The TV Series as a Fairy Tale: Archetypes, Narrative Structure, and Cultural Resonance

by Jana Publication & Research

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Abstract:

This paper examines the connection between fairy tales and television, positioning TV series as a modern equivalent of fairy tales in today's digital age. These series affect viewers similarly to traditional fairy tales, providing fresh insights into the significance of cultural and narrative stereotypes in contemporary society. Stereotypes, as a part of everyday consciousness, accumulate a standardized collective experience, helping individuals navigate life. By analyzing character archetypes, narrative structures, and themes, this study highlights the ways in which TV series reinterpret traditional fairy tales to explore universal human experiences and societal issues. This research contributes to the interdisciplinary field of media studies by defining the TV series as a contemporary fairy tale—a fairy tale of the 21st century.

Keywords: TV series, fairy tale, archetypes, narrative structure, cultural resonance, modern media

The concept of a series has existed since ancient times. A prime example can be found in the Persian fairy tale anthology "One Thousand and One Nights," where the wise Scheherazade captivates her audience by interrupting her storytelling at the most thrilling moments. This technique allows her to branch out her narrative without concluding a story. Inspired by Scheherazade, the idea of ending a tale at a point that leaves the reader eagerly awaiting resolution emerges. This approach creates suspense and serves a practical purpose for the queen, as she extends her life by enchanting the king with her stories until sunrise. She promises him an even more exciting tale each night than the last, maintaining his interest and anticipation for the following night.

The American writer and philosopher Terence McKenna refers to the serial genre as "the new novel." He observes that, much like fish in water, people from different cultures exist within the nearly invisible environment of culturally sanctioned yet artificial states of consciousness. Viewers often engage with the characters from these series as if they are friends or family members—they become an integral part of their lives. Take, for example, Dr. House. Although he is constructed almost like a comic book character, the peculiarities of Dr. House enhance his sense of reality through subtle details. His cane, wrinkled shirt, two-day stubble, and addiction all contribute to a superhero-like image. However, other aspects of Dr. House's character reveal that he is relatable—he lounges on the couch, shops at the store, eats in the cafeteria, and is often unable to control the circumstances around him.

According to David Bushman, an American television editor and programming director, the art of American TV series, like any form of art, "does not reflect reality but rather preserves

it."[1] He emphasizes that "life on the small screen does not need to resemble real life; however, it must align with the idea of the ideal."[2] This may be why one of the easiest ways to gain insight into the soul of America is through its favorite television series.

It is interesting how quickly some viewers switch from one series to another. They "consume" five series a week without truly focusing—merely following the plot twists. Did Don Draper get divorced? Is Walter White still alive? They exit one storyline and instantly immerse themselves in another. Series are discussed on public transport, at work, at home, and in restaurants. Viewers often equate their life experiences with those portrayed on the television screen. "When one of the characters died," recalls German film and TV producer Sabine Eckhard, "people called the TV station asking if they could rent his apartment."[3]

In fairy tales, characters often embody archetypes. According to American author, lecturer, and story consultant Robert McKee, "Cinema should tell archetypal stories about archetypal characters."[4] He emphasized that "realism depends on deviating from various types and stereotypes, as well as on developing the complexity of characters based on archetypes."[5] Citing McKee, finding an engaging archetypal main character is crucial for the success of a series. What truly matters is the presence of archetypality rather than stereotypicality—commonplace traits that fail to capture the audience's interest. To clarify, an archetype (from the ancient Greek words "arche," meaning beginning or principle, and "typos," meaning imprint, form, or model) is a fundamental image or original pattern. Archetypes are universal symbols that have endured through myths, folklore, and culture, passed down from generation to generation. They have been present in literature and folklore for millennia.

In the 20th century, Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, defined archetypes as the components of the collective unconscious. These images and figures can enter people's consciousness uncontrollably through dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations or be projected onto external objects. Fairy tales and magical narratives influence a person's emotional state by tapping into these archetypes within the collective unconscious, thus accessing the vast hidden "energetic" resources they offer. According to Jung, archetypes manifest in a captivating and enchanting manner, unlocking consciousness, logical thinking, and common sense.

Key Archetypes and Their Functionality:

Masculine and Feminine Principles

Popular culture often exploits archetypes that correspond to masculine and feminine energies. These archetypes shape narratives around gender roles, love, and relationships, significantly influencing character dynamics and plotlines.

The Hero

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[1]Genis, Alexandar, Iskustvo Amerikanskovo Seriala, Radio Svoboda, 02.10.2001 http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/24200433.html

[2] Ibid.

[2] Tsirkun, N. Nezamainlennai vzgliad na „mailo"// Iskustvo Kino – 1999, No5

[4] McKee R. Story. Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting. NY., Methuen, 1999, p.4.

[5] McKee R. Interview. Cinemotion, 2012.http://platfor.ma/articles/robert-mckee/

The Hero archetype embodies positive action and ambition, with themes that include overcoming obstacles, achieving success, engaging in challenges, offering protection, exhibiting confidence, competing, and ultimately attaining victory. A hero is not necessarily moral; rather, they are characterized by their active and assertive nature. This is why antiheroes, often found in American action films and post-socialist "gangster" series, resonate with mass audiences.

The Journey

This archetype symbolizes change and the exploration of the unknown. It encompasses themes of travel, adventure, and fantasy, representing a quest or voyage—both physical and spiritual—that drives narratives focused on discovery and transformation.

Destruction

The Destruction archetype revolves around themes including fatal secrets, foreign mystical worlds, crime, drugs, destiny, danger, and mysticism. It examines the allure of the forbidden, the struggle between light and darkness, and the attraction to danger and the unknown.

Death and Rebirth

This archetype explores themes of ultimate transformation and renewal, depicting the destruction of one form and the rebirth into a new existence. Such transformations are frequently explored through melodrama, where characters undergo profound emotional or existential changes.

The Trickster

The Trickster is a cunning archetype, often portrayed as a cheerful liar, jester, or double. Ancient and perpetually youthful, this archetype symbolizes mischief, humor, and the subversion of societal norms. The Trickster challenges the status quo, frequently introducing chaos that leads to unexpected growth or insight.

The classification above illustrates that archetypes in literature, cinema, and television represent characters that effectively convey the essence of human nature, transcending individual personalities and national cultures. The archetypal hero makes stories engaging and relatable to audiences everywhere. For instance, the character of Betty from the series "Ugly Betty," originally titled "Yo Soy Betty, La Fea," received a warm reception in countries such as Germany, Russia, India, the USA, and China, among others. This character was created by a Colombian author and is based on the Cinderella archetype.

Television spectacles, characterized by repetition and the use of masks, engage cognitive mechanisms in viewers that resemble those found in folkloric and mythological thought. In literature, and subsequently in cinema and television series, this engagement necessitates a stable structure— as described by Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp— that enables endless variations of plots, motifs, and character types. In this way, television, regardless of how individuals perceive it, cultivates a distinct collective viewing experience.

The rapid and prolonged engagement of a global audience with certain characters—specifically archetypes like those in "Dr.House" and "Sex and the City"—demonstrates the validity of the archetypal hero theory in television series. Viewers can even empathize with

negative characters when the narrative presents an ordinary person in challenging situations, such as that of a rejected outlaw. This connection is often facilitated by a simple suggestion: "This could happen to me too." However, this approach highlights some negative aspects of the television and film industry. A popular archetypal character can be exploited for as long as possible, which may not always benefit other storytelling elements—such as the originality of the plot, the development of events, the quality of dialogue, and the detail given to secondary characters.

Exploiting archetypal elements and sociocultural stereotypes is a technique commonly found in mass culture (from the Latin *massa*, meaning "piece," and *cultura*, meaning "cultivation," "education," or "development"). Mass culture exists as an autonomous entity, often disconnected from its content, contrasting sharply with the elitist approach seen in literature, auteur cinema, and other art forms. Since the 1980s, the term "mass culture" has been used less frequently due to its negative connotations. Today, it is often replaced by terms like "pop culture" or "show business." However, altering the terminology does not change the underlying essence of the concept. Show business is fundamentally a business, which means its primary goal is profit and sales rather than high artistic achievement. According to Russian theorist and director Vyacheslav Karp, "Show business is entirely controlled by a group of individuals involved in the arts, including business representatives, art gallery owners, and well-compensated critics. This group establishes conventional value standards in mass culture and sets unwritten rules. Within this artistic environment, strategies for festivals, exhibitions, and promotions are developed; certain figures from non-artistic backgrounds are endorsed; stars are created; and the market policies of mass culture are influenced."[6]

Aldous Leonard Huxley, an English writer and philosopher, analyzes mass culture as an aesthetic phenomenon and highlights its popularity, attributing it to its "recognizability and accessibility."[7] He explains that society requires constant reaffirmation of fundamental truths, even though mass culture conveys these truths at a superficial level and with poor taste.

The language of television series serves as an analogy for everyday interpersonal communication. Simultaneously, it acts as a platform for expressing and sharing important sociocultural concepts. Although TV series vary widely, the realities they portray often consist of straightforward actions viewed from a close perspective. However, these "everyday actions" are intertwined with exceptional events and fascinating mechanisms of interpersonal interaction.

The attraction to compelling stories is explored by folklore expert V. Ya. Propp in his book "Folklore and Reality." He discusses how the key features of narrative folklore transition into the aesthetics of realism, illustrating how fairy tale narratives can become reality. Propp emphasizes a crucial characteristic of fairy tales, which also contributes to the success of television series: the extraordinary dynamism of action. He observes that "the storyteller or singer, as well as the listener, are primarily interested in the action itself, rather than in any

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[6] Karp V. I fondamenti della regia. Un'introduzione alla teoria della regia. Ubu libri Edizioni, Milano, 2010.

[7] Hugsley, A. (1958) *Brave New World Revisited*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics

particular details." For instance, they do not focus on the setting of the action or the physical appearance of the characters. Narrative and epic genres do not engage in the art of portraiture; for example, while a queen must be beautiful, the storyteller does not provide a detailed description—she is simply referred to as "fairy-tale beautiful."[8]

Another key feature is the non-essential nature of external motivations. While the randomness of events is often seen as a flaw in the aesthetics of realism, in folklore, it is considered a norm rather than a defect. The focus is on action itself, rather than its cause. This principle also applies to screen folklore. Viewers typically show little interest in the material environment, visual style, or techniques employed. For instance, the seemingly ordinary yet relevant Parisian backdrop in "Fantômas," crafted by the skilled camera work of director André Hunebelle, is nearly indistinguishable in quality from the semi-amateurish but deeply poignant Mexican series "Yesenia" (1971). Ultimately, the artistic quality of the image is not what matters to the viewer.

People exist not only in reality but also in myth. Each person perceives the world based on their own preparations and beliefs. There are both personal myths and collective myths shared by groups or societies. When considering mass perception, we come across a corresponding mythology—those beliefs that the audience unconsciously accepts as normal and acceptable. The success of a television plot with audiences largely depends on how well the narrative aligns with the desires of the mass consciousness.

The world depicted in the TV series captivates viewers by addressing profound themes surrounding human existence—life, death, and love—through transparent storytelling and timeless narratives. These themes resonate with audiences regardless of the era or setting of the series. They can be analyzed using Jung's classic archetypes, such as the "Hero" and "Shadow," as well as the "Anima" and "Animus." In narrative terms, these archetypes represent the relationships between the Hero and the Antihero, as well as between Man and Woman.

The mythological plots primarily utilized in TV series are limited yet profoundly impactful. Among the extensive array of narratives, three central meta-plots are frequently adapted: Cinderella—depicting a heroine who, after enduring significant hardships, ultimately discovers happiness with a charming prince; Robin Hood—a tale of a hero who restores social justice by redistributing wealth acquired through unjust means; and The Rich Also Cry—a narrative illustrating that everyday struggles, envy, and aggression are not confined to the lower classes but are also prevalent among the wealthy.

This model of perception forms the basis of mythological thinking, which Carl Jung connects with archetypes, while Vladimir Propp links it to folklore narratives. Fairy tales serve as archetypal bridges, transporting viewers into a parallel world that is distinct enough to provide an escape from reality yet familiar enough to evoke emotional relatability. In this context, naive perception should not be seen as a lack of intelligence; rather, it reflects a desire for complete immersion. The viewer accepts the narrative uncritically, without distinguishing between

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[8] Prop V. B. Folklor i deistvitelnost. Izbrani statii. Izdatelstvo „Nauka“, M., 1976, c. 91
http://vk.com/doc6752525_146205822

structure (“how”) and content (“what”). This creates a magical space where characters, plots, and worlds exist as mythological realities. Aesthetic pleasure plays a crucial role in this experience, arising from the richness of colors, emotions, and plot twists that deliver an intense sensory experience. The aim is not realism; instead, it is to present an idealized version of the world, where conflicts are more dramatic and emotions are heightened. However, the narrative cannot be entirely divorced from reality. This is why the "bridges" between reality and fantasy are so important—they establish a contact zone where viewers can relate the characters' emotional experiences to their own lives without disrupting the magic of the “other” world.This is why the “bridges” between reality and fantasy are so important—they create a contact zone where viewers can relate the characters' emotional experiences to their own lives without disrupting the magic of the “other” world.

In her research article, Russian journalist and TV presenter Kira Bogoslovskaya argues that fairy-tale stories, in the literal sense, are rare on television. She explains that serial "fairy tales" are not based on fantastical elements but rather on real or quasi-documentary material that aligns with both the conscious and unconscious desires of viewers. Additionally, she points out that viewers define a "fairy tale" not as something magical or mystical, but as the ideal and proper unfolding of real-life plots—essentially the fulfillment of dreams. These stories reflect romantic and emotional desires that may be difficult to achieve in everyday life. People want to envision "the prince on a white horse,"[9] see themselves as a princess, and aspire to a fulfilled life filled with beautiful journeys, loyal love, a happy family, and a successful career. However, these aspirations are not depicted in an overly sweet manner; instead, they are balanced with the realities of life to prevent overwhelming the audience.

In a 2019 study conducted in Russia, researchers analyzed viewers' perceptions of a specific TV series plot. The storyline revolves around a heroine who escapes domestic violence, as she is a victim of her husband's physical abuse. Desperate and unsure of what to do, she struggles with the added challenge of having a young child and no family or place to turn to for support. After facing numerous obstacles, she encounters individuals who provide her with opportunities to start a new life. Along the way, she discovers her own talents and, after overcoming her difficulties, decides to launch a project aimed at helping other women begin anew. The story concludes with a beautifully crafted ending that highlights her success.

The authors of the study point out that the topic is relevant to Russia, but they predict moderate popularity due to its association with social drama. While domestic violence is a reality that many people experience, there is resistance to depicting it on-screen. When audiences do want to see such themes, they often prefer them presented in a more palatable, fairy-tale format. This means that villains should be portrayed as "symbolic" characters—archetypes rather than resembling actual neighbors—and they should face just punishment in the end. Moreover, all the essential elements must be included: a beautiful love story and a suspenseful, dynamic plot. It’s important to note that socially significant themes typically attract only a limited audience. This

[9] Bogoslovskaya K. Seriali: welcome v mir inoi. Iskustvo Kino, 2007, N. 9.

principle applies specifically to mass culture products, including television series, rather than to cinema, which is inherently an auteur art form, or to examples of high literature.

Many people go to the movies and watch television primarily for pleasure; other motivations are not as common. This pleasure often stems from the (often subconscious) reinforcement that their views on life are valid. This confirmation gives them a sense of security and reassures them that they are living correctly and that challenges can be overcome. It fosters the belief that "everything is fine" or "it will be fine."

Meaningful messages such as "Doctors do not always save their patients," "Drugs are widespread," or "Children abandon their parents," when presented without a convincing resolution or treated in a sensationalized manner, can undermine the audience's sense of security. They communicate a feeling of "things shouldn't be this way" or "everything is wrong," which can trigger fundamental anxiety among viewers. As a result, people often change the channel. This is simply a reflection of human nature—people typically don't want to focus on tragedies and illnesses while seeking entertainment.

Mass mythology plays a significant role in shaping male-female relationships and influencing perceptions of appropriate behavior. However, it often only addresses superficial ideas—such as the beliefs that "everything will be okay," that kindness and love will prevail, and that justice will always be served. Referring back to the previously mentioned storyline, it could be argued that the narrative about a heroine who escapes domestic violence would be more successful if it concluded with her finding happiness in a new family, ideally with a wealthy partner. This happy ending would serve as a reward for all the suffering she endured.

When the belief that "everything will be all right" is shattered—particularly regarding significant and unresolved issues—a television series often experiences a decline in popularity. Viewers find it uncomfortable and painful to watch when they are confronted with "unprocessed" or "raw" problems that lack resolutions that meet their expectations. As a result, this discomfort leads to a drop in ratings.

The perception of male characters is shaped by certain mythological themes: qualities like manliness and honesty lead to victory, while criminals and "bad guys" face punishment. Audience expectations dictate that narratives should be straightforward, polished, and somewhat unrealistic. The most commercially successful films and series often draw from lower forms of culture, such as folklore and popular genres. Furthermore, the more traditional and folklore-based the source material of a film or series, the higher the likelihood of its mass appeal.

Research indicates that mass success in film is driven by several key features. A successful film typically includes a traditional plot structure, which consists of exposition, climax, and resolution. It should present an engaging, action-oriented intrigue and conclude with a "closed" ending that provides a clear resolution and an unambiguous message. Moreover, the main character should not be an ordinary person dealing with mundane life issues. The actors in leading roles should be popular and well-liked by the audience. The plot should also incorporate a romantic element. Setting the intrigue in a distant or exotic location can enhance the story, and

the genre should maintain a "pure" and vivid tone—either fully comedic or entirely dramatic. Finally, the cinematic form should be canonical and familiar to viewers.

Television possesses an extraordinary hypnotic power, and the suggestibility of the audience can even influence those who create the shows. Analyzing this phenomenon is quite fascinating. One notable example is the murder of actress Daniella Perez by actor Guilherme de Pádua, whose sense of reality became blurred. There are other instances as well. For example, Linda Evans, who portrayed Krystle Carrington on the TV series “Dynasty”, became so engrossed in her role as a "rich lady" that she expressed a desire to purchase a large diamond ring owned by Elizabeth Taylor. Similarly, David Duchovny, who played Fox Mulder in “The X-Files”, began giving his wife "X-themed" gifts in real life, such as a mysterious piece of meteorite, a jar of sand from Mars, and a rare photo of a UFO. He believed in the authenticity of these items wholeheartedly, unlike his wife.

The expectations of television audiences lead to what is known as the "double bind phenomenon." According to film researcher Bogoslovskaya (2013), "The mass audience desires to see more authentic portrayals of real life. However, they simultaneously want to avoid feelings of anxiety and hopelessness. These desires are contradictory. They want realistic representations—lifelike characters in genuine situations—but without highlighting problems, as these evoke unpleasant feelings and fear."[10]

In the article "Series: Welcome to Another World," Bogoslovskaya (2013) argues that there is a paradox in viewers' desires. On one hand, they wish to relax and escape into a fairy tale, but on the other hand, they also want to see reflections of their contemporary reality on screen. It is easy to observe that the real aspects of life do not align with the idea of a "fairy tale" and are unlikely to provide anyone with the comfort they seek while watching. Additionally, she states that the fundamental metaphors of a successful series must resonate with the prevailing cultural and social sentiments in society. However, they should not mirror these sentiments too directly. Instead, they should create an experience in which viewers feel a sense of symbolic safety while watching. This ensures that their personal safety, worldview, values, and identity remain unthreatened during the viewing process.

The double bind theory, introduced by American anthropologist Gregory Bateson, describes a situation in which a person receives two contradictory messages at the same time. For instance, the phrase "I love you" might be accompanied by an indifferent facial expression and physical withdrawal, creating confusion about the true sentiment. Another example is when a character states, "True friendship is the most important thing in the world," while the surrounding environment features leather armchairs and expensive cars, suggesting that money and status are actually the main priorities.

Gregory Bateson explains that if an experimenter trains a dog to bark in one way when shown a circle and differently when shown an ellipse and then gradually alters the shapes to make them more similar, the dog's ability to distinguish between the two will eventually falter. This could result in the dog barking excessively and possibly even biting the experimenter,

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[10] Bogoslovskaya. K. Dvoinoi kapkan. „Lovushka” zritelskoe vospiyatie. Iskustvo kino, 2013, No 4.

showing signs of acute neurosis. In contrast, when presented with the same shapes, a dog that has not undergone this training does not develop neurosis. When we think about perceiving a TV series, we can draw a parallel to Bateson's dog. Viewers, much like the dog, have already been trained to hold firm and ingrained beliefs about good and evil. Their understanding is shaped by learned behaviors, habits, and sociocultural clichés. These elements serve as guiding principles for what people want to see in order to experience pleasure and fulfillment. When there is a mismatch between their values and their unmet sociocultural expectations, it leads to irritation and can even result in neurosis—similar to what Bateson's dog experiences. Therefore, creating a TV series that disregards these established mythologies is often futile and counterproductive. Instead, mythology should be used skillfully, which is precisely what successful TV series achieve. While experimenting with mythology, making unexpected shifts, and presenting new challenges is the realm of high art—particularly auteur cinema—this approach is fundamentally different in philosophy and impact from mass cultural products.

It is well known that when choosing between a "realistic" and a "fairy-tale" presentation of the plot, the mass audience tends to prefer the "fairy-tale" version, which features beautiful interiors, characters elevated above everyday life, and happy resolutions to the most complex situations.

In a study comparing audience perceptions of two TV series plots featuring heroines navigating divorce and trying to rebuild their lives, Bogoslovskaya (2013) describes the first story as "realistic." In this narrative, the heroine is left by her husband because, at 45, she becomes perceived as unattractive and becomes an ordinary housewife in a bathrobe. The character takes steps that many female viewers would find relatable: she takes care of herself, secures a job as a secretary, starts going to the gym, goes on dates, and addresses her ex-husband's obligation for child support. Ultimately, the heroine finds a modest but kind, intelligent, and considerate partner with whom she forms a positive relationship, including her ex-husband and children.

The second plot, reminiscent of a fairy tale, revolves around a heroine who is a devoted housewife and mother of two. She is abandoned by her husband, a wealthy businessman, and though she was once a television host, she remains beautiful and well-groomed, residing in a luxurious mansion. Her husband leaves her for a young, attractive blonde who cleverly takes control of the entire business during the division of assets, leaving the heroine with just a struggling bread factory. Despite these obstacles, she proves to be talented and hardworking, successfully revitalizing the factory and steadfastly resisting her husband's attempts to seize it from her. Ultimately, she discovers happiness with her husband’s former business partner, who has been a supportive ally throughout her trials.

At the conclusion of the study, a viewer survey was conducted, and the results clearly indicated a preference for the second plot – the "fairy-tale" one.

These character preferences lead to what can be termed "winning" characters in dramaturgical contexts. These characters are often portrayed with exaggerated traits: the unfaithful husband is depicted as profoundly cynical, cruel, and indifferent, while the object of

infidelity is often characterized as a long-legged, predatory blonde. In contrast, the main heroine embodies softness, kindness, and love. This sharp typification and polarization of characters, coupled with the intricately crafted intrigue of infidelity, effectively capture and maintain the viewers' attention. This vivid portrayal enables female viewers to readily recognize that they are engaging with a fairy tale, suggesting that a happy ending is inevitable. They can indulge in dreams and fleeting moments of fear without experiencing profound anxiety or reliving traumas associated with divorce or loneliness.

In contrast, a "realistic" plot draws viewers back to the harsh realities of modern life. When the heroine—especially if portrayed by a skilled actress—is unloved, impoverished, neglects her appearance, or suffers from depression, it triggers a deep-seated anxiety: "This could happen to me, too." Such portrayals can be frightening, prompting heavy thoughts about past failures or unpaid bills. A cramped two-room apartment and dark streets in the storyline evoke a typical reaction: "I recognize this bleakness and unfulfilled relationships—why would I want to watch them on TV, too?" This is why the "packaging" and context in which events are presented in a series are critical and often decisive elements in its creation.

The renowned Russian screenwriter and director Alexander Mitta, known for both feature films and TV series, observes the following: "When it comes to TV series, you must appeal not to the jury at the Cannes Festival but to a broad audience. The essence of a series is not simpler; it is simplified. Like Chekhov's work, simplicity can be profound, as it addresses fundamental life issues. However, what is simplified tends to resemble serialized content. Series often avoid tackling major, complex dilemmas and instead focus on more convenient, 'instant' problems, where conflicts are crafted for easy consumption, even during commercial breaks. In these narratives, someone commits a crime, and someone investigates it—this straightforward premise is easy for viewers to remember. The questions posed are simple, and so are the answers. The story reduces the world to semi-animal emotions, humanized through abundant dialogue."[11]

The mass audience primarily seeks content that inspires hope and enthusiasm. Viewers generally expect narratives that convey the truth while providing the strength to endure it. They are not interested in stories that reflect their everyday struggles unless those stories culminate in a significant victory for truth that resonates with their own experiences. This sentiment can be summarized as: “I am an average person, but I desire a celebration.” This preference stems from the fact that individuals often feel a loss of identity and personal dignity in their daily lives.

David Simon, the creator of one of the greatest masterpieces of the last century—the television series The Wire—also addresses this topic. In an interview that effectively illustrates audience expectations and the narrative rules they impose, he states:

Simon: “*Now, the thing that has been exalted and the thing that American entertainment is consumed with is the individual being bigger than the institution. How many frickin’ times are we gonna watch a story where somebody…*”

Interviewer: “***Rises up against the odds?***”

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[11] Mitta A.: Kino + TV = Telefilm? „Kino – raskas vizualnai Serial – werbalnai”. Iskustvo kino. Art of Cinema/Archive/2006, No10, http://kinoart.ru/en/archive/2006/10/n10 article18

Simon: *You can't do that." "Yes, I can." "No, you can't." "I'll show you, see?" And in the end he's recognized as just a goodhearted rebel with right on his side, and eventually the town realizes that dancing's not so bad. I can make up a million of 'em. That's the story we want to be told over and over again. And you know why? Because in our heart of hearts what we know about the 21st century is that every day we're going to be worth less and less, not more and more*.

Interviewer: ***Worth less and less as people, you mean*?**

Simon: *As human beings. Some of us are going to get more money and be worth more. There are some people who are destined for celebrity or wealth or power, but by and large, the average American, the average person in the world on planet earth, is worth less and less. That's the triumph of capital, and that is the problem. You look at that, and you think that's what we've come to and that's where we're going and it's like, "Can you tell me another bedtime story about how people are special and every one of us matters? Can you tell me that shit?" or "Tell me again about that boxer who came out of the ghetto and became the champ."* **"***And what about that musician whose genius was never recognized? What about him? And, oh yeah, somebody else overcame addiction. That's great. Tell me that one again." Listen, I don't mind a victory if it's earned. But if all you do is victory, if that's your whole dramatic construct and that's 90 percent of American television*."[12]

The need for archetypal characters to achieve mass appeal can also be linked to the necessity of archetypal situations in which these characters operate. As Karp (2010) points out in his study, "Culture is always a complex of different layers. These layers are interconnected but not unified; they each retain their originality. There is a 'higher layer' characterized by the works of prominent poets, thinkers, and great literature. In contrast, another form of verbal art—whether oral or written—emerges from the lower layers. High culture, which is intellectualized and refined, varies each time it appears. However, its anonymous foundation, from which it undoubtedly draws certain impulses, conceptual clichés, and traditions, exhibits remarkable resilience. Consequently, we can identify relatively stable, recurring, and timeless phenomena across different cultures, akin to matrices of consciousness and behavior."[13]

The mass audience often responds to specific "static, timeless, and repetitive structures" that can be identified as matrices or archetypes of perception. These structures typically take the form of familiar, stereotypical plots that consistently engage the sympathy and interest of viewers. A notable example can be found in fairy tales, where narratives such as the struggles of abandoned children resonate profoundly. This particular storyline boasts a rich pre-literary heritage, originating from ancient folklore and carrying inherent emotional and moral lessons with it. As it evolves through various forms of storytelling, including literature, theater, and cinema, it continues to capture the imagination. Despite changes in setting, character roles, and visual presentation, the essence of this archetypal tale remains universal. It conveys enduring

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[12] David Simon interview with Vice Magazine https://www.youmightfindyourself.com/post/297094905/david-simon-interview-with-vice-magazine

[13] Karp. V. I fundamenti della regia. Un'introduzione alla teoria della regia. Ubulibri Edizioni, Milano, 2010.

themes of loss, resilience, and hope, making it a story that transcends cultural boundaries and resonates across generations.

Well-crafted, structured narratives with distinct "rhythms" or patterns—such as the repetitive knots in weaving—are often the most cherished by audiences. These stories present a reality that feels "regulated," aesthetically pleasing, and adapted to dramatic twists. They typically require minimal innovation, relying instead on familiar elements that are colorful, vivid, and sentimental. However, this creativity must remain within moderate limits to avoid descending into prolonged melodrama. Such melodrama often loses its impact when the audience anticipates a happy ending, even during the most intense situations in the plot.

Art critics emphasize the importance of a standardized dramatic structure for a series to be successful, in addition to featuring archetypal characters and dynamic action. For example, Russian film scholar Zorkaya notes, "Among the 'topoi' and artistic stereotypes, one can recognize the effective impact of recurring plot situations supported by both external and internal mechanisms of seriality. This is particularly evident in detective and adventure plots." Zorkaya also presents a framework developed by the renowned Russian screenwriter Viktor Shklovsky, who worked in the 1930s. She states, "We are dealing with a classic intellectual detective plot in which the primary narrative tools are the detective's observations and reflections. The plot can possess an unpredictable sense of freedom and spontaneity." In “The Tale of Secrets,” Shklovsky offers a refined and precise model of the serial "unit," drawing from Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.

"I. Expectation, conversation about past events, analysis.

II. The appearance of a client. The business part of the story.

III. Clues presented in the narrative. The most important are the secondary details, placed so the reader does not notice them. False leads are also provided.

IV. Watson gives a false interpretation of the clues.

V. Going to the crime scene, which often has not been committed yet, creates a duality in the narrative and blends the crime novel with the detective novel. The clues are in place.

VI. The state detective presents a false version; if there is no such standard detective, the newspaper, the victim, or Sherlock Holmes himself gives the false version.

VII. The interval is filled with Watson's reflections, as he does not understand what is happening. Sherlock Holmes smokes or plays music. Sometimes, he groups the facts without concluding.

VIII. The resolution, preferably unexpected. Very often, an attempted crime is used for the resolution."[14]

This scheme, as defined by Shklovsky and summarized in a brief page of literary analysis, illustrates the structure of what is referred to as the "tale of secrets."[15] The careful attention and precision with which the structure of the work—and even more so, the series—is

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[14] Shklovski, V. Teoria Proza. Jrug. M.–Л., 1975, c. 110-111. Tsitat po: Zorkaya N.M. Unikalnae i tiravirovannae: sredstva massavai informatsii i reprodutsirovannae iskustva. M., Iskustvo, 1981, c. 79.

[15] Ibid, p.79-80

identified can serve as an excellent model, guiding viewers through the vast sea of multi-episode productions.

In conclusion, Zorkaya observes that: "If we shift our focus from the detective genre to the more nuanced and intimate realms of fictional and cinematic works, such as romantic adventure novels or psychological dramas—under which early cinema grouped hundreds of love-themed films—we will encounter equally structured mechanisms, the same rigid frameworks, and a consistent tendency toward uniformity and repetition of plot elements."[16]

As a modern fairy tale, the TV series reflects a dynamic evolution of a timeless storytelling tradition. By adapting narrative structures, archetypes, and themes to suit contemporary media, these series continue to fulfill the fundamental purposes of fairy tales: to entertain, educate, and inspire. They serve as a cultural mirror, reflecting societal hopes, fears, and values while providing an escape from reality and offering moral guidance. This study highlights the importance of recognizing TV series as a legitimate and powerful medium for preserving and transforming fairy tales, ensuring their relevance for future generations.

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[16] Ibid, p.80

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