International Journal of Language, Humanities, and Education

A Narrative Analysis of "Angel Has Fallen" Movie

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the struggle of a secret service agent to clear his name of an alleged assassination he did not commit, as visualized in the movie Angel Has Fallen, using Vladimir Propp's theory, particularly the seven spheres of action and thirty-one narrative functions. To conduct this research, the writer employed a qualitative method. During the analysis process, the writer classified the characters into the seven spheres of action and identified the sequence of events based on the thirty-one narrative functions. The results of this research revealed five spheres of action: villain, donor, helper, hero, and false hero. Additionally, ten narrative functions were identified in the movie Angel Has Fallen, including departure, pursuit, the first function of the donor, unfounded claims, beginning counteraction, villainy, guidance, struggle, victory, and exposure. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of how narrative structures and character roles are used to convey themes of redemption and justice in action movies. The application of Propp's theory provides a framework for analyzing the narrative complexities of modern films. This research could serve as a reference for future studies exploring the narrative structures of action or thriller genres and could also be useful for filmmakers aiming to craft compelling and structured narratives.

INTRODUCTION

Film, also referred to as a movie, is a dynamic and engaging visual art form that stimulates experiences by communicating ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty, or atmosphere through the use of moving images. As a versatile medium, film serves various purposes, functioning not only as a source of entertainment but also as a

platform for education and social critique (Nainggolan et al., 2024). This dual functionality sets film apart from other forms of media, as it has the potential to entertain while simultaneously provoking thought and raising awareness about critical societal issues.

In comparison to other communication media, films possess a unique set of characteristics that enhance their effectiveness as a storytelling medium. These include the use of permanent free motion, the ability to convey messages through direct visual translation, the integration of real sounds, and the capacity to address diverse and complex topics. This distinctiveness allows films to explore and deliver various aspects of life in ways that other media often cannot. As noted Ali and Siddiq (2023), films provide both emotional and logical sensations that can significantly influence the audience's perceptions and thought processes. These features make films a powerful tool for storytelling and an impactful medium for conveying narratives.

Despite the technical and sensory strengths of films, the core of their appeal often lies in the narrative structure. The narrative serves as the backbone of a film, weaving together characters, events, and themes to create a cohesive and compelling story (Mafulla et al., 2020). Without a well-developed narrative, even the most visually stunning films may fail to resonate with audiences. As such, narrative analysis is a critical aspect of film studies, offering insights into how stories are constructed and how they impact viewers .

The term "narrative" originates from the Latin word narrare, which means "to know" or "to inform." In its essence, a narrative is a structured account of events, often with the intent to convey a message, idea, or lesson (Azizaty & Putri, 2018). However, a narrative encompasses more than just the content of a story; it also includes the characters that bring the story to life (Wahyuni et al., 2020). Characters play a pivotal role in narratives, acting as vehicles through which storytellers express their ideas and emotions (Eriyanto, 2013). By creating relatable and multidimensional characters, filmmakers can engage audiences and evoke empathy, making the narrative more impactful.

One of the foundational principles of narrative analysis was introduced by Vladimir Propp in his seminal work, Morphology of the Folktale. (Propp, 1968) analyzed hundreds of Russian folktales and identified a consistent structure comprising thirty-one narrative functions and seven character roles, or "spheres of action." These roles include the villain, donor, helper, hero, false hero, dispatcher, and princess (or the sought-after person). Although Propp's theory was originally developed for analyzing folktales, its applicability extends to modern storytelling forms, including films. The universality of Propp's framework allows researchers and critics to examine how contemporary narratives adhere to or deviate from traditional storytelling structures.

This study applies Propp's narrative framework to analyze the 2019 action

thriller film Angel Has Fallen. Directed by Ric Roman Waugh, the film is the third installment in the Has Fallen series, following Olympus Has Fallen (2013) and London Has Fallen (2016). The narrative centers on Mike Banning, a dedicated secret service agent who becomes the prime suspect in an assassination attempt on the President of the United States, Allan Trumbull. Accused of a crime he did not commit, Banning embarks on a journey to clear his name, uncover the true perpetrators, and protect the President. Along the way, he receives assistance from his estranged father, Clay Banning, while evading pursuit by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies.

The film's narrative structure offers a rich case for analysis using Propp's theory. By identifying the characters that fulfill Propp's seven spheres of action and mapping the events of the film onto his thirty-one narrative functions, this study seeks to uncover the underlying structure of the film's storytelling. For instance, Mike Banning clearly assumes the role of the hero, striving to overcome obstacles and achieve justice. Other characters, such as the true perpetrators of the assassination attempt, fulfill the role of the villain, while Clay Banning acts as a helper, providing crucial support to the hero.

Analyzing the narrative structure of Angel Has Fallen not only enhances our understanding of the film but also highlights the broader significance of narrative analysis in film studies. As a form of visual storytelling, films rely heavily on their narratives to convey meaning and evoke emotional responses. By examining the narrative elements of a film, researchers can gain insights into its themes, character development, and overall impact on audiences.

Furthermore, applying Propp's framework to modern films demonstrates the enduring relevance of traditional narrative theories. While films like Angel Has Fallen differ significantly from the folktales analyzed by Propp, they still share common narrative elements, underscoring the universal nature of storytelling. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on narrative analysis, offering a methodological approach that can be applied to other films and genres.

In conclusion, films are a unique and versatile medium that combines visual, auditory, and narrative elements to create compelling stories. The narrative structure is a critical component of filmmaking, shaping the way stories are told and experienced by audiences. By applying Vladimir Propp's narrative theory to the film Angel Has Fallen, this study highlights the importance of narrative analysis in understanding the complexities of storytelling in modern cinema. The findings underscore the enduring relevance of traditional narrative frameworks and their applicability to contemporary media. As film continues to evolve as an art form, narrative analysis will remain an essential tool for exploring its impact on culture and society.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method to examine the narrative structure of the story, with a specific focus on character narratives, character characterizations, and story frameworks. The analysis was grounded in Vladimir Propp's (1968) seminal theory of narrative structure, as outlined in his work *Morphology of the Folktale*. Propp's framework, which identifies thirty-one narrative functions and seven character roles, served as the primary analytical lens for understanding the underlying structure and dynamics of the narrative under investigation.

Qualitative research methods are particularly suitable for studies that aim to explore complex phenomena, such as narrative structures, in depth and detail (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By employing this approach, the study was able to examine the nuances of character roles, their interactions, and the sequence of events within the story. Qualitative methods also allow for a more flexible and interpretive approach to data analysis, which is essential when analyzing narratives, as they often contain multifaceted and context-dependent elements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A central component of this study was the analysis of character narratives, which involves understanding how characters contribute to the progression of the story and how their roles align with Propp's seven spheres of action: the hero, villain, donor, helper, princess (or sought-for person), dispatcher, and false hero. These roles are instrumental in advancing the plot and shaping the narrative's overall structure

Character characterization, another key focus of the study, refers to the techniques used by the storyteller to convey a character's personality, motivations, and relationships with other characters. Through detailed analysis, the study explored how the characters' actions and decisions were integral to the unfolding of the story. For instance, the protagonist's (hero's) journey was examined in terms of its alignment with Propp's narrative functions, such as "departure," "struggle," and "victory." Similarly, the antagonist's (villain's) role was analyzed to understand how their actions created conflict and propelled the narrative forward.

Characterizations were also evaluated to determine how they contributed to the audience's understanding of the story's themes and moral lessons. By examining the interplay between character roles and their development, the study highlighted the ways in which characters were used as narrative tools to convey deeper meanings and engage the audience.

The study also examined the story's framework, which refers to the structural elements that organize the narrative. Propp's theory provided a comprehensive framework for this analysis, as his thirty-one narrative functions outline the typical sequence of events in a story. These functions range from "villainy," which sets the conflict in motion, to "resolution," which marks the story's conclusion (Propp, 1968).

Using Propp's framework, the study identified how the story's events aligned with these narrative functions. For example, the analysis revealed instances where the protagonist's journey followed a classic heroic arc, encompassing functions such as "guidance" (where the hero receives assistance) and "victory" (where the hero overcomes the antagonist). By mapping these functions onto the story's sequence of events, the study provided insights into the structural coherence and thematic depth of the narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
RESULTS

This section presents the findings and analysis of the narrative structure in the movie Angel Has Fallen, using Propp's framework. The findings include an examination of five spheres of action and ten narrative functions identified within the film.

1. Spheres of Action

Propp's spheres of action provide a foundation for categorizing characters based on their narrative roles. In Angel Has Fallen, five spheres are identified:

The Villain

The role of the villain is embodied by Wade Jennings, who orchestrates the attempted assassination of President Allan Trumbull. As a former ally of the hero, Jennings betrays him, creating tension and conflict. Jennings states his motives during a confrontation:
Wade: "*You really think you're better than me, Mike? Just because you stayed behind protecting them while I went out and fought?*"
(01:35:12 – 01:35:20)

The Donor

Clay Banning, Mike's estranged father, fulfills the donor role by providing shelter and assistance. Despite their strained relationship, Clay ultimately helps Mike escape danger:
Clay: "*Let's blow this place up. They'll regret ever coming here.*"
(01:03:45 – 01:03:50)

The Helper

President Allan Trumbull serves as the helper by trusting Mike despite the accusations against him. During a pivotal moment, Trumbull asserts:
Trumbull: "*Mike wouldn't do this. I trust him with my life.*"
(00:45:20 – 00:45:30)

The Hero

Mike Banning is the hero who strives to clear his name, protect the President, and uncover the truth. His commitment to justice is evident in his conversation with Clay:

Mike: "*I need to stop him, Dad. Wade won't stop until the President is dead.*"
(01:09:37 – 01:09:45)

The False Hero

Vice President Martin James Kirby represents the false hero. He collaborates with Jennings to assume power, making unfounded claims against Mike:

Martin: "*Our intelligence confirms that Mike Banning planned and carried out the assassination attempt with Russian support.*"
(00:57:55 – 00:58:10)

2. Narrative Functions

Ten of Propp's narrative functions are identified in the film:

Departure (↑)

Mike leaves his home to fulfill his duty as a Secret Service agent:

Mike: "*I'll see you in a few days, okay?*"
Leah: "*We'll talk about it when you get back.*"
(00:15:35 – 00:15:50)

Pursuit (Pr)

After being framed, Mike is pursued by the FBI and Jennings' mercenaries. FBI Agent Helen Thompson commands:

Helen: "*I want every surveillance camera scanning for Banning. He knows our tactics.*"
(00:40:10 – 00:40:20)

The First Function of Donor (D)

Mike seeks refuge with his father, Clay, who tests his resolve before helping him:

Clay: "*Did you do it? Did you betray your country?*"
Mike: "*You know I didn't.*"
(00:54:23 – 00:55:06)

Unfounded Claims (L)

Martin Kirby falsely accuses Mike on national television:

Martin: "Mike Banning is the mastermind behind this attack."
(00:57:55 – 00:58:29)

Beginning Counteraction (C)

Mike devises a plan to save the President with Clay's help:

Mike: "*I need to get to the President. He's not safe.*"
(01:09:37 – 01:09:45)

Villainy (A)

Jennings' mercenaries attempt to harm Mike's family:

Mercenary: "*Please don't resist. It's for your own safety.*"

Leah: "*Stay away from my daughter!*"

(01:12:20 – 01:13:00)

Guidance (G)

Mike sneaks into the hospital disguised as a police officer to protect the President.

(Figure 1: Mike sneaking into the hospital – 01:20:00)

Struggle (H)

Mike engages Jennings in direct combat on the rooftop:

(Figure 2: Mike fighting Jennings – 01:41:41)

Victory (I)

Mike defeats Jennings, stabbing him fatally:

(Figure 3: Jennings dies from blood loss – 01:44:09)

Exposure (Ex)

President Trumbull exposes Martin's involvement in the conspiracy:

Allan: "*We've uncovered enough evidence to arrest you, Martin.*"

(01:50:20 – 01:50:35)

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Angel Has Fallen adheres to Propp's narrative framework, blending traditional storytelling techniques with contemporary cinematic elements. The presence of five spheres of action and ten narrative functions reveals the film's strong structural alignment with Propp's archetypal narrative structure. This alignment underscores the universality and flexibility of Propp's theory, showing how it can be applied to modern narratives that differ significantly in context and medium from the Russian folktales originally analyzed by Propp. By employing these narrative elements, the film creates a coherent and engaging story that resonates with audiences, combining timeless storytelling structures with the dynamic, fast-paced action typical of modern thrillers.

One significant observation is how the spheres of action in the film highlight the interplay of character roles in advancing the plot. For example, the hero (Mike Banning) is juxtaposed against the villain (Wade Jennings) and the false hero (Martin Kirby), creating layers of conflict that drive the narrative forward. These roles are further complemented by the donor (Clay Banning) and the helper (President Trumbull), whose contributions provide the hero with the resources and support needed to overcome

challenges. This clear delineation of roles allows the film to maintain narrative clarity while developing complex relationships between characters. Such a structure ensures that the audience remains engaged and invested in the hero's journey, a hallmark of effective storytelling.

The integration of Propp's narrative functions adds another dimension to the film's storytelling. Functions such as "Departure," "Pursuit," "Villainy," and "Victory" provide a clear framework for the progression of events, guiding the audience through the hero's challenges and triumphs. For instance, the "Pursuit" function, where Mike is chased by both the FBI and Jennings' mercenaries, intensifies the tension and keeps the audience on edge. Similarly, the "Villainy" function, where Jennings' mercenaries target Mike's family, raises the stakes and deepens the audience's emotional connection to the hero's plight. These narrative functions, while rooted in traditional folktales, seamlessly adapt to the high-stakes action and political intrigue of a modern thriller.

The application of Propp's theory to Angel Has Fallen also highlights the enduring relevance of classical narrative structures in contemporary storytelling. Despite the film's modern setting and action-packed sequences, its narrative remains grounded in archetypal patterns that have captivated audiences for centuries. This finding underscores the timeless appeal of Propp's framework and its potential for analyzing narratives across diverse genres and mediums (Propp, 1968). Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of understanding how these narrative structures can be adapted to suit the thematic and stylistic demands of modern cinema. By blending traditional narrative elements with innovative cinematic techniques, Angel Has Fallen demonstrates how classical storytelling can be reimagined to captivate contemporary audiences.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the narrative structure of the film Angel Has Fallen using Propp's framework of narrative functions and spheres of action. The findings revealed five spheres of action—hero, villain, donor, helper, and false hero—and ten narrative functions, including "Departure," "Pursuit," "Villainy," and "Victory." These elements highlight the film's alignment with Propp's archetypal narrative structure, demonstrating the universality of his theory even in modern action-thriller films. The analysis showed how the interaction of these character roles and narrative functions contributes to a coherent and engaging storyline. However, the study is limited by its sole focus on Propp's framework, which may not capture the nuances of modern cinematic techniques, character depth, or the cultural specificity of the narrative. This limitation suggests the need for integrating additional narrative theories to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the film.

The findings have implications for both narrative studies and filmmaking. For narrative research, this study underscores the relevance of classical storytelling frameworks, such as Propp's, in analyzing contemporary media. For filmmakers, it

highlights the enduring value of archetypal structures in crafting compelling narratives that resonate with audiences. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring how Propp's framework interacts with other narrative theories, such as Todorov's equilibrium model or Campbell's hero's journey, in the context of modern films. Additionally, comparative studies could analyze the application of Propp's framework across different genres, cultures, or media formats, such as television series or digital storytelling, to further assess its adaptability and limitations.

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