



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

# **Anastasia – history or fairytale?**

*Analyzing the animated film Anastasia with Vladimir Propp's  
Morphology of the Folktale*

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs**

**Auður Eva Guðmundsdóttir**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The history of Russia's last Emperor has been and will remain an interesting one, for many the history of Anastasia Romanov is the most interesting because for a long time rumours and speculations of her survival flourished. The first chapter of this essay is an overview of Romanov history from 1901-2008, discussing life after Anastasia was born and until the imperial family's murder and aftermath – including a brief summary of Anna Anderson involvement. The second chapter discusses Vladimir Propp's pioneering book *Morphology of the Folktale* and his system for writing fairytales. Propp's functions and spheres of action will then, in the third chapter, be applied to the animated film *Anastasia* (1997) – a fairytale that blossomed from the actual mystery of an Emperor's daughter. The third chapter also discusses whether and in what way the fairytale corresponds to the actual historical events. The fourth chapter gives us the conclusion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Fairytales are popular in the whole world and have been for centuries. Hollywood has a special interest in fairytales, since they are probably one of the more profitable stories to make films from. The films are not only popular with children but also adults, even adults without children. Today the world recognizes countless animated stories from many production companies: from Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to *Mulan* (1998) and Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995) and *Finding Nemo* (2003). One of animated fairytale is 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's story of *Anastasia* (1997).

Fairytales are mystical, magical stories and it's quite unusual for them to be based on real life events. *Anastasia*, however, is based on the life and death of a young, charming and playful woman. The real story is somewhat a fairytale with an unhappy ending. Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna Romanov was the fourth daughter of Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, Emperor and last Monarch of Russia. Following Russia's losses in World War I there was an economic crisis and rioting began in the early months of 1917 in Petrograd.<sup>1</sup> When the army joined the rioters Nicholas was forced to relinquish. In July 1918 the Romanov family was shot to death. Anastasia and her three sisters survived the initial firing because they were wearing jewellery sewn into their garments; therefore they were stabbed and shot from close range to the head (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 359).

There have always been controversies about the shooting of the Romanov family. Could someone possibly have survived? For a long time after Anastasia's death there were women falsely identifying themselves as the Grand Duchess, the most

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<sup>1</sup>Saint Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1914 as the former name was perceived too German due to World War I.

convincing one was Anna Anderson. It wasn't until the year 2007 that the world could lay to rest the idea that Anastasia Nikolaevna Romanov had survived the killing of the Romanov family. What really happened to the Romanov family? The film *Anastasia* is based on these true events and the correlation between these two stories will be explored. Are there any similarities in the stories? Or is *Anastasia* merely a fairytale with no historical references? The film will then be analyzed according to Vladimir Propp's pioneering book on the writing of fairytales, *Morphology of Folktales*. Propp's system will be applied to the plot of *Anastasia* to better realize its fairytale qualities.

## 1. ROMANOV HISTORY 1901-2008

The actual story of the Romanov family (and especially Anastasia) has long appealed to the public's imagination in Russia and in the West. The story is a fantasy of rich lives encrusted with jewels and gowns which came to an end with an arrest, captivity and execution, with no heir to the tsarist throne (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 1).

Anastasia was born on June 18<sup>th</sup> 1901. She was the fourth daughter of Tsar Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. Having the fourth daughter was without a doubt disappointing to the Tsar, since he needed an heir to the throne. However, 3 years later Alexei was born. Anastasia was known as a playful child and perhaps a bit mischievous and a bit of a tom-boy. The Romanov children often visited with the family doctor, Botkin. Tatiana Botkina describes one visit from the year 1911 (Anastasia 10 years old) this way:

Most of all we saw Anastasia Nikolaevna. She came and sat at the foot of the coach my father laid on, and in the evenings, when the cannons would be fired just before sunset, she always pretended that she was very afraid and hid in the farthest corner, plugging her ears and peeping out from her intensely frightened eyes. Sometimes while speaking politely she would discretely trip us with her leg if we stood up for something.

Maria Nikolaevna and Anastasia Nikolaevna loved playing "crosses and zeroes" tremendously and knew a secret – and with its help they won every time, but the clever Gleb<sup>2</sup> discovered their secret and Anastasia, after having lost to him a few times warned Maria:

"Be careful Mari, he plays well."

Gleb was already very good at drawing people with animal heads and they brought pieces of paper and pencils to copy.

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<sup>2</sup> Tatiana's brother



Once Anastasia Nikolaevna came all covered in her loose hair, in which somewhere hung a small white hair bow and sat at the foot of the coach, pulled from her pocket a whole pile of crumpled sheets of cigarette paper that she began to smooth out on her lap and accurately fold together.

“Now, what are you doing with those little cigarette papers?” asked my father.

“Well, I’m going to play with them”, said Anastasia Nikolaevna and piled them up and stuffed them again into her pocket.

Then, after sitting for a while she told us that Maria Nikolaevna ruins all shoes because she puts them on and crushes the heel. She talked some more, then stood up, said goodbye and left, however not into the corridor, but only behind the curtain so we saw the tips of her white shoes.

“We see you, Anastasia Nikolaevna”, said my father laughing.

She peered out from behind the curtain, laughed and ran away.

The following day she did the same thing: Anastasia pretended to be gone, but from behind the curtain peeked her white shoe.

“We see you”, said my father.

But behind the curtain there was silence.

“Come out Anastasia Nikolaevna, we see you.”

Still silence.

We pushed back the curtains and there stood a sole white shoe, however Anastasia Nikolaevna had put a foot dressed in a stocking onto the toe of the other shoe and peeked out from behind the slightly open door to the corridor<sup>3</sup> (Botkina 2006).

Anastasia was obviously a spunky, lively young woman and the film producers honoured those characteristics as we will later find out. Alexei inherited haemophilia from his mother which contributed to their relationship with a pilgrim named Rasputin since the Empress believed him to be a faith healer. Rasputin became a friend of the family and a frequent visitor as Alexandra steadfastly thought he could save Alexei

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<sup>3</sup> Essay author’s translations from Russian to English.

from death. By many Rasputin is seen as an evil force in the Romanov's history; that he was one of the main influences in the destroyed monarchy (Moynahan 1997, ix). This common thought is probably what contributed to his role in the film *Anastasia* of the villain and the sole danger to the Romanov family. During the World War I Nicholas went to the front as commander in chief and left Alexandra to deal with the country matters (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 45). Alexandra was mostly influenced by Rasputin's opinion which fuelled ill-feelings toward their friendship.

The description by a leading historian of Russia accurately echoes the opinion of many contemporaries: "A narrow-minded, reactionary, hysterical woman and an ignorant, weird peasant ... had the destinies of an empire in their hands." (Riasanovsky and Steinberg 2005, 421)

The Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna was especially frustrated with this friendship and was said to have given Nicholas an ultimatum; send Rasputin away or she would leave the capital. Nicholas did nothing. Rumours grew that the Dowager Empress conspired to overthrow her son as she was convinced Alexandra would lead them to disaster. (Kiste 1998, 187).

Grand Duke Paul tried to inform and warn Nicholas of how dreadful the situation of Russia had become, how the army was demoralized and the people starving and angry. Paul then addressed his concerns of Rasputin and how his influence was obviously ill received by the people. Nicholas had nothing to say about Rasputin, but Alexandra ardently defended him. She believed many envied his position and that he only had the empire's best interest at heart and prayed for the family (Kiste 1998, 189). Perhaps the people's hatred of Rasputin should have been reason enough to take him out of the equation, at least his fate would possible have been different. Stories of his murder are quite well known as he appeared to be impossible to murder; he was given

poison, shot and thrown into the icy cold Neva where he eventually drowned.<sup>4</sup> This is actually referenced in a small way in the film as he falls through ice and seemingly drowns in front of Anastasia and her grandmother. However, he doesn't completely die; he gets stuck in limbo since he didn't manage to complete his curse. The stories of Rasputin's real death and the sheer difficulty of murdering him perhaps add to how easy and fitting it was to create a purely evil spirit in his name.

Rasputin objectors were many; however, those who believed Russia would be saved after the elimination of Rasputin would soon find out that it made no difference at all. Or at least not the difference they had hoped for. If anything the Empress became more determined to do everything she believed Rasputin would have wanted (Kiste 1998, 192). Alexandra's relationship with Rasputin is never mentioned in the film and actually Alexandra is hardly mentioned at all. Maybe the film producers really didn't have to stretch the truth about people's perception on Rasputin all that much. So many believed (and still do) that he was the villain and cause for an unhappy ending to the fairytale of the Romanov Empire, as said before.



**Picture 1** Rasputin the puppet master – cartoon from c. 1915 (Clare 2010)

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<sup>4</sup> A detailed description of Rasputin's death can be found in Kiste's book *The Romanovs 1818-1959*, page 190.

What is hardly mentioned in the film is the deteriorating situation in Russia, which had little to do with Rasputin. During the war the economy got increasingly dire which contributed to unhappiness with Russia's partake in the war. Neither Nicholas nor Alexandra seemed to fully understand the severe discontent of the people. By the fall of 1916, Nicholas started to recognize the political dangers inherent in the fact that the people were about to starve – and rioting by men and women on strike had begun in Petrograd. They shouted: "Give us bread" (r: *Дайте хлеб* and *Хлеба, хлеба*) (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 45-47). In February 1917 a revolution broke out, without clear leadership. Russia had finally reached boiling point.

In March 1917 Nicholas announced that he would abdicate the crown to his brother Grand Duke Michael. Nicholas didn't suggest his son Alexei because of his disease and because Nicholas and Alexandra would probably be exiled from Russia after he had abdicated. Grand Duke Michael declined the throne and just over three hundred years of Romanov monarchy had fallen. This however, was far from the end of Romanov history – though it might be regarded as the end of their fairytale-like lives.

The Emperor was replaced by the Russian Provisional Government, an alliance of liberals and socialists. The Provisional Government discussed evicting the imperial family primarily for their safety but in the end came to the conclusion not to do so, however "it is necessary only to limit their place of residence within known boundaries, equally limiting the possibility of their movement" (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 102). For five months the imperial family was under arrest in Alexander Palace in Tsarskoe-Selo<sup>5</sup>. All except two entrances to Alexander Palace were sealed; the kitchen and main entrance were guarded at all times. All letters were examined and telephones were usually off limits. Rules were somewhat inconsistent in the Palace. Life became

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<sup>5</sup> Former residence of the imperial family, located 16 miles south of St. Petersburg's centre.

tedious and quiet. Alexei's tutor described it: "The days follow one another, all alike, divided between lessons and walks" (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 122). They were allowed to read books and newspapers, to embroider and keep a kitchen garden. Some of the guards treated the family with respect while others were hostile and impolite especially to Alexandra (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 123).

Early on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August the former imperial family were escorted to Tobolsk Siberia, which may give the impression that they were to receive a harsher prison-time, however, life in Tobolsk was hardly worse than life had been in Tsarskoe-Selo. The imperial family, in fact, still lived in relative luxury – only in captivity. Kerensky, leader of the Russian Provisional Government, instructed his guards on departure to Tobolsk: "Don't forget that this is the former Emperor. Neither he or his family should experience any deprivation" (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 171). Even the journey to Siberia was as comfortable as possible at the time, with tasty meals and sleeping arrangements in the train. Alexandra felt it was a blessing that they were being moved to a location so close to her "dear friend's" Rasputin's native village (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 129, 169). They arrived on 6<sup>th</sup> of August on an ironically recently renamed street, Freedom Street<sup>6</sup>, and complained that the governor's mansion was empty and dirty. As in Tsarskoe-Selo days was repetitive and boredom was really all the imperial family suffered.

For some time Tobolsk was still run by its old city council and in fact the Provisional Government's commissar was in charge of the imperial family until January 1918. The October Revolution was, however, clearly felt by the captives of Freedom House. Their guards were ordered to be stricter to the imperial family and other regiments were brought in which proved to be more hostile, offensive and degrading

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<sup>6</sup> And the governor's mansion therefore received the ironic nickname Freedom House (Steinberg and Khrustalëv, 1995, 171).

towards them. In the early months of 1918 more and more restrictions were set, for example the captives were no longer allowed to leave the mansion and their entourage were all voluntarily imprisoned as well, except for the doctors who were still allowed to come and go. Nicholas and Alexei could no longer wear their epaulettes on their uniforms and walks in the yard were reduced. This was just the beginning of their discomfort (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 179).

One of the reasons for more restrictions was the justifiable fear of counter revolution by monarchists (the White army) who would attempt to free the former Emperor. This created public demand that the imprisonment should be intensified and “Nicholas the Bloody Romanov” should be moved to the fortress at Kronstadt and trialled. (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 182). The immediate threat and danger quickly passed since the peace treaty was signed about a week later. The imperial family was still transferred from Tobolsk to Yekaterinburg in the Urals in the spring of 1918. The imperial family stayed in the home of a wealthy merchant named Ipatiev; therefore it is often referred to as the Ipatiev house. The main objective of moving them to Yekaterinburg was to keep them from being freed. Guards were outside and inside the house, the windows were whitewashed and two high sets of fences were built. The soldiers were cruder than ever – writing obscenities and drawing cartoons of Alexandra and Rasputin in sexual positions (some of them had Nicholas watching and drinking) (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 278-281).

As the situation grew more intense, the people no longer demanded that the former Emperor would be trialled; rather they demanded him to be killed. Rumours that spread repeatedly of the killing of the imperial family reflected real threats. The Bolsheviks’ response to these threats was to give the Cheka<sup>7</sup> the responsibility to guard

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<sup>7</sup> The political security police (Steinberg and Khrustalëv, 1995, 284).

the prisoners of Ipatiev house. This altered the mood very much. The rudeness and constant thefts of the family's belongings ceased and more rules for the guards were implemented. One thing had yet to be decided: the fate of the Emperor (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 287). It seems as though they never really decided what to do with the former imperial family until moments before they were killed. Here is Tatiana Botkina's description of the life in Ipatiev house:

Life of the prisoners in the Ipatiev house grew more awful each day. They ransacked and confiscated all valuables; likewise they tore down icons hanging on a gold chain from above Alexei Nikolaevich's bed. When they brought food, which was the guards' leftovers, they spat into it or removed it just as the prisoners had begun eating.

In the beginning the grand princesses themselves prepared stew and macaroni, brought by Derevenko, on a gas burner for Her Majesty, but soon they ceased to allow Derevenko to visit and they received almost nothing.

At this time there was one German spy in Yekaterinburg's sovdep<sup>8</sup> (who later proved to be Yakovlev, a former Russian officer and a German spy). A member of Yekaterinburg's sovdep - a spy for the German Government was admitted by the commissioners to the monarch and they stated that the entire Imperial family would be set free and sent abroad if their Majesties would sign the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Their Majesties refused, and after that their lives became even worse.

A new commissioner was signed – a Jew named Yurovsky. The attitude of the guards was a continuous mockery but their Majesties endured it all with the pure Christian humility of holy martyrs<sup>9</sup> (Botkina 2006).

The last days of the imperial family are somewhat based on speculations and assumptions. No evidence exists of who made the order to assassinate them, was it

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<sup>8</sup> Совдеп (e. Sovdep) is a contraction of Совет Депутатов, which means Soviet/Council of Deputies (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic: Early Years 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Essay author's translations from Russian to English.

Lenin personally, or the Bolshevik party as a whole along with the Cheka? Was Nicholas supposed to be executed without a trial or did they mean to bring him to trial in Yekaterinburg unless it transpired to be too difficult to move him to a secure location? Another unknown element is whether the order to kill Nicholas (with an attempt of trial or not) included his family. The announcement sent out to disclose that the former Emperor had been executed said: "Nicholas Romanov's wife and son are in a secure place" (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 341). The lack of information about Nicholas' daughters is odd, seeing as they were inarguably the most innocent of them all. The speculations and imperfect evidences of the family's death were the cause of a boom of stories about Romanov survivors, especially of Anastasia. One very possible scenario is that two of the children survived the initial shooting because the bullets failed to penetrate their jewel encrusted corsets. They then regained consciousness on the way to their burial site. Some of the rumours for Anastasia's survival built on this scenario; that the soldiers took pity on the children and helped them escape. This is supported by the fact that two bodies were not in the same grave as the others and were therefore initially missing (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 296).

From Yurovsky's account of the execution as told at a meeting:

When the shooting stopped, it turned out that the daughters, Alexandra Fyodorovna, the lady-in-waiting [actually, the personal maid] Demidova, I think, and also Aleksei were alive. I thought that they had fallen out of fear or perhaps on purpose and that was why they were still alive. Then we began to finish them off. They shot the daughters but nothing happened, then Yermakov set the bayonet in motion and that didn't help, then they were finished off by being shot in the head. Only in the forest did I discover what hampered the shooting of the daughters and Alexandra Fyodorovna (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 359).



“When, after their execution, their bodies were stripped for burial, eighteen pounds of diamonds and jewelry were found sewn into their clothing and underwear – the financial resources they would have needed to survive in exile or until the restoration to power” (Steinberg and Khrustalëv 1995, 284). They had always believed that they would live. The events of the Emperor’s abdication and the imperial family’s capture and death are not portrayed in the film. Although, the film in a way becomes a part of making the family the myth they have become. Tatiana Botkina took part in making them mythical figures in the way she described the family at their final hour. Here is Botkina’s description of the imperial family’s execution, her father, Botkin, was the imperial family’s doctor and was killed along with them:

They died a *martyr’s death* [italics are mine] on the night of the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> of July) 1918. Rumours of this terrible, unprecedented crime immediately spread through Siberia, however, the participants of the event tried to conceal it. Of course none of us believed the rumours (right away), not until we arrived to Vladivostok and I met people who personally had read the whole matter, carried out by General Dietrich on the night of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> of July (16-17) the year 1918 the Imperial prisoners were ordered to be assembled in the road. The whole Imperial family, my father and their entourage were soon ready and were all brought to a room in the basement of the Ipatiev house. There they were requested to wait. They asked for chairs; and two were brought: on one sat the Emperor with the heir in his arms, the Empress sat on the other. They waited for a short while, until Yurovsky entered accompanied with 12 soldiers, of whom only two were Russian, the others were Jews and Latvians. Yurovsky turned to the Emperor:

-You refused to accept the aid of your relatives, therefore I must shoot you.

The Emperor silently crossed himself and went down on his knees, as before holding the heir.

The Empress also crossed herself and knelt down.

Shots were heard. Yurovsky shot at the Emperor and the soldiers at the rest. When they turned over the bodies and finished them off with bayonet's, Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna came to and screamed. They also finished her off.

After this the bodies were gathered, stacked into an automobile and taken to a forest, where they were burnt on two bonfires – with fire and acid; in spite of this diligent destruction some small items remained whole in the ash, and I saw photographs of them and recognized items that were known to me of the Imperial family and of my father.

Thus died these *great people* [italics are mine], these *truly faithful* [italics are mine] Christians.

All of Russia is to blame for the death of these *Holy Martyrs* [italics are mine], and no one thinks, no one admits to his sins! Now more than ever, we need to resort to prayer, we must awaken within ourselves the sleeping faith, and we must call to Christ, our saviour and pray, pray for the salvation of souls of all the people, for each of us, for all of us, for allowing the death of their Emperor and heir.

Prayer, repentance and consciousness of their own great sin against the Imperial family, can possibly expiate this sin, which otherwise will also fall on our children and we will have no more homeland, we will not be given the prosperity of our soil, we will not be given to see the Kingdom of Heaven. So forgive us Lord Almighty and holy family of *Imperial Martyrs* [italics are mine] our great sin and help us Christ to start a new bright life on his teachings<sup>10</sup> (Botkina 2006).

In the spring of 1979 Gueli Riabov, a Moscovit producer, and Alexander Avdonin, an ethnographer, discovered three skulls from reading Yurovsky's note on the execution of the Romanovs. They reburied the skulls and kept this a secret for ten years. It wasn't until the year 1991 that exhumation of the grave was performed and Sergueï Abramov, a Muscovit medical expert concluded that the remains belonged to Anastasia, Alexei and Nicholas. On further investigation only 9 skulls were discovered, though 11

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<sup>10</sup> Essay author's translations from Russian to English.

people were murdered. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1991 the discovery was announced to the world with the conclusion that the missing bodies were that of Alexei and Maria. However, a year later an American forensic team led by William Maples concluded that the missing bodies were Anastasia and Alexei.



**Picture 2** Romanov remains examined (Ipatiev House 2010)

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1998 the Emperor, his wife and three daughters were reburied in the crypt of St Petersburg's St Peter and Paul Cathedral (Ipatiev House 2010). This was perhaps an attempt to canonize the imperial family and the way Botkina describes them as martyrs adds to that effect. The imperial family was becoming a fable. Two years later their status as a myth became reality when, in August 2000, the imperial family was canonized as Royal Martyrs and Passion Bearers (Serfes 2009). Not everyone agreed with this decision, especially since the Emperor's reign is controversial. The general opinion is that Nicholas wasn't a very skilled Emperor and during his reign so many suffered which makes his canonization somewhat ironic since it places him on a pedestal to be worshipped for the mere fact of being murdered alongside his family.

As said before the imperial family's captivation and murder is not depicted in the film, nevertheless there is a certain element that can't be overlooked. Because

Alexei and one of the daughters were missing from the initial grave men and women started sprouting up claiming they were the Emperor's children. One of the most convincing Anastasia impersonators was Anna Anderson. Anna Anderson is an important component for the film since without her the fairytale might not have existed. She represents the possibility of a surviving princess. In 1920 a young unknown woman was brought to a hospital after probably attempting a suicide by jumping into Landwehr Canal in Berlin. She had only the clothes on her back and was without any identification. The police got no information from her. She refused to disclose her identity, profession or anything else for that matter. The only thing doctors got from her was that she was a "working woman" (Kurth 1985, 27-29). After six weeks she was sent to Dalldorf Asylum. It wasn't until she had almost been at the asylum for two years when she finally announced that she was the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna. The staff at the asylum never doubted that she was Russian because a former resident of Russia said Anna spoke Russian like a native. But she not only knew the language fluently but military and country affairs as well (Kurth 1985, 35-36).

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2007 two skeletons of children were found in a separate grave and the speculations whether Anna was Anastasia were about to be suffocated. They were finally brought to a complete end in the year 2008 when DNA testing showed that all bodies of the immediate Romanov family were recovered and furthermore Anna Anderson's DNA proved no relation to the Romanovs. The remains of the two children were added to the imperial family's new grave at St Peter and Paul Cathedral. It's hard to believe anyone ever thought Anna Anderson was actually Anastasia when looking at pictures of Anastasia and Anna. It must have been a case of wishful thinking since everybody loves a good fairytale; it's easy to hope for the fairytale ending of a lost young woman finding her family. This could be the same

reason that we perhaps don't mind that the film doesn't represent accurate history. Or maybe people didn't have easy access to the variety of pictures as today. The following pictures are probably the most popular pictures of Anastasia and Anna to compare for those who tried to prove Anna was Anastasia. Countless others exist where they look absolutely nothing alike.



**Picture 3** Anna Anderson (Freewebs 2007)



**Picture 4** Anastasia Romanov (Kurth n.d.)

## **2. VLADIMIR PROPP**

It would be interesting to find out whether Anastasia easily falls under the category of fairytale. The best way to do that is to subject the movie to Vladimir Propp's system for fairytales. Propp is one of the best known names in literary criticism. Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1895 to a family of German descent. He was born in St. Petersburg and received a degree in philology from St. Petersburg University. Propp taught Russian and German in various secondary schools. In 1932 Propp became a member of Leningrad University's faculty, where he worked for the

rest of his life, teaching languages until he turned his interest to folklore in 1938 (Lieberman 1984, ix-lxxxix). He died on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1970.

In 1928 Propp published his first work in Leningrad; however, *Морфология сказки* (e. *Morphology of the Folktale*) was for a long time unnoticed in Russia. In fact, *Morphology of the Folktale* was forgotten until the 1950's when it was rediscovered by various scholars. The book was first translated into English in 1958, since then it has been regarded as pioneering work in literary criticism. Nobody had succeeded (or perhaps attempted) to condense all folktales to one structure before Propp did. *Morphology of the Folktale* became so popular in its English translation that a second edition was published in Russia in 1969, shortly before Propp's death.

Propp became famous, late however, not until the English translation came out in 1958. The American folklorist Alan Dundes immediately recognized the importance of a structural study for all types of folklore and was one of the first people to accept Propp's ideas and apply them to new material (Tangherlini 2005). However, as with all pioneering work, Propp's book received some criticism, especially by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. These two scholars, Dundes and Lévi-Strauss instigated Propp's fame. In the USA scholars followed Dundes lead in applying Propp's scheme without any interest in critiquing it. In France structuralists took Lévi-Strauss road and found ways to improve Propp's scheme (Lieberman 1984, ix-lxxxix). In the Soviet Union Propp was primarily thought of as a folklorist, his books were studied for information about Russian tales, bylinas and festivals for example in his book *Theory and History of Folklore*.

## 2.1 System

The basic idea of *Morphology* is that the tremendous diversity of details in Russian wonder tales is reducible to one single plot, that the elements of this plot (thirty-one in number) are always the same and always follow one another in the same order and, finally, that only seven different characters should be taken into consideration (Lieberman 1984, xii).

Narratology is a subdivision of structuralism but has asserted itself as an independent genre. Structuralism is not particularly easy to explain in a few words. A concise description of structuralism can be found in Barry's *Beginning Theory*: "...its essence is the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of (hence the term 'structuralism')" (2002, 39).

Barry also briefly describes narratology and by that the difference of narratology and structuralism can be understood: "Narratology, then, is not the reading and interpretation of *individual* stories, but the attempts to study the nature of 'story' itself, as a concept and as a cultural practice. [...] The 'story' is the actual sequence of events as they happen [...]" (2002, 223). Vladimir Propp is an important figure of narratology. His work has enormously influenced folklorists, linguists, anthropologists, and literary critics. He was a Russian formalist critic who studied 100 Russian folktales from Aarne-Thompson's collection of Russian fairytales. His study is limited to the tales found under numbers 300-749 in Aarne-Thompson's index (Propp 1968, xi-xiv). Propp published his findings in his book *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928. Morphology is the study of forms or components of a whole. Propp analysed the fairytales and identified structures and situations that were reoccurring. His system consists of 31 functions, which are never all used in one story. The story entails a selection of

functions, although very importantly the functions always appear in the right order. For example, there can be a story that consists of functions 1, 5, 6, 16, 18, 20, 29 and 31, in this order. But there is never a story that has functions 31, 27, 25 and so forth. The functions are a structure to how the narratives of fairytales are written. With this system one can build a formula for each fairytale – a kind of formula one might find in mathematics. This system is invaluable when studying fairytales, and could very easily be used as a sort of recipe for new ones. One could say that he found a new and different way of describing the narrative through calculated steps.

Here are Propp's 31 functions as from his book *Morphology of the Folktale*:<sup>11</sup>

1. One of the members of a family absents himself from home:
  1. The person absenting himself can be a member of the older generation.
  2. An intensified form of absention is represented by the death of parents.
  3. Sometimes members of the younger generation absent themselves.
2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero. The interdiction can be two ways: The hero is banned from doing something or going somewhere, or an inverted form of an interdiction occurs and the hero is told to do something or go somewhere in particular.
3. The interdiction is violated.
4. The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.
5. The villain receives information about his victim.
6. The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.
7. The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.

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<sup>11</sup> The functions are taken from Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, p. 26-65. His elaborate explanations or subcategories have been omitted or altered to fit the purpose of the chapter.



8. The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family.
  1. One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something.
9. Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.
10. The seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction.
11. The hero leaves home.
12. The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper.
13. The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.
14. The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.
15. The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search. Subcategories:
  1. The hero flies through the air.
  2. He travels on the ground or on water.
  3. He is led.
  4. The route is shown to him.
  5. He makes use of stationary means of communication.
  6. He follows bloody tracks.
16. The hero and the villain join in direct combat.
17. The hero is branded.
18. The villain is defeated.
19. The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.
20. The hero returns
21. The hero is pursued.

22. Rescue of the hero from pursuit.
23. The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country. Here there are two possible scenarios: arriving home or arriving at another king's court (another country). Often these arrivals entail the hero's service since he is unrecognized, although a simple arrival is also a possibility.
24. A false hero presents unfounded claims.
25. A difficult task is proposed to the hero.
26. The task is resolved.
27. The hero is recognized.
28. The false hero or villain is exposed.
29. The hero is given a new appearance. This function has 4 subcategories:
  1. A new appearance is directly effected by means of the magical action of a helper.
  2. The hero builds a marvellous palace.
  3. The hero puts on new garments. A girl puts on a (magical?) dress and ornaments and suddenly is endowed with a radiant beauty at which everyone marvels.
  4. Rationalized and humorous forms.
30. The villain is punished.
31. The hero is married and ascends the throne. This function has 6 subcategories:
  1. A bride and a kingdom are awarded at once, or the hero receives half the kingdom at first, and the whole kingdom upon the death of the parents.
  2. Sometimes the hero simply marries without obtaining a throne, since his bride is not a princess.

3. Sometimes, on the contrary, only accession to the throne is mentioned.
4. If a new act of villainy interrupts a tale shortly before a wedding, then the first move ends with a betrothal, or a promise of marriage.
5. In contrast to the preceding case, a married hero loses his wife; the marriage is resumed as the result of a quest.
6. The hero sometimes receives a monetary reward or some other form of compensation in place of the princess' hand.

Propp's 7 sphere's of actions will shed a light on the role of the characters in the fairytale:<sup>12</sup>

1. The villain – someone against the hero, the evil vs. the good.
2. The donor – someone who gives the hero a magical agent.
3. The helper – someone who helps the hero on his journey.
4. The princess or her father – a sought-for person.
5. The dispatcher – someone who sends the hero away and makes the hero's lack known.
6. The hero – either a seeker hero or a victim hero.
7. The false hero – someone of the same sex as the hero who falsely identifies themselves as the hero.

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<sup>12</sup> The spheres and their explanations are taken from Propp's *Morphology of the folktale*, p.79-83.

### **3. THE ANIMATED FILM *ANASTASIA***

A very dramatic voice from the trailer to the animated film says:

An enchanted world. A sorcerer's course. A young princess who vanished without a trace. One of the greatest mysteries of all time is now the most magical motion picture event of our time. [...] It's the story of an orphan named Anya and a dreamer named Dimitri. They're teaming up to find a clue to her past before the evil Rasputin destroys their future (Bluth and Goldman 1997).

The trailer could easily give someone the impression that the film is going to correspond to the actual events, since they mention that it is based on an actual mystery. Stories of orphans have always been very popular, from *Annie* to *Oliver Twist* to nowadays *Harry Potter*. We automatically have compassion for these children and young adults for not having a family and without question support them in their journey to find a family. In the film, *Anastasia* is an orphan from about 8 years old; however, the real *Anastasia* was never an orphan. The film is first and foremost a colourful story for children to enjoy. It's a family film and received 17 award nominations and 8 wins, 2 of the awards it won were: Favorite Animated Family Movie and Best Family Feature Film – Animation (IMDb 2010).

For history lovers the film *Anastasia* has a promising beginning; the voice of an older lady describes the enchanted world of 1916 in St. Petersburg – with elegant palaces and grand parties. The scene is the celebration of the monarchy's 300th anniversary. There's a beautiful moment between *Anastasia* and her grandmother, the Dowager Empress, the other children of the Emperor are not shown. The Dowager Empress gives *Anastasia* a music box and a small, round key to wind it up. The

grandmother is about to return to Paris and had the key engraved with the words: “Together in Paris”. Already there is an inaccuracy in the film, it’s the year 1916 and Anastasia is about 8 years old, however at that time the real Anastasia was 15. Anastasia’s playful character is immediately depicted by her pulling a face towards her grandmother, corresponding well to Botkina’s memory of her.



**Picture 5** Anastasia playfully pulling a face (Bluth and Goldman 1997)

Suddenly the scene turns dark and Rasputin, the villain, walks into the party – he is obviously an evil force from the very first moment attention is turned to him. Rasputin’s look is not at all far from the real Rasputin, everything has been exaggerated to make him more unattractive, his facial features all much larger and his beard is also much longer. His clothes were easily made similar, since it is a monk’s cloak, though the cloak is a little more mainstream looking than the more fitted cloak he wore. His look in the film is not a pioneering one for an animated film, we have seen this look before in other villains for example in Jafar from *Aladdin* (1992) and in Scar from *The Lion King* (1994) – even though Scar is an animal. Some history lovers might beg to differ to his depiction as an obvious evil spirit in the film, though others wouldn’t since by many Rasputin was seen as pure evil and the reason for all Romanov misfortune.

The Dowager Empress says: “We thought he was a holy man, but he was a fraud, power-mad and dangerous” (Bluth and Goldman 1997). This statement might actually have come from one of the people who detested Rasputin. Nicholas heroically confronts Rasputin right away and asks him to leave; telling him he is not their confidant, but a traitor. Many would say that Nicholas’ heroic actions in the film are far from his actual indifference to Rasputin and his effect on Russia; however the princess’s father obviously can’t be a lily-livered one. Nicholas’s appearance is, however, a quite accurate one.



**Picture 6** Rasputin (Yellow Tulip Press n.d.) **Picture 7** Nicholas Romanov playing with family dog (Yale University n.d.)



**Picture 8** Scene from *Anastasia*; Rasputin and Nicholas (Bluth and Goldman 1997)

Rasputin lays a curse on the Romanov family: “You and your family will die within a fortnight. I will not rest until I see the end of the Romanov line forever” (Bluth and Goldman 1997). Rasputin sells his soul for the power to destroy the family and receives a green bottle of some sort – green obviously being the colour of witchcraft and evil. The odd thing about Rasputin in the film is that he was described as power mad, yet he doesn’t seem to be chasing any titles or rewards, his only goal is to kill the Emperor and his family. Usually that would include the villain receiving the throne himself, but not in this case. He seems to have risen from death for revenge although we never find out why. Rasputin sends the evil, green spirits to kill the family and then the movie ever so slightly mentions the situation of Russia at the time. “From that moment on the spark of unhappiness in our country was fanned into a flame that would soon destroy our lives forever” (Bluth and Goldman 1997). From here on the historical moments of the film diminish considerably – or even disappear for the sake of a true Hollywood fairytale. Why this critical part of history is omitted in the film is probably the fact that the film is first and foremost an animated family film and its largest group

of audience is children. Not only is it a family film, it's also a fairytale and as such the plotline has to be uncomplicated; focusing on a handful of characters on their journey. If the film would include a storyline about the revolution and national conflicts the film would probably no longer be a fairytale, according to Vladimir Propp's system.

Let's look a little closer at this Hollywood fairytale and remember that certainly the films are not all animated. Is there a formula for a Hollywood fairytale? Well, there are at least common entities: first of all romance and a battle between good and evil. The evil, which Propp refers to as a villain, might be a stepmother or just another pretty girl in the same high-school competing for the attention of the same boy (prince). In the animated films the villain is usually much more dark, gloomy and quite frankly ugly – as Rasputin is.

Most of these fairytales are created for an audience of girls; with the main character being a loveless, teenage girl who more often than not either only has one parent or if she has two then one is a step-parent. She usually has frizzy hair, unfortunate glasses, maybe braces, and poor social skills in the beginning. The classic stories of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are used over and over to make a new film. An example of one of these films is Walt Disney's *The Princess Diaries* (2001) – which actually slightly resembles *Anastasia's* plot. These films could probably all easily be subjected to Propp's system of writing a fairytale.

The next scene of *Anastasia* shows rioters bursting into the palace and the family fleeing. Here the fairytale commences, we don't follow most of the imperial family to their captivation and murder, which is Propp's function no. 1.2. – an intensified form of absention by Anastasia's parents being killed. Instead we follow Anastasia, who runs back to get her music box and her grandmother chases her. A young kitchen boy appears from behind a hidden door in the wall and sends them through there to safety.



The music box and the boy were left behind as three comrades rush in and beat the boy in the head. Now we briefly meet Bartok, a white little bat who is Rasputin's left hand and one of the movies comic reliefs at daunting moments such as this one. For, surely, the film can't be too horrifying to watch since it is a family film, even the pure evil (and of course quite ugly) Rasputin serves as a comic relief since he is always physically falling apart. Anastasia and her grandmother barely escape from Rasputin's grip as he falls through ice and drowns. The Dowager Empress slips on board an already moving train but fails to pull Anastasia aboard. Anastasia was left behind and the viewers are drawn in. What would happen to the young recently orphaned girl?

After that we see St. Petersburg, though, 10 years later. Anya is around 18 years old, whereas the real Anastasia would have been 25, but who wants to see a romantic fairytale with such an "old" leading lady? Anya is exactly the age when the real Anastasia died which in itself gives the film less historical reference, unless we shift our minds from thinking about the real Anastasia's fate to the possibility of Anna Anderson's journey. We see industry, factory workers and people standing in lines for everything. The people sing: "Since the revolution our lives have been so grey, thank goodness for the gossip that gets us through the day" (Bluth and Goldman 1997). It's obvious that this is no place for a princess; this is merely a place for the great unwashed. A rumour, a legend and a mystery is going around St. Petersburg that Anastasia survived the killing of the Romanovs and that the Dowager Empress would pay a good sum of money to the one who brings Grand Duchess Anastasia back to her. This corresponds quite well to the actual events as there were always rumours of Anastasia's survival and a lot of speculation on how she might have survived. However, the part about the Dowager Empress' award is purely for the plot of the film.

The scene turns to the con artist Dimitri (who can be viewed as a “princess” or a sought-for person), and his friend Vlad, who is a former member of the imperial court, they are holding auditions in St. Petersburg to find a girl or an actress to play the part of Anastasia so they can collect the reward money for finding her. Their main objective is to get out of St. Petersburg and to Paris to meet with the Dowager Empress and con her into believing they have found her granddaughter. Since Vlad is a former member of the imperial court and Dimitri was a kitchen boy in the palace they have a good chance of training a girl to fool the Dowager Empress. Dimitri and Vlad are both entirely fictional characters.

Now we meet Anya, a young woman leaving an orphanage. Here Propp’s function no. 9 comes into play when the headmistress of the orphanage dispatches her and makes her lack known. This is followed with Propp’s function no. 11 as Anya leaves the home she has known for the last 10 years. She is clearly classified as a seeker hero since she is allowed to leave and is in pursuit of love, home and family. Anya has suffered amnesia since she has no clue about her life before the orphanage. Except one, a little trinket she keeps around her neck. The round key her grandmother gave her that turns on the music box (only, she doesn’t know that). The trinket is engraved with: “Together in Paris” (Bluth and Goldman 1997), and so she believes she could possibly find her family in France – a proper place for a princess and romantic fairytale. The headmistress of the orphanage has arranged a job for Anya at a fish market.

At the crossroads Anya stops to consider her possibilities. This would be Propp’s function no. 12 as she is being tested to make the right decision and it prepares for her receiving a magical agent or helper. Going left means a job at a fish market and possibly being “Anya the orphan” forever. Going right has no pre-decided factors – it’s the unknown. She asks for a sign or a hint of some sort to tell her what she should do.

She has hardly finished the request when Propp's function no. 14 pops up from seemingly nowhere – a helper in the form of a small, scruffy looking dog (Pooka) pulls her to the right, to St. Petersburg. Magically glittering snow also blows swirls in the direction of St. Petersburg, which gives the viewer a hint that an adventure is about to take place and that she made the right decision. This is a typical fairytale moment, especially for animated films; an animal shows the way or helps our hero in any way. We probably all remember Snow White's helpers in cleaning the dwarfs' house and Pinocchio's cricket – perhaps even some remember Mulan's cricket and tiny misfortunate dragon. Many of these animals stay for the rest of the film to add comic relief or even simply to be able to let the main character have conversations in scenes where she or he would otherwise be alone. It was a nice touch that the animal following Anya around was a dog, since the Romanov family loved and owned dogs.

As we get to know Anya we find out her character is not far from the real Anastasia; she is a playful, spunky, young lady and a little bit of a tom-boy. Her appearance has similarities to the real Anastasia, especially those blue eyes. The clothes she wears as an adult in the film have a likeness to a picture of the real her, as shown above in Picture 4, which is commonly used to showcase Anna Anderson's facial resemblance. Anya is certain that she had the love of a family before and starts her journey to the past. She finds out she needs an exit visa to get to Paris and receives information to find someone named Dimitri at the old palace for forged papers. When Dimitri and Vlad see Anya for the first time, she is standing in front of a big painting of the imperial family and her blue eyes (both as a young adult and as a child in the portrait) are highlighted for our benefit. As soon as Dimitri clearly sees her face he immediately sees a striking resemblance to Anastasia. Anya decides to go with them to Paris to find out if she might be the real Anastasia.

Bartok appears with a green reliquary, which seems to have come to life again giving him an indication that Anya is the real Anastasia. Green, evil forces begin to spew out of the bottle and pull Bartok down where we find Rasputin stuck in limbo, since his curse wasn't fulfilled. The reliquary gives him power and he sends the green, evil spirits to find and kill Anastasia (his second attempt at killing her). Bartok informs Rasputin that Anastasia is still alive.<sup>13</sup>

For the next section of the film we follow Anya, Dimitri and Vlad on their journey to France which fits well to Propp's function no. 15.2. since they travel by train, ship, bus and even walk and ride horses. While Anya, Dimitri, Vlad and Pooka are on a train heading towards France the viewer spots obvious hints of romance between Anya and Dimitri. On their way to France it's time for Dimitri and Vlad to teach Anya all things royal; the way to walk, talk and even ride on horseback. They teach her names of her relatives and to their surprise she seems to know a few things they haven't told her. As with many princess films the girl needs to go from an ugly duckling to a strikingly beautiful princess – it makes no sense if the hero is ugly. Dimitri gives her a dress, which is seemingly 10 sizes too big but as Anya puts it on it magically fits her and as she lets her hair down, it seems to have grown about 10 inches.

Pooka helps to move the story along as he goes into Dimitri's bag and out rolls the music box – he even picks it up in his mouth and hands it to Anya. Vlad mistakes it for a jewellery box and Anya disagrees with him and magical images (memories) start floating around her head of people dancing to a tune. Pooka puts a halt to the story as he breaks her concentration by licking her toes. They go to sleep and Rasputin sends his third attempt to kill Anya – as he has been pursuing Anya from the time he knew she was still alive which is Propp's function no. 21. The green goblins enter Anya's dreams

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<sup>13</sup> This could be Propp's function no. 5, but it doesn't fit systematically.

and lure her from her bed with images of her brother. Thankfully, Pooka wakes up Dimitri, since they're on board a ship and there's a storm outside. Anya was almost lured to jump into the sea by images of all her siblings and even her father playing and swimming – at the last possible moment Dimitri heroically grabs her, Propp's function no. 22.

After their travel on ground and water, they arrive in France – and of course Anya is yet to be recognized as Anastasia, Propp's function no. 23. In France we meet Sophie, the Dowager Empress' first cousin. She is interviewing yet another girl pretending to be Anastasia with an obviously rehearsed speech, a false hero and therefore Propp's function no. 24. The Dowager Empress, who is the other sought-for person in the film, interrupts the girl with a frustrated and exhausted voice and decides to see no more girls – she has given up her search for Anastasia. In come Vlad, Dimitri and Anya, and Vlad introduces Anya as: Her Imperial Highness, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna. They are not allowed to meet with the Dowager Empress; however, Sophia questions Anya thoroughly and lastly asks how she escaped the palace during the siege. Dimitri looks defeated since he knows they didn't teach Anya the correct answer to that question. Much to his surprise, Anya tells Sophie about the boy who opened the wall. He realizes that she actually is Grand Duchess Anastasia, but tells no-one yet. Dimitri recognizes that he and Anya can't be together; since he is not royalty.

Propp's function no. 25 entails a difficult task presented to the hero. Anya's task is to prove herself to the Dowager Empress, both because she has no memory of her past as well as because the Dowager Empress has no interest in even being in the presence of another girl who is probably only pretending to be Anastasia. Sophie tells them to meet the Dowager Empress (without her knowing) at the Russian Ballet. After

the Russian Ballet, Dimitri tries to persuade the Dowager Empress to meet Anya and finally gets her to talk to Anya by giving her the music box (which puts him a little bit in the donor position).

The Empress is about to leave when Anya resolves the task, Propp's function no. 26, by remembering the smell of peppermint, which the Empress explains as oil for her hands. Anya then recalls spilling a bottle of the oil all over a carpet, which after that forever smelled of peppermint and reminded Anya of her grandmother. The Empress finally sits down, intrigued about this young woman and notices the key around Anya's neck. The Empress takes up the music box and Anya puts the pieces together, turning the music box on and they fall into each other's arms – the Empress has recognized Anastasia, Propp's function no. 27. Dimitri walks quietly away. The perfect fairytale ending seems to be close by.

A moment of new appearance, Propp's function no. 29, actually takes place three times in the film. Each time, Anya receives new clothes, which get more expensive and princess-like every time. First Dimitri gives her a humble, blue dress, which is obviously too big for her even though in the next scene it fits perfectly – plus her hair magically grows a few inches. Second when she puts on a beautiful royal blue gown for the Russian Ballet and everyone gasps in her presence. Third and fitting to Propp's timeline is when the Dowager Empress places the crown on Anastasia's head and she puts on a jewel encrusted dress to accompany it. Propp's function no. 29 is typical moment for the Hollywood fairytale. There's a scruffy looking girl, who nobody loves (or wants to date as in *The Princess Diaries*) until someone gives her a makeover, which often includes new clothes, taking down large glasses or straightening curly hair. It seems a Hollywood fairytales can't exist without it.

Next the Empress tells Anastasia that Dimitri didn't take the reward money and that she has a choice to make; either stay and be a Grand Duchess or go after Dimitri. Pooka runs outside barking and Anastasia follows him into the garden maze, which magically closes off behind her. She meets Rasputin and his fourth attempt to kill her is set in motion. Heroically Dimitri appears and helps her defeat Rasputin, though, much of it was her own doing – for after all she is the story's hero. Again the deciding factor in everything is Pooka, who manages to snatch the reliquary from Rasputin's hand and give to Anastasia. Anastasia steps on it, once for Dimitri, once for her family and lastly for Rasputin: "Do Svidandja" (Bluth and Goldman 1997). Rasputin is finally killed, Propp's function no. 30, and his skeleton turns to dust and blows away.

Dimitri and Anastasia almost kiss, but are interrupted by Pooka, who holds her crown in his mouth, reminding them of her ancestry and that they can't be together if she is the Grand Duchess. In the end the Dowager Empress reads a letter from Anastasia and it is made clear that she has chosen Dimitri. Sophia's words: "They've eloped. Isn't it romantic? It's the perfect ending" (Bluth and Goldman 1997) give us the feeling that they will get married which corresponds quite well with Propp's function no. 31. 2. "Sometimes our hero simply marries without obtaining the throne, since his bride is not a princess" (Propp 1968, 64). Because Dimitri is only a kitchen boy, and not royalty, Anastasia is forced to choose between him and the throne. By choosing love instead of a title Anya is the perfect hero, plus it's much easier to make her disappear than making her an Empress to a non existing Empire. Even though they do not actually marry in the film, they do "elope" (as Sophia phrases it) and that's proof enough for me that they will, at least it's obvious that they are a couple. And so the film has the perfect fairytale ending, although the Dowager Empress prefers calling it a perfect beginning. To top it

off they've added a shooting star in the background of the new couple sailing away, it really doesn't get more romantic than that.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

As the trailer to the film stated, the film is based on one of the more interesting and mysterious events of our time, though today the mystery has been solved. Anastasia Romanov was killed along with her family on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1918 and Anna Anderson was a polish factory worker without any DNA relation to the Romanovs. Anna Anderson was, however, an important component of history for the fairytale because without her there was really no base for the plot. One might say that the film explores the fantasy of how it could have been if Anna Anderson had turned out to really be Anastasia Romanov.

The fate of Anastasia Romanov and her family was grim. The beginning of the children's lives was to some extent like a real-life fairytale with jewels, gowns and parties. The ending, however, was as far from a fairytale as possible – with events leading up to their murder. Many of these events had little to do with Rasputin, but the fact that so many people believed (and still do) that he was the sole cause of their downfall makes it easy to portray him as a villain in the fairytale and in a way he was their curse. The imperial family's canonization lends a hand in creating the fairytale because by that the family has become somewhat of an untouchable myth – a myth that perhaps is completely based on delusions.

Needless to say, the film has received some criticism by bloggers and history lovers, but many critiques also include that the film was an enjoyable one, even with its historical inaccuracies. Don Bluth, producer of the film, once bluntly answered



*Anastasia* critics in an interview: „I’m not worried about them. There are hundreds of documentaries about the Romanovs -- let them go watch them. This movie isn’t intended to change history. It’s mythology rooted in truth” (Anastasia Producer To Critics: It's Not History 1997).

It was clear from almost the very beginning of *Anastasia* that the film would not correspond closely to the actual events. In fact the film has close to no historical references – it is nothing more than a fairytale. Then again... is that such a bad thing? It has all the necessary elements of a fairytale and rather easily fits to Propp’s system. It serves its purpose well, its purpose being an entertaining film for children and perhaps a handful of adults. It also has all we can wish for in a successful family film; it’s colourful, it has distinctive and vivid characters, it has catchy songs and a simple, exciting and funny plot – however far from history. And of course: a happy, romantic ending.

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