of analysis. Actually, any decision producing a workable analytic method will probably be a compromise; that is, the researcher will probably argue that he has tried to reveal the structure of his material in his analysis, but he will also realize that the model he offers has been drawn from material inescapably subjected to his own system of patterning. André Martinet concludes his discussion of structure with the following comment:

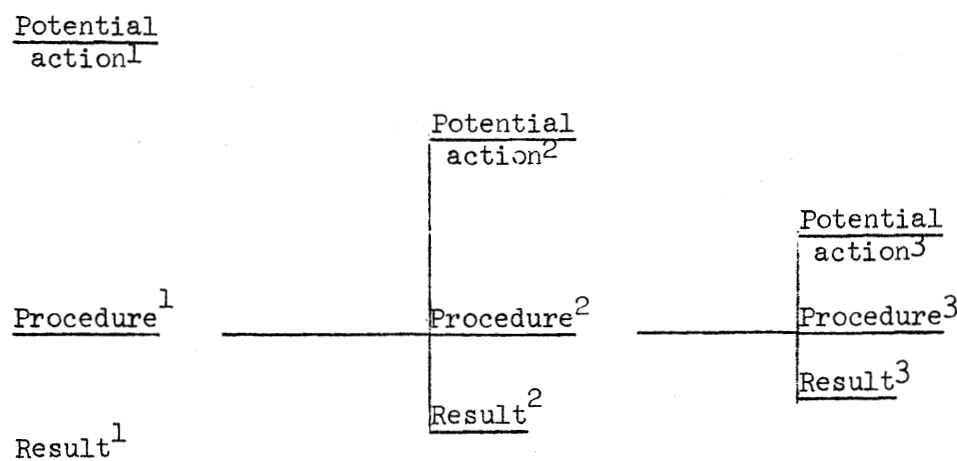
To sum up, the model is not the structure, for the structure is always in the object, latent as it were but only if latent is not opposed to real. The best that can be expected of a model is that it represent the structure exactly, and it will do so if the scholar has succeeded in correctly disentangling the latencies involved and has not tried to force them into a prefabricated model founded on the set of a priori ideas currently in fashion.¹³

It is, I hope, from such a compromise position that I present my analysis of three representative Finnish runes. Before presenting this analysis, however, I would like to discuss very briefly various sets of "a priori ideas currently in fashion" with the hope of showing why I prefer the method I have used. The names most closely associated with folkloristic structuralism are Propp, Dundes, Lévi-Strauss, and Leach -- scholars who have not only talked about structure but have also applied their theories to actual narrative material.¹⁴ I intend not to embarrass myself by presuming to have anything near a proper understanding of the arguments and systems proposed by Lévi-Strauss. Therefore, as they say in the sagas, he is now out of this paper. Leach, I am afraid, receives the same rude treatment. Propp and Dundes I have found very helpful in formulating the rather elastic concepts I now have about structuralism.

In his Morphology of the Folktale, Propp defines morphology as "a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole."¹⁵ Actually he selects only one kind of "component part," the function, and considers the relationships between these units only at a unilinear level. Propp's influence, as the first to propose such a new unit, has resulted in some contorted applications of the term "function." For example, Claude Brémond in his study of the French folktale has retained Propp's term which originally meant an "act of a character" and applied it to what might more properly be seen as a process of the narrator. In other words, by stressing the existence of "potential" action, Brémond shifts the emphasis from concern with what the character will do to concern with what the narrator will choose to have the character do. The actions themselves are the same in either case, hence Brémond's retention of the term "function." But, the shift in emphasis allows Brémond to expand the physical representation of the term; that is, he can use a structural

model which can accommodate potential action on the part of the character as seen by the narrator.

This structural model, Brémond claims, represents "the three phases of all process: at first potential, then actualizing itself, and finally achieved."¹⁶ This is something more than the beginning, middle, and end of an action. Because the first phase is potential action, it allows for either of two choices in the second phase, positive or negative. If the second phase represents the positive choice, actualizing itself, then the third phase can represent either of two choices, success or failure. Thus the second phase might be termed "procedure" similar to the procedure phase of a scientific experiment: the procedure will determine the result, and the result will be either success or failure. The advantage of such a model is that it allows the result in any one sequence to depend on the results of various "internal" sequences just as the result from an experimental procedure will be determined by the series of actions within the procedure. We can illustrate this graphically:



Thus "Result¹" cannot be determined until "Result³" is represented. Such a model does not represent a unilinear conception but rather a system of internal levels. In this way Brémond has found at least a working solution for the problems of multiple functions and tale levels.¹⁷ He says of his analytic method:

We picture the structure of the tale (and that of any story) as being composed, like a braid, of multiple superimposed elementary sequences, entwined, and bound together. Each event and action may fulfill simultaneously several functions in the story, i.e., to advance several juxtaposed elementary sequences.¹⁸

Further, by using a versus symbol (vs.) Brémond works around the problem of dramatis personae; that is, he allows for the shift in perspective which occurs throughout many narratives. The use of the vs. symbol means "that a given event, fulfilling a given function in the perspective of a given agent, is converted into another function if one takes the perspective of another agent."¹⁹ This avoids the arbitrary decision to attribute all motives for action to the hero as was necessary, for instance, in Propp's scheme.

Using Brémond's method of analysis, with some modification and reinterpretation, I have analyzed three Finnish runes as represented in English

in Martti Haavio's Väinämöinen: Eternal Sage and Elias Lönnrot's The Kalevala. As the versions in Haavio's book are generally more concise, I have constructed the basic chart of each rune on the basis of his text noting variations in the Kalevala version on a separate sheet. In an effort to heed Martinet's warning and not simply follow a fashion, I have not assumed any of Brémond's sequence terminology on the first chart. The sequences Brémond found to represent the structure of French folktales were evidently determined by generalizing the specific actions of the tales. Therefore, rather than assuming that I would necessarily find the same generalized actions represented in these Finnish runes, I have started with elementary sequences describing very particular actions. In other words, I have used terms suggested by the contents. The first chart is, in fact, a summary of the narrative in chart form, precariously close to the kind of summaries provided in the Arne-Thompson tale-type index.

Looking at the first chart, we can see that the individual sequences are closer to a "motif" than a structural unit in Propp's sense. As I suggested above, such a unit has not been "purified" of its content element. This is the problem Propp broached when he wrote of the need to separate variable from constant; the content is variable, but the structural unit must be constant. Despite appearances, the only way to convert a variable into a constant is to generalize it. For example, the sequence "The world to create" (first chart) can be generalized to the sequence "Task to accomplish." A generalized sequence can then accommodate any number of specific content sequences that may be seen as more detailed illustrations of the generalized action.

Perhaps this will become clearer in the second chart. Here I have generalized those specific actions which to me seem obvious representatives of the generalized actions. For example, in this rune, Väinämöinen is building a boat; obviously that is the task he is to accomplish. He needs three words to finish the task; that is he must acquire the means of finishing his task. To acquire the means he must make a journey, and so on. By the time Väinämöinen has completed the last phase of the last sequence, "Means used," he has accomplished his task.

The third chart is interesting in several respects. For one thing, it illustrates the common feature of internal repetition: the sequence "Test to take" is repeated four times in Haavio's version and five times in the Kalevala version. Further, the narrative illustrates a failure in the initial sequence. This situation is similar to one described by Brémond in relation to French folktales. He said of those tales: "The tale ends most often with the establishment (or the re-establishment) of a satisfactory state (or the creation of a better one), sometimes with the establishment (or the re-establishment) of a state of deficiency."²⁰ Väinämöinen is obviously faced with the reestablishment of a state of deficiency. However, it is interesting to notice that the "Special Case" version of the rune in the Kalevala does demonstrate a success in the initial sequence, that is, a "Task accomplished." Another observation might be made about this second appearance of the rune in the Kalevala. In the earlier version (Poem 16), Väinämöinen goes to Death's Domain in search of three charms. However, lines 255-256 of the poem claim that he is there in search of an awl; this is, of course, what he is looking for the second time he goes to Death's Domain. This illustrates Lord's comment on the singer's use of theme: "In a traditional poem, therefore, there is a pull in two directions: one is toward the song being sung and

the other is toward the previous uses of the same theme."²¹

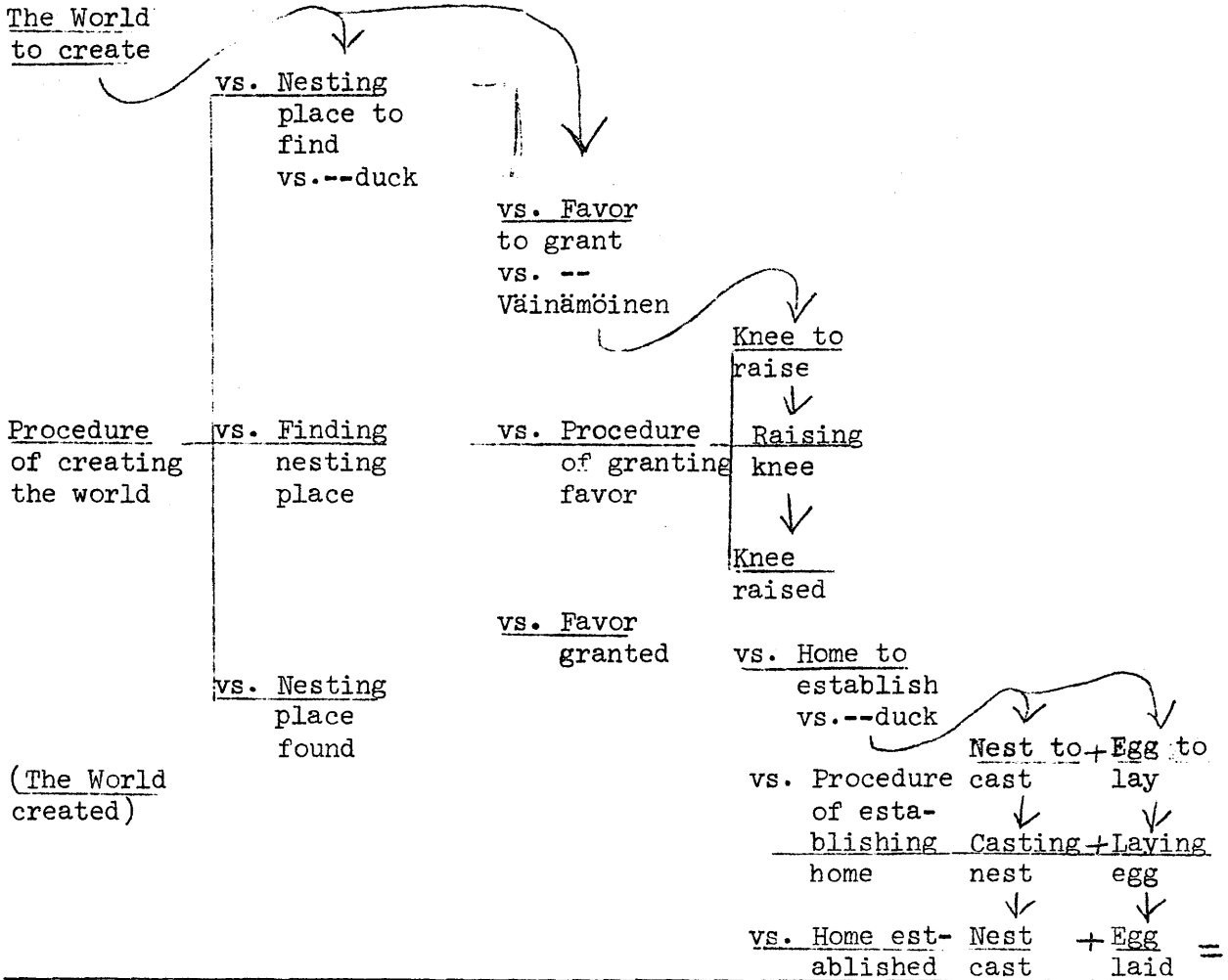
If we remove Lord's "theme" from the realm of content and consider only its properties as a structural unit, we can see that the singer might have in mind a generalized theme similar to the sequence "Means to acquire" -- three charms or an awl. Except for the sake of content consistency, there is no reason structurally why charms or awl could not be used interchangeably, and in fact in the case of Poem 16, they are.

We can see, then, that structural units conceived of in terms of Brémond's models are likely to come close to structural representation of the "real" patterns used by the singer in creating the narrative. On the other hand, these units are perhaps even more manageable as scholar's models in that they illustrate the interdependence of actions and the varying perspectives of the dramatis personae. In relation to the three Finnish runes I have analyzed, we can at least see that Brémond's method is helpful in moving from variable to constant within the narrative and in clarifying the difference between the two. It is perhaps not really surprising that many of the sequences in the third chart (the most generalized) are similar to or the same as those Brémond presented as most frequent in French folktales.

Chart One: Väinämöinen, Creator of the World (Haavio, pp. 45-46)

Väinämöinen as hero

In the version in Poem One of the Kalevala (approximately lines 175-244), Väinämöinen's mother is the principal character. The structure is essentially the same.



= Egg to warm
↓
Warming egg
↓
Egg warmed

vs. Injury to avoid
vs. -- Väinämöinen

vs. Procedure of avoiding injury

vs. Injury avoided

Knee to = Egg & nest move to break

Moving = Breaking knee nest & egg

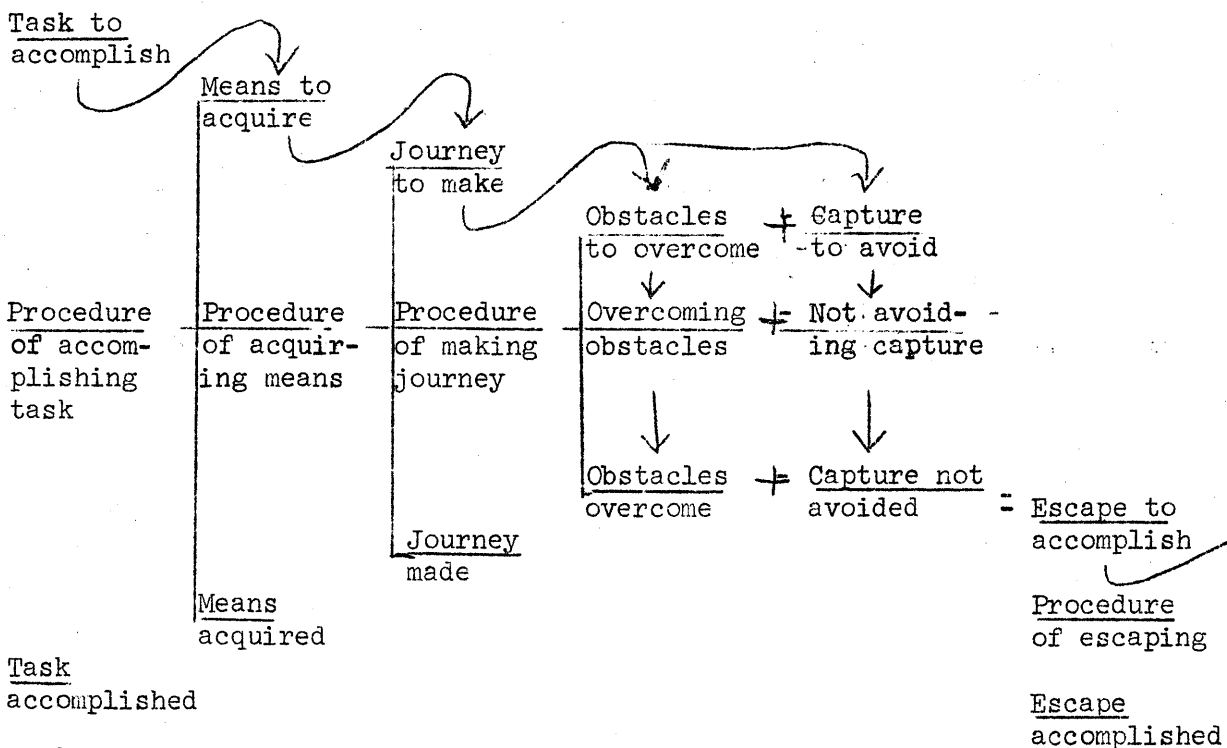
Knee = Egg & nest = Fragments moved broken to use

Procedure of using fragments

Fragments used

The earth, etc. to make
↓
Making the earth, etc.
↓
The earth, etc. made

Chart Two: Väinämöinen and Antero Vipunen (Haavio, pp. 106-107)



Damage to inflict
↓
Inflicting damage
↓
Damage inflicted

vs. Further damage to prevent vs. --Vipunen

vs. Procedure of preventing further damage
vs. Further damage prevented

Favor to grant
↓
Granting favor
↓
Favor granted

vs. Means to receive vs. -- Väinämöinen
↓
vs. Receiving means
↓
vs. Means received

= Means to use
↓
Using means
↓
Means used

The Kalevala, Poem 17

In this version Ilmarinen appears as a helper following the sequence "Obstacles to overcome."

Obstacles to overcome

vs. Favor to grant
vs. - Ilmarinen

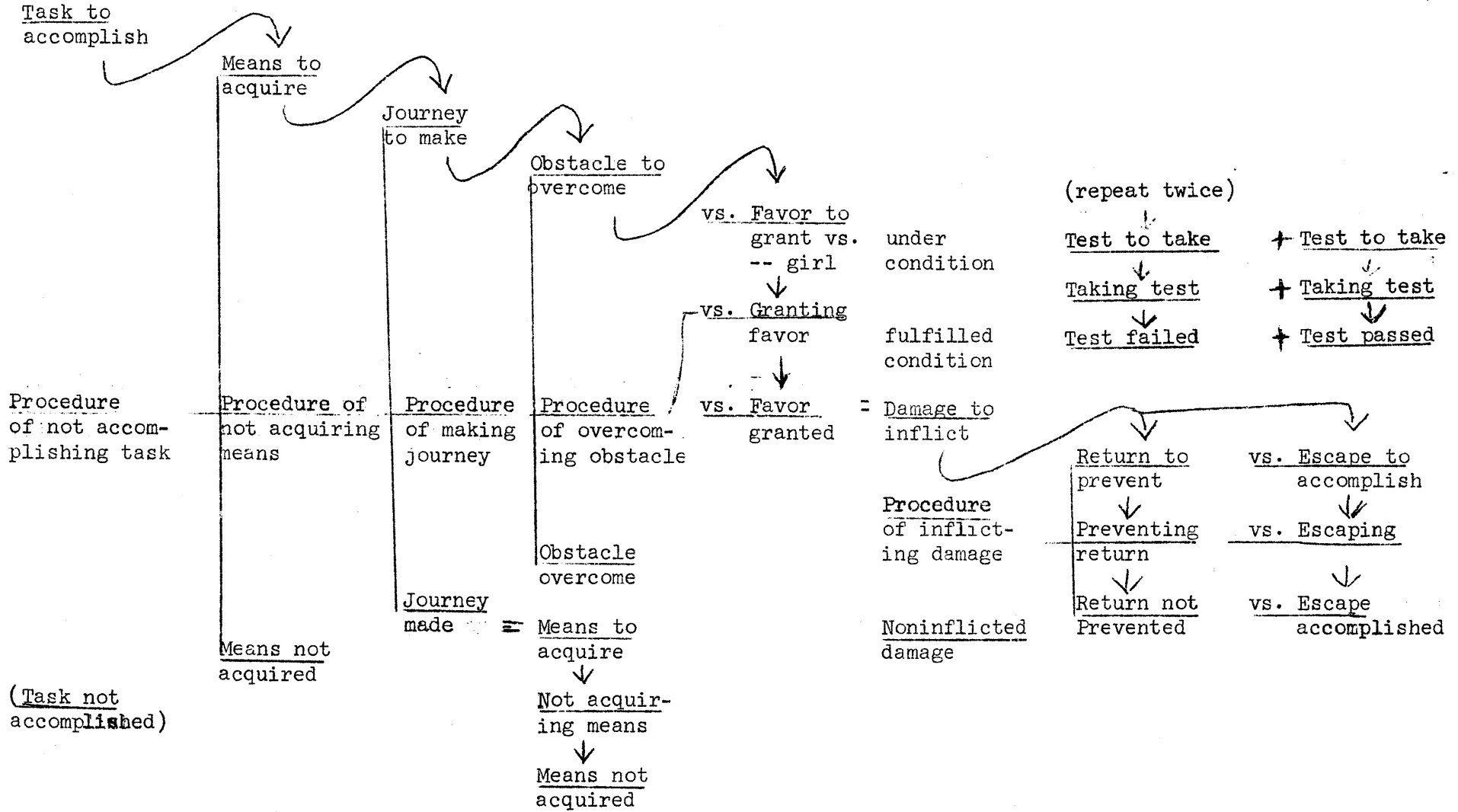
Overcoming obstacles

vs. Granting favor

Obstacles overcome

vs. Favor granted

Chart Three: Väinämöinen's Journey to Tuonele (Haavio, pp. 83-86)

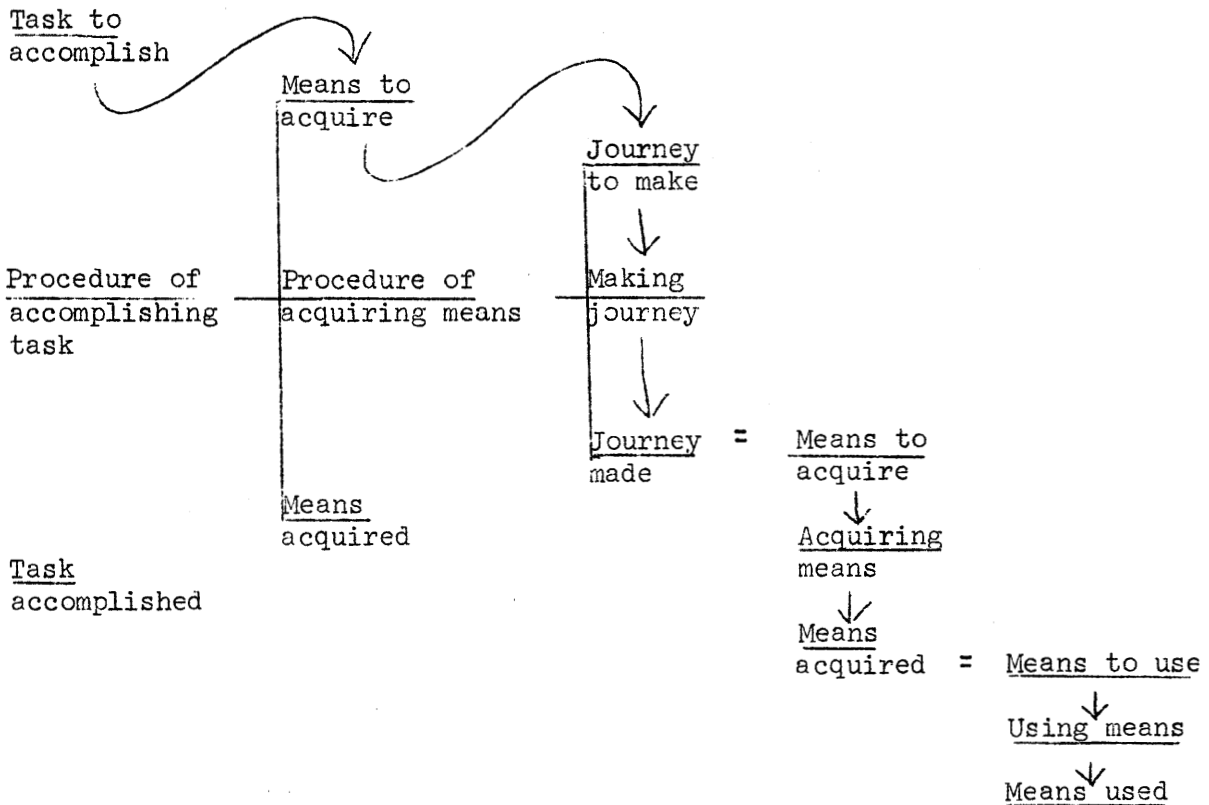


Kalevala, Poem 16 (approximately lines 101-412)

In this version the sequence "Journey to make" occurs twice before appearing in the usual position in the chart. These repetitions are immediately after the sequence "Means to acquire" -- the second sequence.

Also the "Test to take" sequence with "failure" result is repeated one additional time in the Kalevala version.

"Special Case": Kalevala, Poem 25 (approximately lines 674-738)



NOTES

1. Philip E. Lewis, "Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenology of Language," in Structuralism, ed. Jaques Ehrmann (Garden City, N.Y., 1970), p. 13.
2. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York, 1966), p. 158.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 151. See also Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York, 1966), p. 114, for a discussion of the necessity of form.
4. Albert B. Lord, "Composition by Theme in Homer and South-slavic Epos," TAPA 82 (1931): 73. Cf. James A. Notopoulos, "The Generic and Oral Composition in Homer," TAPA 81 (1950): 28-36, particularly p. 35.
5. Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (New York, 1971), p. 95.
6. Scholes and Kellogg, p. 25.
7. Michael Nagler, "Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula," TAPA 98 (1967): 281.
8. Lauri Honko, "Genre Analysis in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion," Temenos 3 (1968): 48.
9. Bertel Nathhorst, "Genre, Form and Structure in Oral Tradition," Temenos 3 (1968): 130.
10. Honko, p. 62. See also Juha Pentikäinen, The Nordic Dead Child Tradition (FFC Communications no. 202) (Helsinki, 1968), pp. 118-124.
11. Honko, p. 61.
12. Nathhorst, p. 129.
13. André Martinet, "Structure and Language," in Structuralism, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (Garden City, N. Y., 1970), p. 4.
14. See Review of Bertel Nathhorst's Formal or Structural Studies of Traditional Tales by Dan Ben-Amos in JAF 85 (1972): 82-84.
15. Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 2nd ed. (Austin, 1968), p. 19.
16. Claude Brémond, "Morphology of the French Folktale," Semiotica 2 (1970): 248.
17. For other considerations of these problems see: Scholes and Kellogg, p. 239; Propp, p. 93; Alan Dundes, "Structural Typology in North American Indian Folktales," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliff, N. J., 1965), p. 221; Paul S. Powlison, "The Application of Propp's Functional Analysis to a Yagua Folktale," JAF 85 (1972): 6; and William F. Hansen, The Conference Sequence: Patterned

Narration and Narrative Inconsistency in the Odyssey, University of California Publications: Classical Studies, 8 (1972): 2.

18. Brémond, p. 250.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 252.
21. Lord, *Singer of Tales*, p. 94.

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