

Doaa Taher Matrood AL-Dihaymawee, 2024

Volume 10 Issue 1, pp. 01-12

Received: 04th July 2023

Revised: 27th November 2023, 04th December 2023

Accepted: 06th December 2023

Date of Publication: 15th March 2024

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2024.101.0112>

This paper can be cited as: Al- Dihaymawee, D. T. M. (2024). *Applying Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale to Nicholas Sparks' "The Lucky One"*. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(1), 01-12.

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## **APPLYING VLADIMIR PROPP'S MORPHOLOGY OF THE FOLKTALE TO NICHOLAS SPARKS' "THE LUCKY ONE"**

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### **Abstract**

*The novel as a literary genre appeared in the eighteenth century with the rise of the mid-class as a form of entertainment. Nickola Spark is one of the modern American novelists. He is a New York Times bestseller author with over eighty million international copies in forty-five languages. The researcher aims to examine Spark's "The Lucky One" (2008) according to the Russian folklorist and scholar Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale (1927). Even though Propp's theory used to apply to folktales, some researchers apply it to novels, such as Nursantia (2003), entitled "The Moral Aspect in Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" and Salmah (2004) in his thesis entitled "The Moral Forms in Charles Dickens's 'Our Mutual Friend'". Thus, the lack of applying Propp's theory on novels in general and modern text in specific encourages the researcher to fill this gap in the study by applying Propp's Morphology of the Folktale to a modern novel, "The Lucky One" (2008). Trying to answer the following research questions: 1) Is it possible to apply Vladimir Propp's Morphology of*

*the Folktale (1927) to Nicholas Spark's novel "The Lucky One"? 2) What are the good and bad morals portrayed by the main characters in "The Lucky One"? 3) How many features of Propp's thirty-one features can be found in Nickola Spark's "The Lucky One"?*

**Keywords:** Hero, Logan, Morphology of the Folktale, Novel

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## **1. Nicholas Sparks' Life**

Nicholas Sparks is an American bestselling novelist internationally known. He was born on December 31, 1965, in Omaha, Nebraska. His father was Patrick Michael Sparks, a professor; his mother was Jill Emma Marie Sparks, an optometrist's assistant and homemaker. His family was Catholic, and Nicholas now follows the Catholic belief. He has an older brother Michael Earl Sparks and a younger sister, Danielle Sparks, who died of cancer at 33. She inspired Nicholas Sparks's heroin in his novel "A Walk to Remember" (Abbas, 2013, p.20).

During his childhood, Nicholas moved from one city to another as his father was a student. He lived in Los Angeles, Grand Island. When he was eight, his family settled in California. He graduated from Bella Vista High School in 1984 as the class valedictorian. He was an excellent middle-distance runner. Thus, he got a (Mandasari & Yousuf, 2017, p.202) full scholarship to Notre Dame University, where he set a school record before he hurt his Achilles tendon (Mandasari & Yousuf, 2017, p.202). During that summer, Nicholas wrote his first novel, "The Passing", which is still unpublished. In 1988, he graduated with honours and met his future wife, Catherine, whom he married on July 22, 1989. Nicholas' mother died at 47 in a horseback riding accident six weeks later. Nicholas and his wife moved to California, where he wrote his second novel entitled "The Royal Murders", which is again still unpublished (Abbas, 2013, p.21).

Three years later, Sparks worked in real estate appraisal, food service, home restoration, and medical and dental supply sales jobs. Meanwhile, he was co-author with the Olympic gold medalist Wokini, who reached over 50,000 sales copies. In 1992, Nicholas moved to North Carolina (Mandasari & Yousuf, 2017, p.202-203). Meanwhile, he knew that his sister had cancer. In 1994, Sparks decided to make his last attempt as a writer. He wrote his first published novel, "The Notebook", which in 2004 was adapted as a film with the same name.

He found an agent and a publisher within an astonishingly short time; Sparks moved from being a relatively unknown author to the author with a \$1 million movie rights contract. Meanwhile, his father die din an automobile accident at 54. Sparks wrote his sorrows via writing "Message in a Bottle", about a man who writes letters to his dead wife and sends them in bottles through the sea. His parents' love inspired this story. In February 1997, he succeeded in selling "Message in a Bottle" to Hollywood before the novel was even completed. The movie was featured by Paul Newman and Kevin Costner in 1999 (Abbas, 2013, p.22-23).

With his family support, Sparks has written and published several novels, including "Nights in Rodent", "the Guardian", "A Walk to Remember", "The Wedding", "True Believer", "At First Sight", "Dear John", "The Choice", "The Lucky One", "The Last Song", "The Best of Me", and "Safe Haven" (Nursanti, 2017, p.15). Most movies have been adopted as movies (Abbas, 2013, p.24).

Sparks have five children. His children are called Miles, Ryan, Landon, Lexie, and Savannah. He is now a New York Times bestseller with almost 80 million copies worldwide, in 45 languages, among them over 50 million copies only in the US, and his fame continues to increase daily (Abbas, 2013, p.20-21).

## **2. Previous Studies**

The first academic study that has been done about Nicholas Sparks' novels is represented by Esa Yolanda Putri (2011) entitled "An Analysis of Stylistics in Dear John Novel by Nicholas Sparks". The researcher aims to study the use of figurative language in "Dear John" novel. To achieve the thesis's aims, the researcher uses all the figures of speech; metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, litotes, metonymy, irony, and synecdoche. The researcher uses qualitative methods to discover that Sparks uses living objects, visible and invisible things, and animals to highlight human attitudes and feelings. Additionally, the researcher concludes that the most common figures of speech Nicholas Sparks uses are figures of contrast, figures of comparison, and figures of association.

In 2013, Abbas studied in his thesis "The Portrayal of Women in Sparks' Nights in Rodanthe". "Nights in Rodanthe" is one of Sparks' novels. Abbas examines the representation of women in American society during the 21st century, taking this novel as a sample. Abbas uses the genetic structural approach, emphasizing the literature's extrinsic and intrinsic basics. Then, the writer uses descriptive analysis to define the existing phenomena. The researcher concludes that Sparks

divides the depiction of women in "Nights in Rodanthe" into two parts which are moral and independent. Moreover, the researcher also divides the portrayal of 21st-century American Women into two characteristics: hardworking and married (Abbas, 2013, p.1).

Another thesis was done in 2016 by Nadya Rahmi Safitri entitled "Allie's Absurdism in the Novel Nicholas Spark's The Notebook". Nadya studies the main character in Sparks's The Notebook, Allie, using the Absurdism theory to answer the research questions.

However, Abidatillah (2017) studies the main male character, Noah's struggle in The "Notebook". Her thesis is "Noah's Struggle to Move On from Allie in The Notebook by Nicholas Sparks". This study examines the main character, Noah's love journey and his struggle to move on after his deep love for Allie. The paper adopts the psychological theory and New Criticism as a tool to answer the research questions related to Noah's love struggle. The researcher selects only Noah's uttered sentences as research data. Abidatillah uses qualitative methods to reach the research aims. The thesis concludes that Noah is a faithful lover, a family man, an introvert, responsible and respectful man. Secondly, no matter how hard he tries, Noah cannot forget his love for Allie. Lastly, Noah cannot move on because he always thinks about their joyful memories.

Another study about Spark's "The Notebook" has been done by Mandasari and Yousuf (2017) entitled The Struggle of Love as Reflected in Nicholas Spark's "The Notebook". The researchers selected the structural approach as a tool to analyze the selected data from Noah's narration. The researchers realize Noah left Allie because Allie's parents did not support this relationship. Yet, the couple reunited as Allie understood she loved Noah over Lon. Consequently, her family was forced to give their blessing to the relationship.

Another study done in 2017 is Nursanti's thesis entitled "Analysis of Moral in Nicholas Sparks Safe Haven". The researcher studies the good and the bad morals of the main characters in Sparks' "Safe Haven". The thesis follows the descriptive method as a method analysis technique. Nursanti discovers that good morals are Helping, Patience, Regret, and Diligent Work, while Bad morals are Violence, Lying, and stealing. Nevertheless, the main characters do whatever they can to get what they want using good and bad morals.

Ratih & Widisanti (2022) study the "Acts of terror committed by the antagonist in Nicholas Sparks's See Me". The researchers examine the antagonist acts of terror committed in Sparks' "See Me". They apply descriptive-analytical procedures and literature studies, which are based on both extrinsic and intrinsic foundations, in addition, to modern theories on psychoanalytics. The study

concludes that the antagonist committed acts of terror against Maria, and this is shown via every act of terror that Avery does. Moreover, Avery has no mental disorder, and his terror acts are carried out due to his deep hatred and desire to avenge his daughter's death. His terror acts are represented in sending threatening messages, manipulating people, and carrying out acts of violence.

### **3. Propp's Morphology of the Folktale**

Vladimir Propp (1895–1970) is a Russian folklorist who delivered the first classic versions of stereotypical character functions in literary theory. Propp investigated a hundred Russian folktales and found about thirty-one features for the hero and seven stereotypical character functions (which he named *dramatis personae*): Hero, Villain Helper, Donor, False Hero, Princess, and Dispatcher. While Hero and Villain are ubiquitous, other roles, such as Donor and False Hero, are somewhat ethnically specific (Jahan & Finlayson, 2021, p.493).

## **4. Applying Propp's Morphology of the Folktale on Spark's "The Lucky One"**

### **4.1. Absentation**

The novel is opened with of absentation of Drake Green. Drake went to the Iraqi war in 2003 but never returned. He was declared dead by friendly fire. However, his only sister Elizabeth Green misses him so much to the degree that when she first sees Logan, she starts comparing him to her brother *"he reminded her of Drake in the way he seemed to dominate the room"* *"Like Drake, he was probably close to six feet and lean, with wiry arms and broad shoulders"*, *"While Drake's eyes were brown and rimmed with hazel, the strangers were blue; while Drake had always kept his hair short, the stranger's hair was long"* (Sparks,2008, p.73).

When Logan comes to apply for the kennel job, Elizabeth still decides whether to give him the job, so she asks her grandmother Nanny. Nan gives him the job *"I trust him' she gave a sad smile as if she knew exactly what Beth was thinking. 'Even if he was a marine'"* (Sparks,2008, p.81). Consequently, another common point between Drake and Logan is that they are both Marines. A point that Elizabeth feels uneasy as Logan reminds her of her brother absentation *"I wonder if he knew Drake"* (Sparks,2008, p.104).

### **4.2. Violation**

Deputy Keith Clayton represents the violation feature. He is Elizabeth's ex-husband. Keith is a government employee meant to protect the people. However, the novel opens with Keith miss using this power as he uses his department's camera to take photos of nipped female students swimming and chilling near the lack in the forest. Therefore, this was not his first time "*he hoped the pictures came out. They would make a nice addition to his little collection*" (Sparks,2008, p.5).

#### **4.3. Reconnaissance**

Reconnaissance aims to find the location of specific items such as children, precious objects, etc.

The whole story is developed around Logan looking for the picture's owner and, later, the girl in the picture. Thus, Logan searches for the camp for the picture's owner by "*tacked the photo to a message board...every inhabitant of the camp made his way there at one point*" (Sparks,2008, p.22). However, no one claims it, and he has the picture during his three tours in Iraq. After the war, he walks from Colorado to Hampton, North Carolina, looking for the girl in the photo.

#### **4.4. Delivery**

According to Propp (1927:28), delivery happens when the villain receives information about the victim variously. In this novel, Tony is the delivery guy as he is the one who informs Keith about Logan. First, when the novel opens with Logan asking in the bar about Beth, Tony calls Keith, "*you remember. I called you from Decker's about this guy showing Beth's picture around*" (Sparks,2008, p.270). Later when he recognizes Logan with Beth. Tony told Keith, "*After the church. He was talking to Beth and your grandfather. He was the dude on the piano today*" (Sparks,2008, p.270). Thus, Tony is the one who reveals Logan's true aim in visiting Hampton with Keith.

#### **4.5. Spatial Transference between Two Guidance, Kingdoms, etc.**

Logan is looking for the girl in the picture; consequently, he has to walk with Zeus from Colorado to Hampton to look for her. "*He'd searched the country for her*" (Sparks,2008, p.187). Therefore, Logan reaches his destination after several months of walking, and this feature is called 'delivery'.

#### **4.6. Trickery**

Even Keith Clayton is a Deputy. However, he is an outlaw. He uses his uniform and badge to cover his outlaw activities, such as taking nudity pictures for college students, threatening his ex-wife's dates to control her personal life, criticizing his son and threatening his well-being.

#### **4.7. Villainy**

Keith Clayton represents the villainy feature. He is Elizabeth's ex-husband. In his job, Keith misses using this power as deputy via taking nudity pictures of nicked students while they are swimming in the lack.

He also has threatened anyone who goes on a date with his ex-wife *"you're out of luck, he said. She's off-limits. She's married? No, but let's say she doesn't date. Her ex wouldn't like it, and trust me, you don't want to mess with him."* (Sparks,2008, p.66). Her grandmother says, *"You were his toy, and even though he's got new toys, it doesn't mean he wants anyone to play with his old toys"* (Sparks,2008, p.225). Hence, according to Popp (1927, p.32), one of the main points of villainy is that the *"villain controls his victim"*. Sparks describes Keith from Logan's perspective as *"A bully. Quick to anger. In a position to abuse his power. Someone who thought he deserved whatever he wanted whenever he wanted it?"* (Sparks,2008, p.103), *"I'm pretty sure he was the one who broke into my house"* (Sparks,2008, p.217).

Additionally, he sexually harasses her when he forces himself on her asking for a kiss *"All I want is a kiss. Is that such a big deal?"*. He is still consistent in his bad intentions even when she begs him to stop *"Please, Keith. I don't want this. I don't want to kiss you." "You're hurting me!"* (Sparks,2008, p.318). He goes on in his demands more than a kiss *"I think we should go on a ...date ... I'm not going to take no for an answer"*, and when she rejects what he is asking from her. He starts to threaten her, *"Let me make sure you understand. First, you tell Thigh-bolt that you never want to see him again. Then you tell him to leave town. And after that, we'll go out. For old times' sake. It's either that, or Ben's going to live with me"* Sparks,2008, p.319).

Keith is also bad with his ten-year-old son. He forces his son to clean the kitchen *"He had the kid clean the kitchen and the bathrooms, too, thinking it would show him how the real world worked"*. Additionally, Keith mistreats Ben and forces him into certain sports that Ben dislikes and constantly criticizes. Once, Keith was playing with Ben, but he was *"tired of the kid's attitude"* as he considers Ben *"playing catch like a blind man"*. *"it pissed him off"*. Thus, Keith throws the ball so hard in Ben's direction that it hits Ben's face. Instead of caring for his child, Keith describes Ben as *"screaming like a baby, like he was dying or something." "bruises would be gone in a couple of weeks."*, *"No big deal. Happens all the time. It's part of the game."* (Sparks,2008, p.166). Meanwhile,

Logan can have wonderful times with Ben. *"If only her ex had been there to see how happily Ben played when he was not being pressured or criticized."* (Sparks,2008, p.103).

#### **4.8. Lack**

All human desires spring from their need. Elizabeth needs a man to care for her and protect her from her ex-husband's control. *"Out here, she had too much time to think...And even the sad state of her love life, which never failed to depress her. It would be wonderful, she thought, to meet someone special, someone to laugh with, someone who would love Ben as much as she did"*, "Or even to meet a man with whom she could go to dinner and a movie" (Sparks,2008, p.69). Nana needs a hand to help her in the kennel. *"The stroke took a lot out of her. Her left side is still really weak. She can manage some of the training, but running the kennel and training is beyond her"* (Sparks,2008, p.29). Ben needs a role model, a friend and a father.

Logan needs a partner, and the magical tool (the picture) leads him to fulfil all their needs.

#### **4.9. Mediation**

Mediation is divided into two types of heroes: victimized hero and seeker hero, according to "the Lucky One" narration, Logan is a seeker as he found Elizabeth's picture in Kuwait before the Iraqi war started. Later, he realizes that he survived three tours of brutal war due to this picture of magical power. He decides to go on a journey, looking for the girl in the picture. Thus, our hero is a seeker, not a victimized hero.

#### **4.10. Departure (The Hero Leaves Home)**

The story opens with the hero leaving Colorado and walking across the country, leaving his home and his mother searching for the girl in the picture. Later he discovers the true purpose of his journey.

#### **4.11. Donor (Provider)**

The First donor is Drake's Elizabeth brother. Even though Logan does not meet him personally, Drake is the donor in this tale, as he owns the magical picture that Logan found. One day, when Logan was deployed to Kuwait for Operation Iraqi Freedom while running in the desert for his morning exercises, he *"spotted the dull gleam of a photograph, half-buried in the dirt"* (Sparks,2008, p.21). He picks it up and cleans it, which was the first time *"he saw her"*. Later the picture becomes his *"good-luck charm."* *"You found the picture for a reason. No one claimed it*



*for a reason. Only you were meant to have it” (Sparks,2008, p.23). “The young marine who’d lost the photo in Iraq?” (Sparks,2008, p.123)*

Victor is the second donor/ helper. He is Logan’s best friend in the squad, who believes in magical power. He explains to Logan that the woman in the photo is his good luck charm and she is his destiny as he should look for her *“eventually, you will look for her. There is a greater purpose to all this. It is your destiny.”* (Sparks, 2008, p.149) *“You’re meant to be together”* (Sparks, 2008, p.150)

#### **4.12. Receipt of a Magical Agent**

The hero gets a magical eagle, a horse, etc. Sometimes the magical agents appear in balls, swords, cudgels, guslas, rings, etc. Several characters offer their help at the hero's disposal; for instance, an animal offers his services to the hero as if he were present (Propp, 1927, p.43-45).

##### **4.12.1. Photo**

In “The Lucky One”, the hero gets the help of the magical power of the photo to keep him safe. Primarily, Logan does not believe in the magical power of the photo he finds in Kuwait’s desert before the American troops enter Iraq. In his first poker games, Logan has the photo in his pocket; thus, *“he’d won more than he’d earned in his first six months in the Marines.”* (Sparks,2008, p.23). Victor is the one who tells Logan that the girl in the photo is the good-luck charm *“you can’t ever lose the picture”* and *“then the charm works in reverse.”* (Sparks,2008, p.24)

After they finish their three tours in Iraq, Logan and Victor meet for a fishing trip. They have a deep chat in which Victor tells Logan that visions of dead soldiers haunt him *“I see them during the day-the one who died, I mean. I’ll be at the store, and I’ll see them all standing there blocking the aisle. Or they’re on the ground bleeding as medics work on them... All they do is stare at me. Like it’s my fault they were wounded or my fault that they’re dying.”* (Sparks,2008, p.119). Victor envies Logan because he does not suffer from any nightmares or see ghosts *“I forgot that things are different for you because of the picture”* (Sparks,2008, p.120). Victor is sure that Logan should look for the girl in the picture *“eventually, you will look for her. There is a greater purpose to all this. It is your destiny”* (Sparks,2008, p.149). Thus, Logan has carried Elizabeth’s picture for over five years. He walks across the country looking for her because she saved him in Iraq and during Victor’s accident. Eventually, the picture keeps Ben alive during the storm *“I was scared, but I had the picture in my pocket. Thibault said it would keep me safe.”* (Sparks,2008, p.329).

##### **4.12.2 Zeus**

Zeus is the second magical agent in the novel. Zeus is always with Logan; they walk together across the country. He brought Zeus from Germany because, in the photo, Elizabeth has a German shepherd "*We had a German shepherd. His name was Oliver*", and "*I brought him because a woman in the photograph owned a German shepherd*" (Sparks,2008, p.189). Zeus always protects Logan and is a good friend to Ben; he even safe him during the storm "*their two figures merged, and Zeus suddenly turned, heading for her side of the creek, Ben behind him, holding Zeus's tail*" (Sparks,2008, p.328), "*Zeus had saved him in the river, it had become impossible to separate them*" (Sparks,2008, p.329).

#### **4.13. Struggle**

Throughout the novel, Logan comes to rescue Beth from Keith's control over her life. The novel opens with Keith having the upper hand as he is a deputy and the son of the most vital family in town. However, Logan is the only one who stands in his face when Keith tries to hurt Beth "If I were you, I'd let go of her arm" (Sparks,2008, p.167). Later, he tries to protect Beth, using his cleverness by threatening Keith to "Stay out of Elizabeth's business" (Sparks,2008, p.246). Logan also threatens him to stop forcing Ben to clean the kitchen or treating him poorly "Know this: You've never met someone like me before. You don't want me as an enemy" (Sparks,2008, p.246). Logan threatens him that he will give the camera's disk, which contains the nude pictures he took in his department's camera, to the news.

#### **4.14. Unrecognized Arrival**

When Logan arrives in Hampton, he works in Nana's Kennel as a dog trainer while trying to figure out how to tell Elizabeth the truth about the photo.

#### **4.15. Difficult Task**

Finally, the hero may be recognized for accomplishing a hard task (Propp, 1927). Logan's last difficult task is to save Ben from the treehouse and the river during the storm. Logan shows great courage in saving Ben's life.

#### **4.16. Exposure**

Even though she spends much time with him as a boyfriend, husband and co-parenting, Beth does not discover Keith's real character. Due to Logan's help, she starts to see Keith for the real person he is "*I am sick of you and your family telling me what I can and can't do, and I'm not going to put up with it anymore!*" (Sparks,2008, p.321).

#### **4.17. Punishment**

The novel closes with the villain punished for all his bad deeds with death. Keith dies while he is trying to save Ben's life. While Logan and Beth live happily forever after with Ben and Zeus

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper, the researcher studies Nicholas Sparks's novel "The Lucky One" (2008) according to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to fill the study gap. So far, no study has been done applying Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to a modern novel. Among Propp's thirty-one features, the researcher finds eighteen in Sparks's "The Lucky One". Thus, even though Propp's theory is relatively old and designed to be applied to Russian folktales, it is easily applied to novels and modern fiction.

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