

The Role of Folklore Study in the Rise of  
Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist Literary Theory

by

Jessica Evans Merrill

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Committee in charge:

Professor Irina Paperno, Chair

Professor Harsha Ram

Professor Alan Timberlake

Professor John Connelly

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## Abstract

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Russian formalism and Czech structuralism are understood to have initiated the study of literature as a self-sufficient discipline by applying linguistic concepts to the analysis of literary texts. This dissertation seeks to enrich our understanding of this development by examining the transition from linguistics to literary theory from an intellectual-historical perspective. My thesis is that folklore study played a crucial role in the rise of formalist and structuralist literary theory by serving as a mediating field between language and “high” literature. Folkloristics, which traditionally approached its subject matter through linguistic theory, understood verbal art to behave like language—as an impersonal repertoire of poetic forms which adhere to regular laws governing their usage and evolution. This body of scholarly work provided early literary theorists with a model for theorizing literature or art as a law-abiding, “scientific” object of study akin to language. The transfer of ideas from the field of folkloristics to literary theory was the product of scholarly training, personal intellectual exchange, and institutional affiliations. In the first chapter I focus on Viktor Shklovsky’s use of A. N. Veselovsky’s writings to develop a universalist theory of narrative structure in his *Theory of Prose*. Drawing on Roman Jakobson’s *The Newest Russian Poetry* and his work on the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy, the second chapter illustrates parallels between Jakobson’s conceptions of literary value and literary evolution and the work of his teacher V. F. Miller. The last chapter argues that Jan Mukařovský’s *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* drew on P. G. Bogatyrev’s functional structural ethnography and compares their respective conceptions of the semiotic collective. By tracing these intersections, we can see how the emergence of theory intended to explain “high” literature was galvanized by moments of contact with folklore studies. Highlighting the role that folkloristics played in the work of these three pioneering literary theorists (Shklovsky, Jakobson and Mukařovský) allows us to better understand the emergence of twentieth-century literary theory as an autonomous discipline.

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## Transliteration, Translations and Abbreviations

Transliteration follows the Library of Congress system, except for last names ending in –ii which are written –y (e.g. Shklovsky, Veselovsky). Names follow the LOC system in the Works Cited section and footnotes.

When available I have used published translations of primary sources. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

I use the following abbreviations in the text:

AFNV	Jan Mukařovský's <i>Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts</i> [ <i>Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty</i> ]
CFS	Commission for Folklore Study [Komissiiia po narodnoi slovesnosti]
MDC	Moscow Dialectological Commission [Moskovskaia dialektologicheskaia komissiiia]
MLC	Moscow Linguistic Circle [Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok]
NRP	Roman Jakobson's <i>Newest Russian Poetry</i> [ <i>Noveishaia russkaia poeziia</i> ]
OLEAE	Society of Lovers of Natural History, Anthropology and Ethnography [Obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii]
OPOIaZ	Society for the Study of Poetic Language [Obshchestvo izucheniia poeticheskogo iazyka]
PLC	Prague Linguistic Circle [Pražský lingvistický kroužek]

## Introduction

The intellectual movement known as Russian formalism is widely understood to have laid the foundations for modern, twentieth-century literary theory. The formalists established a set of theoretical precepts and a methodological approach aimed at defining literature as a self-contained field of study.<sup>1</sup> They sought to create a science of literature by approaching their subject matter as a special field of linguistic production within which they sought commonalities, patterns, and laws of development. In the spirit of the methodological development of linguistics and sociology, the formalists strove to treat literature as a social fact in the way that Ferdinand de Saussure approached language, or Émile Durkheim approached the collective consciousness. This meant, first and foremost, abandoning the understanding of the literary text as a manifestation of the genius or psychology of an individual and substituting in its place a conception of literature as a unique phenomenon defined by discoverable general principles.

In the theoretical work that resulted, the formalists articulated a variety of highly-influential postulates which I take as my starting point. Of central importance is Viktor Shklovsky's now-famous argument that to study art, one must focus on its "devices" [priemy], rather than the relationship between the art object and its real-life referent. In their analyses of what made prose fiction different from other modes of writing, Shklovsky and other formalists articulated the distinction between "plot" [siuzhet] and a non-artistic sequence of events [fabula]. Roman Jakobson argued that "poetic language" differs from "practical language" by virtue of the fact that it calls the reader's attention to the very structure of the poetic utterance. He and other formalists also produced a number of influential theories about the principles that underlie literary history. Over the course of the 1920s, the focus on the formal attributes of literary texts gave way to a view of the literary work and the literary field as an internally-organized system. This turn was taken up as a fundamental tenet of Czech structuralism, a movement which succeeded Russian formalism in the late 1920s. The Czech structuralists applied this systemic model not only to literary works, but to other artistic media such as theater and film. This work was foundational for the twentieth-century study of semiotics—the application of the concept of the linguistic sign to the realm of culture.

The theoretical development of formalism and the continuation and further development of its premises in Prague are the subjects of much excellent scholarship. The foundational monographs on these movements appeared between 1955 and 1989.<sup>2</sup> In subsequent decades scholarship on the formalist and Czech structuralist movements has increasingly shifted in a historical direction. A number of books and articles have been published which treat the role of politics, intellectual history and biography in the development of individual formalists' and structuralists' work.<sup>3</sup> Building on this scholarship, my dissertation seeks to explain the

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton's widely-read *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), for example, identifies the publication of Viktor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Device" (1917) as modern literary theory's point of departure.

<sup>2</sup> These include: Victor Erlich's *Russian Formalism, History, Doctrine* (Mouton, 1955), Peter Steiner's *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Cornell University Press, 1984), František Galan's *Historic Structures: The Prague School Project, 1928-1946* (University of Texas Press, 1985), Jurij Striedter's *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Monographs that focus on the intellectual biography of Russian formalists and Czech structuralists include: Jindřich Toman's *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle*, (MIT Press, 1995), and Carol Any's *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist* (Stanford University Press, 1994). Many articles and archival sources relating to the formalist movement have been published in the

emergence of key concepts of formalist and Czech structuralist literary theory, described above, as products of specific scholarly institutions and intellectual traditions.

It is commonly known that Russian formalism and Czech structuralism were closely associated with three scholarly societies. The first two, formalist societies, were formed in St. Petersburg and in Moscow on the eve of the 1917 revolutions. The origins of the better known of the two, the Society for the Study of Poetic Language [Obshchestvo izucheniia poeticheskogo iazyka] (OPOIaZ), reportedly lay in a meeting between Victor Shklovsky and the philologists L. P. Jakubinsky and E. D. Polivanov in 1914.<sup>4</sup> In 1915 this group began meeting in the apartment of Osip and Lili Brik, which functioned at the time as a meeting place for the artistic avant-garde.<sup>5</sup> The second society, the Moscow Linguistic Circle [Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok] (MLC), began as a student group within the Commission for Dialect Study [Moskovskaia dialektologicheskaiia komissiiia] at Moscow University in March of 1915. The leader of this group was Roman Jakobson. Its core membership in the years 1915-1919 was made up of students of linguistic dialects and folklore.<sup>6</sup> Personal contacts between members of the two groups led to increasing collaboration in the post-revolutionary years. In 1919 many of the OPOIaZ scholars joined the MLC and plans were drafted for a joint OPOIaZ-MLC publication.<sup>7</sup>

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*Tynianovskie sborniki* (Riga: 1984- ) Ed. M. Chudakova. Extensive historical documentation of the formalist movement can be found in the commentary to Iu. N. Tynianov's *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*. Ed. V. Kaverin, A. Miasnikov (Nauka: 1977). Insightful studies have appeared on the subject of the relationship between the evolution of formalist theory and the political circumstances in the USSR. See, for example, Aleksandr Galushkin's "Neudavshii dialog: Iz istorii vzaimootnoshenii formal'noi shkoly i vlasti," *Shestye Tynianovskie chteniia: Tezisy dokladov i materialy dlia obsuzhdeniia* (Riga: 1992), Samuel Eisen's "Whose Lenin Is It Anyway? Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum and the Formalist-Marxist Debate in Soviet Cultural Politics (A View from the Twenties)," *Russian Review*, 55 (1996), 65-79, Svetlana Boym's "Poetics and Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt," *Poetics Today* 26 (2005), 581-611, Galin Tihanov's "Marxism And Formalism Revisited: Notes on the 1927 Leningrad Dispute," *Literary Research/Recherche littéraire*, 19 (2002), 69-78, Tihanov's "The Politics of Estrangement: The Case of the Early Shklovsky," *Poetics Today*, 26 (2005), 665-696, Tihanov's "Why did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (and why is it now dead?)," *Common Knowledge*, 10 (2004), 61-81, and Cristina Vatulescu's "The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky's Device through Literary and Policing Practices," *Poetics Today*, 27 (2006), 34-66. Shklovsky's concept of "defamiliarization" [ostranenie] and his recantation of his theories in January 1930 have been the subjects of much scholarly debate. See in particular Richard Sheldon "Viktor Shklovsky and The Device of Ostensible Surrender," *Slavic Review*, 34 (1975), 86-108, Victor Erlich "On Being Fair to Viktor Shklovsky or the Act of Hedged Surrender," *Slavic Review*, 35 (1976), 111-118, and Aleksandr Galushkin "V. B. Shklovskii. Pamiatnik nauchnoi oshibke (vtoraia redaktsiia)," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 4 (2000), 154-158.

<sup>4</sup> Shklovsky recalls that he was introduced to Polivanov and Jakubinsky by their teacher, the linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (Shklovskii 1964: 95). OPOIaZ, unlike the MLC, was never an officially registered society. Two other well-known OPOIaZ formalists, Boris Eikhenbaum and Iury Tynianov, joined the group in 1918 and 1919. On the history of OPOIaZ see A. P. Chudakov's commentary to Iu. N. Tynianov. *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*. (Nauka, 1977), 504-505. The commentary points out that dates given in various sources for the "foundation" of OPOIaZ range between 1914 and 1917.

<sup>5</sup> On the Briks' salon see Bengt Jangfeldt's preface to *Love is at the Heart of Everything: Correspondence between Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik*. (Polygon, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Jakobson lists the founding members of the MLC as, other than himself: F. N. Afremov, P. G. Bogatyrev, A. A. Buslaev, S. I. Ragozin, P. P. Sveshnikov, N. F. Jakovlev. For an overview of the history of the Circle see M. I. Shapir's publication of R. O. Jakobson. "Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok." *Philologica* 3 (1996), 361-379.

<sup>7</sup> The Briks moved to Moscow in March of 1919 and the MLC protocols reveal that Osip Brik played a large role in discussions beginning in April 1919. The protocol from the meeting of the MLC on September 1, 1919 (where Shklovsky presented his work and was elected a member) mentions the "affirmation of a plan for a joint [MLC-OPOIaZ] publication" (Barankova: 1999, 365). Shklovsky's personal archive contains a table of contents for a *Sbornik* which would include contributions from both OPOIaZ and MLK members. Sections were to include:

The writings of individual formalists reflect the fact that the movement was fueled by collective debate. Terms coined by one scholar soon appeared in the publications of others. Nevertheless, as Peter Steiner has stressed, there is no monolithic formalist theoretical platform. He concludes that Russian formalism is “a *polemos*, a struggle among contradictory and incompatible views none of which could become the absolute ground of a new literary science” (1984: 259). This “centrifugal tendency” of formalism stands in contrast to the much more unified stance adopted by the Prague Linguistic Circle, a scholarly society founded by Roman Jakobson and Vilém Mathesius in 1926 (Steiner 1984: 260). Czech structuralism, the platform of this Circle, emerged with a programmatic set of “Theses,” and the bylaws of the Circle made functional structuralism the obligatory research method for all members of the society.<sup>8</sup> My dissertation seeks to place the ideas produced in these circles in the context of a broader paradigm for thinking about language and verbal art transmitted to the formalists by influential Russian philologists of the late-nineteenth century.

Placing the innovative departures of the Russian formalists and Czech structuralists into this context, I believe, allows us to better understand the process that enabled them to produce such influential concepts. The most far-reaching of these was the reconceptualization of literature as the object of a scientific methodology—as a self-contained field of cultural production defined by consistent formal properties and regular evolutionary principles. This move is rightly understood to have resulted in large part from the formalists and structuralists’ application of linguistic concepts to the study of literature. The paradigm for literary theory that the formalists launched in the 1910s, and which is seen as having begun to disintegrate in the early 1990s, was overwhelmingly based on the linguistic model.<sup>9</sup> As Fredric Jameson put it, the conceptual model that formalism and structuralism advanced meant nothing less than to “rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics!” (vii).<sup>10</sup> My dissertation seeks to contribute to our understanding of how this linguistic turn in modern literary theory came about through a detailed analysis of how three leading thinkers of the formalist and structuralist movements—Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) and Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975)—transformed linguistic concepts into tools of literary theory via folkloristics.

Each of these scholars was on the forefront of creating a methodology for a sub-field within literary theory. Shklovsky was working on narrative structure, Jakobson on poetic language and Mukařovský on semiotics. Each scholar, I demonstrate, made use of folklore study

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“Материалы по фольклору, этнографии и диалектологии,” and “Работы по поэтике” under which are listed the following subheadings “Ритм и эвфоника,” “Поэтика сюжета,” “Старые ученые в области поэтики” and “Сборник работ по истории поэзии.” Of the Petersburg scholars the following were to contribute: “О. М. Брик, В. Томашевский, В. М. Эйхенбаум, В. Б. Шкловский, Л. П. Якубинский, Е. Д. Поливанов,” from Moscow: “Б. И. Ярхо, Б. О. Кушнер, Р. О. Яковсон П. Г. Богатырев, А. А. Буслаев, Н. Ф. Яковлев, Г. О. Винокур, В. И. Нейштадт, С. М. Бонди, С. И. Бернштейн.” Shklovskii, V. B. RGALI Fond 562, opis’ 1, ed. khr. 378.

<sup>8</sup> These were first published as the “Theses Presented to the First Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague, 1929.” On the group dynamics and emphasis of collective work in the PLC see (Toman 1995: 153-165).

<sup>9</sup> Modern literary theory can be seen as a dimension of the “linguistic turn,” which occurred in philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, and which subsequently affected, often via structuralist literary theory, an array of academic disciplines in the 1960-1980s. Gustav Bergmann’s argument that Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (1921) initiated “a linguistic turn” in philosophy is seen as the first articulation of this idea. See Gustav Bergmann’s “Logical Positivism, Language, and the Reconstruction of Metaphysics” (1953).

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson’s *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. (Princeton University Press: 1972) argues against the viability of a structuralist linguistic model for the study of literature as a temporal phenomenon.

in order to bridge the gap between linguistics and the analysis of “high” literature or art. In my analysis of this trend I show that it was historically conditioned by the Russian tradition of literary scholarship that the formalists inherited as students. The chapters that follow analyze in detail how each scholar’s use of folklore theory shaped his contribution to the field of modern literary theory. The Russian academic study of literature at the turn of the twentieth century studied oral folklore and high, written literature together—according to the same methods, and as phenomena understood to belong to the same category. As a result, literary scholars were familiar with folklore theory and willing to extend conclusions based on folklore study to the realm of literature and art more generally. My thesis is that this tendency facilitated the development of Russian formalism and Czech structuralism by allowing leading theorists to envision high art as a law-abiding, “scientific” object of study akin to language—that is, to argue that high art behaves like folklore was understood to.

Folklore was well poised to serve as a bridge between linguistic theory and the study of literature because of its intrinsic properties as a form of oral creativity. The amenability of folklore to linguistic analysis is amply illustrated by a brief glance at the history of folkloristics. It would in fact be difficult to separate the history of these two fields in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries. The modern study of these two disciplines was fundamentally transformed by German Romantic scholarship of the mid-nineteenth century. Building on Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744-1803) writings on folk poetry and language, German linguists were also frequently collectors and scholars of folklore—the work of Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) epitomizes this dual preoccupation. In Russia, this tendency is exemplified by the work of the Romantic philologist F. I. Buslaev (1818-1898), the lexicographer and folklorist V. I. Dal’ (1801-1872), and the linguist A. A. Potebnia (1835-1891).

Potebnia concisely articulated the Romantic understanding of the relationship between folklore and language in his “Oral and Written Poetry” [“Poeziia ustnaia i pis’mennaia”], stating that “язык, вероятно, навсегда останется первообразом и подобием такого гуртового характера народно-поэтического творчества” (144) (“language will probably always remain the prototype and analogy for the herd-like character of popular-poetic creation”). This analogy between folklore and language is manifest in the characteristics attributed to folklore in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. (1) Folklore, like language, is a product of collective creativity. Folklore is stored in the collective consciousness and is passed orally from one person to another and from one generation to the next in the way that language is. (2) As a result, folklore exists in a state of manifold variation; it is not “fixed” in one authorial version but exists in a state of flux, evolving slowly through repeated use.<sup>11</sup> (3) This evolution is conservative, with folk performers eschewing radical innovation in favor of generally accepted, normative content and style. (4) In a manner analogous to the production of speech, the oral composition of a tale

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<sup>11</sup> A. A. Potebnia provides an excellent description of this understanding of folklore: “Слушающий замечает и запоминает только то, что создано в общем стиле, к усвоению чего он приготовлен; но этот стиль есть общий и в том смысле, что он не исчерпывается мыслью отдельного лица. Услышанное другим при повторении почти неизбежно изменяется не только по форме, но и по содержанию, ибо сам первый певец, при жизненности народной поэзии, не может повторить песни именно так, как спел первый раз. Таким образом *песня* на протяжении своей жизни *является не одним произведением, а рядом вариантов*, коего концы могут быть до неузнаваемости далеки друг от друга, а промежуточные ступени незаметно между собою сливаются. [...] Народная поэзия, как язык, по выражению В. Гумбольдта, не произведение (*Ergon*), а деятельность (*Energia*) (143-144 italics in original). There are many points of similarity between Potebnia’s description of folklore here and that articulated in Jakobson and Bogatyrev’s 1929 “Folklore as a Special Form of Creation.”

[skazka] was understood to draw on a collectively-held “fund” [sklad] of verbal elements (stock phrases, situations, characters) that facilitated the production of tales in accordance with general compositional principles.<sup>12</sup> The pressure to tell a tale that would be accepted by conservative folk norms was seen as constraining oral tradition, making it adhere to known patterns in the way that the pressure to produce comprehensive speech necessitates an adherence to rules of syntax and word formation in spoken language.<sup>13</sup> (5) The understanding that oral tradition forms a densely organized body of material akin to a language led to the assumption that it would evolve over time according to regular laws in the way that sound changes adhere to laws in the evolution of language.<sup>14</sup>

To separate folkloric creativity from the non-folkloric (whether defined as “urban,” “high” art, “individual” creativity, or “written” literature) is a clearly complicated and fraught proposition. I do not want to suggest that the Russian formalists took properties that rightly belong to “folklore” and then imposed them onto high art. Instead, I base my argument on a commonly held conception of folklore and literature that the Russian formalists themselves, implicitly or explicitly, adhered to. This was the view of folklore and high art as forms of creativity existing at two ends of a continuum. The widely-accepted terms used to describe these two endpoints were “impersonal” [bezlichnyi] as opposed to “personal” [lichnyi] creation. It was also assumed that the former was generally “oral,” while the latter “written.” The phenomenon of “everyday” language was assumed to lie at the far extreme of the impersonal end of this spectrum. In the realm of verbal art, “impersonal” creation was defined by a close adherence to known forms and structures (clichés), while “personal” creation in its most extreme manifestations was understood to strive to express a sense of uniqueness by breaking with normative expectations, or introducing innovative constructions.

This continuum, which shaped the conception of (oral and high) literature the formalists operated with, can be applied to different literary genres. Small oral genres such as proverbs, riddles, and folktales gravitated towards the “impersonal” end of the spectrum. Formulaic, popular fiction (oral or written) could be said to fall towards the middle. High written literature, particularly that which seeks to break with established conventions, would be placed towards the “personal” end of this continuum.<sup>15</sup> This heuristic scale of genres moving away from the phenomenon of “everyday” language is useful for understanding the role of folklore in the early formalist writings of Shklovsky and Jakobson. It highlights the role that folklore or “low” genres might play in crafting a theory based on the extension of linguistic concepts to (high) written literature. Once an idea developed in linguistics is applied to the folktale, it can, from there, be extended to the short story—if the short stories chosen are interpreted in such a way as to bring them closer to the properties of folklore described above. This schema also reflects the fact that

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<sup>12</sup> This concept is discussed in detail in Chapter One in the context of Shklovsky’s references to P. N. Rybnikov’s description of the “general fund” [obshchii sklad] of poetic devices that is available to all storytellers.

<sup>13</sup> Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev describe this pressure as a type of “prophylactic censorship” in their “Folklore as a Special Form of Creation.”

<sup>14</sup> This proposition was explored in great detail in the functional-structural ethnography of P. G. Bogatyrev. His best known work in this vein is his *Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia* (1937).

<sup>15</sup> In his article “Ot A. N. Veselovskogo do nashikh dnei” (1996) N. I. Tolstoi provides an excellent overview of the relationship between folklore and “high” literature as understood by Veselovsky and Propp and other Russian folklorists. He also discusses the place of “popular” literature in a three-stage scheme between folklore and written literature as proposed by Iu. M. Lotman. For reasons I discuss in Chapter Two, the experimental poetry of the Russian avant-garde, which according to the logic of this scheme should fall towards the far “personal” end of this spectrum, lent itself to interpretation in relation to “everyday” language as the common denominator for all verbal art.

analogies between the study of everyday language (linguistics) and certain forms of oral creativity—e.g. riddles or folktales—may present themselves more naturally than those between linguistics and high, written literature.

I will attempt to illustrate this last observation on the grounds of a well-known example. It is instructive to compare formalist studies of narrative structure by Victor Shklovsky and Vladimir Propp (1895-1970). As I will discuss in detail in Chapter One, Shklovsky's earliest writings on narrative structure were inspired by work on the oral folktale [skazka], and particularly by the suggestion that folktales are composed in a manner analogous to the speech act. In a 1919 article in which Shklovsky analyses the structure of folktales, he proposes that tales are formed according to "special laws of plot formation" ("особые законы сюжетосложения") which are not yet known (1929: 27). In a study published almost a decade later, *Morphology of the Fairy Tale* [*Morfologiya skazki*] (1928), Propp, citing Shklovsky's 1919 essay, states that his morphology has finally "determined" the "laws" that Shklovsky had intuited (116). Thus, Shklovsky came to be convinced of the existence of these laws by studying folklore theory and folktales, and Propp triumphantly proclaimed to have revealed them on the basis of the same material. What particularly interests me in this story, however, is an essay on the genre of the detective story Shklovsky published between these two events, in 1925, which clearly anticipates Propp's morphology. Shklovsky's analysis concludes with a general schema for Conan Doyle's stories which consists of chronological sequence of nine important "moments" that he has culled from an analysis of the Sherlock Holmes stories. He then compares this sequence with a similar outline of a story by Edgar Allan Poe. Shklovsky's essay is insightful; he suggests that the genre of the detective story is defined by a standard sequence of events combined with a typical use of narrative perspective. Yet this work has not received much attention.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the *Morphology of the Folktale*, a work written by a folklorist who never wrote on "literature" per se and who was not a member of the formalist circles, has been heralded as one of the best-known and most influential works of "formalist" analysis.<sup>17</sup> Victor Erlich identified it as one of "the least 'vulnerable' Formalist studies," and decades later, in light of Propp's influence on French structuralism, Jameson was able to call it "one of the richest Formalist investigations" (49; 64).<sup>18</sup>

Why would a book on the *folktale* prove to be so much more successful in establishing a theory of narrative structure for the field of literary theory when the first moves in this direction had been made by Shklovsky, a scholar specifically interested in creating a *literary* theory? The main reason, I would suggest, is that folktales or popular, oral genres are innately better equipped to yield impressive results when approached through a theory inspired by linguistics. This is because oral, popular forms of verbal creativity are, as I suggested above, shaped by the same

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, one of the only scholarly discussions of this essay treats Shklovsky as a "precursor of Propp." See Heda Jason's "Precursors of Propp: Formalist Theories of Narrative in Early Russian Ethnopoetics," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 3 (1977), 471-516.

<sup>17</sup> Propp's classification as a formalist depends on one's definition of formalism. From a theoretical perspective his work has been taken as the paradigmatic example of Russian formalism. If one approaches formalism from a historical perspective, however, I. Shaitanov is right in pointing out that "Propp could be classified as a formalist only in a very loose sense" (Shaitanov 2001: 429). Peter Steiner discusses both Propp's *Morphology* along with the folklorist A. Skaftymov's *The Poetics and Genesis of the Byliny* (1924) in detail in his *Russian Formalism: A Meta-poetics*, 68-98.

<sup>18</sup> Galin Tihanov writes, for instance: "narratology—notwithstanding the differences discernible in its later versions (those of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Algirdas J. Greimas, Claude Bremond, Gérard Genette, Eberhard Lämmert, Dorrit Cohn, Mieke Bal)—never quite severed itself from the legacy of Vladimir Propp" (2004: 64).

forces that shape language. The widespread use and repetition of oral genres creates a large corpus of examples that adhere more obviously to patterns (e.g. the use of three, stock situations) than the corpus of high written fiction does. This fact is reflected Shklovsky's approach. The title of his essay is the "Mystery novella," ["Roman tain"]; yet in order to provide a convincing and sufficiently detailed schema for the genre, he focuses on a specific series of works by a single writer (Conan Doyle's Sherlock Homes stories). This provides him with a body of discourse that is sufficiently densely patterned to create something like a morphology. By limiting himself in this way, however, Shklovsky is forced to claim more modest results—rather than revealing the laws of the *genre*, he has largely demonstrated the working pattern of a single author. (He brings in Poe to attempt to broaden his claim, but he refers to only one of his stories). Thus, paradoxically, a conclusion based on folklore could be said to hold greater appeal for a linguistically-oriented literary theory than one based on literature, in that it appears to be a more *general* discovery.<sup>19</sup>

My dissertation is concerned with demonstrating how folklore was used as a bridge between linguistics and literature, rather than with formalist analyses of folklore per se. In other words, it is Shklovsky's attempt to move from the *skazka* to the mystery story that interests me rather than Propp's "success" with the fairytale. In the individual chapters of the dissertation I outline in detail how early theorists' familiarity with folklore and folklore theory enabled them to move between linguistics and high art. Before turning to my individual cases (Shklovsky, Jakobson and Mukařovský), however, it is necessary to address how this familiarity with folklore was prepared by academic literary studies in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. There were two central attributes of this intellectual context that set the stage for the emergence of a linguistically-inspired literary theory in Russia. The first was a particular conception of the category of "literature" as "verbal art" [*slovesnost'*] that prevailed in the Russian academy at the turn of the twentieth century. The second was an understanding of the methods and goals for the "scientific" study of literature established with far-reaching authority by A. N. Veselovsky. These concepts would have been absorbed by the formalists while they were students in the 1910s. It is worth briefly describing these two factors before turning to a discussion of how the formalists built upon and modified the conceptions of literature and literary science that they inherited.

Fundamental to understanding the role of folklore in the emergence of formalist literary theory is the concept of literature as "verbal art" [*slovesnost'*]. As a discursive category *slovesnost'* encompasses the spectrum of verbal art—from language to high literature—discussed above. In his recent book on nineteenth-century Russian academic literary scholarship Andy Byford writes that, of the discursive categories that academic scholars used to describe their subject matter, "*slovesnost'* probably was the widest frame of reference to poetic verbal artifacts" (2007: 32). This term "could incorporate the notion of poetic language or discourse in general, and was often used specifically as a way of legitimately including folklore in the realm of 'literature', as in the phrase '*narodnaia slovesnost'*'" (Ibid.). The availability of a literary category which encouraged scholars to think of the literary and the oral as part of a single continuum allowed early literary theorists to move between the two forms of verbal creativity

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<sup>19</sup> This appeal rests on the assumption that folklore is relevant for understanding literature more generally as an early, or simple instance of a modern, more complex phenomenon. This view is evident in the tendency to cite folktales as evidence of the universality of fictional narrative, a move which suggests that the principles these tales adhere to will thus be those that could be said to provide a basic foundation for understanding what is common to all fictional narrative.

with relative ease. The formalists would have been encouraged to adopt this category when thinking about literature because *slovesnost* more than other available constructions was associated with scholarliness [nauchnost']. *Slovesnost* was assumed to be an “objective” category while other categories such as such as “belles-lettres” [iziashchnaia literatura] or “poetry” [poeziia], which were reserved for fine, educated writings or works of the highest cultural value, were associated with aesthetic judgment (Ibid.).

The fact that *slovesnost* was the object of the scholarly methodology of philology (comparative linguistics) contributed to the sense that it was a naturally-occurring category, existing independently of aesthetic or philosophical preconceptions. *Slovesnost* did, of course, have socially determined parameters. A product of the conception of literary studies as the study of the national history and spirit, the common denominator uniting *slovesnost* was the understanding that the discourse included in this domain was relevant for understanding national identity. These parameters, however, were arguably not consciously recognized by scholars and students of literature at the turn of the century. I argue that Jakobson and Shklovsky built on this approach to literature as *slovesnost* in their approach to folklore and literature as existing in a continuum and as the naturally-occurring object of a “scientific” approach.<sup>20</sup> Shklovsky and Jakobson replaced the historical and ethnographic study of *slovesnost* characteristic of their teachers with a formalist approach, while continuing to operate within largely the same category.<sup>21</sup>

The second factor that encouraged Russian literary scholars to consider folklore theory in conjunction with their work on written literature can be traced to the role A. N. Veselovsky (1838-1906) played in the sphere of literary scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century. Veselovsky was the chair of the department of General History of Literature and a professor at St. Petersburg University (from 1872). From the early 1900s he was also chairman of the Division of Russian language and literature in the Academy of Sciences. His scholarship was widely discussed and popularized during his lifetime, and in the 1890s a series of his studies and lectures was published as the foundation for a scientific method for literary theory, what Veselovsky called “historical poetics” [“istoricheskaiia poetika”]. These publications, products of decades of research and a vast erudition hailed as unparalleled in either Russia or the West, set a golden standard for literary scholarship in Russia.<sup>22</sup> As René Wellek succinctly states in *A History of Modern Criticism*, “Veselovsky has assigned a task to scholarship which can hardly ever be solved. The Russian formalists, however, have taken up his challenge” (279). Veselovsky’s conception of a literary science was so influential because he provided his successors with a rich stock of basic concepts which were understood to rest on the firmest of scholarly foundations.

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<sup>20</sup> Steiner describes the formalists’ position as follows: “The common denominator, the ‘absolute’ presupposition of the Formalists’ literary science, was that there should be no suppositions in scientific inquiry” (1984: 251). I would suggest that this stance was anticipated by the “scientific,” philological study of *slovesnost* in Russian academic literary scholarship.

<sup>21</sup> Tihanov makes this point more generally in regards to what he calls the “foundational paradox inherent in some of the best examples of early literary theory” in East and Central Europe—that “it is possible to think about and theorize literature per se, beyond national constraints, yet the importance of literature per se as a subject of theory is validated by analyzing texts that had been—or are being—canonized as nationally significant” (2004: 76).

<sup>22</sup> Placing Veselovsky in the company of Western European literary historians such as Heymann Steinthal, Benedetto Croce, Ferdinand Brunetière and Hippolyte Taine, Wellek describes Veselovsky’s work as a “grandiose attempt[. . .] to write a historical poetics on a world wide scale. [. . .] More concretely, and with a much wider command of literatures than anybody in the West, he traces the history of poetic devices, themes, and genres throughout oral and medieval literature” (1969: 47 italics added).

These conceptual foundations were predicated on the understanding of literature as *slovesnost*—as a field of poetic forms spanning from primitive oral genres to complex modern literature. Interestingly, Veselovsky focused on his inclusion of low genres as that aspect of his method that separated it from the study of literary history as it was practiced in the West. In his 1870 lecture, “The Method and Tasks of Literary History as a Field of Scholarship,” Veselovsky, who had just returned from ten years spent at universities in Western Europe, began with a critique of the reigning methods in German and French scholarship. Their approach was too narrow, and thus not sufficiently scientific; the scope of German philology was confined to venerated old texts, while the French attempted to organize literary history around a few “great men.” A more scholarly approach, Veselovsky proposed, would place these works in their broader context; it was only work which dared to “look[] into those masses [...] the hidden springs of the historical process,” that could explain literary history. The study of an epoch was to begin with an inductive study of its “everyday trivia” (1967: 35-36). In keeping with his proposal, the writings that made up “historical poetics” were dedicated largely to the study of folkloric, oral genres. Veselovsky argued, however, that conclusions formed on the basis of this material were ultimately valid for the larger body of *slovesnost*, that is, for written, high literature as well.

Veselovsky not only provided the formalists with basic concepts that came from the analysis of folklore, but he imparted an understanding of the goal and method of literary studies which implied that folklore lay at the heart of any understanding of literature more generally. As Andy Byford has emphasized, Veselovsky defined the boundaries of literary scholarship based on a distinction between collective and individual creativity. Byford points out that, according to Veselovsky,

the process of individual creation is ‘covered by a veil, whom no one has ever raised or will raise’ (Spielhagen), but we can define more accurately its boundaries [granitsy], by following the centuries-long history of literary developments and by trying to clarify its internal lawfulness [zakonnost’] that limits individual achievement, even that of a genius (cited in Byford 2005: 128).

For Veselovsky the subject of literary science is thus the general—the common basis that underlies the literary creation of individual authors. Extracting these elements from the field of the literary broadly defined will lead to literary science as a statement of the “laws” of literature. This understanding of literary science was the challenge “taken up” by the formalists. The pride of place attributed to folklore in Veselovsky’s work as the general, and the understanding that literary studies must focus on commonalities, eschewing the individual, encouraged subsequent generations of Russian scholars to include and rely on folklore and folklore theory in their approach to literature.

Building on these preconditions, each chapter that follows explores in further detail the role that folklore study played in the theoretical work of Victor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský. Each chapter revolves around a case of intellectual exchange between scholars—between those working on folklore per se and each of the three leading literary theorists. Taken as a whole, the emergence of literary theory is shown to have been galvanized by a moment of contact and transition between an “older” theory that is primarily oriented towards folkloric, oral, or “low” art, and the subsequent formulation of theory that is articulated as a theory capable of explaining “high” literature or art. In each case this moment of contact

occurred differently. Shklovsky, who was by all accounts largely an autodidact, imbibed folklore theory through reading. I focus on his use of folkloristic writings of A. N. Veselovsky and P. N. Rybnikov as well as the work of his fellow formalists Jakobson and P. G. Bogatyrev. Jakobson, in contrast, was exposed to a systematic education in folkloristics. The most important influence for him in this regard was the specialist on the Russian oral epic V. F. Miller (1848-1913), director of the Lazarev Institute of Eastern Languages where Jakobson was a student between 1903-1914, and chairman of the Commission for Folklore Study [Komissiiia po narodnoi slovesnosti], of which Jakobson was a regular member between 1914 and 1917.<sup>23</sup> Jan Mukařovský's pre-structuralist work on literary subjects was largely influenced by Herbartian aesthetics, which had a widespread following in Czech scholarship, and there is no suggestion that he was interested in folkloristics prior to joining the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC). In his case, I argue that folklore theory informed his semiotics as a result of collegial exchange with Bogatyrev, a fellow member of the PLC.

Despite the fact that the points of contact for each scholar emerged under different circumstances and that Shklovsky, Jakobson and Mukařovský worked in different sub-fields in literary theory, the role that folklore played in their theoretical development adheres to a basic pattern. To generalize, in each case the theorist appears to have had a preconceived understanding of what a scientific theory of literature should entail. Inspired largely by linguistics, which demonstrated that language follows basic grammatical laws that dictate usage and is governed by sound laws that determine its evolution, formalists and structuralists sought to determine analogous laws for the composition and evolution of literature. The folklore theory that these scholars drew on provided an interpretation of verbal art that adhered to the type of linguistic laws they had in mind.

Shklovsky was interested in the “laws of plot construction,” which were conceived as roughly analogous to the rules of syntax that govern the production of speech. While Shklovsky was interested in creating a theory of prose that would explain works such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, he derived the basic elements of his theory from an analysis of folktales and by borrowing from folkloristic work on oral composition. By applying these concepts to works of high literature he interpreted them in a way that folklorizes them—that is, he saw them as constructed according to principles primarily valid for oral composition. This allowed Shklovsky to argue that these works follow the “laws of plot construction” that he posited. As a result, Shklovsky's theory of prose suggests that narrative, including high literature, is composed in a manner analogous to the speech act.

Jakobson's student years provided him with ample experience in the application of linguistic concepts to folklore study—both in his instruction in the philological analysis of the oral epic and the national epic, the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* [*The Song of Igor's Campaign*], as well as in his fieldwork dedicated to the collection of dialectological and folkloristic material. In his efforts to create a formalist methodology for the study of poetic language, particularly

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<sup>23</sup> Miller was also a professor of philology and folklore at Moscow University (after 1877) and held a number of prominent positions in academic institutions in Moscow at the turn of the century. In her history of Russian folkloristics T. G. Ivanova describes Miller and Veselovsky as the two luminaries of Russian humanities studies at the turn of the twentieth century. Miller's historical “method,” she suggests, was more frequently applied by followers, while Veselovsky's work, which would have been more challenging to reproduce, was widely discussed. She points out that in the second half of the twentieth century Veselovsky's method enjoyed a renaissance while Miller's work ceased to play leading role (152). More recently, Veselovsky's “historical Poetics” has been taken up by a working group at the University of Chicago led by Boris Maslov et al. I discuss recent scholarship on Veselovsky further in Chapter One.

contemporary poetry, Jakobson drew heavily on this background. Both V. F. Miller's philological study of the epic [bylina] and Moscow dialectology approached oral tradition and language as organized by the gravitational pull of "centers" of authority. Guided by these models, in his work on poetic language Jakobson sought to replace the conception of poetic language as the product of an individual author with an approach which saw poetic language broadly defined as classed according to its distance from a "center" of poetic authority. This approach to poetry provided a stable, systemic vision of literary history—approximating that attributed to the epic tradition or to language.

Mukařovský's utilization of Bogatyrev's work on rural, folkloric art and ritual could be said to folklorize his understanding of collectivity rather than his view of art or literature per se. In Mukařovský's semiotic theory the object of study was shifted from the creation of the art object to the role of the collective in establishing stable conceptions of artistic function, norm and value. Granting that the definition of "art" was based on social norms and values, Mukařovský still sought to see the evolution of these concepts as immanent—that is, as driven by laws arising from an internal structure. This understanding reflected his adherence to an ideal for literary science modeled on language, which was understood to evolve in this way. In order to theorize social conventions as internally organized in a manner analogous to language, Mukařovský drew on Bogatyrev's structural functional ethnography, which posited that collectively-held definitions (i.e. functions) of elements of culture are structured in the way that language is organized in the mind of an individual or in the collective consciousness. Bogatyrev's work drew on theories of "primitive mentality" that essentialized the collective consciousness. These properties were transmitted to Mukařovský's understanding of collectivity which underlay his semiotic theory developed to analyze culture, and particularly high art.

Each chapter goes beyond the basic thesis of the dissertation I have articulated here to describe how the folkloristic aspect of each theorist's development was conditioned and modified by a variety of specific factors. In Shklovsky's case his use of Veselovsky's work is treated as part of an overarching desire to create a universal theory of prose. The chapter discusses Shklovsky's universalism in the context of his intellectual evolution in the late 1910s and early 1920s when he was writing his *Theory of Prose* [*O teorii prozy*] (1925). An additional factor discussed is Shklovsky's association with Maxim Gorky's post-revolutionary publishing venture "World literature." The ethos of the project was an internationalist humanism that valued the study of world literature as a universal legacy. This approach was reflected in Shklovsky's approach to the novels of Cervantes, Sterne, and Dickens in Russian translation, which he treated as sources for deriving universal principles of literary structure without considering the original texts of these works. Another factor considered is the extreme privations of the Civil War years. The conditions in which Shklovsky was working undoubtedly influenced the particular understanding of human nature reflected in *Theory of Prose*. In a context in which starvation and death from cold was an everyday reality, the conception of human nature as a fight for survival stood out in greater relief. For Shklovsky the real-life plot [fabula] which the devices of plot construction complicate, prolong and bring pleasure to, is equated with the human drive to procreate and ensure the further survival of the species.

In the chapter on Jakobson I focus on the tension between Jakobson's understanding of literary value and his proposed "poetic dialectology" as a method for the formalist study of poetic language. I argue that Jakobson's concept of value can be understood as that of the "epic past"—that is, an intensely valorized moment of national linguistic-poetic origins. Evidence is found for this in a variety of Jakobson's writings from the 1910s through the 1960s. This mode

of evaluation is found to be consonant with the system of evaluation inherent in the philological method. The act of distinguishing between linguistic layers of medieval texts as relevant or irrelevant for the reconstruction of the oldest version involves the differential evaluation of linguistic facts. This mode of evaluation of language—in terms of (national) origins—is also compatible with the understanding of poetic creativity held by the futurist group called Hylaea, with which Jakobson was affiliated in the 1910s. I compare, in particular, Velimir Khlebnikov’s understanding of trans-rational [zaum’] poetry as a reconstruction of a lost, universally comprehensible primordial language with Jakobson’s scholarly efforts in this period. This conception of value, derived from an imagined point of origin, was partially in conflict with Jakobson’s “poetic dialectology” proposed in his *The Newest Russian Poetry [Noveishaia russkaia poeziia]* (1921), which he describes as the synchronic analysis of contemporary poetry around poetic “centers” of gravity. After publishing a second synchronic study of poetic language in 1923, Jakobson turned to traditional philological subjects during much of the 1920s and 1930s. His extensive work on the influence of the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy on the history of Czech verse, I argue, utilizes the concept of a “cultural center” as it was employed in Miller’s studies on the Russian *bylina*. In his analyses of the oldest Czech poetry Jakobson’s philological method and his evaluation of poetry in terms of its relationship to the “epic past” are more easily reconciled.

The third and final chapter compares the semiotic theory of Jan Mukařovský and Petr Bogatyrev as pioneers in the application of structural linguistics to the study of art and ethnography. I establish a moment of maximum overlap in their work (1934-35), fueled by their adherence to the Circle’s program and their frequent attendance of meetings. Focusing on their conceptualization of the boundaries of the semiotic collective (i.e. the group of individuals that creates a shared cultural code), I point out that despite significant theoretical commonalities, Bogatyrev tended to see these collectives as multiple, loosely related autonomous wholes, whereas Mukařovský approached collectivity as a monolithic whole organized by a dominant element. This difference reflects their assumptions regarding language and collectivity. As a leader of the Circle, Mukařovský’s view reflected the position the Circle took on the subject of literary Czech. The Circle described literary Czech as created and standardized by writers and linguists—placing these groups, I argue, in the role of a social “dominant.” A second factor differentiating Bogatyrev and Mukařovský’s semiotics was the former’s background in a tradition of Russian, pre-revolutionary dialect study which celebrated local identities, as opposed to Mukařovský’s adherence to conceptions of the Czech language as an ancient and organic whole.

In the course of my analysis of the role of folkloristics in the rise of Russian formalist and Czech structuralist literary theory I point out that the use of folklore at these three junctures can be viewed critically. Shklovsky’s use of folklore theory leads him to adopt a view of literary creativity and narrative structure which treats literary narrative in a way that is closer to a scholarly description of oral performance than it is to accepted understandings of the possibilities afforded by writing. Jakobson’s use of a “cultural center” in his approach to literary history leads to an argument for unbroken literary continuity—a much more conservative approach than that of other formalist theorists who based their view of literary evolution on parody or the introduction of non-literary material. Finally, Mukařovský’s understanding of collective consciousness, which borrows from Bogatyrev’s ethnography, reproduces a metaphysical and static conception of “primitive” collective mentality that informed early twentieth-century folkloristics. These observations, I hope, can serve contemporary scholarship by allowing us to

better understand both the generative potential of including folklore in a theory of literature as well as the limitations of this move.

By pointing out the role of folklore in the work of these theorists my aim is not to suggest that the boundary between literature and folklore should have been more carefully guarded. Indeed, the works I focus on—Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*, Jakobson's *Newest Russian Poetry*, and Mukařovský's *Aesthetic Norm, Function and Value as Social Facts*—are all classics of modern literary theory, and their canonical status eloquently affirms the utility of their approach. The growth of specialization in academic scholarship has led to an increasing differentiation between the fields of linguistics, folkloristics and literary theory, allowing us to see with greater clarity how these now-separate disciplines contributed to the creation of modern literary theory. Now that the “death” of modern literary theory and the collapse of the linguistic paradigm have been proclaimed, the state of literary studies perhaps resembles the disorderly conglomerate of different approaches that the Russian formalists sought to transcend in their effort to create a clearly differentiated academic field with a specific method of analysis. One might hope that today, in an era when the study of literature has again fragmented into a wide swathe of different approaches, comparably productive ideas may again emerge from this *mélange*. The comprehension of how this happened roughly 100 years ago may allow us build with greater awareness of the lessons of Russian formalism and Czech structuralism.

## Chapter One

### Viktor Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose* and the Folklorization of Literature

In the late 1910s and early 1920s Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984) wrote a series of essays that were published in 1925 as *Theory of Prose* [*O teorii prozy*]—a work which is understood to have pioneered the study of plot structure in twentieth century literary theory. The book begins with three theoretical essays: “Art as Device,” “The Relationship between the Devices of Plot Construction and the General Devices of Style,” and “Structure of Fiction.” These are followed by individual studies of specific authors and genres; chapters treat Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Conan Doyle’s detective story, Dickens’ mystery novel, Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, and finally Rozanov’s use of non-literary material in his *Fallen Leaves*.<sup>1</sup> My chapter places Shklovsky’s development of his theory of prose in the context of his intellectual biography. I argue that Shklovsky’s approach can be profitably understood as an attempt to create a universal theory of narrative structure. His attempt to establish the “general laws” of fiction rested on a humanist universalism, that is, on “the principle of regarding humanity as a whole, rather than in terms of different nations, races, etc.”<sup>2</sup>

More specifically, Shklovsky’s approach can be situated in relation to two world literature models he was engaged with between 1918 and 1922. One was of a topical nature—the universalism of socialist revolutionary ideology. Maxim Gorky’s “World Literature” publishing project, with which Shklovsky was affiliated in this period, advocated the study of foreign literature from the perspective of an internationalist humanism. Shklovsky’s efforts to demonstrate the existence of universal laws through the study of foreign literature (i.e. Cervantes, Dickens, Sterne) is in part a product of Shklovsky’s affiliation with Gorky’s project while writing his *Theory of Prose*. A second model that impacted Shklovsky’s universalist approach to prose was A. N. Veselovsky’s (1838-1906) “historical poetics” [“istoricheskaia poetika”]—a collection of highly influential studies on the evolution of literature published in the 1890s. Veselovsky directly influenced Shklovsky’s approach to literature as a universal human phenomenon in that Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* remained within the paradigm Veselovsky established for the comparative study of literature. Veselovsky’s work, which drew on nineteenth-century folkloristics and anthropology, provided Shklovsky with an understanding of the trope of parallelism as the most basic element of poetic language and prose structure. According to Veselovsky, parallelisms, found in folk poetry the world over, were a reflection of

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<sup>1</sup> The chapters of the 1925 edition are: “Iskusstvo kak priem,” “Sviaz' siuzhetoslozheniia s obshchimi priemami stilia,” “Stroenie rasskaza i romana,” “Kak sdelan Don-Kikhot,” “Novella tain,” “Roman tain,” “Parodiinyi roman,” and “Literatura vne 'siuzheta'.” The 1929 edition of *Theory of Prose* added two chapters: “Ornamental'naia proza,” and “Ocherk i anekdot.” The fact that the titles of each chapter refer to the genre of the work they treat as opposed to its title or author (e.g. the Parodiinyi roman [“The parodic novel”] focuses on Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*) suggests that these chapters were meant to be read as case studies rather than a specific analyses of an individual author.

<sup>2</sup> “universalism, n.” OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press.

the basic psychic unity of mankind. Shklovsky, who built on this concept, created a theory of prose that inherited a number of assumptions from the fields of folkloristics and anthropology.

This chapter aims to demonstrate how Shklovsky's use of folklore theory not only allowed him to create a universal theory of literature, but had a far-reaching impact on his understanding of literary creativity and narrative structure. I argue that Shklovsky's book "folklorizes" literature. This is suggested even from a cursory glance at the makeup of *Theory of Prose*—the first three, theoretical, chapters are steeped in folkloric examples and frequently cite folklore theory. The remainder of the book, I argue, applies folkloristic concepts to the realm of high, written literature. Drawing on studies of oral tradition by Walter Ong and Albert Lord, I attempt to show that Shklovsky articulates a theory of literary creativity that is based on oral performance and that Shklovsky's view of narrative structure adheres to scholars' descriptions of oral poetics.

Shklovsky's approach can be contrasted with the work of his colleagues in the formalist Society for the Study of Poetic Language [Obshchestvo izucheniia poeticheskogo iazyka] (OPOIaZ) and in the Moscow Linguistic Circle (MLC). Inspired by developments in the field of linguistics, the formalists' work was generally shaped by their desire to create a "scientific" methodology for the study of literature. They focused on the elucidation of universal principles that would get at the essence of the phenomenon they studied. Shklovsky's universalism was in step with this general approach, but, unlike many of his colleagues, Shklovsky did not seek to anchor the universal laws of literature in linguistic principles. Instead, as I will demonstrate, the foundation for literary universality and scientificity for Shklovsky is the assumption of the psychic unity of humanity.

### Shklovsky and World Literature

The universalism of Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose* suggests that this work can be placed in the context of competing theories of "world literature." This is an idea that has recently garnered critical interest in the context of debates regarding the content and methodologies of world literature courses in an era of globalization. The origins of the concept are traced to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and his scattered pronouncements on what he termed *Weltliteratur*.<sup>3</sup> René Wellek defines Goethe's *Weltliteratur* as "an ideal of the unification of all literatures into one literature where each nation would play its part in a universal concert" (cited in Pizer 29). This unification was understood to result from the "exchange of ideas, letters, books and their translations analogous to world trade and communication (Hoffmeister)."<sup>4</sup> John Pizer, in his argument for the contemporary relevance of Goethe's idea, stresses that Goethe's *Weltliteratur* envisioned literary exchange as a process by which local specificity would be preserved: "unlike Hegel and Marx," Pizer writes, "who presupposed a leveling of discrete cultures to a sameness through dialectical evolution, Goethe never lost sight of the unique, specific aspects of divergent nations and peoples" (26). This idea can be contrasted with Shklovsky's implicit understanding of world literature. Shklovsky makes clear it in the preface to

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<sup>3</sup> Pizer writes that "public and scholarly awareness of Goethe's thoughts on the matter [Weltliteratur] became widespread only after 1836, when the *Gespräche mit Goethe* were published" (3).

<sup>4</sup> Goethe himself wrote in 1830, that "*Weltliteratur* as free trade in ideas will tear down the Chinese Wall of outdated prejudices" (cited in Hoffmeister). This idea is understood to have been a product of Goethe's own experience as a center of a pan-European literary exchange. Hoffmeister writes that "Goethe was convinced that he was the European center of literary exchanges due to his own initiative and also due to letters, reviews and gifts from abroad." See also (Pizer 20-21).

his *Theory of Prose* that he is not interested in studying literature as a commodity subject to world markets or politics:

Я занимаюсь в теории литературы исследованием внутренних законов ее. Если провести заводскую параллель, то я интересуюсь не положением мирового хлопчатобумажного рынка, не политикой трестов, а только номерами пряжи и способами ее ткать (1929: 4-5).

I've been engaged in the study of the internal laws that govern literature. If I may bring up the analogy of a factory, then I would say that neither the current state of the world cotton markets nor the politics of cotton trusts interest me. One thing alone concerns me: the number of strands that make up the cotton plant and the different ways of weaving them (1990: vii).

His understanding of the universality of literature is thus not based on global exchange, but rather on the fundamental commonalities assumed to be valid for all literatures. Like any approach to world literature, Shklovsky's approach is comparative, but, as I will show, the commonalities he derives from comparison are frequently conceived in anthropological terms as a reflection of the common basic stages or origins of literary/cultural development.

The most immediately relevant figures for understanding Shklovsky's literary universalism are A. N. Veselovsky and Maxim Gorky (1868-1936). Based on Shklovsky's publications, it appears that he was reading Veselovsky in the years immediately preceding his affiliation with Gorky's "Vsemirnaia literatura" [World literature] publishing project, which Shklovsky joined in the early fall of 1919. Before turning to the models they provided, however, it is useful to situate Shklovsky's literary-theoretical work in the context of his intellectual and political biography. Shklovsky formulated the central ideas for his theory of prose in the period between 1918 through 1922. These years, which largely overlap with the Russian Civil War, were a time of great activity for Shklovsky. In the summer of 1917 he volunteered to fight on the southwestern front and was awarded the St. George Cross for bravery in battle.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of 1918, Shklovsky joined an underground organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party to restore the Constituent Assembly. Over the course of the next year he was engaged in planning an anti-Bolshevik coup. According to scholars, Shklovsky's active involvement in political and military campaigns came to an abrupt halt at the end of 1918 when, returning to Petrograd, he claimed to renounce all further political activity.<sup>6</sup> This disavowal is understood to have motivated his polemic with N. Punin on the subject of "Kommunizm i futurizm," ["Communism and futurism"], which appeared in *Iskusstvo kommuny* [Art of the Commune] on March 30, 1919.<sup>7</sup> His oft-cited response denounced the futurists' assumption of leading positions in the Narkompros art division, famously declaring that "искусство всегда было вольно от жизни, и

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<sup>5</sup> The advance was ordered by the Provisional Government in order to support the Entente forces. Shklovsky received the Cross of St. George for rallying his regiment to attack under fire. A. Galushkin reproduces the order accompanying the award that described Shklovsky's actions (6-7).

<sup>6</sup> Sheldon writes that Shklovsky "arrived in [Petrograd in] January 1919 and, with the help of Gorky, was exonerated of complicity in the Socialist Revolutionary terrorist activities of the summer of 1918" (1984: xiii). See also (Galushkin 8).

<sup>7</sup> This article was subsequently republished in Shklovsky's *Khod konia* (Berlin, 1923), under the title "Ullia, Ullia, Marsiane!" For an account of the polemic between Shklovsky and Punin see A. Galushkin's commentary to "Ullia, ullia, marsiane!" in *Gamburgskii schet* (Moscow, 1990), 402-04.

на цвете его никогда не отражался цвет флага над крепостью города” (73) (“art has always been free from life. Its flag has never reflected the color of the flag that flies over the city fortress” (22)).

This renunciation of ties between politics and art is supported, in Shklovsky’s article, by a universalist approach to prose based largely on folklore theory. This is evident from the arguments Shklovsky provides to support this statement. He cites five points. The first two refer to Theodor Benfey’s “theory of borrowing” which posited that many themes found in European folklore originally migrated from India via the Middle East along trade routes. The third and fourth point relate to the universality of plot types in folktales, and the fifth applies the conclusions of the first four points to “high” literature following the logic of Veselovsky’s historical poetics.<sup>8</sup> Shklovsky tellingly concludes: “Уже Александр Веселовский положил начало свободной истории литературной формы. А мы, футуристы, связываем свое творчество с Третьим Интернационалом” (1990: 74) (“It was Aleksandr Veselovsky who set the stage for a free history of literary form. And to think that we futurists have connected our creative work to the Third International!” (2005: 23)). Shklovsky’s adoption of an apolitical approach to literature thus appears to have been grounded in a universalism derived from folklore theory.

In the period of time between Shklovsky’s return to Petrograd in late 1918 and his escape to Finland in March of 1922 Shklovsky dedicated himself primarily to intellectual pursuits. He wrote afterwards, “I never in my life worked the way I did that year [1919/1920]” and his output during this period was indeed prodigious (1984: 186).<sup>9</sup> In the three year period between 1919-1922 he published sixty-six short articles on artistic subjects, six longer theoretical studies, and wrote sixteen plays. During this time he taught literature in Petrograd in Gorky’s Translators’ Studio (a part of the “Vsemirnaia literatura” project) and in the Petrograd State Institute of Art

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<sup>8</sup> There is a striking similarity between Shklovsky’s third and fourth points and the protocol from a meeting of the Moscow Linguistic Circle held a month after the publication of Shklovsky’s article, on April 20, 1919. Shklovsky’s points read: “[3] Если бы сословные и классовые черты отлагались в искусстве, то разве было бы возможно, что великорусские сказки про барина те же, что и сказки про попа. [4] Если бы этнографические черты отлагались в искусстве, то сказки про инородцев не были бы обратными, не рассказывались бы любым данным народом про другой соседний” (74). In the protocol the following comments are attributed to Roman Jakobson: “*Якобсон*: нет ни одного сюжета о попах, который не получал бы иного приурочения. Попы--благодарный материал потому, что незнакомое должно переплетаться со знакомым а таков быт сельского духовенства” and “*Якобсон*: Анекдоты об инородцах с мотивом надувательства – это не что иное, как приуроченные анекдоты о хитрецах. Сдвиг речи, оправданный иностранным приурочением, может найти не только смехотворное, но и иное, напр. мистическое применение [... ] Анекдоты, высмеивающие быт инородцев, не являются этнографическим очерком.” IRIa Arkhiv MLK Fond 20, ed.kh. 2 “Protokoly zasedanii 1918-1923 gg” List. 20. Shklovsky is not reported to have been present at this meeting. The correspondences between their arguments written/transcribed within a one-month period, however, may reflect conversations between the two leading formalists of Petrograd and Moscow. Jakobson and Shklovsky are understood to have been close in this period. Both men recall that Jakobson hid Shklovsky in his apartment in late 1918 when the latter was engaged in underground activities. They had a falling out, however, after Jakobson moved to Czechoslovakia. Their relationship is the subject of a recent biographical film by Vladimir Nepevnyi “Viktor Shklovskii i Roman Iakobson. Zhizn’ kak roman” (Russia, 2009, 90 min). Leon Trotsky focused on the first two points of Shklovsky’s argument in his critique of formalism in his *Literature and Revolution* (1924). Trotsky responded to Shklovsky’s reference to Benfey with the anthropological theory of A. Lang, et al. See (Erllich 101-102).

<sup>9</sup> Shklovsky fled the country because he faced imminent arrest as a former member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Cristina Vatulescu reads Shklovsky’s *Sentimental Journey* in the context of the infamous trial of the SRs that took place in the summer of 1922, at the time when he was writing his memoir in Berlin. See “The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky’s Device through Literary and Policing Practices” in *Poetics Today* 27 (2006): 35-66. Shklovsky returned to the USSR in the fall of 1923.

History. He attended meetings and presented his work at both OPOIaZ and the Moscow Linguistic Circle, and he founded his own journal, *Peterburg*, in 1922.<sup>10</sup> Much of this activity took place in conditions that might be commonly considered highly adverse to this type of intellectual productivity. The Civil War caused severe shortages, not only of paper and ink, but of foodstuffs, fuel and other basic necessities. Shklovsky's memoirs describing this period detail the shocks registered by witnessing the collapse of institutions and basic norms of social behavior on a broad scale. Out of this flurry of stimuli I would nevertheless isolate Veselovsky and Gorky as figures that allow us to understand more specifically how Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose* emerged as a universalist theory of literature.

In the second part of his memoir, *Sentimental Journey*, written shortly after his escape to Finland and then Berlin in 1922, Shklovsky describes working on his long essay, "The Relationship between Devices of Plot Construction and General Devices of Style" ["Sviaz' priemov siuzhetoslozheniia s obshchimi priemami stilia"] (hereafter "Plot construction") in the course of his peripatetic underground efforts on the part of the SRs in 1918 (1984: 147, 153). He took with him, he says, several books which he had "unbound . . . and divided into small parcels" (1984: 151). Among these materials were almost certainly sections of A. N. Veselovsky's collected works. The "Plot construction" essay, which was published in the third of the OPOIaZ *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* in the spring of 1919, is in large part a commentary on, and reinterpretation of, several ideas central to Veselovsky's work (on the "Poetics of plots" and the role of "Psychological parallelism" in the early development of verbal art). Veselovsky's scholarship was characterized by a breadth and erudition that is often hailed as virtually unmatched; R. Wellek, in his multi-volume *History of Modern Criticism*, writes that "Veselovsky must be classed among the greatest literary scholars of the [nineteenth] century in breadth of knowledge and scope of competence" (278-279). He was a specialist on Italian renaissance culture and published extensively on Slavic folklore, comparative epic studies, the Ancient Greek novel, and East-West literary ties. He also wrote monographs on Boccaccio, Petrarch and V. A. Zhukovsky.<sup>11</sup>

Veselovsky began his professorial career in St. Petersburg in 1863 as the Chair of the newly founded department of General History of Literature [vseobshchei istorii literatury]. In keeping with this position, his scholarship is seen as having laid the foundations for the discipline of comparative literature in Russia.<sup>12</sup> His work was based on what came to be called

<sup>10</sup> See Viktor Shklovsky: *An International Bibliography of Works by and About Him*. Compiled by Richard Sheldon. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977. Shklovsky presented his work at least four times at the MLC. The titles of his presentations were: "Siuzhetoslozhenie v kinematograficheskom iskusstve" (September 1, 1919), "'Tristam Shendi' Sterna" (February 21, 1920), "Tema, obraz i siuzhet V. V. Rozanova" (March 20, 1921), and "Istoriia romana" (July 10, undated [1919?]). He also volunteered on the side of the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1920 in the fight against General Wrangel's White Army until a grenade exploded in his hands, leaving him severely injured.

<sup>11</sup> For a bibliography of works by Veselovsky published during his lifetime see A. N. Veselovskii "Spisok trudov akademika A. N. Veselovskogo: 1859-1906." *Pamiati akademika Aleksandra Nikolaevicha Veselovskogo*. Petrograd: Otd. rus. iaz. i slov. RAN, 1921.

<sup>12</sup> The department of world literature at St. Petersburg University was one of the first, if not the first department of comparative literature in the world (Shaitanov 2009: 21). I. Shaitanov writes on the foundation of the department: "Русский университет, подвергнутый разгрому при Николае I и теперь стремящийся к восстановлению своих прав, к духовному обновлению, решает проблемы, актуальные и для Европы. Как всегда в России в подобные моменты, в качестве необходимой составляющей новизны мыслится открытость всему миру, и в первую очередь - европейскому. Идея всемирности, всеобщности несет особую смысловую нагрузку и требует реального воплощения. [...] Кафедра всеобщей истории литературы была введена в русский

the “historical-comparative” method, and in the 1890s he published a series of works which outlined the parameters of his conception of literary scholarship, what he called “historical poetics.”<sup>13</sup> V. M. Zhirmunsky summarized this work as addressing four basic topics in the evolution of poetry: 1) the primordial syncretism and evolution of genres, 2) the position of the poet and the social function of poetry, 3) the evolution of poetic language and 4) the poetics of plots (30). In his work on these subjects, Veselovsky’s approach embraced a global conception of the poetic. He frequently cited not only Slavic, Western European, and Ancient Greek and Latin sources, but also, relying on the anthropological works of James Frazer, Andrew Lang, Edward Tylor and others, he cited examples from North and South American and Indian folklore. Veselovsky’s work focused on the reciprocal interchange between high and low forms of art and the migration of poetic devices (e.g. “epithets” or “motifs”) between national traditions. V. N. Peretts described Veselovsky’s work as based on the idea that “literary phenomena cannot be studied in isolation,” and he cited Veselovsky as arguing “эпос каждого исторического народа есть эпос международный” (39) (the epic of every historical people is an international epic).

Veselovsky’s international scope, however, was balanced by his insistence that devices “borrowed” across cultures were not accepted passively. He argued that the “влияние чужого элемента всегда обуславливается его внутренним согласием и уровнем той среды, на которую ему приходится действовать” (cited in Tolstoi 574) (“the influence of a foreign element is always conditioned by its internal agreement with and the level of that environment on which it acts”).<sup>14</sup> While I do not wish to equate Veselovsky’s extensively researched theoretical project with Goethe’s “scattered remarks” on *Weltliteratur*, it is worth noting a few basic common principles which will allow Shklovsky’s departure from this approach to stand out more clearly (Pizer 11). Goethe and Veselovsky’s conception of world literature is essentially historical; literary exchange is a part of a larger dynamic of social (e.g. political, economic) developments. Furthermore, both understood that literature develops through international exchange, and envisioned this as a process in which local identities evolve through participation in a larger dialog while at the same time maintaining their uniqueness.<sup>15</sup>

Shklovsky, who studied at least briefly in the Philological Faculty of St. Petersburg University after enrolling in 1913, recounts that the spirit of Veselovsky’s “historical poetics” was a matter of continued interest to the students even after the latter’s death in 1906. Shklovsky

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университетский Устав в 1863 году. Этот Устав известен как одно из освободительных свершений нового императора - Александра II” (2009: 19-20 italics in original).

<sup>13</sup> These works, which make up the extant authorized text of Veselovsky’s “Historical poetics,” include: “Introduction to Historical Poetics,” *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia (ZhMNP)*, II (1893), 1–22; “From the History of the Epithet,” *ZhMNP*, IV (1895), 179–99; “Epic Repetitions as a Chronological Moment,” *ZhMNP*, 4, ot del 2 (1897), 271–305; “Psychological Parallelism and Its Forms Reflected in Poetic Style,” *ZhMNP*, 3, ot del 2 (1898); “Three Chapters from Historical Poetics,” *ZhMNP*, 4–5, ot del 2 (1898), 62–131, 223–89. All these publications were first collected in Veselovsky’s *Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. 1 (1913) and then in *Istoricheskaiia Poetika* (1940).

<sup>14</sup> Veselovsky’s stress on the fact that “все, что слишком резко вырывается из этого уровня, остается непонятным или поймется по-своему, уравновесится окружающей средой,” is echoed in the work of subsequent generations of folklorists. It became a centerpiece, for example, of P. G. Bogatyrev’s functionalist ethnographic theory (cited in Tolstoi 574).

<sup>15</sup> Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* and Veselovsky’s “historical poetics” projected the unity of world literature onto different temporal horizons, however. Goethe appears to have based his ideas on his own contemporary experience and to have imagined the fruits of continued international dialog as future world peace. Veselovsky’s work, in contrast, gravitated towards universal commonalities based in a primordial past.

later wrote of Veselovsky that “новые идеи пришли к нему вместе со студенческими спорами. [...] В студенческой традиции Петербургского (Ленинградского) университета сохранились рассказы о новых замыслах ученого” (1947: 182) (new ideas came to him along with student debates [...]) The student tradition at Petersburg (Leningrad) University retained accounts of the new ideas of the scholar”).<sup>16</sup> The international scope of Veselovsky’s approach was fundamental to “historical poetics,” and would have been an important element of his students’ understanding of the field of literary scholarship. The broad range of the examples he drew on buttressed the legendary scholar’s claim to scholarliness [nauchnost’]. As Andy Byford has shown, this claim was an essential component of his legacy for the formalists’ generation of literary scholars.<sup>17</sup> It is telling that Shklovsky focused on Veselovsky’s universality as the redeemable core principle of the latter’s work in an article published in 1947, just prior to the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of 1948-49 in which Veselovsky was to become a main target. Shklovsky wrote,

У А. Веселовского в основе его работы лежит *мысль о человечестве*, которое сообща создает культурные ценности. Идея равноправности народов как бы подразумевается в работах А. Веселовского, и он, основываясь на этой аксиоме, строит свою историческую поэтику, и эта идея нигде не приводит его к ошибке” (176 italics added).

At the base of A. Veselovsky’s work lies the *concept of humanity* which as a whole creates cultural values. The concept of the equality of peoples is assumed in A. Veselovsky’s works and, based on this axiom, he built his historical poetics. This idea never lead him to error (italics added).

This statement belongs to a context in which Veselovsky’s comparative approach was in need of reframing to make it acceptable to a more narrowly nationalist definition of scholarship.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, his orientation towards the universally *human* basis of literature was in fact the aspect of Veselovsky’s work that is seen to be the most appealing to Shklovsky as early as 1916. I will return to discuss in more detail how Veselovsky’s approach to world literature as a product of anthropological (human) universals provided the paradigm for Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*.

A second impetus to conceive of literature in universalist terms would have come from Shklovsky’s affiliation with Gorky’s “Vsemirnaia literatura” [World Literature] project. Shklovsky recalled that he first met Gorky in 1915, writing, “before I say anything else about Gorky, I must say that Aleksei Maksimovich saved my life several times” (1984: 188).<sup>19</sup> Gorky,

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<sup>16</sup> Sources differ as to how long Shklovsky remained at St. Petersburg University. Emily Finer reports that “footnotes to Chukovsky’s commonplace book, *Chukokkala*, state that Shklovsky left in 1914 without finishing his first year; Galushkin [who was Shklovsky’s personal secretary later in life] suggests that he studied in the Philological Faculty for three years” (10).

<sup>17</sup> See Andy Byford’s “The Rhetoric of Aleksandr Veselovskii’s ‘Historical Poetics’ and the Autonomy of Academic Literary Studies in Late Imperial Russia” in *Slavonica* (2005), and also his *Literary Scholarship in Late Imperial Russia: Rituals of Academic Institutionalisation*. London: Legenda, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> For a treatment of the campaign against cosmopolitanism in the USSR in the context of the history of the concepts of cosmopolitanism and world literature see Galin Tihanov’s “Cosmopolitanism in the Discursive Landscape of Modernity: Two Enlightenment Articulations,” *Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism*. (London, 2011), 133-154.

<sup>19</sup> Shklovsky reports that “I knew him [Gorky] from having worked on his publications *New Life* [*Novaia zhizn*] and *Annals* [*Letopis*]” (1984: 173). *Annals* appeared between 1915-1917 and *New Life* between 1917-1918. *Annals*

as is commonly known, played the role of protector to hundreds of Russian intellectuals and artists in the years following the Bolshevik Revolution. Shklovsky's relationship with Gorky was of this nature; the older writer secured him with a place to live, food allotments, employment, venues for publication, as well as the political protection Shklovsky needed in light of his one-time allegiance with the SR Party. Shklovsky relied heavily on Gorky in this period (1919-1922) when war-time shortages meant that the urban population of Petrograd was in a severe state of want.<sup>20</sup> One of Gorky's largest undertakings in the years immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution was his publishing venture, "Vsemirnaia literatura," founded in August 1918. The projected plan for "Vsemirnaia" was the translation and publication of world literature on a grand scale. "World Literature," one scholar tells us, "was to have been the most extensive translation enterprise in Europe, thereby demonstrating and propagandizing the international scope and cultural benefits of the proletarian revolution" (Shane 29).<sup>21</sup> Gorky immediately hired over 350 scholars and authors to assist in the project.<sup>22</sup> Their publishing plans divided world literature into "Western" and "Eastern" departments. Within these there were "principal" [osnovnaia biblioteka] and "popular" [narodnaia biblioteka] title series. The initial plans were ambitious; within the Western division the "principal" series planned to publish 1,500 titles and the "popular" series was to have between 3,000 and 5,000 shorter works (Golubeva 99-101). This plan met with a financial and material obstacles, however, and over the course of Gorky's leadership of "Vsemirnaia" (1918-1921) only 59 books were published (Golubeva 108).<sup>23</sup>

The impact of this undertaking should not be measured, however, in terms of this output alone. Gorky's project spawned a literary Studio which had a lasting impact on the young generation of authors who were affiliated with it.<sup>24</sup> Most important for my argument is the fact that, as a teacher in the Studio, Shklovsky was immersed in an environment which encouraged him to expand his nascent folkloristic, apolitical understanding of literature into a theory of prose

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was "designed to campaign against the justification of the war [WWI] and to defend the idea of international culture against all manifestations of nationalism and imperialism" (Yedlin 109).

<sup>20</sup> Evgeny Zamiatin, who was a member of the editorial planning board of "Vsemirnaia" and who taught in the Studio, described this period: "For three years we were locked up together in a steel shell, and cramped in darkness we hurtled into the unknown with a whine. In these seconds-years before death we had to do something, to accommodate and live in the hurtling shell. Humorous projects in the shell: "World Literature," "The Union of Practitioners of Imaginative Literature," "The Writers' Union," the Theater. . . And all of the surviving writers jostled one another in these cramped quarters. . ." (quoted in Shane 24). Alex Shane writes that, despite extreme hardships, "the years 1917-1920 marked Zamiatin's most intense and productive period of literary creativity" (24).

<sup>21</sup> In a note from the editor appended to a preparatory publication on the "Literature of the East" [Literatura vostoka] series of "Vsemirnaia" (1919), the project is described as one that will familiarize the Russian reader with the monuments [pamiatniki] of world literature, to "передать понятною русскою речью замечательные и характерные произведения восточных писателей" (70). The breadth of the proposed program meant, furthermore, that "мы будем в праве сказать, что русская литература обладает серией памятников восточной словесности, какой не имеет еще ни один народ" (Ibid.).

<sup>22</sup> The chairmen of the publishing house were M. Gorky, Z. I. Grzhebin, and I. P. Ladyzhnikov. The editorial board included F. D. Batiushkov, A. A. Blok, F. A. Braun, A. L. Volynskii, E. I. Zamiatin, M. Gor'kii, N. S. Gumilev, A. Ia. Levinson, M. L. Lozinskii, A. N. Tikhonov, and K. I. Chukovsky (Zaidman 142).

<sup>23</sup> Shane writes that "the meagerness of its output was due solely to the lack of paper, which was impossible to obtain despite Gorky's desperate pleas to various agencies and even to Lenin, himself" (30). Shane reports that "by February 1921, the backlog of manuscripts had risen to eight thousand printer's sheets. Thus, the publishing house was functioning at only 6 percent of its capacity" (30-31).

<sup>24</sup> Most famously, the Literary Studio fostered a group of young writers who became known as the Serapion Brothers. See Richard Sheldon's "Šklovskij, Gor'kij, and the Serapion Brothers," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 12 (1968): 1-13, and Barry Scherr's "Notes on Literary Life in Petrograd, 1918-1922: A Tale of Three Houses," *Slavic Review* 36 (1977): 256-267.

based on studies of works from different national traditions. Gorky's editorial board began to expand the "Vsemirnaia" project in a pedagogical direction soon after its foundation. K. Chukovsky and N. Gumilev published essays on techniques of translating, and a Translators' Studio, meant to function on a "laboratory" model, was opened in February 1919. The Studio held regular seminars and was open to the public (Zaidman 143). The following September Gorky and the leadership decided to expand the Studio's program in order to familiarize students, largely aspiring writers, with the theory and history of literature. It was at this point that Shklovsky became affiliated with the Studio. The title of the course he taught, "Theory of Plot" [Teoriia siuzheta], reflects the interests of his theoretical writings from his period, and his work on Cervantes and Laurence Sterne was reportedly a product of his involvement with the Studio. Shklovsky mentions in his memoir, for instance, that "with the help of my students, I was writing my articles on *Don Quixote* and Sterne" (1984: 186).<sup>25</sup> Shklovsky's articles on Conan Doyle and Dickens, which went into *Theory of Prose*, arguably stem from his pedagogical work in the Studio as well.

In his references to Gorky's "Vsemirnaia" project Shklovsky is dismissive, describing the project ironically: "the World Literature Publishing House—a Russian writer mustn't write what he wants to: he must translate classics, all the classics; everyone must translate and everyone must read. When everyone has read everything, he will know everything" (1984: 189).<sup>26</sup> I would suggest, however, that there were in fact correspondences between Shklovsky's understanding of world literature and Gorky's project. These come to the surface if we distinguish between Gorky's two intertwined, yet contradictory, understandings of world literature. It was understood to both represent the "very best" literature and also to be that which is universal in literature.<sup>27</sup> This tension reflects Gorky's personal "humanistic philosophy" which, in collaboration with A. A. Bogdanov and A. V. Lunacharsky, he developed the doctrine of "god-building" [bogostroitel'stvo], described as a theory of the "divinity of the masses" (Yedlin 28, 86-87). In short, Gorky believed that man has within him the possibility to achieve a God-like perfection and he valued literature, particularly the Western European classics, for their ability to help man achieve this inherent potential. As a committed socialist, who had contributed to the cause of fomenting a socialist revolution since 1901, Gorky was inclined to see the proletariat as the class of humanity that was most likely to lead the way towards achieving godliness on earth.<sup>28</sup>

The realities of the situation, however, meant that literature's attributes of universalism, associated with the world proletariat, and quality, associated with the high art of the elite classes, were split into the "principal" and the "popular" literary series. This split betrays an element of Gorky's project that would not have been entirely foreign to Shklovsky. While the notion of compiling schematic lists of the "very best" literature smacked of the conservative aestheticism

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<sup>25</sup> The course was mentioned in the journal of the House of Arts (Zaidman 146). In his description of his involvement with the Studio, Shklovsky recalled, "I had a very good young audience. We studied the theory of the novel. With the help of my students, I was writing my articles on *Don Quixote* and Sterne. I never in my life worked the way I did that year [...] It's so nice to go from work to work, from novel to novel, and to see what theory comes out of them" (1984: 186).

<sup>26</sup> K. Chukovsky recalls Shklovsky in the Studio as a contrarian—who "бушевал... грома и сокрушая блюстителей старой эстетики" (498).

<sup>27</sup> An interpretation of the project as a selection of the world's "very best" is conveyed in Chukovsky's description of the project: "Горькому захватила широкая мысль: дать новому, советскому читателю самые лучшие книги, какие написаны на нашей планете самыми лучшими авторами, чтобы этот новый читатель мог изучить мировую словесность по лучшим переводным образцам" (128).

<sup>28</sup> T. Yedlin dates Gorky's active involvement in revolutionary work to 1901, and writes that he joined the RSDWP in 1905 (29, 59).

Shklovsky rejected, the assumptions regarding the universalism of literature were ones he shared. In the literature on “Vsemirnaia,” it appears that the “popular” series was understood to embody literature’s universal properties. This series, which Chukovsky claimed was the dearest to Gorky’s heart, was intended for the “broad reading public” or for people with “little education” (Chukovsky 130; Golubeva 101).<sup>29</sup> The popular series focused on works with “entertaining plots, humor, historical and adventurous stories” (Ibid.). These publications, intended for the proletarian reader, were to serve, Gorky claimed, as a “залогом братства всех людей – залогом грядущего Интернационала” (cited in Golubeva 101) (“a guarantee of the brotherhood of all people – a guarantee of the coming International”). It would be the popular series, above all, that could be said to fulfill Gorky’s conception of literature’s “planetary role” – “роль силы, наиболее крепко и глубоко изнутри объединяющей народы сознанием общности их страданий и желаний, сознанием единства их стремлений к счастью жизни красивой и свободной” (cited in Golubeva 97) (“a role of strength, unifying peoples with great firmness and from deep within through the consciousness of the commonality of their sufferings and desires, the consciousness of unity and their strivings towards the happiness of a beautiful and free life”). The echo here of French revolutionary rhetoric (e.g. the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man) is underscored by the temporal frame chosen for the “Vsemirnaia” project: works were originally to be selected beginning with the era of the French Revolution and ending with the Bolshevik Revolution.

This suggests that Gorky’s conception of world literature was not just the conservative great books approach that Shklovsky criticizes, but that it also drew on a current of a utopian socialist universalism or internationalism. Both Gorky and Shklovsky rejected the Bolshevik coup of 1917 while embracing international socialist revolution as an ideal. Gorky, for instance, allied himself with the Internationalists in the Constituent Assembly in 1917 (Yedlin 118). And when Shklovsky does touch on his political beliefs during the this period, he stresses that it was the internationalism of a socialist revolution that appealed to him. “There wasn’t a man alive, Shklovsky wrote, “who didn’t experience periods of belief in the Bolsheviks. [...] Yes, indeed, Germany and England will collapse and the plow will plow under the borders needed by no one!” (1984: 240). In the conclusion of his *Knight’s Move* [*Khod konia*], written before he returned to the USSR in 1923, he wrote: “In 1917 I wanted happiness for Russia. *In 1918, I wanted happiness for the whole world*—wouldn’t settle for less. Now I want just one thing: to return to Russia (130 italics added).

The socialist conception of world literature differs from that of Goethe or Veselovsky, described above as a historically embedded, “growing network” of international “communication between writers and between writers and readers” (Tihanov 2011: 142). The temporal shift inherent in the utopianism of a socialist internationalism means that while the nineteenth-century vision saw the dialog of national literatures as a process, Gorky’s perspective was retrospective and summarizing. The historical brackets for world literature suggested by the French and Russian revolutions allowed the “Vsemirnaia” project to take an essentializing approach—as Shklovsky stresses, “when everyone has read everything, he will know everything.” This standpoint allowed Gorky and the participants in the “Vsemirnaia” Literary Studio to approach world literature from a pragmatic standpoint. Unlike Goethe’s or Veselovsky’s interest in the preservation of cultural particularities in the process of world literary exchange, socialist universalism assumed an unproblematic possession of world culture that dismissed national,

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<sup>29</sup> Chukovsky writes: “«Народную серию» Горький принимал к сердцу ближе всего остального и требовал, чтобы мимо него не проходила не одного из этих книг” (130).

cultural specificity in favor of international solidarity. This is not to say that Gorky and the participants in the Studio would not have been aware of these differences, but they were neither of interest, nor an obstacle to the further utilization of foreign literature. This pragmatic, humanist standpoint characterizes Shklovsky's approach to foreign literature in his *Theory of Prose*. It is registered most clearly in two related aspects of his analyses—Shklovsky's dismissal of the original foreign-language text, and his treatment of foreign literature as a source to be mined for useful information and literary techniques.

Gorky's "Vsemirnaia" project may shed light on a curious aspect of Shklovsky's approach to foreign literatures in *Theory of Prose*—his disregard for the linguistic specificity of the original work. In her recent book on Shklovsky's reception of Laurence Stern's *Tristram Shandy*, Emily Finer surveys Shklovsky's approach to literature in translation. She reports that "the Shklovsky family are adamant that he [Shklovsky] did not master a single foreign language at any point in his life" (10). She and other scholars have commented on the fact that Shklovsky appears to have taken a somewhat cavalier approach to his foreign-language sources. Finer concludes that "Shklovsky ignores the fact that he is reading texts at several removes from their original language versions, both when he cites directly from translated works and from translations borrowed from secondary sources. Furthermore, *he is unaware, or uninterested, in the accuracy of translated material*" (13-14 italics added). She suggests that Shklovsky's refusal to contextualize his material in a "chronological or national framework" was a factor of his interest in establishing the "general laws" [obshchie zakony] of literature according to a "scientific method" (17-18). I agree, although I believe that more can be said on this account.

In the first, 1925, publication of *Theory of Prose*, five of its ten chapters are dedicated to the analysis of texts originally written in English or Spanish. Shklovsky never acknowledges the translator of the text he is working with, nor does he address the fact that he is working with a translation rather than the original. Shklovsky's lack of interest in the original text and its linguistic texture stands in stark contrast to the early work of fellow OPOIaZ members on poetic language. Their studies focused largely on the acoustic materiality of language—its phonetic texture and the primacy of sound over meaning. Early OPOIaZ studies included L. Jakubinsky's "The Sounds of Poetic Language" and his "The Accumulation of Identical Liquids in Practical and Poetic Speech," O. Brik's "Sound Repetitions," and Polivanov's "Sound-Gestures in the Japanese Language." Shklovsky's 1916 "Poetry and Transrational Language" ["O poezii i zaumnom iazyke"], which came out in the first of the *Sborniki* along with several of the articles listed above, also focuses on the primacy of sound in certain types of language.<sup>30</sup> In "Art as Device" (1917) Shklovsky refers affirmatively to Iakubinskii's materialistic (phonic) definition of poetic language, which contrasted "poetic" and "practical" language on the basis of the assertion that the former operated according to different sound laws.<sup>31</sup> While it is perhaps to be expected that a theory of prose would place less emphasis on the sound texture of language than a theory of poetic language would, Boris Eikhenbaum's study of the use of verbal masks and sound play in "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' is made" ["Kak sdelana 'Shinel' Gogolia"], written and

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<sup>30</sup> OPOIaZ published six *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* between 1916 and 1923.

<sup>31</sup> Shklovsky summarizes this argument stating: "статья Л. П. Якубинского об отсутствии в поэтическом языке закона расподобления плавных звуков, и указанная им допустимость в языке поэтическом трудно-произносимого стечения подобных звуков — является одним из первых, научную критику выдерживающих, фактических указаний на противоположность . . . законов поэтического языка законам языка практического (1929: 11).

published in 1918 and 1919, applies the OPOIaZ focus on sound to the realm of prose.<sup>32</sup> Shklovsky, who turned to prose structure at this same time with his “How Don-Quixote was Made” (1919), makes no reference to the linguistic structure or phonic level of the text. His approach thus reflects a distinct departure from the first stage of OPOIaZ work focused on the phonic characteristics of Russian poetry and prose.

The ethos of “Vsemirnaia” arguably appealed to Shklovsky’s tendency to equate scholarliness with universality and to define this quality not via linguistic laws (Shklovsky did not have the linguistic training that many of his counterparts did), but in regard to basic aspects of human nature.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to OPOIaZ, the ethos of “Vsemirnaia literatura” was oriented towards foreign models, downplaying linguistic specificity in favor of a goal-oriented, pragmatic approach to world literature. These tendencies are reflected in Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*. He didn’t see world literature in terms of “knowing everything,” but he did assume, like Gorky, that world literature in Russian translation was unproblematically a body of material from which he and his students could derive further utility. The approach to literature in the Studio was defined by the students’ desire to gain the tools necessary to become authors themselves. In one of the chapters of *Theory of Prose* with a more overtly pedagogical tone, “Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story,” Shklovsky concludes with the statement that “каждый, собирающийся заняться делом создания русской сюжетной литературы, должен обратить внимание на использование Конан-Дойлем намеков и на выдвигание развязки из них” (142) (“everyone intent on engaging in the creation of Russian plot-based literature should pay close attention to Conan Doyle’s use of clues and the way the denouement emerges out of them” (116 translation modified)).<sup>34</sup> Conan Doyle is not approached as an English author, indeed, Shklovsky goes to the trouble of stating that “if these stories were written by a writer living in a proletarian state” [...] “the construction of the story (the issue we are now engaged with) would not change” (translation modified 110) (“строение новеллы (вопрос, занимающий нас сейчас) не изменилось бы” (136)). The construction [stroenie] of the story for Shklovsky is a fundamentally international, universal element of literature and thus *useful* for anyone who wants to create their own literature.

According to memoirs, Shklovsky spent most of his time in the Studio between 1920 and 1921 with Evgeny Zamiatin and the circle of the young writers who called themselves the “Serapion brothers.” Both Zamiatin and many of the members of this group were interested in foreign literary models as source of inspiration for revitalizing Russian literature.<sup>35</sup> Marietta

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<sup>32</sup> The parallel in the titles of their essays strongly suggests the authors’ collaboration. Both Shklovsky and Eikhensbaum were affiliated both with OPOIaZ and with Gorky’s “Vsemirnaia literatura” in 1919.

<sup>33</sup> In his later reminiscences, *Zhili byli* (1964), Shklovsky wrote: “Я не лингвист, в чем раскаиваюсь и буду раскаиваться до смерти. Стану писать как литератор о лингвистике, стараясь понять, что получили мы от великого ученого [И. А. Бодуэн да Куртенэ] и чего я не смог получить” (89).

<sup>34</sup> Shklovsky’s study provides a schema for Conan Doyle’s stories which can be said to anticipate V. Propp’s morphology of the folktale. See Heda Jason’s “Precursors of Propp: Formalist Theories of Narrative in Early Russian Ethnopoetics” in *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 3 (1977), 471-516. Jason discusses Shklovsky’s approach to the Sherlock Holmes stories in comparison to V. Propp and the folklorist A. I. Nikiforov’s concept of the “function” (479). In the essay on Don Quixote he attributes an observation regarding Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* to “my pupil L. Lunts” (92). Another, more ironic, pedagogical suggestion appears in “The Structure of Fiction” in which he suggests: “в данном случае я предлагаю читателю сочинить и приставить к отрывку из Лесажа хотя бы описание ночной Севильи или ‘равнодушного неба’” (73).

<sup>35</sup> Carol Avin’s *Border Crossings: The West and Russian Identity in Soviet Literature* (University of California, 1983), treats the role of western literary models in the work of several Serapions—Marietta Shaginan, Konstantin Fedin, and Veniamin Kaverin.

Shaginian's *Mess-Mend* (1924-25), for example, was based on the genre of the Nat Pinkerton detective, and much of Veniamin Kaverin's early writing (e.g. *Masters and Apprentices* (1923)) was based on parodying the work of E. T. A Hoffman. This approach also characterizes Shklovsky's own quasi-fictional works from this period. His *Sentimental Journey* (1923) and *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love, or The Third Heloise* (1923) contain obvious references in their titles to Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Finer argues that *Zoo* also cross-references Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* (106). In his teaching, theory and literary practice Shklovsky was thus deeply engaged in the project of renewing the Russian literary tradition through the (frequently parodic) use of foreign models.

*Theory of Prose* is aimed at, as Shklovsky states, establishing literature's "internal laws." This approach does not assume that "literature" is a completed canon, yet it is not historically embedded either. These laws can be derived from the material Shklovsky has at hand—a broad selection of world literature, decontextualized and translated into Russian. This approach rests on the pragmatic approach to world literature that appears to have reigned in the Studio. It also reflects an understanding of world literature based on human universals; while for Gorky these qualities were expressed in his humanistic philosophy, Shklovsky sought them in the formal structure of literature and in the assumed relationship between structure and anthropological constants. In the remainder of this chapter I will outline the scholarly sources for Shklovsky's understanding of plot as an anthropological phenomenon based on universal psychic drives. Shklovsky's engagement with a utopian, socialist approach to world literature shaped his *Theory of Prose* by expanding his subject matter. The intellectual tradition that he drew upon to establish the theoretical principles of his book, however, was that of Russian folkloristics.

### Shklovsky and Veselovsky

A. N. Veselovsky's importance for literary scholars of the formalists' generation and beyond has been recently called an "open secret"; "for some, it's too obvious to comment on, whereas to most, it represents a long-forgotten chapter in the history of criticism" (Maslov 1-26). Scholarship on formalism has long acknowledged Veselovsky's importance. Victor Erlich devotes several pages to his work, writing that "Veselovsky's studies in narrative art, focusing on the collective literary tradition rather than on the 'creative will' of the individual artist, were bound to hold considerable appeal for the Formalist theoreticians" (239).<sup>36</sup> R. Wellek described Veselovsky as "one of the originators of Russian formalism" (1966: 280).<sup>37</sup> More recent scholarship has reassessed Veselovsky's legacy, seeking to more fully acknowledge the depth of his impact. Igor Shaitanov has focused on the continuities between Veselovsky's treatment of genre and subsequent work by M. Bakhtin and Iu. Tynianov. He concludes that, "without him

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<sup>36</sup> I would suggest that a correspondence between Veselovsky's and the formalists' turn away from the literary person had deeper roots in a paradigm for literary scholarship that was based largely on the study of linguistics, medieval texts and folklore (philology). I discuss this in Chapter Two.

<sup>37</sup> Wellek also focuses on Veselovsky's "anti-individualist" approach. His critique reiterates some of the criticisms that he leveled elsewhere at the Russian formalist and Czech structuralist movements more generally. He writes "Veselovsky worships objective facts and science so excessively that he cannot deal with aesthetic value. The central problem of criticism remains outside his ken. He transmitted an all-embracing universalism, an anti-individualistic, almost collective approach, a concern for literary evolution and its social causes to later Russian literary scholarship, but he also saddled it with a technological methodology that tries to drain literature of its aesthetic and this finally of its deepest human appeal" (280).

[Veselovsky], contemporary literary theory in Russia lacks its source, unity and continuity. No matter how distant the extremes to which Bakhtin and the formalists may have run, they were always aware that they worked within the field which bore the name given to it by Veselovsky – *historical poetics*” (2001: 441). Boris Maslov traces the formative influence of the Veselovskian paradigm on the achievements of Shklovsky, Propp and Bakhtin. He goes farther than Shaitanov, concluding that, were it not for “ideological and political causes,” Veselovsky may well have achieved a reputation as the “founding figure” of modern literary studies comparable to the roles assigned to Ferdinand de Saussure or Max Weber in the fields of linguistics or sociology (1-26).

The relationship between Shklovsky and Veselovsky is treated in foundational scholarship by Steiner and Erlich.<sup>38</sup> Steiner’s analysis represents a relatively canonical interpretation. He points out that Shklovsky’s “mechanistic formalism was in some respects a mirror image of Veselovsky’s poetics” in that Shklovsky reversed some of the latter’s key premises (1984: 53). To summarize, Veselovsky’s understanding of the history of literature is divided into “two factors: the passive artistic form and the active social content” (Ibid.). The static repertoire of poetic forms, what Veselovsky called *predanie*, is passed from generation to generation like language and is recombined in every literary work. The “engine of literary history” lies in socio-historical realm. As Veselovsky put it, his task is “to study how new life content, this element of freedom that rushes in with every new generation, fills old molds, those forms of necessity in which the entire previous development has been cast” (cited in Steiner 1984: 54-55). Shklovsky’s understanding of literature, based on the continual defamiliarization of old artistic forms, can be seen as a “reversal” of Veselovsky’s historical poetics. Shklovsky argues that new forms come about in an immanent process which serves to renew our perception of life; in other words, life does not ensure novelty in art, but art ensures novelty in our perception of life. Steiner writes, “He [Shklovsky] was certainly aware of the perils that this inverse parallelism posed to his own theorizing. ‘I am afraid of the negative lack of freedom’ he complained. ‘The negation of what others are doing ties me to them’” (1984: 53).

Steiner focuses in particular on one outcome that arises from stripping away the historical, extra-literary component of Veselovsky’s theory in favor of a self-perpetuating immanent evolution of literary forms. Steiner points out that Shklovsky’s approach raises the question as to “whether this model, which treats literary history as an ‘eternal return’ of the same artistic forms, does not preclude the possibility of actual developmental novelty” (1984: 57). That Shklovsky’s reinterpretation of Veselovsky does indeed lead to this impasse is suggested by a remark Shklovsky himself made in which he attributes this problem to Veselovsky’s original theory. He writes, “в основе теории заимствования лежала идея, встречающаяся в различных теориях наследования, утверждавшая, что история – это тасовка колоды карт и вечное повторение” (1947: 178) (“At the basis of the theory of borrowing lay the idea, found in various theories of inheritance, which asserts that history is a shuffling of a deck of cards and eternal repetition”). This statement effaces the difference, outlined by Steiner, between Veselovsky’s historical poetics and his own theory of prose. In this later article Shklovsky banishes Veselovsky’s “new life content” from the latter’s original conception just as he had when articulating his own theory of literature almost thirty years earlier. The understanding of poetic forms as a static linguistic fund, a “deck of cards,” which authors continually reshuffle was in fact the operative understanding of literature that underlies much of Shklovsky’s *Theory*

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<sup>38</sup> Sheldon also dedicated a section of his dissertation, *Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky: Literary Theory and Practice, 1914-1930*, to Shklovsky’s interpretation and use of Veselovsky’s ideas.

*of Prose*. I will return to discuss the sources and repercussions of this idea in more detail in the context of Shklovsky's folklorization of literature.

There is more to be said, however, about Shklovsky's relationship to Veselovsky's "historical poetics." As Steiner and others rightly point out, Shklovsky "was brought up on Veselovsky's system" and "worked within the field" he established.<sup>39</sup> Shklovsky's theory of prose emerges in dialog with Veselovsky's understanding of the *motif* as the basic unit of plot structure. This is clearest in the essay "Plot construction" which can be seen as the theoretical cornerstone of Shklovsky's theory of narrative structure. His more frequently cited essay, "Art as Device," outlines Shklovsky's understanding of literature and art more generally; "Plot construction," placed second in *Theory of Prose* after "Art as Device," outlines his theory of plot structure. The essay reveals that Shklovsky retained two central premises from Veselovsky: (1) folklore and high, written literature are integrated components of a single phenomenon in which folklore represents an earlier stage of development, (2) universal literary devices (e.g. "*motifs*," or tropes) can be isolated on the basis of folkloric material as the most basic constitutive elements of literature.<sup>40</sup> These ideas furnish Shklovsky with a basis for understanding literature as a universal phenomenon, and they set the stage for the folklorizing tendency of Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*.

In "Plot construction" Shklovsky's theory of prose is framed as a new answer to a central question that Veselovsky's work on the "Poetics of Plot" ["Poetika siuzhetov"] sought to explain. The fact that Shklovsky situates his work as an answer to a question posed by earlier authorities indicates that his work remained within their intellectual paradigm. The question can be stated: *why are tales with similar plots found all over the world?* This question had shaped folkloristic research in the second half of the nineteenth century, resulting in several competing theories. The development of two central theories in response to this question corresponds, as Iu. Sokolov pointed out, with the expansion of Western knowledge of world cultures. The first major theory emerged in 1859, following the extension of trade to and colonization of the Middle East in the 1850s. The discovery of correspondences between the literary traditions of this region and those of Europe were explained by the "theory of borrowing," attributed to the German scholar and Orientalist Theodor Benfey (1809-1881).<sup>41</sup> This theory, which would have a long-lasting impact on folkloristics, sought to establish the routes (often following avenues of trade) by which a variety of legends traveled from India via the Mediterranean to Europe.<sup>42</sup> This theory was challenged in the 1870s, however, with the expansion of Western knowledge about increasing far-flung peoples and their folklore. Following the emergence of striking coincidences in the folklore of unrelated cultures, not easily explained by routes of cultural transfer, the "theory of spontaneous generation of subjects" was proposed. This theory was also called "anthropological theory," and was based on the work of the English anthropologist Edward B.

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<sup>39</sup> Shklovsky "reverses" Veselovsky's criteria, which he was able to do, Steiner writes, because "he was brought up on Veselovsky's system and shared some of its postulates. While subverting some of Veselovsky's principles, Shklovsky covertly borrowed others from the nineteenth-century philologist" (1984: 53).

<sup>40</sup> As integrated subspecies of a single phenomenon, folklore and literature belong to the category of "verbal art" [slovesnost']. I discuss this concept in detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>41</sup> Benfey's seminal contribution was his German translation of the collection of Hindu tales, the *Panchatantra*, with an introduction in which he "pointed out the striking resemblance of the Sanskrit (Hindu) tales to the European and to the tales of other non-European peoples. Resemblance of subject, in Benfey's opinion, is caused not by the relationship of peoples, but by the cultural-historical connections between them, . . . by borrowing" (Sokolov 78).

<sup>42</sup> In Russia, leading scholars whom Iu. Sokolov identifies as proponents of Benfey's traveling theory are A. N. Pypin, V. V. Stasov, as well as A. N. Veselovsky (81-85).

Tylor (1832-1917) and his follower Andrew Lang (1844-1912).<sup>43</sup> This approach found an answer to the above question in the “essential community of human nature, mind and thought, and in the identity of the paths of development of human culture” (Sokolov 95). Tylor’s work focused on the study of primitive culture and the elucidation of universal elemental religious concepts based on “animism”—the attribution of human characteristics to man’s surroundings.

Veselovsky drew on both the “theory of borrowing” as well as “anthropological” theory in his “historical poetics.” His approach sought to provide a methodology for studying world literature and, as such, the foundations for his approach lay in the universal constants of poetic form. These were based on his translation of Tylor’s animistic theory into poetic terms. In the opening to his notes on the “Poetics of plots,” Veselovsky states:

Задача исторической поэтики, как она мне представляется, --определить роль и границы предания в процессе личного творчества. Это предание, насколько оно касается элементов стиля и ритмики, образности и схематизма простейших поэтических форм, служило когда-то естественным выражением собирательной психики и соответствующих ей бытовых условий на первых порах человеческого общежития. *Одномерность этой психики и этих условий объясняет одномерность их поэтического выражения у народностей, никогда не приходивших в соприкосновение друг с другом* (493, italics added).

The task of historical poetics, as it appears to me, is to determine the role and the boundaries of tradition [predanie] in the process of personal creation. This tradition [predanie], in as much as it concerns elements of style and rhythm, the figurativeness and schematism of the simplest poetic forms, served at one time as a natural expression of the collective psyche and the corresponding conditions of life at the first stages of human communal life. *The one-dimensionality of that psyche and conditions explain the one-dimensionality of its poetic expression among peoples who have never come into contact with each other* (Italics added).

*Predanie* for Veselovsky meant what he called elsewhere a “stylistic lexicon” [stilisticheskii slovar’], or an inherited repertoire of tropes: “комплексе типических образов-символов, мотивов, оборотов, параллелей и сравнений” (498) (a complex of typical images-symbols, motifs, turns of phrase, parallels and comparisons). Byford, who identifies *predanie* as “one of the key concepts in Veselovsky’s ‘historical poetics,’” summarizes that “what he most frequently meant by it was a more or less unconscious, deeply ingrained, memorized store of poetic forms, motifs, symbolic meanings, and plots . . . He nearly always modeled *predanie* on oral, loose forms of tradition, such as those found in folklore” (2005: 126).

On the level of *predanie*, literature is universal. In Veselovsky’s study, “Psychological parallelism and its forms in the reflection of poetic style” [“Psikhologicheskii parallelizm i ego formy v otrazheniakh stilia”], he describes how parallelism, the core and origin of poetic

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<sup>43</sup> Tylor’s major contribution was his book *Primitive Culture* (London, 1871). Sokolov describes the book: “On the foundation of the vast amount of material which he collected on the mode of life, views and creative work of the most diverse peoples of the world, Tylor came to the conclusion that all peoples reveal a great resemblance in their mode of life, customs, and their creation of religious and poetic concepts” (94-95). For a thorough treatment of this book see Joan Leopold. *Culture in Comparative and Evolutionary Perspective: E. B. Tylor and the Making of Primitive Culture*. Berlin: Reimer, 1980.

language, is a product of man's basic impulse to see parallels between human attributes and those of his environment. Universal psychological parallelisms thus build on animistic thought. In his work on the "Poetics of plots," Veselovsky argues that the most basic element of prose—the *motif*—belongs to this class of phenomena. It is universal and is based on the primitive psyche: "Под *мотивом*," he writes "я разумею формулу, отвечавшую на первых порах общественности на вопросы, которые природа всюду ставила человеку" (494) ("By *motif* I mean a formula answering questions which nature everywhere posed to man in the first stages of social life").

Veselovsky differentiates between the *motif*, an element of *predanie*, and the plot [siuzhet] which is a higher level of organization: "под сюжетом я разумею тему, в которой снуются разные положения-мотивы" ("by *plot* I mean a theme into which different situations-motifs are clustered"). He provides the following example of how this can occur:

Простейший род мотива может быть выражен формулой  $a + b$ : злая старуха не любит красавицу -- и задает ей опасную для жизни задачу. Каждая часть формулы способна видоизмениться, особенно подлжит приращению  $b$ ; задач может быть две, три (любимое народное число) и более; по пути богатыря будет встреча, но их может быть и несколько. *Так мотив вырос в сюжет, как формула лирического стиля, построенная на параллелизме, может приращаться, развивая тот или другой из своих членов* (495, italics added).

The simplest type of motif can be expressed through the formula  $a + b$ : an evil old woman dislikes a beautiful girl and assigns her a dangerous task. Every part of the formula is capable of modification,  $b$  in particular is subject to augmentation; there may be two, three (a favorite folk number) tasks or more; the epic hero meets someone on his path, but he may meet several people. *Thus the motif grows into a plot [siuzhet] in the way that a formula of lyric style, based on a parallelism, can expand, developing one or another of its parts* (italics added).

Veselovsky grants that identical simple plots may be found the world over, but more complex plots, of the type " $(b(a + bb^1b^2 \text{ etc.}))$ ," for example, if found in two different locations, must be explained by the "theory of borrowing."<sup>44</sup> Veselovsky's understanding of plot, which Shklovsky makes his point of departure, can thus be seen as a two-part argument. The first treats the *motif* as an elemental universal poetic element based on Tylor's "anthropological theory." The second, which describes the plot (*siuzhet*) as a string of *motifs*, refers to Benfey's "theory of borrowing" to explain the common occurrence of more complex plots.

In the opening of "Plot construction" Shklovsky begins by citing Veselovsky's definitions of *motif* and *siuzhet* from his "Poetics of plots." He then intercedes, presenting his own understanding of why it is that complex plots may be found in two far-flung places. When we first hear Shklovsky's voice, it is to say:

Но совпадение сюжетов встречается и там, где нельзя предположить заимствования, например: сказка североамериканских индейцев о том, как птицы выбирали себе царя и выбранной при помощи хитрости оказалась самая маленькая,

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<sup>44</sup> On Veselovsky's relationship to Benfey's scholarship see the commentary in A. N. Veselovskii. *Istoricheskaia poetika*. Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1989, 401-402.

весьма сходна с европейской сказкой на ту же тему; так же сходна одна занзибарская сказка со сказкой Гримма № 15. Особенно замечательна потанинская параллель между историей Бата (Битью) и жены Анту (египетская повесть о двух братьях) и тюркской сказкой об Идыге. Отмечаю, что промежуток между записями этих двух сказок – около четырех тысяч лет” (26).

But the coincidence of plot structures may be encountered even where there is no question of borrowing; for example, the American Indian legend of how the birds chose for themselves a king, with the smallest bird managing to win the honor through sheer cunning, is remarkably similar to a European legend on the same subject. Similarly, a certain folktale from Zanzibar resembles Grimm’s folktale no. 15. Especially remarkable is the Potanian parallel between the story of Bat and his wife Anupa (the Egyptian tale of two brothers) and the Turkic tale of Idiga. I would like to point out that an interval of four thousand years separates these two folktales (16-17 translation modified).

Having thus provided grounds to refute Veselovsky’s *second* argument, he concludes, “Подвожу итоги. Случайные совпадения невозможны. Совпадения объясняются только существованием *особых законов сюжетообразования*. Даже допущение заимствований не объясняет существования одинаковых сказок на расстоянии тысяч лет и десятков тысяч верст” (1929: 27 italics added) (“To sum up: fortuitous coincidences are impossible. Coincidences can be explained only by the existence of *special laws of plot formation*. Even the admission of borrowings does not explain the existence of identical stories separated by thousands of years and tens of thousands of miles” (1990: 17 italics added)). Shklovsky’s postulate of the existence of “special laws of plot formation” thus rests on assumptions that he shares with Veselovsky: that the same complex plots can be found all over the world, and that this, at least at the most elemental level, results from the universality of the basic units of literature. Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*, like Veselovsky’s “historical poetics,” rests on the assumption that these units reflect basic aspects of the human psyche.<sup>45</sup>

Shklovsky’s adherence to Veselovsky’s understanding of the *motif* is bound up with his acceptance of Veselovsky’s view of the relationship between folklore and high literature—that is, that folklore is relevant for the study of high literature in that it represents an earlier stage of literature. This was a central tenet that defined Veselovsky’s “historical poetics” as a method distinct from existing models of Western European literary scholarship. As early as 1870, in an introductory lecture to the proposed course of study in the newly-founded department of General History of Literature, Veselovsky positioned his work in opposition to the prevailing tendency in German and French scholarship which focused on the “great men” of literary history such as Petrarch, Cervantes or Dante. Rather than focus on such figures in isolation, he advocated an approach based on the understanding that literature grows out of, and is deeply intertwined with, folklore.<sup>46</sup> Veselovsky wrote that “the science of folklore can be isolated,” but its *subject matter* is deeply intertwined with the study of literary history:

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<sup>45</sup> Veselovsky allows for this in his discussion of *motif* and *siuzhet*, although only to a limited degree: “можно допустить, что, совершаясь самостоятельно, развитие от мотива к сюжету могло дать там и здесь одинаковые результаты, то есть что могли явиться, независимо; друг от друга, сходные сюжеты как естественная эволюция сходных мотивов” (495).

<sup>46</sup> In his 1870 address, Veselovsky, who refers approvingly to Herder’s work on folk song (*Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, 1778-79), also champions “modern scholarship” which “has taken the liberty of looking into those masses who up to this time have stood mute behind these heroes; it has detected life and movement which were

Popular poetry—the main object of investigation of folklorists—is also the first phase of all poetic and literary development, which is subject to investigation in the comparative history of literature. In practice it is not always possible to separate one field from the other, in view of *certain questions which arise in the field of poetics and can be settled only on the ground of popular poetry* (cited in Sokolov 103, italics added).

These types of questions loomed large in Veselovsky's "historical poetics," in which he devoted much of his attentions to the original stages of poetic development. His folkloristic /anthropological center of gravity is manifest, for example, in the overall organization of his "Three Chapters from Historical poetics" [Tri glavy iz istoricheskoi poetiki], the "central and best known part of his published texts" (Shaitanov 2001: 438). Veselovsky begins with the preliterate period in which the origins of poetry emerged through "collective creation" and "syncretic ritual." Veselovsky described this stage as a "protoplasm" in which artistic forms and genres, even the voice of the individual poet, were still undifferentiated.<sup>47</sup> The three chapters are arranged chronologically: the first "The syncretism of the oldest poetry and the beginning of the differentiation of poetic genres" ["Sinkretizm drevneishei poezii i nachala differentsiatsii poeticheskikh rodov"] is 117 pages, while the second "From the singer to the poet. The separation of the concept of poetry" ["Ot pevtsa k poetu. Vydelenie poniatii poezii"] and last chapter, "The language of poetry and language of prose" ["Iazyk poezii i iazyk prozy"] are 30 and 33 pages respectively. The emphasis on the earlier stages of his historical project evident here is characteristic of his *Historical poetics* as a whole.

Shklovsky retained Veselovsky's understanding that folklore precedes literature and that there is no strict distinction between the two forms of creativity. This accounts for the prevalence of folkloric examples in Shklovsky's early essays such as "The resurrection of the word" ["Voskreshenie slova"] (1914), and "Poetry and transrational language" ["O poezii i zaumnom iazyke"] (1916) in which he cites folk epithets and incantations from studies by A. A. Potebnia and Veselovsky as well as from collections of folklore.<sup>48</sup> In the first three theoretical essays ("Art as Device," "Plot construction" and "The Structure of Fiction") that open his *Theory of Prose* Shklovsky refers to folkloric material more frequently than he does to works of "high" literature. Counting the instances where Shklovsky cites or refers to specific textual examples in these three essays, we find 74 citations of folklore as opposed to 48 of "high," written literature.<sup>49</sup> If we

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undiscernible to the naked eye, like everything that takes place in too great dimensions of space and time. It was necessary to seek out the hidden springs of the historical process here, and, along with a lowering of historical research to more ordinary materials, the center of gravity was transferred to the life of the people" (1967: 35). As N. I. Tolstoi states in his article on Veselovsky and his legacy, "исследователя привлекли не имя и личность писателя, а наличие в его произведении народного начала" (571).

<sup>47</sup> Wellek summarizes this aspect of Veselovsky's approach: "Veselovsky assumed an original syncretism of genres: not a mixture but rather an undifferentiated original oral poetry which he construed just as the Indo-European philologists construed the supposed parent language from which all 'Aryan' languages are descended. [...] Poetic language is assumed to have been created only in these prehistoric times. It even now reflects the conceptions of primitive man: animism, myth, rituals, ceremonies, etc. Thus the 'psychological parallelism' between man and nature in much popular lyrical poetry reflects an original, animistic view of the world" (1966: 279).

<sup>48</sup> The first essay "The Resurrection of the Word" draws on Potebnia and Veselovsky's work on "constant epithets" [postoiannye epitety] in folklore. "Poetry and Transrational Language" argues that the futurists' poetic experiments made self-evident a broader tendency manifest in children's speech and in folkloric incantations.

<sup>49</sup> I counted references to old or medieval literature as "high" literature, and excluded (minimal) references to the Bible or Ancient Greek literature and myth from either category. Needless to say the numbers arrived at above are only meant to represent a rough sense of where the bulk of Shklovsky's research lay. Certain works, such as the *One*

include the appendices to “Plot construction” in this tally then the number of folkloric examples jumps to 105. Shklovsky’s basis in folklore theory is also evident from the list of references cited in *Theory of Prose*; of 49 works cited, 22 are collections of folklore per se. This number does not include works by Veselovsky or Potebnia, which demonstrably furnished Shklovsky with an abundance of folkloric examples. The numbers suggest that Shklovsky sought to establish proof the universality of a literary phenomenon based largely on folkloric as opposed to “high” literary examples. In “Art as Device,” for instance, although Shklovsky’s quotes from Tolstoy stand out for their sheer length, he cites Tolstoy only five times. In comparison, Shklovsky provides eighteen different concrete examples from folkloric works in this essay. It is thus not surprising that Jakobson, when referring to Shklovsky’s early work in a lecture on formalism in 1935, described it in passing as Shklovsky’s “folkloristic explorations” [“folkloristické úvahy”] (14).<sup>50</sup>

Veselovsky’s understanding of his historical project meant that he started with folklore and posited that later, modern works, once seen in historical perspective, would “fall in line” with the patterns now recognizable in the ancient past: “их линии [of modern literature] сольются с теми, которые открываются нам теперь, когда мы оглянемся на далекое поэтическое прошлое,--и явления схематизма и повторяемости водворятся на всем протяжении” (494) (“its lines [of modern literature] will converge with those which reveal themselves to us now when we look at the ancient poetic past,--and the evidence of schematism and repetition will emerge along the entire length”).<sup>51</sup> Veselovsky’s ambitious project was commonly understood to have been left unfinished. This is not only because his writings on “historical poetics” lack a clearly defined authorial version, but also because the application of his method to more contemporary literature, understood to be the final goal of the project, was unrealized. Shklovsky, who dismissed Veselovsky’s historical considerations in favor of a maximally universalist argument, attempts to reveal the “schematism” that Veselovsky posits by directly juxtaposing folklore and modern, “high” literature.<sup>52</sup> Yet Shklovsky does not entirely do away with a sense of chronology. He still assumes that folklore represents a more primitive “essential” stage in the sense that folklore was understood to be a cultural “survival” left over from an earlier state of civilization.<sup>53</sup> This assumption emerges from the way in which Shklovsky

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*Thousand and One Nights* can arguably be placed in either category (I counted this as “folklore” based on its oral poetics and anonymous origins). See Rana Kabbani’s *Europe’s Myths of Orient*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 24. The bulk of the “folklore” citations, however, refer to works that are generally accepted as such (e.g. riddles [zagadki], tales [skazki], epic songs [byliny], folk songs, etc.).

<sup>50</sup> Despite the preponderance of folkloric examples in his writings, Shklovsky’s work has not generally been considered in the context of Russian folkloristics. One exception is Heda Jason “Precursors of Propp: Formalist Theories of Narrative in Early Russian Ethnopoetics” in *PTL* (1977), 471-516.

<sup>51</sup> The full sentence reads: “Современная повествовательная литература с ее сложной сюжетностью и фотографическим воспроизведением действительности по-видимому устраняет самую возможность подобного вопроса [the treatment of plot structure as an element of *predanie* - JM]; но когда для будущих поколений она очутится в такой же далекой перспективе, как для нас древность, от доисторической до средневековой, когда синтез времени, этого великого упростиеля, пройдя по сложности явлений, сократит их до величины точек, уходящих вглубь, их линии сольются с теми, которые открываются нам теперь, когда мы оглянемся на далекое поэтическое прошлое,--и явления схематизма и повторяемости водворятся на всем протяжении” (494). Shklovsky makes a similar statement in arguing that folkloric (collective) creativity is essentially the same as “personal” creativity. We cannot see essential commonalities between folklore and literature, he suggests, because of “the difficulty of seeing the present day in general” (2005: 44).

<sup>52</sup> I discuss the formalists’ tendency to compare works from widely varying periods and traditions in Chapter Two.

<sup>53</sup> The concept of survivals is attributed to by E. B. Tylor. His articulation of this influential concept drew on his assumption of universal psychic unity. Folk religion, or beliefs that seemed “absurd” to civilized man, were survivals from an earlier state in which they had previously a “practical intention” (Stocking 162). This meant,

uses folklore. He writes, for example: “*no существу своему искусство внеэмоционально. Вспомните, как в сказках сажают людей в бочку, утыканную гвоздями, и потом скатывают ее в море*” (192 italics added) (“*by its very essence, art is without emotion. Recall, if you will, that in fairy tales people are shoved into a barrel bristling with nails, only to be rolled down to the sea*” (159 italics added)).<sup>54</sup> Folklore is called upon to support arguments about the essence of literature based on the assumption that it is the earliest, most universal, and therefore most authoritative, example. The understanding that folklore is the “first phase of all poetic development” had a decisive impact on Veselovsky’s, and subsequently Shklovsky’s, understanding of the *motif* as the basic element of literary plots.

### Psychological Parallelism and the Erotic Riddle

In his act of stripping away the historical, external “engine” that Veselovsky relied on for literary evolution, Shklovsky retains an important element of the ahistorical, anthropological side of his predecessor’s poetics particularly as it was outlined in “Psychological parallelism.” To see this it is useful to recognize that Veselovsky presents two understandings of *motif* in his “Poetics of plots.” The first, cited above, suggests that the *motif* is a literary formula akin to a trope such as parallelism. The second, which Veselovsky spent more time developing, interprets the *motif* in ethnographic terms. Shklovsky, who refers to Veselovsky’s work as the “ethnographic school,” stresses the latter and he cites this ethnographic definition in order to reject it.<sup>55</sup> It is, however, relatively clear that Shklovsky’s approach follows the first definition of *motif*, a definition he does not cite. This is the suggestion that the *motif* can be a formula e.g. “an evil old woman dislikes a beautiful girl—and assigns her a dangerous task,” and that it can grow into a plot by adding more “tasks,” in the way that “a formula of lyric style, built on a parallelism, can expand, developing one or the other of its parts” (Veselovsky 495). This argument is central to Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*, which can be said to combine elements of Veselovsky’s ideas on “Psychological parallelism” with those suggested in “Poetics of plots.” This is indicated by the terms in which Shklovsky refers to his own work. Referring to “Plot construction,” he writes: “об остранении в психологическом параллелизме я пишу в своей статье о сюжетосложении” (1929: 20) (“I write about defamiliarization in psychological parallelism in

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Stockton writes, that “the European peasantry now served as a crucial link between modern civilized and primitive savage man. In good uniformitarian fashion, survivals united the causal processes of present with those of the past” (163).

<sup>54</sup> Shklovsky continues: “In “Tom Thumb” [“Mal’chik s pal’chik”] a cannibal cuts off the heads of his daughters, and the children who listen rapturously to every detail of this legend never let you skip over this detail in the telling and retelling of the story” (159 translation amended). Shklovsky provides yet another example from “folkloric dance songs” before concluding, “In art blood is not bloody. No, it just rhymes with ‘flood’” [Krov’ v iskusstve ne krovava, ona rifmuetsiia s ‘liubov’] – an epigrammatic line that has been frequently quoted. Shklovsky’s argument here relies on an understanding of the “essence” of art as revealed in folklore and in children’s behavior, which he interprets to be “without emotion.” The appeal to folklore and child psychology to get at the “essence” of narrative is widespread. Peter Brooks, for instance, begins his *Reading for the Plot* with the statement that “the narrative impulse is as old as our oldest literature: myth and folktale appear to be stories we recount in order to explain and understand where no other form of explanation will work. The desire and the competence to tell stories also reach back to an early stage in the individual’s development, to about the age of three (1984: 3).

<sup>55</sup> Shklovsky writes “the ethnographic theory is flawed to its very core. According to this theory, story motif-situations constitute recollections of relationships that have actually existed in reality. So, for example, the presence of incest in certain stories attests to a primitive ‘hetaerism.’ Similarly, the presence of helpful beasts attests to traces of totemism...” (1990: 18).

my article on plot construction”). Shklovsky’s attack on Veselovsky’s ethnographic interpretation of the *motif* thus appears to be an attempt to obscure the extent to which he actually found this idea useful.

Shklovsky, like Veselovsky, places parallelism at the center of his understanding of poetic (and literary) form. As I have mentioned, Veselovsky understood “psychological parallelisms” to reflect the anthropological origins of poetry. Veselovsky writes:

Мы невольно переносим на природу наше самоощущение жизни, выражающееся в движении, в проявлении силы, направляемой волей; в тех явлениях или объектах, в которых замечалось движение, подозревались когда-то признаки энергии, воли, жизни. Это мирозерцание мы называем анимистическим; в приложении к поэтическому стилю, и не к нему одному, вернее будет говорить о *параллелизме* (125).

We involuntarily transfer onto nature our self-perceptions of life which manifest themselves in movement, in the display of strength, or the application of will; onto those phenomena or objects in which we notice movement, in which we discern indications of energy, will or life. We call this worldview animistic; in application to poetic style, and not to it alone, we speak rather of *parallelism*.<sup>56</sup>

Eschewing the ethnographic element of Veselovsky’s work, Shklovsky replaces animism with defamiliarization. This involves a significant departure from Veselovsky’s approach. The former is a juxtaposition between the human and the natural. The latter is defined as the use of juxtaposition in a way that surprises or captivates the reader. While Shklovsky’s quasi-philosophical descriptions of defamiliarization are quoted more frequently, Shklovsky also defines this principle in tropological terms. In these moments, defamiliarization is defined as the “goal of parallelism”: “целью параллелизма, как и вообще целью образности, является перенесение предмета из его обычного восприятия в сферу нового восприятия, т.-е. своеобразное семантическое изменение” (1929: 20) (“The purpose of parallelism is the same as that of imagery in general, that is, the transfer of an object from its customary sphere of perception to a new one; that is, a *sui generis* semantic change” (1990: 12 translation modified)).<sup>57</sup> This semantic shift, as Shklovsky writes in “Plot Construction,” is the definition of art:

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<sup>56</sup> Byford paraphrases and interprets Veselovsky’s definition of parallelism as follows: “Veselovsky argued that a ‘parallelism’ was neither an ‘identification’ (*otozhestvlenie*), which would imply a destruction of the boundary that separated man from nature in animist representation, nor a ‘comparison’ (*sravnenie*), which would imply that the boundary had a definite and clear outline, and that man had realized a self-conscious, i.e. autonomous, status in relation to nature. A ‘parallelism’ was rather a ‘juxtaposition’ (*sopostavlenie*) of the human and the natural in both representational and psychological terms” (2005: 125).

<sup>57</sup> The most frequently cited definition of defamiliarization comes from “Art as Device”: “Автоматизация съедает вещи, платье, мебель, жену и страх войны. [...] И вот для того, чтобы вернуть ощущение жизни, почувствовать вещи, для того, чтобы делать камень каменным, существует то, что называется искусством. Целью искусства является дать ощущение вещи, как видение, а не как узнавание” (1929: 13) (“Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war. [...] And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead to a knowledge of things through the organ of sight instead of recognition” (1990: 5-6)).

Для того, чтобы сделать предмет фактом искусства, нужно извлечь его из числа фактов жизни. Для этого нужно, прежде всего, ‘расшевелить вещь,’ как Иван Грозный „перебирал“ людишек. *Нужно вырвать вещь из ряда привычных ассоциаций, в которых она находится.* Нужно повернуть вещь, как полено в огне (1929: 79 italics added).

In order to transform an object into a fact of life, it is necessary first to withdraw it from the domain of life. To do this, we must first and foremost ‘shake up the object,’ as Ivan the Terrible sorted his henchmen. *We must extricate a thing from the cluster of associations in which it is bound.* It is necessary to turn over the object as one would turn a log on the fire” (1990: 61 italics added).

The means to “make the stone feel stony,” as Shklovsky famously put it, lie in one’s use of parallels or metaphors to describe objects in a novel way. The move from animism to artistry (defamiliarization), while based on the same linguistic device, is one with a far-reaching consequences for the conception of poetic language. In the first case, the basis of literature is rooted in primitive man’s attempt to “logically” explain the world. Tylor described animistic religion as a “philosophic system of nature” or even a “savage biology.” It represented the attempt to find causal explanations for natural phenomena according to capacities of human thought at a “rudimentary stage” (371, 373, 379). Shklovsky’s approach rejects the suggestion that poetry is related to primitive *logic* in favor of the use of language in a non-utilitarian manner, that is, as we will see, largely for the sake of *pleasure*.

There is one form of parallelism that is particularly important for Shklovsky’s definition of art and his theory of plot—the riddle. Shklovsky cites a number of (erotic) riddles in “Art as Device” and he concludes that “остранение . . . основа и единственный смысл всех загадок. Каждая загадка представляет собой или рассказывание о предмете словами, его определяющими и рисующими, но, обычно, при рассказывании о нем не применяющимися (1929: 19) (defamiliarization is [...] the foundation of all riddles. Every riddle either defines and illustrates its subject in words which seem inappropriate during the telling of it” (1990: 11)). This definition is close to the one we find in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which states that “the essence of a riddle is to express true facts under impossible combinations (41).<sup>58</sup> In his “Psychological parallelism” Veselovsky points out the riddle is a type of “parallelism” in which one branch of the parallel has been “silenced” (184).<sup>59</sup> Veselovsky highlights parallelisms which juxtapose humans and plants. The latter, just like people, “рождались и отцветали, зеленели и клонились от силы ветра” (125) (“were born and faded, grew and bent over in the

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<sup>58</sup> On Shklovsky’s use of Aristotle’s *Poetics* see Aage Hansen-Love, *Russkii Formalizm: Metodologicheskaia rekonstruktsiia razvitiia na osnove printsipa ostraneniia*. Moscow (2001), 17-20. Veselovsky also quotes Aristotle’s definition of the riddle in his “Psychological parallelism.” Alan Dundes and Robert Georges define the riddle: “as a traditional verbal expression which contains one or more descriptive elements, a pair of which may be in opposition; the referent of the elements is to be guessed. Two general categories of riddles are (1) non-oppositional, in which there is no contradiction to be found in one or more descriptive elements, and (2) oppositional, in which at least one pair of descriptive elements is in contradiction. The nonoppositional riddles may be literal or metaphorical, but in either case there is no apparent contradiction involved. Oppositional riddles are almost always metaphorical or a combination of metaphorical and literal descriptions” (116).

<sup>59</sup> The full quote reads: “известный тип загадки покоится на одночленном параллелизме, причем образы сознательно умолчанного члена параллели, который приходится угадать, переносятся порой на тот, который и составляет загадку” (183).

wind”). Among his examples we find the following parallelism: “зеленая березонька, чему белая, не зелена? / Красная дзевочка, чему смутна, не весела?” (136) (“Green little birch, why are you white not green? / Pretty little girl, why are you sad, not gay?”). Riddle collections also feature similar juxtapositions, e.g., between man and tree: “In spring I am gay,/In handsome array;/In summer more clothing I wear;/When colder it grows,/I fling off my clothes,/And in winter I quite naked appear” (*A tree*) (Cited in Pepicello 153-154). Or “What tree grows without roots?” (*Human being*) (Ibid.). The parallelisms that Veselovsky cites, and that Shklovsky occasionally quotes from Veselovsky (e.g. “Катилось яблычка с замостья, / Просилась Катичка с застолья”) can be restated as a riddle only by going back to the original logical or psychological comparison that the parallelism or the riddle is based on; for example the parallel “man–tree.”<sup>60</sup> Shklovsky, who understands the riddle as a type of parallelism, establishes his theory of art and narrative more on the basic mental act of comparing and juxtaposing than on the formal properties of these tropes.

Shklovsky returns to the riddle in several of the subsequent essays in *Theory of Prose*. In his essay on Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* and the genre of the mystery novel, Shklovsky defines the riddle as a form of parallelism, but builds on Veselovsky’s claim, saying: “загадка не просто параллелизм с выпущенной второй частью параллели, а игра, с возможностью провести несколько параллелей” (1929: 143 italics in original) (“a riddle is not merely a parallelism, one part of which has been omitted. Rather, it plays with the possibility of establishing a number of parallel structures” (1990: 117)). For Shklovsky, the riddle is key in that it is a (psychological) parallelism, meaning that it is connected to the basic operations of the human psyche. And, at the same time, it is a playful instance of parallelism, one that suggests a “primitive” impulse not towards logical explanation, but towards defamiliarization or “play” with the meanings of words. The riddle is privileged in *Theory of Prose* for its role in defamiliarizing objects and also for its capacity to provide impetus for narrative. The riddle poses a *question* to be answered, which both Shklovsky and Veselovsky understand to be fundamental to the creation of prose narrative.<sup>61</sup> In his “Plot construction” Shklovsky suggests that folktales which initiate a plot with the posing of a riddle, represent the “simplest” means of engendering narrative: “загадывание загадок взято как наиболее простой способ создать безвыходное положение” (46) (“the posing of riddles serves as the simplest means of creating a hopeless situation” (34)). As we have seen, Shklovsky understands the “essence” of the riddle to be defamiliarization. By suggesting this type of tale is prototypical for narrative, Shklovsky, like Veselovsky, suggests that narrative structure [siuzhet] can be said to grow out of parallelism. In the riddle-based folktale, the riddle provides the framework for expanding a parallelism into a plot. Shklovsky sees the riddle as a prototype for more complex narrative structures as well.

Shklovsky begins his chapter, “The Mystery Novel” [“Roman tain”] with a discussion of erotic riddles. He argues that, like the erotic riddle, the mysteries in Dickens’ novel are based on a play between a “true” and a “false” solution. The false solution, which the mystery novel hints at, creates a suspicion of something “far more horrible than [what] we actually find” (122). Shklovsky reminds us that “этот прием . . . каноничный для русских народных загадок типа

<sup>60</sup> This example appears on page 135 in Veselovsky’s “Psikhologicheskii parallelizm” and on page 62 in *Theory of Prose*. Another parallelism Shklovsky cites from Veselovsky is “Солнце не знало, где его покой,/ Месяц не знал, где его сила”; again, it would be difficult to transform this into a riddle without first returning to the basic “psychological” parallelism it is based on (35).

<sup>61</sup> Veselovsky foregrounds questions as the origin of narrative: “Под *мотивом* я разумею формулу, отвечавшую на первых порах общественности на *вопросы*, которые природа всюду ставила человеку” (484 italics added).

‘Висит, болтается, всякий за него хватается’, разгадка – ‘Полотенце’” (150) (“this device. . . is canonical for Russian folk riddles of this type: ‘It hangs, swings back and forth. Everyone tries to get his hands on it.’ The solution: ‘It’s a towel’” (123)). Shklovsky argues that this “play” between several answers to a riddle is the basic organizing unit of the novel. In the mystery novel “ложная разгадка--истинная разгадка и составляет технику организации тайны; момент перехода от одной разгадки к другой есть момент развязки. Взаимоотношение частей, то же как в сюжетах, развернутых из каламбура” (150) (“the false solution is a true solution and provides the technique of organizing the mystery. The moment of transition from one solution to another is the denouement. The interrelationship of the parts composing the mystery is similar to that in plots founded on puns” (123)).<sup>62</sup> Shklovsky breaks Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* down into a series of “riddles,” each of which plays out over the course of the novel in a variety of tangential plots.

Shklovsky’s use of the riddle as his core trope for understanding defamiliarization and narrative structure allows us to see how these two concepts are related in *Theory of Prose*. His suggestion that the riddle is the prototypical device of defamiliarization foregrounds the role of play and pleasure as the psychological corollaries to the human tendency to think in parallelisms. His use of the riddle to explain longer narratives suggests that the novel is the complication and protraction of the same psychological impulse: “загадка дает возможность педалировать изложение, остранить его, напрячь внимание читателя” (1929: 169) (“the riddle makes it possible for the writer to manipulate the exposition, to defamiliarize it, to capture the reader’s attention” (1990: 140)). The pleasure that comes from playing with “double meanings” is the same psychic impulse that compels the reader to keep reading, and which the writer toys with to keep him or her interested.<sup>63</sup> Focusing on Shklovsky’s use of the riddle also allows us to see more clearly the role that tradition plays in his *Theory of Prose*.

The moment of recognition that art builds on is a fact of social consensus. Although in the earlier “Art as Device” he stresses “seeing” [videnie] as opposed to “recognizing” [uznavanie] the art object, in subsequent chapters he consistently uses the term *uznavanie* (recognizing) to describe the moment that provides narrative closure and that thus distinguishes a descriptive passage from a “story.”<sup>64</sup> According to the definition of the riddle as a form of psychological parallelism, riddles are understood to operate by taking a juxtaposition that is a fact of social consensus (e.g. man–tree) and turning it into a puzzle. They work by making it unfamiliar enough so that once the known association is revealed the audience derives a moment of pleasure at the *recognition* of the old in new garb. As Shklovsky writes, “the solution is as important as the riddle itself” (1990: 140). This adds nuance to the definition of art or narrative as defamiliarization; the moment of artistic perception is not seeing something new, but

<sup>62</sup> Shklovsky concludes this chapter with a sprint through of the history of the novel concluding with the genre of the mystery novel: “the adventure novel had become obsolete. It was revived by satire. There are elements of the adventure novel in Swift (*Gulliver’s Travels*) that play a purely ancillary role in the novel. A time of crisis followed. Fielding parodied the old novel in *Tom Jones* by presenting a hero of amoral character [...] The old novel tried to increase the range of its devices by introducing parallel intrigues. In order to connect several intrigues, it was found convenient to use the technique of the mystery novel. [...] The mystery novel allows us to interpolate into the works large chunks of everyday life [...] that is why the mystery novel was used as a ‘social novel’” Shklovsky concludes that “the mystery technique” continues to be used at the current time by writers such as Veniamin Kaverin (145).

<sup>63</sup> “Double meaning” for Shklovsky can be said to be that of the “double entendre” understood as “A double meaning; a word or phrase having a double sense, esp. *as used to convey an indelicate meaning.*” double entendre, n. OED Online. March 2012. Italics added.

<sup>64</sup> Целью искусства является дать ощущение вещи, как видение, а не как узнавание” (13) (“The purpose of art, then, is to lead to a knowledge of things through the organ of sight instead of recognition” (5-6)).

it is rather the pleasure of recognizing something known through an unexpected medium. This shifts the concept of defamiliarization in a conservative direction—placing emphasis on the role of social consensus.<sup>65</sup> As a result of his tradition-oriented theory of prose Shklovsky's defamiliarization can be said to be not so much an avant-garde "slap in the face" of bourgeois taste, but rather a reflection of universal human impulses.<sup>66</sup>

In order to understand the universalist aspirations of *Theory of Prose* and the book's basis in anthropological concepts, it is necessary finally to consider the role of folklore and the erotic in Shklovsky's book. Of the folkloric examples that Shklovsky provides many are erotic in nature. In "Art as Device," which Shklovsky subsequently refers to as his "chapter on erotic defamiliarization" (53) ("глав[а] об эротическое остранении" (1929: 69)), Shklovsky devotes several pages to the relationship between defamiliarization and the erotic and between defamiliarization and the folk riddle; the folk and the erotic appear to vie for primacy as the most essential instance of defamiliarization. He suggests that "наиболее ясно может быть прослежена цель образности в эротическом искусстве" (18) ("the purpose of imagery can be most clearly followed in erotic art" (10)). Transitioning from eroticism in Gogol to examples of erotic riddles, Shklovsky feels the need to assure the reader that: "остранение не только прием эротической загадки — эвфемизма, оно — основа и единственный смысл всех загадок" (19) (defamiliarization is not a device limited to the erotic riddle—a euphemism. It is also the foundation of all riddles (11 translation modified)). As we have seen in Shklovsky's approach to Dickens, the riddle is attributed great significance in *Theory of Prose*. The primacy of the erotic folk riddle is overdetermined. It combines the assumed universality of not only parallelisms and folklore, but of sexuality as an element of the human psyche.

The centrality of the erotic in his *Theory of Prose* emerges in Shklovsky's extensive treatment of what he calls the plot based on "error" [oshibka] followed by the "recognition" [uznavanie] of the original error. Shklovsky arguably stresses this plot device because it appears to follow the model of a riddle. One example which Shklovsky cites twice (in two different chapters) is Chekhov's story "The Bathhouse" ["Bania"]. The story is set in a bathhouse in prerevolutionary Russia during Lent. A barber, seeing a man with long hair whispering under his breath, assumes that he is a nihilist and insults him. It turns out he is a priest. Shklovsky reduces the story to the following: "Дано: у священников и у социалистов длинные волосы. Необходимо смешать их. Мотивировка – баня" (149) (*Given*: Both priests and socialists wear their hair long. *Task*: confuse their identities. *Motivation*: The bathhouse" (119)). From Shklovsky's summary it is just another short step to reduce the plot to a riddle, e.g., Who has long hair and mutters but is not a nihilist? (*a priest*). Yet there is another error-recognition plot that Shklovsky returns to at least three times in *Theory of Prose* which reveals more about his thinking on this subject. Shklovsky writes that "in folklore we often find that a son mistakes his mother and father, whom he has found in his bed, for his wife and her lover. He then kills them" (119).<sup>67</sup> Here we find again, like Shklovsky's application of the erotic riddle to the mystery

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<sup>65</sup> In his article "The Politics of Estrangement: The Case of the Early Shklovsky," Galin Tihanov argues that Shklovsky's early works are marked by a "conservative" stance in that he tends to derive "values and standards from the past in resistance to trends embedded in the present" (671). Tihanov traces this stance to his "political conservatism of an intellectual opposed to the Revolution" (672).

<sup>66</sup> I am referring to the title of the first manifesto of the Russian Cubo-Futurists, "A Slap in the Face of the Public Taste" ("Poshchechina obscestvennomu vkusu"), which appeared in December 1912. The title suggests revolt and aggression directed against bourgeois "good taste."

<sup>67</sup> Shklovsky presents several variations of this story. He gives one example: "coming home to his wife, the husband sees her asleep with some young man. It is his own son" he kills or threatens to kill them before realizing his

novel, that he suggests that plot structures operate on an ambivalence between a “true” (sanctioned) answer to the riddle/parallelism and a “false” (repressed, sexual) one. Here the psychological parallelism is “mother–wife.” The play between the two, Shklovsky suggests, creates the plot of the folktale in which the mother is defamiliarized in her guise as “wife.”

Shklovsky’s use of erotic riddles to illustrate defamiliarization adds a second layer of meaning to this concept. The pleasure that the audience derives from guessing the answer to the riddle is not simply, as I have suggested, that of recognizing something known in different garb.<sup>68</sup> It would seem that Shklovsky suggests that this pleasure is related to the sexual as something repressed or taboo. This would mean that the purpose of parallelism/riddles or defamiliarization is not just to “shake up the object” [rasshevilit’ veshch’] but to juxtapose objects in a way so as to hint at an “improper” association between them. The erotic, like the riddle, is cited both as a basis for defamiliarization (e.g. innuendos of the “lock and key,” or “pen and inkwell” type (10-11)), as well as for longer plot structures. The drawing out of a plot is likened to the deferral of gratification. In “Plot construction” he begins by asking, “почему Овидий, создавая из любви ‘искусство любви,’ советовал поторопиться в наслаждении?” (24) (“why is it that, in fashioning an *Art of Love* out of love, Ovid counsels us not to rush into the arms of pleasure?” (15)). Elsewhere Shklovsky refers to the deceleration of the plot as the “the torture of deferred pleasure” (1929: 39) (“пытк[а] задержанного наслаждения” (1990: 52)).

Shklovsky’s focus on the sexual, repressed desires, and the Oedipal plot suggests the influence of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Shklovsky never acknowledges that he has read Freud, although Freudian ideas would have been “in the air.”<sup>69</sup> While it is beyond the constraints of this chapter to enter into a more thorough analysis of Shklovsky’s use of Freudian ideas, it is instructive to compare Shklovsky’s erotic approach to plot to Peter Brooks’ more recent Freudian analysis of narrative in *Reading for the Plot* (1984). On first glance Brooks’ approach appears to have been anticipated by Shklovsky on several points. Brooks advances a “psychoanalytic literary criticism” as a means to “respond to the erotics of form, that is... [to] engage ... with the psychic investments of rhetoric, the dramas of desire played out in tropes” (1987: 348). In his work on narrative, he, like Shklovsky, conceives of “the reading of plot as a

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mistake (120). In another chapter Shklovsky writes “of interest to us are the different expositions constructed by the author to enable him to kill off the father and create a state of incest. For example Yulian Milostiviy slays his father and mother, whom he finds sleeping in the guest room, mistaking them for his wife and her lover. Compare the analogous legend called “On the Poor and Needy”: “After a period of absence, a merchant sees two young men lying in his wife’s bed. He wants to kill them. They are his sons” (44). Shklovsky points out in the opening of his chapter on Dickens that one of the “false” solutions in *Little Dorrit* is the suggestion of incest.

<sup>68</sup> This, more general, understanding of the goal of poetic innovation is suggested by Veselovsky in his “Psychological parallelism” “Это -- метафоры языка; наш словарь ими изобилует, но мы орудуем многими из них уже бессознательно, не ощущая их когда-то свежей образности; когда “солнце садится”, мы не представляем себе раздельно самого акта, несомненно живого в фантазии древнего человека; нам нужно подновить его, чтобы ощутить рельефно” (127). Shklovsky’s “Resurrection of the Word” (1914) paraphrases this statement.

<sup>69</sup> Sokolov, in his historiography of folkloristics, writes that Tylor’s conception of the community of human psychology was superseded by the work of Wilhelm Wundt. Russian folkloristics at the turn of the century was familiar with a trend he terms the “psychological school,” which applied Freudian theory to the analysis of folklore (96-97). It is not clear whether Shklovsky was familiar with this work. On Freud’s reception in Russia. See Alexander Etkind’s *Eros of the Impossible. The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia* (Boulder: 1997). For a treatment of psychologism and Russian formalism see I. Iu. Svetlikova’s *Istoki russkogo formalizma: traditsiia psikhologizma i formal'naia shkola* (Moscow: 2005).

form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text” (1984: 37).<sup>70</sup> Yet Shklovsky’s interpretation of the connection between desire and plot differs from Brooks’ as a result of Shklovsky’s insistence on avoiding the individual reader or writer’s thought processes. Literary tropes and plot devices reflect sexual desire for Shklovsky as for Brooks, but Shklovsky uses folklore as a mediating stage at which biological and psychological drives are transformed into literary devices. The assumption that folklore is a strictly impersonal phenomenon allows Shklovsky thus to allude to a universal, sexual, impulse behind literature without appearing to open his formal analysis of literature to the complexities of individual subjectivity.

Shklovsky’s conception of folklore as a mediating stage between anthropological or biological forces and literary form is conditioned by his assumption that folklore does not belong to the sphere of the everyday. While it continues to exist as a part of modern life, it is a survival that reflects more general or fundamental principles that underlay modern phenomena such as “high” literature. In “Plot construction” Shklovsky devotes a page to detailing “an extraordinarily curious custom recorded by Roman Jakobson in the village of Kostyushino” in which “we see the device of deceleration *even more clearly*” than we do in the previous *literary* examples he has provided (40 italics added) (“*Еще ярче прием задержания* виден в чрезвычайно любопытном обычае, записанном в деревне Костюшино” (53 italics added)). The custom reported is categorized by Shklovsky as a variant of the “trial nights” ritual, and his account details how an evening, in which a group of young men and women gather, unfolds. The devices of deceleration are featured prominently (first no one answers the door, then the men are not let in, then a match cannot be found, then there is no water for the samovar, etc., etc.) (40-41). This reference to folk ritual appears to break with the division between “life” and “art” that Shklovsky strenuously insists on elsewhere. Shklovsky, when discussing folk custom, however, does not associate this with a fact of everyday life (*byt*). Unlike Jakobson and Bogatyrev, whom he cites on several occasions in *Theory of Prose* as sources of folkloric examples, Shklovsky did not go on ethnographic expeditions. When he refers to folkloric material from published collections, therefore, it exists for him at a double remove. Peasant folklore, for Shklovsky, is impersonal both in that it reflects a “collective” mentality and in that it represents a “survival” from a previous era. These conceptions were commonplaces at the turn of the twentieth century.

Shklovsky’s assumptions regarding folklore help explain its role in his work. Shklovsky likely thought that citing primarily *folkloric* sexual examples placed a barrier between his theory and a psychological approach. This was possible because Shklovsky appears to have understood that Freud’s psychoanalysis was applicable only to specific individuals, rather than to a more universal conception of the human psyche. Thus, as a theory of the individual and the particular, Shklovsky deemed psychoanalysis to be unscholarly. Paraphrasing Veselovsky, Shklovsky stated:

не нужно увлекаться биографией художника, он пишет, а потом ищет мотивировок. Меньше всего нужно увлекаться психоанализом. Психоанализ анализирует

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<sup>70</sup> Brooks refers to “formalism” repeatedly in *Reading for the Plot*, but reduces it to “static” or “pure” formalism, choosing Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* as the epigrammatic formalist work on narrative. He situates his approach as a move beyond formalism. For example, he writes “‘plot’ in fact seems to me to cut across the *fabula/siuzhet* distinction in that to speak of plot is to consider both story elements and their ordering. Plot could be thought of as the interpretive activity elicited by the distinction between *siuzhet* and *fabula*, the way we *use* the one against the other” (13 italics in original).

душевные травмы *одного* человека, а *один* человек не пишет,--пишет время, пишет школа-коллектив (1929: 211 italics in original).<sup>71</sup>

there is no point in becoming enamored of the biography of the artist. He writes first and looks for motivations later. And least of all should one be enamored of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis studies the psychological traumas of *one* person, while in truth, an author never writes alone. A school of writers writes through him. A whole age” (1990: 176 italics in original).

Shklovsky’s association of the sexual and the folkloric allowed him to draw on Freudian ideas while at the same time situating his approach on the level of the anthropological as opposed to the individual. This is made clear in Shklovsky’s comment in “Literature without a Plot” in which he described the way that “forbidden” themes continue to hover on the margins of the literary tradition. He writes: “запрещенные темы продолжают существовать вне канонизованной литературы так, как существует сейчас и существовал всегда эротический анекдот, или так, как существует в психике подавленные желания, изредка выявляясь в снах, иногда неожиданно для своих носителей” (1929: 229) (“the outlawed themes continue to exist outside the literary canon in the same way that the erotic anecdote exists to this very day or in the way that repressed desires exist in the psyche, revealing themselves unexpectedly in dreams” (1990: 191)). This sentence applies the logic of a Freudian distinction between consciousness/unconsciousness to the collective (the “school” or an “age” in the quote above) rather than the individual. Shklovsky’s mention of the “erotic anecdote” here, which lingers over time in society’s unconscious, reveals that Shklovsky’s understanding of “culture” is close to that of E. B. Tylor. The folkloric, which continues to exist on the margins of “civilized,” canonical culture, represents a survival from the “childhood” of a universal process of cultural maturation (Stocking 189). Tylor’s view, which Shklovsky assumes, was that culture was everywhere the same, but that “primitive” cultures were simply at a different, childlike, stage in the same process that the “civilized” cultures of Western Europe had already passed through.<sup>72</sup> Given a Freudian slant, folklore could be said to express childhood/primitive sexuality, repressed as the individual/society matures. Shklovsky suggests that defamiliarization taps into repressed desire on a *collective* rather than an individual level. As a result the folkloric and the sexual are bound together as a manifestation of the collective unconsciousness.

In conclusion, it appears that Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* is based on a reinterpretation of Veselovsky’s *motif* as the most basic, elemental, unit of literary structure. Like Veselovsky he begins with psychological parallelism, but rather than posit the juxtaposition “man-nature”

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<sup>71</sup> This statement is recognizable as a restatement of Veselovsky’s approach to literary biography. Sokolov writes, “in the creative individuality at various stages of the development of poetry, Veselovsky sees, above all, the expression of group opinions, and he introduces the term, ‘group personality.’” Sokolov cites Veselovsky as writing: “with the ‘emergence of a cultured group, as the guiding one, the exponent of its mood will be some individual poet; the poet is born, but the materials and the mood of his poetry are prepared by the group. In this sense it may be said that Petrarchism is older than Petrarch” (107). Compare Osip Brik’s statement “Пушкин не создатель школы, а только ее глава. Не будь Пушкина, ‘Евгений Онегин’ все равно был бы написан” (213).

<sup>72</sup> In Taylor’s *Primitive Culture*, Stocking writes, Tylor was no longer concerned “with determining whether specific similarities of culture were the result of diffusion. The problem was not now the history of ‘tribes or nations,’ but rather the ‘condition of knowledge, religion, art, custom and the like among them.’ The way to solve it was to classify ‘the phenomena of Culture’ and to arrange them ‘stage by stage, in a probable order of evolution.’ In making such comparisons, ‘little respect’ need be had ‘for date in history or place on the map,’ or for ‘the question of race” (161).

(animism) as the impulse that leads to the formation of poetic language, tropes, formulae and eventually plot, Shklovsky provides a sexual interpretation of parallelism. In replacing animism with sexuality, Shklovsky replaced Veselovsky's view of poetic thought based on "logical" associations between objects, with the play between repressed and sanctioned associations. By rooting his theory in folkloric examples, Shklovsky thought that he was basing his definition of art on scientific grounds. While animism posits the universality of a type of logic, sexuality might have appeared more scientific (universal) in that it would seem to be closer to man's biological, animal instincts. Thus folklore, and particularly sexual folklore, secured the universality of Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*. In the remainder of this chapter I will demonstrate how the folkloristic basis of this theory impacted his approach to "high," written literature.

### Folklorization of Literature

As I hope to have shown, Shklovsky's universalist approach to literature remained within Veselovsky's world literature paradigm. This meant that both approached literature as ultimately derived from a repository of universal poetic tropes which are in turn a product of human psychology. Like Veselovsky, Shklovsky believed that the universal devices of literature can be isolated on the basis of folkloric material as an earlier stage of literature. In the remainder of this chapter I will show how this folkloristic foundation shaped Shklovsky's understanding of the process of literary creation and the fundamentals of literary structure. It resulted in an approach to high literature that treated it as a product of oral creativity—making Shklovsky's theory of prose one that can be said to folklorize literature.

Shklovsky's conception of literary creativity builds directly on the assumptions that he makes, following Veselovsky, about the universality of basic tropes and their *modus operandi*. As I have mentioned, Veselovsky understood these tropes to make up a "stylistic lexicon," which is passed down from generation to generation with little formal change. This operation was based on a linguistic model. Veselovsky's poetic lexicon (*predanie*) is understood to exist in the collective consciousness roughly like Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue*—the system of rules speakers of a language must have internalized in order to produce speech. The transmission and evolution of *predanie* was based on folklorists' observations of the processes of the acquisition and dissemination of *oral* genres such as the epic [bylina] or the tale [skazka]. This idea was not unique to Veselovsky and similar views can be found in many nineteenth-century Russian folklorists' and philologists' statements on the nature of the language of folklore.<sup>73</sup> One particularly suggestive description of the process of folkloric creation, that hints at a more detailed parallel between folkloric composition and language production, can be found in a letter from one *bylina* scholar to another, from P. N. Rybnikov (1831-1885) to V. F. Miller (1846-1913).<sup>74</sup> Shklovsky cites this letter at length at a critical moment in his "Plot construction" essay. Shklovsky, as I discussed above, stages his departure from Veselovsky's "Poetics of plots" by arguing that similar, complex plots are found the world over and that their similarity does not result from borrowing alone. It is at this point that Shklovsky cites Rybnikov, using the passage below to provide evidence for his conclusion that "coincidences can be explained only by the laws of plot formation." Shklovsky quotes the following passage from Rybnikov's letter:

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<sup>73</sup> See A. T. Khrolenko Ed. *Iazyk fol'klora: Khrestomatiia* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> In his letter Rybnikov is trying to convince Miller of the difference between the *bylina* and the *skazka*. He is arguing that the latter is composed with much more freedom. Rybnikov invites Miller to go on an expedition with him to go "listen to the tale teller..."

Послушаем *сказчика*. У хорошего слова так и нижутся, как бисер, слышен даже ритм, целые стихи. [...] Заставьте его повторить, он многое передаст другими словами. Спросите, не знает ли той же сказки кто-нибудь другой, – он укажет вам на *однодеревенца*, имярек. Имярек вместе с ним слышал от такого-то старика или прохожего. Вы просите Имярека рассказать ту же сказку, она передается не только другим языком, другим складом речи, но иногда другим ладом. Один вводит или сохраняет жалостные подробности, другой вносит или удерживает насмешливый взгляд на иные эпизоды, третий выбирает или прилаживает из другой сказки (или из общего всему люду *сказчиков склада*, о чем после) иную развязку, появляются новые лица, новые похождения. [...] известные, причастные всему народу представления оделись в известное платье, получили известный склад речи. «Сказка – складка» (cited in Shklovsky 1929: 26-27, italics in original).

Let's listen to the *storyteller*. If he is a good one, his words will weave themselves into place like beads on a string. You can hear the rhythm itself. Whole lines of verse. [...] Force him to repeat and he will express much of it differently. Ask him if anyone else knows the story, and he'll point to a *fellow villager*, a certain So-and-So, and he'll tell you that this So-and-So heard the story along with him from a certain old man or minstrel. Then go ask this So-and-So to tell this same story, and you will hear the story told not only in a different language and with different figures of speech, but often in a different key. One storyteller introduces (or preserves) the piteous details, another contributes (or perpetuates) the satirical point of view in certain episodes, while a third storyteller adapts a denouement from another tale (or from the *general fund* [obshchii sklad] that is available to all storytellers, of which later). In addition, new characters and new adventures appear on the scene [...] The well-known, communally shared conceptions put on a certain costume and were expressed with a certain turn of speech. 'Story = structure' (Shklovsky 1990: 17 italics in original).

The most important ideas expressed here are Rybnikov's reference to a "general fund" [obshchii sklad] available to all storytellers and his detailed description of how this fund is employed in the process of storytelling. Rybnikov suggests that storytelling can be understood as a formally demanding argot spoken by a particular social group (e.g. tale-tellers [skazchiki]). It is one step from this suggestion to posit that tales are formed according to a basic grammar that, along with tropes and episodes, is drawn from the "general fund." While Shklovsky does not use specific linguistic terminology, he treats the laws of plot construction as a type of syntax which governs the way in which stories are continually assembled anew through the arrangement of the basic units (tropes, devices, motifs) described in the previous section. Condensing Rybnikov's observation, Shklovsky summarizes: "the story disintegrates and is rebuilt anew" (17). The idea of a fund of devices and the concept of collective creativity feature prominently in Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*, in which he applies this folkloristic concept to literature more broadly.

Shklovsky's focus on the importance of tradition (as a fund of devices) in the creative process meant that he downplayed the import of the individual author. Personal, idiosyncratic creativity was attributed a minor role in relation to the fund of devices, understood to be the property of the collective. As a result, even high literature was posited to be the product of "collective creativity." As we have seen, Shklovsky rejected psychoanalysis and biography as irrelevant for literary theory in his study of Andrei Bely's "Ornamental prose" (1924), arguing

that “an author never writes alone. A school of writers writes through him” (1990: 176). In an earlier essay “Parallels in Tolstoy” [“Paralleli u Tolstogo”] (1919) which went into chapter three of *Theory of Prose*, Shklovsky uses Rybnikov’s *sklad* to articulate his understanding of tradition in high literature (in reference to Tolstoy and Maupassant):

говоря о литературной традиции, я не представляю ее себе в виде заимствования одним писателем у другого. Традицию писателя я представляю себе, как зависимость его от какого-то *общего склада литературных норм*, который так же, как традиция изобретателя, состоит из суммы технических возможностей его времени” (1929: 82 italics added).

when I speak of literary tradition, I do not have in mind a literal borrowing by one writer from another. I conceive of it as a *common fund of literary norms* from which each writer draws and on which he is dependent. If I were to use the analogy of an inventor and his tradition, I would say that such a literary tradition consists of the sum total of the technical possibilities of his age (1990: 64 italics added).

Shklovsky’s comparison of literary tradition to that of technical inventors [izobretateli] minimizes the individual element that Rybnikov stressed in his description of the storyteller’s use of the general fund. It would seem that Shklovsky sees in Tolstoy’s work less of an individual, idiosyncratic origin than Rybnikov does in the folktale!

The suggestion that creating literature is akin to technical invention was common to the discourse of the formalists and some of the avant-garde more generally in the post-revolutionary period.<sup>75</sup> This view was linked to the downplaying of the individual in favor of a cumulative collective knowledge, of the sort that the natural sciences were understood to draw on. In an article published in September 1919, “Collective Creation” [“Kollektivnoe tvorchestvo”], Shklovsky lays out in more detail his understanding of collective creativity. He refers to the concept of “Brownian Motion,” which is based, he explains, on the observation that:

minute particles suspended in liquid, by virtue of the insignificance of their mass, perceive the movement of the molecules and begin to vibrate under the action of their jolts. The creator – be it the inventor of the internal combustion engine or a poet – plays the role of such particles, which make motions—invisible by themselves—visible (2005: 43).

To illustrate how this molecular movement translates into literary terms, Shklovsky refers to the repertoire of jokes in *Commedia dell’arte* or the songs of the epic poet, which draw on a “fund of spare parts” [sklad zapasnykh chastei]. Citing Rybnikov again, Shklovsky makes it clear that he sees this concept as valid for all literary creation: he writes, “it seems to us that our so-called individual creation is accomplished not in that way [like Rybnikov’s tale-teller - JM], but that is a

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<sup>75</sup> A number of Lef (Left front of Art) manifestos from 1923, for example, return to V. Khlebnikov’s distinction between “inventors” [изобретатели] and “consumers” [приобретатели] and lay out a program for a futurist-constructivist poetry based on the model of technical ‘invention’ [изобретение]. See S. Tret’iakov’s article “Otkuda i kuda?” *Lef* 1 (1923): 192-203. Shklovsky joined Lef upon his return to the USSR in 1923.

result of the impossibility or, more accurately, the difficulty of seeing the present day in general” (2005: 44).<sup>76</sup>

Shklovsky’s use of folkloristics to create a theory of literary creativity more generally appears to have been motivated by the desire to make literary theory more scientific. By minimizing the role of the individual, as a unique and idiosyncratic agent in the process, the evolution of literature can be seen as a more law-abiding phenomenon. Just as—as Shklovsky points out—two people invented the telephone at the same time, so—as Brik famously argued—someone else would have written “Evgenii Onegin” if Pushkin hadn’t.<sup>77</sup> The more regular the literary process, the more amenable it is to a scientific literary theory. Inspired by folkloristics, Shklovsky’s attempt to create a scholarly literary theory was based on the conception of tradition as a regular, law-abiding phenomenon. This may come as a surprise given that Shklovsky is most famous for articulating a modernist definition of art based on the act of flaunting or “defamiliarizing” tradition. As I have tried to show, however, Shklovsky’s interest in creating a theory of prose that was maximally universal, that is, free of historical or national/ethnic specificity, coincided with his embrace of folklore theory. Veselovsky’s or Rybnikov’s work on folklore could be stripped of its historical or personal element because the backbone of folklore was understood to be made up of self-perpetuating traditional forms. Left with this skeleton—endlessly reshuffling the deck of cards—he had eliminated, as Steiner suggests, any source of literary novelty. Yet Shklovsky’s theory of prose does have an “engine,” as we would expect from a theorist who so frequently utilized mechanical metaphors.<sup>78</sup> I will return to demonstrate that Shklovsky understood this force in anthropological/biological terms.

Shklovsky’s use of folkloristic theory—the fund of devices residing in the collective consciousness—had far-reaching repercussions for Shklovsky’s understanding of narrative structure. Of central importance is the fact that the folkloristic paradigm Shklovsky extends to narrative structure in his *Theory of Prose* is based on *oral* forms of creativity rather than written. In order to engage with the distinction between oral as opposed to written creativity I will refer to some of the more basic elements of Walter Ong’s differentiation between an “orally based mode of thought and expression” and a textual, or “typographical” one in his *Orality and Literacy* (1982) (34). Without invoking the larger argument of his highly influential and not uncontested book, I will use his helpful enumeration of the qualities characteristic of “orality” as they refer to the more incontrovertible exigencies of oral composition. These attributes mainly stem from the fact that in the oral performance of a tale the teller is, to a larger degree than a writer, composing the work as he or she goes along. Ong, drawing on the work of Milman Parry

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<sup>76</sup> Shklovsky goes on to say, “by the world collective here I understand not the entire mass of the population but a society of bards and writers not dependent on whether we are speaking about so-called folk creativity or about so-called artistic creativity” (2005: 44) (“вне зависимости от того, говорим мы о так называемом народном или так называемом искусственном творчестве” (1990: 82)).

<sup>77</sup> In an article “Т. н. ‘formal’nyi metod” (1923) Brik provocatively asserted: “необходимо массовое изучение приемов поэтического ремесла, их отличия от смежных областей человеческого труда, законы их исторического развития. Пушкин не создатель школы, а только ее глава. Не будь Пушкина, ‘Евгений Онегин’ все равно был бы написан. Америка была бы открыта и без Колумба” (213).

<sup>78</sup> Shklovsky was a specialist on the operation and mechanics of armored cars and this was as times his primary profession between 1914 and 1922. Sheldon writes, “in the summer of 1914, when war broke out, Shklovsky enlisted. Assigned to a motorized unit, he worked for a while in Petersburg motor pools and completed a course in drivers’ training. [...] During the early part of 1915, Shklovsky was sent as a driver to the Western Ukraine and Galicia. Then he was reassigned back to Petrograd as an instructor in a school for armored-car drivers” (1966: 18). Steiner argues that Shklovsky’s early writings were dominated by a mechanical metaphor which he links to Shklovsky’s reliance on nineteenth century philology.

(1902-1935) and Albert Lord (1912-1991), scholars of the epic tradition, describes this process saying, “basically, the singer is remembering in a curiously public way—remembering not a memorized text. . . nor any verbatim succession of words, but the themes and formulas he has heard other singers sing. He remembers these always differently, as rhapsodized or stitched together in his own way on this particular occasion for this particular audience” (145). This view can be seen as an elaboration on Rybnikov’s description cited above. Based on this understanding of oral creativity Ong suggests several features which characterize oral poetics. Because it is composed in the moment, its structure tends towards: simple, “additive” syntactic structures, an “aggregative” accumulation of detail or epithets, “redundant” repetitions as opposed to a sparser linearity, and a more “conservative” relationship to poetic norms (38-41). The narrative structure of an oral performance, such as an epic poem, is described as “episodic.” The epic is seen to be comprised of a progression of episodes strung together by the singer in performance according to associations rather than adhering to a strict chronological order (144, 165). In contrast, the writer, who has the opportunity to draft, write and rewrite a work, produces a text which is a product of “careful selectivity,” which can produce a “consciously contrived narrative as typically designed in a climactic linear plot” (148, 141).<sup>79</sup>

Interestingly, we find a passage in Shklovsky’s “The Structure of Fiction” that suggests that he is sensitive to a distinction between the degree of structural complexity allowed by oral as opposed to written modes of creation. He writes,

Очень важно отметить, что эти приемы, приемы книжные, самая громоздкость материала, не позволяют применить такие способы связи частей в устной традиции. [...] Разработка способов соединения новелл могла быть дана в так называемом *народном*, т.-е. анонимном, не сознательно-личном творчестве только в зародыше. Роман со дня своего рождения, и даже до дня своего рождения тяготеет к книге (1929: 84).

It is very important to point out that these devices are confined to the domain of written literature. The cumbersome nature of this material does not permit such an interrelationship of parts in the oral tradition. [...] The working out of a unifying technique for short stories in the so-called *folk* or anonymous (as opposed to consciously personal) literature was possible only in embryonic form. From the day of its birth and even before, the novel gravitated towards a literary rather than an oral form (1990: 66).

This statement, which many would agree with on face value, is puzzling when placed in the context of this essay and in *Theory of Prose* more generally. As I hope to show, much of Shklovsky’s treatment of prose structure belies this statement.<sup>80</sup> If we conceive of the

<sup>79</sup> Ong covers a number of other characteristics of written literature which he sees as a product of “print culture” – that is, the phenomenon of the mass-produced book for private consumption. These include the concept of literary “closure,” the use of a fixed point of view, the development of “round,” psychological characters and depictions of interiority (132, 135, 150).

<sup>80</sup> It is notable that the literary examples that precede Shklovsky’s cited claim are early story cycles such as *A Thousand and One Nights* or *Tales of a Parrot* of Arabic or Persian (Sanskrit) origin. These are hardly collections which Ong would cite as exemplifying the characteristics of a textuality. Many of the tales in *A Thousand and One Nights*, for example, are understood to have been circulating in oral and written form for centuries before the creation of the first known, fourteenth-century, manuscript edition (Kabbani 24). Furthermore their total structure is deemed to be largely fortuitous: “the collections of stories that nowadays are presented under the umbrella of the

characteristics of orality and textuality provided by Ong above as two poles at either end of a continuum, then Shklovsky's understanding of literary structure—even as he describes “high” works of written origin—falls towards *the oral end* of this spectrum.

Perhaps the most obvious case in which Shklovsky's treatment of narrative structure adheres to Ong's characteristics of orality is his presentation of its key devices. In “Plot Construction” Shklovsky focuses on the devices of “stepped construction” [stupenchatoe stroenie] in which he dwells primarily on: the means by which parallel constructions “create their own content” (24-25), the deceleration of the plot through “threading of the tasks” (34) in folktales, and the use of a framing device [obramleniia] in order to set up a situation where “the principle characters tell their stories in succession ad infinitum until the first story is completely forgotten” (42). These are all additive devices that create narrative structure in an aggregative, step-by-step [stupenchatyi] fashion. One episode (e.g. a task), is strung after the next in a manner that is, as Shklovsky points out, endlessly extendible. Summarizing the chapter he writes, “я наметил тип ступенчатого нарастания мотивов. Такие нарастания по существу своему бесконечны, как бесконечны и авантурные романы, на них построенные. Отсюда . . . ‘Десять лет спустя’ и ‘Двадцать лет спустя’ Александра Дюма” (1929: 68) (“I pointed out the progressive accumulation of motifs. Such accumulations are by their very nature limitless, as are also the adventure novels built on them. This is the very source. . . for Alexandre Dumas' *Ten Years Later* and *Twenty Years Later*” (1990: 52)). In two sentences Shklovsky take us from the “motif,” the most basic element of prose, all the way to Dumas via the device of accumulation!

The stress on aggregative devices of accumulation is a product of Shklovsky's focus on “deceleration” [zaderzhanie]. The centrality of deceleration in this chapter is indicated by the titles of its five subsections. After the introductory sections “On the ethnographic school” [“Ob etnograficheskoi shkole”] and “On motifs” [“O motivakh”], Shklovsky presents the laws of plot formation in sections titled “Stepped construction and deceleration” [“Stupenchatoe stroenie i zaderzhanie”], “The motivation of deceleration” [“Motivirovka zaderzhaniiia”], and “Framing as a device of deceleration” [“Obramlenie, kak priem zaderzhaniiia”]. This dual focus on deceleration and accumulation results from Shklovsky's particular understanding of the temporal dynamic of fiction. The overwhelming majority of his examples come from oral folklore, and his concept of literary creativity, introduced via Rybnikov, is also based on the description of oral composition. It is in this, folkloristic, oral context that Shklovsky's focus on deceleration and accumulation makes sense. The oral performer, composing in the moment, builds his or her tale by adding one component to the next. Under the exigencies of this type of creation the formal properties of an element already employed dictate with greater pressure the parameters for what can come next. This can be illustrated through the example of rhyme. As Shklovsky concludes his chapter: “сюжет и сюжетность являются такой же формой, как и рифма” (60) (“the plot and the nature of the plot constitute a form no less than rhyme” (46)). Shklovsky's most compelling examples for how motifs (parallelisms) “create their own content” by determining what can come next come from the oral epic (the Finnish *Kalevala*).<sup>81</sup> In Albert Lord's *Singer of*

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*Nights* consist of every possible story of genuine or pretended Arabic origin. They are diverse in form, provenance, and date of composition. *It hardly makes any sense to speak of them as a group*” (Mahdi 9 italics added).

<sup>81</sup> Shklovsky writes “in the Finnish epic where synonymous parallelism is the norm and where the stanzas take the form of ‘If you take back your incantation./ If you draw back your evil spell. . .’ and where numbers are found in the verse which, as is well known, lack synonyms, then the number that is next in order is selected that does not numerically call attention to a distortion in meaning. For example: ‘He finds six seeds on the ground, / Seven seeds he raises from the ground’” (1990: 25). This example clearly demonstrates how artistic structure dictates the selection of the paradigmatic element (Shklovsky's “content”).

*Tales* (1960), based on the study of oral epic performance within the territory of former Yugoslavia, he describes the moment of oral composition:

The singer's problem is to construct one line after another very rapidly. The need for the 'next' line is upon him before he utters the final syllable of a line. There is urgency. To meet it the singer builds patterns of sequences in lines, which we know of as the 'parallelisms' of oral style. [...] Milman Parry has called it an 'adding style'; the term is apt (54).

This description helps understand the rationale that underlies Shklovsky's "laws of plot formation" as they are outlined in his chapter "Plot Construction."<sup>82</sup> Shklovsky focuses on stepped, additive constructions which *slow down* the pace of the narrative. The oral performer's devices are, in part, designed to allow him to buy time while composing on the spot. The additive nature of verbal art can be derived from the poetics of the oral tales and epics that Shklovsky used to create his theory of plot construction. It also naturally follows from a view of literary creativity based on a *sklad* of devices.

Shklovsky's "Plot construction," as I have mentioned, was based almost entirely on folklore theory and examples drawn from oral tradition. In the subsequent chapters of *Theory of Prose*, Shklovsky continues to operate with an understanding of creativity and structure based on oral performance, applying it to the novels of Cervantes, Sterne and Dickens. This is reflected in his treatment of narrative structure as the "unfolding" or expansion [razvertyvanie] of the *motif*.<sup>83</sup> The basis for this "unfolding" was introduced in "Art as Device" in which Shklovsky argued that "сюжеты эротических сказок представляют из себя развернутые метафоры, например мужской и женский половые органы у Боккаччо сравнены с пестом и ступкой. Сравнение это мотивировано целой историей, и получился «мотив»" (1929: 69) ("the plot lines of erotic tales represent extended metaphors (e.g., the male and female sexual organs are compared in Boccaccio with the pestle and mortar). This comparison is motivated by the entire story, giving rise thus to a 'motif'" (1990: 53)). The model by which this type of "unfolding" of a parallelism (metaphor) could be further expanded beyond the length of a tale into a longer work was arguably provided by folk theater, particularly the folk play "Tsar Maximilian." Shklovsky's interest in this subject can be explained by the fact that folk theater enjoyed a wave of great popularity in the Civil War period. The historian Richard Stites calls Petrograd in this period (1918-1921) the "theater city." One manifestation of this was the "blossoming of street theater" which represented "a revival of traditional folk festival with mobile units presenting carnival shows and acts all over the city" (93).<sup>84</sup> Jakobson and Bogatyrev, whom Shklovsky cites on this

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<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to note that Shklovsky appears to interpret Tolstoy's "labyrinth of linkages" [лабиринт сцеплений] in these terms. Shklovsky cites Tolstoy's letter at the end of the article, in which Tolstoy writes: "we need people who would show the absurdity of searching for [individual] thoughts in a work of art and who could guide the reader permanently in that endless labyrinth of linkages which is the essence of art. And in accordance with those laws which serve as a foundation for those linkages" (46). Shklovsky suggests that he has discovered the laws of literary "webs" [плетенки] in his discussion of the use of parallelisms in a *bylina* (27, 25). This suggests that rather than see that the structure of Tolstoy's novel represents a finished, crystal-like integral structure, Shklovsky understands Tolstoy's "linkages" more like the self-perpetuating devices of oral composition.

<sup>83</sup> Two chapters from *Theory of Prose*, "Stroenie rasskaza i romana" and "Kak sdelan Don-Kikhot" were first published under the title "Razvertyvanie siuzheta" as part of the fourth *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (1921).

<sup>84</sup> Stites writes that "street theater [in Petrograd] became big in the holidays of 1919 with 'flying troupes' on platforms pulled by streetcars and trucks, carnival acts and circus shows at designated stops with clowns, skits, and

subject, were also working on a book on folk theater at this time.<sup>85</sup> Folk theater, like the epic or the folktale, is an oral genre understood to be a product of tradition-based improvisation. Folk plays were celebrated at the time for the spontaneous, collective nature of their performances.<sup>86</sup> Shklovsky describes the basic structure of “Tsar Maximilian” in “The Structure of Fiction”:

Интересно, как разворачивается, например, сюжет народной драмы о „Царе Максимилиане“. Сюжет очень прост: сын царя Максимилиана, женившегося на Венере, не желает поклоняться идолам, и гибнет за это от руки отца. . . Этот текст воспринимается потом как сценарий; к разным местам его, пользуясь самой разнообразной мотивировкой, приставляются вне его развившиеся мотивы. [...] Во многих случаях новые эпизоды, а особенно словесные игры, то есть нагромождение омонимов, мотивированных глухотой, так пышно разрослись, что совершенно вытеснили Максимилиана. Он остался как предлог начинать комедию (86).

It is worth noting how the plot of the folk drama Tsar Maximilian unfolds [разворачивается]. The basic plot structure is very simple. The son of King Maximilian, who has married Venus, refused to worship idols and suffers death at the hands of his father for it... This text is adopted as a kind of scenario. Supported by the most diverse motivations, expanding [развившиеся] motifs are interpolated at different points in the narrative of the story. [...] In many places, new episodes and wordplay, particularly in the form of an accumulation of homonyms motivated by deafness, grew with such luxuriance that Maximilian himself was nearly smothered by them. He remained as an excuse to start a comedy (67-68 translation modified).

That Shklovsky’s interest in “Tsar Maximilian” is relevant for understanding his approach to the novel is made most clear in an article published in *Zhizn’ iskusstva* on October 5, 1919 “Embellished Tolstoy” [“Dopolnennyi Tolstoi”]. Shklovsky gives a favorable review of Yury Annenkov’s staging of Tolstoy’s play “The First Distiller” in which Annenkov interpolated a variety of farcical material into Tolstoy’s text. Shklovsky, who refers to “Tsar Maximilian” in the article, describes Annenkov’s approach in similar terms: “Annenkov dealt with Tolstoy’s text in the following way: he treated it as a scenario and expanded [razvernul] it by inserting accordion players, *chastushki* [folk poetry], a clown, acrobats, etc.” (2005: 79). Shklovsky then

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songs lasting about 15-30 minutes. But these shows were overshadowed in 1920 by the mass spectacles of revolutionary myth” (93-94). The four mass spectacles of that year were attended by as many as 45,000 spectators at a single event (96). On theater in Petrograd see also chapters “Ritual Capital of Revolutionary Russia” and “Ritual Capital of Revolutionary Russia” in Katerina Clark’s *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 122-161.

<sup>85</sup> Shklovsky wrote a review of the writer A. M. Remizov’s staging of “Tsar Maximilian” published in *Zhizn’ iskusstva* in October of 1919.

<sup>86</sup> Petr Bogatyrev describes the mechanics of folk theater as an impromptu act of collective creativity in which the distinction between “audience” and “performers” is attenuated. Bogatyrev provides, for example, the following 1921 description of the Russian folk play, “Pakhomushkoi”: “зритель в обычном понимании слова в игре комедии не существует. Это поистине ‘соборное действо.’ Все наполняющие беседную избу принимают настолько живое участие в игре, что активностью оставляют далеко за собой ‘зрителя’ нашего массовых празднеств. Каждый, кто когда-либо сам играл или видел, как играли, совершенно не стесняясь, прерывает действие и вставляет свои указания как в текст, так в мизансцены” (cited in Bogatyrev 1971: 51).

moves from Annenkov's staging to literature and suggests that the development of the novelistic plot is based on a similar principle:

Развертывание сюжетной схемы материалом, органически с ней не связанным, в искусстве почти правило. Напомню, например, развертывание в «Дон Кихоте», где для заполнения привлечен чуть ли не весь философско-дидактический, фольклорно-литературный и даже филологический материал того времени. Иногда такое развертывание дано с мотивировкой, обычно нанизываясь на речи или чтения действующих лиц, как у Сервантеса, Стерна, Гёте («Вертер»), Анатоля Франса и у сотен других (1990: 93).

In art, the elaboration [развертывание] of the plot framework with material not organically connected with it is almost right. Let me remind you, for example, of the elaboration [развертывание] in *Don Quixote* where the plot is fleshed out by including virtually all the philosophical, didactic, folkloric, literary and even philosophical material of that time. Sometimes such an elaboration [развертывание] is presented with motivation. Usually, though, it's threaded on speeches or on readings by the characters, as in Cervantes, Sterne, Goethe (*Werther*), Anatole France and hundreds of others (2005: 80).

Shklovsky suggests that the heroes such as Goethe's Werther have a function analogous to the role Maximilian plays—that is, they function as a pretense to link together a variety of episodes. Moreover his analyses of longer fictional narratives tends towards the model provided by “Tsar Maximilian”; a plot begins with a basic scenario, a *motif*, and then it is expanded by interpolating a variety of material that slows down the progression of the plot. The chapters of *Theory of Prose* on Sterne and Dickens treat different aspects of novelistic fiction, yet Shklovsky's approach to the basic foundation of plot structure returns to the concept of the unfolding of the metaphor (in the form of a riddle, pun, or parallel). The first focuses on the way in which Sterne parodies the use of a chronologically ordered plot in the autobiographical novel through a series of digressions often motivated by erotic puns.<sup>87</sup> The second dissects Dickens' *Little Dorrit* into a series of parallel plots based on different “riddles” which are expanded over the course of hundreds of pages. The plots of these novels are thus, to varying degrees, presented as cumulative structures made up of an agglomeration of motifs (themselves frequently spun out of tropes). In this, Shklovsky continues to treat complex, “high” fiction according to the basic modality of oral performance in the moment.

This understanding of the literary work is reflected in Shklovsky's depiction of the act of literary creation as a step-by-step or “piece-by-piece” process. To illustrate the act of literary

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<sup>87</sup> Sterne, who is parodying the linear plot, could be said to intentionally create a “oral” aesthetic whereas Cervantes' novel is assumed to lack a tight narrative structure as a reflection of the semi-oral structure of the genre of the medieval romance. This is reflected in Shklovsky's analysis. Whereas Cervantes' novel evolves without him realizing what he is doing, the chaos of Sterne's plotless work is “planned.” Shklovsky writes of *Tristram Shandy*, “when you examine the structure of the book more closely, you perceive first of all that this disorder is intentional. There is method to Sterne's madness. It is as regular as a painting by Picasso” (1990: 148) (“Но когда начинаешь всматриваться в строение книги, то видишь, прежде всего, что этот беспорядок--намеренный, здесь есть своя поэтика. Это закономерно, как картина Пикассо”(1929: 178)). Morson in his article “Contingency and the Literature of Process” refers to *Tristram Shandy* as a paradigmatic example of the open-ended work reflecting a “processual aesthetic” (268-269).

creation he cites a letter of L. N. Tolstoy's from 1865 in which he explains the character Andrei Bolkonsky from *War and Peace*. The letter makes it plain that Tolstoy did not have the entire novel planned out in advance, and the role of the character Andrei changed over the course of writing the novel. Shklovsky suggests that this letter is an important piece of evidence, which will help reveal the "laws of artistic will" ("законы. . . художественной воли"). Importantly, this "will" is not interpreted in terms of creativity or originality, but simply as that force which compels the artist to "create his artifact, *taking one piece and placing it next to other pieces*" (41 translation mine, italics added) ("воли творца, строящего произведение, *берущего один кусок и ставящего его рядом с другими кусками*" (1929: 54 italics added)). Tolstoy's letter, cited to illustrate this principle, reads:

I shall endeavor to say who my Andrei is. In the battle of Austerlitz . . . it was necessary for me to kill off a brilliant young man. Later in the same novel I found that I needed old man Bolkonsky and his daughter. Since it is rather awkward to describe a character who is in no way connected with the novel, I decided to make the brilliant young man the son of old Bolkonsky. I then became interested in him and gave him a role in the unfolding plot of the novel. And, feeling charitable, I had him severely wounded instead of killed" (41-42, translation modified).

Я постараюсь сказать, кто такой мой Андрей. В Аустерлицком сражении . . . мне нужно было, чтобы был убит блестящий молодой человек; в дальнейшем ходе самого романа мне нужно было только старика Болконского с дочерью, но так как неловко описывать ничем не связанное с романом лицо, я решил сделать блестящего молодого человека сыном старого Болконского. Потом он меня заинтересовал, для него представлялась роль в дальнейшем ходе романа, и я его помиловал, только сильно ранив его вместо смерти (55).

This depiction of the novelistic hero recalls Shklovsky's references to the role of the folkloric Maximilian or Cervantes' Don Quixote discussed above. I would like to draw attention to a correlate of this functional view of the hero (as opposed to the view of the hero as an integrated psychological 'whole' with internal coherence). This is the idea that the author does not necessarily have a clear idea of how his work will develop. Shklovsky argues in his chapter "How Don Quixote was Made" ["Kak sdelan Don Kikhot"] that "the Don Quixote type made famous by Heine and gushed over by Turgenev was not the author's original plan. This type appeared as a result of the novel's structure" (1990: 80). In accordance with this thesis, Shklovsky stresses that Cervantes "did not realize" ("сам Сервантес не замечал") aspects of the hero's depiction, or that outcomes of his approach were "not anticipated by the author either at the beginning or even in the middle of the novel" ("не предусмотрена автором ни в начале ни в середине романа" (1929: 95-96)). Shklovsky's insistence on the additive, in-the-moment nature of literary creation is arguably a result of his initial reliance on folklore theory. The concept of creating a work by "placing one piece next to another" stems from his adoption of Veselovsky's approach to the *motif* as an element of oral tradition and Shklovsky's embrace of the idea that authors work from a "fund" of commonly-known literary devices.

This foundation led Shklovsky to take a view of artistic structure different from the organicist model that many other formalists, spurred by an "awareness of the holistic nature of

the literary work and its intrinsic dynamism,” embraced (Steiner and Davydov 150).<sup>88</sup> In contrast, Shklovsky’s approach to literature did not insist on the interrelation of elements of internal structure. This results in a different view of the totality of the art work. “It is my firm belief, Shklovsky wrote in *Theory of Prose*,

что произведение, особенно длинное, не создается путем осуществления своего задания. Задание существует, но техника произведения переделывает его до конца. *Единство литературного произведения--вероятно, миф*, так кажется, по крайней мере, мне, писавшему полу-беллетристические вещи и издававшему много, как их писали (215 italics added).

that a literary work, especially a long one, is not brought into being by fulfilling a task. Yes, a task exists all right, but this task is completely altered by the technical means at the author’s disposal. *The unity of the work of literature is more likely than not a myth*. At least that is how I see it. And, as you know, I have written a piece of fiction or two in my time and have observed others of my generation at their craft” (179-180 italics added).

In rejecting the idea that the work is a holistic unity, Shklovsky is following the logic of his additive understanding of plot formation. This view is reflected in his decision to focus on works such as *Tristram Shandy* or *Don Quixote*—novels whose structure could be said to be infinitely expandable.

The celebration of open-ended literary structure has more recently been taken up by Gary Saul Morson, who refers to this as a “processual aesthetic” (268). Morson contrasts a set of literary works, primarily novels, which evince an open-ended temporal logic, with what he sees as a (dominant) strain of thought characterized by closedness or “finalization.” The latter is epitomized in literary theory by Aristotelian poetics with its injunction that works should have no superfluous parts and in literature by works which evince a tightly controlled overarching plan.<sup>89</sup> Morson draws heavily on the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin in his conception of an open-ended aesthetics, which he associates with a particular ethical position. He goes beyond Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel, however, to suggest that what Bakhtin was getting at was really “a particular kind of creative process” (268). “Polyphony” is a subset of a broader group of works which Morson argues display some of the following characteristics. Most of his criteria reiterate what scholars of orality describe as the central aspects of oral tradition. Morson’s processual aesthetic is characterized by works that: “operate entirely by forward, rather than backward, causation. No plan of the whole governs”; “the work renounces the privilege of an ending that would tie up all loose ends and complete a pattern”; “typically, the work is published serially or in parts”; the work “leaks” in that it frequently spawns related spin-offs or sequels, and finally, “we sense that the story as it has developed is one of many possible stories, that if it were possible to play the tape over again, there are many points where something else might have happened” (268-270).

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<sup>88</sup> They write, “the Formalists who utilized the biological metaphor for their study of literature can be divided into roughly two groups, according to whether they emphasized the holism of the biological organism or its intrinsic dynamism. Zhirmunskii and Eikhenbaum belong to the first category, Propp and Petrovskii to the second” (150-151). The view of the artwork as a whole made up systemically interrelated related parts was a basic premise of Prague structuralism, discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>89</sup> Morson writes, “for Aristotle, and for the tradition of poetics deriving from him, the harmony of art ideally eliminates all contingency from the artwork. It makes a perfect ‘unity’ in which everything has its place. Nothing is just *there*, as it is in life, but everything is there for a purpose” (251).

It is instructive to compare Morson's opposition between open-ended works and closed ones with Ong's opposition between the characteristics of the oral and the textual mindset. The central concept that characterizes both orality and the open-ended novel is that of "presentness" as opposed to the distance of analytical contemplation; man is either in the moment engaged with his surroundings, or at a remove, imposing an abstract structure on his thoughts.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Morson's list of characteristics above, like Ong's orality, can be attributed to a vision of creativity as occurring "in the moment." To generalize, both additive, oral performances and serialized novels (if they are not planned beforehand) "operate by forward, rather than backward, causation" because the author does not know what will come next.<sup>91</sup>

While a fuller treatment of the underlying connections between Morson's processual aesthetic and Ong's orality is beyond the constraints of this chapter, I have engaged Morson at some length because his argument reveals an important common denominator between the work of Bakhtin and Shklovsky. This is a commonality which may stem in part from both scholars' original point of departure in Veselovsky's "historical poetics."<sup>92</sup> Bakhtin's concept of openendedness, "unfinalizability," is first described in his 1929 book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* [*Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*]. Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky's polyphonic approach to writing allows him to create characters who enjoy "relative freedom and independence" (1984: 47). This results from writing in a way that allows the "characters to genuinely surprise the author in the course of writing" (Morson 267). Bakhtin describes this as a dialog between the author and the fictional character:

The new artistic position of the author with regard to the hero in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel is a *fully realized and thoroughly consistent dialogic position*, one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author the hero is not "he" and not "I" but a fully valid "thou," that is, another and other autonomous "I" ("thou art"). The hero is the subject of a deeply serious, *real* dialogic mode of address, not the subject of a rhetorically performed or conventionally literary one. And this dialogue—the "great dialogue" of the novel as a whole —takes place not in the past, but right now, that is, in *the real present* of the creative process. [...] The great dialogue in Dostoevsky is organized as an *unclosed whole* of life itself, life poised *on the threshold* (1984: 63 italics in original).

This passage suggests that both Shklovsky and Bakhtin's orientation towards open-ended works results from their use of the speech act as the basis for their theory of literature. Both, most importantly, envision the production of the literary work occurring in "the real present." If we recall, Veselovsky and Russian folklorists such as Rybnikov envisioned the act of folkloric

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<sup>90</sup> Morson writes, "Bakhtin maintained that ethics was precisely a matter of knowing what to do on a particular occasion, and he insisted that it could not be formulated as a set of rules. [...] It follows that actual, perceptive, and energetic *presence* on a given ethical occasion is necessary" (259). He links the finalized mode of writing to movements in the realm of philosophy (Leibnitz), theology (Augustine) and the social sciences (functional anthropology or rational-choice theory). Ong, in a more general argument, claims that textuality is the basis for "modern science" in that print allowed for the "exactly repeatable visual statement" (142).

<sup>91</sup> Morson, however, who is not working with a specifically orally grounded theory of creativity (like Shklovsky or Ong), does not envision the novel as composed in a purely additive manner.

<sup>92</sup> On Veselovsky and Bakhtin see Igor Shaitanov "Aleksandr Veselovskii's Historical Poetics: Genre in Historical Poetics." *New Literary History*, 2001, 32: 429-443 and Boris Maslov "Comparative Literature and Revolution, or the Many Arts of (Mis)reading Alexander Veselovsky" Forthcoming in *Compar(a)ison*.

creativity as the production of a specialized type of speech. Working in the present moment, under the constraints of time and the demands of the audience, the oral performer uses a store of known devices to “spin out” an often complex work which combined the idiosyncrasies of the tale-teller’s personal manner of “speech” and the collective fund of knowledge that he had accumulated. Bakhtin, referring to Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* (1923), expands this model in the direction of an ethical authorial position.<sup>93</sup>

Shklovsky, on the other hand, appears to eschew philosophical interpretations in favor of anthropological ones. Bakhtin and Shklovsky, both writing in the 1920s, set the moment of literary creation in the present moment and, so doing, attempt to curtail the reach of the author’s individual personality.<sup>94</sup> In *Theory of Prose*, this is because the author is beholden to the devices he has at his disposal. For Bakhtin, this results from the author allowing another perspective to inhabit his writing. In both cases the author’s personality is seen to be subsumed in the writing process in roughly the way that Albert Lord describes the performance of the singer of tales.

I have suggested that Shklovsky gave precedence to the role of tradition in the interest of scientificity because this downplays the element of the unpredictable or non-generalizable in this process. Yet Shklovsky does not just emphasize the weight of tradition, he goes even farther, interpreting the personal “will” of the author in anthropological or biological terms. Shklovsky states, “в художественном произведении кроме тех элементов, которые состоят из заимствований, существует еще элемент творчества, известной воли творца, строящего произведение, берущего один кусок и ставящего его рядом с другими кусками (1929: 54) (“apart from elements which consist of borrowings, a work of art also contains an element of creativity, a force of will driving an artist to create his artifact, taking one piece and placing it next to other pieces” (1990: 41)). In the remainder of this chapter I will demonstrate that Shklovsky understood this “force of will” in anthropological/biological terms.

As I hope to have shown, Shklovsky’s understanding of literary creativity and narrative structure were influenced by his familiarity with folkloristics, resulting in his adoption of collective creativity and an oral, additive, poetics as normative for literature. The time constraints inherent in oral creation mean that it is essentially forward moving, in that the work that results proceeds “piece-by-piece.” In the quote above, Shklovsky describes the force that propels the narrative forward as the creator’s “will.” More generally, the concept of forward motion is a leitmotif of Shklovsky’s theoretical and memoiristic writings from this period. Anne Dwyer argues, for example, that “Shklovsky’s understanding of the very nature of cultural production is founded on the principle of movement,” and that in his autobiographical writings, he repeatedly figures the “quest for new literary devices as nomadic movement” (1-29). In this we can see Shklovsky “realizing the metaphor,” to borrow one of Jakobson’s favorite terms, in that the image of the nomad realizes his principle of step-by-step construction [stupenchatoe stroenie] by depicting the hero putting one foot after another.

The use of movement as the generating force of literature is a fundamental principle of Shklovsky’s theory of prose, and is essential to understanding his influential distinction between the ‘story’ [fabula] and the ‘plot’ [siuzhet]. Shklovsky himself focuses mainly on the ‘plot’ leaving its necessary plane of contrast less well defined. Peter Steiner and Tzvetan Todorov,

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<sup>93</sup> For an overview of scholarship treating the “Bakhtin-Buber theme” see Caryl Emerson’s *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 225-231.

<sup>94</sup> Bakhtin’s personal correspondence reveals that “he had been at work on a study of Dostoevsky since at least 1921,” so there is the possibility that Shklovsky’s work on plot and Bakhtin’s work were relatively contemporaneous projects (Emerson xxix).

commenting on the different formalist interpretations of these two concepts, agree that for Shklovsky the *fabula* was understood to be a “lifelike story” or even “life itself” (Steiner 1984: 58, 85, 90). Todorov writes that, for Shklovsky, the *fabula* corresponded with “any pre-literary aspects” of the narrative (12). He suggests that this aspect of Shklovsky’s theory is undesirably vague, writing “he [Shklovsky] seems to lay exceptional importance on a kind of intuitive feeling as to what the normal rhythm of narrative composition should be” (13). These leading scholars of formalism find B. Tomashevsky and Iu. Tynianov’s definitions of *fabula* and *siuzhet* more useful, in that the former term is defined more specifically as the order of events referred to by the narrative.<sup>95</sup> I agree that for Shklovsky the *fabula* is “life itself,” and I believe that a consideration of the anthropological basis underlying Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* will allow us to better understand the “normal rhythm” that Todorov refers to.

There are many suggestions in Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose*, as well as in his memoiristic writings, that *fabula* is life itself in a biological sense. The comparison between life and a literary plot is a leitmotif of his *Sentimental Journey*. Life, Shklovsky suggests, unfolds according to familiar narrative devices, particularly folkloric ones. A striking example is his comparison of Trotsky to an epic hero [bogatyř]. He writes:

Шевелилась Финляндия. Нужно было сделать последнее усилие. --‘Товарищи, сделаем последнее усилие!’ кричал Троцкий. Коммунист поехал на фронт. Был снег. Снег и елка или сосна. Раз ехал он на лошади по этому снегу вместе с товарищем, ехал, ехал. Потом остановился, слез с лошади, сел на камень. Сидение на камне изображает отчаяние в эпосе (смотри А. Веселовский, том 3), сел на настоящий камень и заплакал.

Finland was stirring. One had to make a final effort. ‘Comrades, let us make a final effort!’ screamed Trotsky. A communist rode to the front. There was snow. Snow and a fir tree or a pine. One day he was riding on a horse on this snow along with a comrade. And he rode on and on. Then he stopped, dismounted, and sat down on a stone. Sitting on a stone represents despair in epic (see A. Veselovsky, vol. 3), he sat down on a real stone and wept (cited in Maslov 1-26).

Shklovsky’s reference to Veselovsky here is ironic, but there are enough moments in which Shklovsky applies literary theory to the interpretation of real life events in his memoir to suggest that he is not entirely mocking the parallel between the Russian folk epic and the Bolshevik campaign. A major theme in the memoir is that, despite the seeming extraordinariness of the events of the Civil War period, they can be seen to adhere to timeworn formulas and plot devices. This idea is powerfully underscored by Shklovsky’s presentation of the seeming arbitrariness of the paradigmatic element in the plot that unfolds between 1918 and 1922. People go on living, eating, sleeping, heating their stoves, but the “material” that can be entered into this syntagmatic framework appears to have been chosen by a madman; people eat cocoa butter, burn

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<sup>95</sup> Todorov, contrasting Tomashevsky and Shklovsky, writes, “instead of contrasting the thematic essence of a story with digressions, Tomashevsky creates an opposition between the sequence of events referred to by the narrative and the way these events are presented in the story. The *fable* [fabula] would seem to consist of a collection of narrative motifs in their chronological sequence [...] whereas the subject [siuzhet] represents the same collected motifs, but in the specific order of occurrence which they are assigned in the text” (15). The difference between these two approaches is not just one of clarity. Tomashevsky’s approach remains within the realm of artistic structure, while Shklovsky’s theory has one foot in human psychology.

books to keep warm, or use a samovar to pound nails.<sup>96</sup> In particular, Shklovsky stresses, the biographical person is irrelevant: “life flows in staccato pieces belonging to different systems. Only our clothing, not the body, joins the disparate moments of life” (1984: 184). At one point Shklovsky suggests that he holds his life together even less than Don Quixote integrates Cervantes’ novel, “I’m like a needle without any thread,” he writes “passing through cloth and leaving no trace” (1984: 226).<sup>97</sup>

In his *Theory of Prose* the analogies that Shklovsky draws between life and art are frequently couched in erotic examples. The rationale for deceleration, which in turn motivates Shklovsky’s aggregative plot devices, is the deferral of pleasure. Deceleration, impeding, or blocking the forward movement of the plot, as Todorov points out, are the central categories that separate Shklovsky’s *siuzhet* from the *fabula*. The forward impetus of the plot, driven by the author’s creative will, is repeatedly compared to the impetus to create life—that is sexual reproduction. Moreover, the forward flow of life/the plot is understood to go on according to its own laws regardless of the personality of the individual/character inserted into this flow. In a chapter from *Theory of Prose* Shklovsky compares Bely and Tolstoy’s use of the same “device”—the “introduction of an interpretation that is at odds with that of the author.” Their motivations for employing this device are, however, different: “anthroposophy” as opposed to “morality.” Shklovsky then indicates that, for him, this distinction is ultimately irrelevant, writing: “but this business reminds me a lot of love affairs. Each case is unique. One man loves a woman for her blue eyes, while another loves a woman for her grey eyes. The end result is one and the same: The earth is never short for children” (1990: 179) (“но это--как романы между людьми: все они разные, и один любит женщину за то, что у нее голубые глаза, а другой любит другую женщину за то, что глаза у нее серые. А результат один--на земле не переводятся дети” (1929: 214)).

The parallel Shklovsky suggests here is that between the device and love/reproduction. The “outcome” for Shklovsky of this inevitable plot movement is not death, but reproduction. This is in contrast to views of narrative that see that “death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell”—that “only the end can finally determine meaning, close the sentence as a signifying totality” (Walter Benjamin, cited in Brooks 22). Shklovsky’s attempt to situate narrative against the backdrop of the human psyche as opposed to the individual act of transmission, means that the psychological “plot” that serves as a counterpoint to narrative is ultimately open-ended rather than closed. If the story of one person’s life gains its final “meaning” only in death, the meaning of the human race for Shklovsky lies in its motor for eternal perpetuation. Shklovsky’s theory of prose is built on a conception of the human being that lacks closure. Literature is not a product of the closed, unique whole of the individual psyche, it is instead based on the view of the human being as one of a species—the person is not unique, but human “material” determined by biological laws.

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<sup>96</sup> Shklovsky stresses that despite the extreme nature of these years of privation, that people carried on as if things were normal: “I saw one man eating a dried fish while another, who had come to pay him a visit, furtively took the bones and the fishheads from the edge of the plate and ate them on the spot. Both men pretended that this was nothing at all, that this was the way it had always been done” (2005: 17). One of the articles included in *Knight’s Move* is titled “Pounding Nails with a Samovar” [Самоваром по гвоздям].

<sup>97</sup> One scholar points out that Shklovsky had political reasons for effacing his own agency in the events of 1918. See Cristina Vatulescu “The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky’s Device through Literary and Policing Practices” in *Poetics Today* (2006), 35-66. As we have seen, however, the tendency to efface authorial or literary personalities is found throughout not only Shklovsky’s memoirs but his literary theory as well.

Once we recognize that Shklovsky understands the forward driving momentum of the plot (the “will” of the artist) to be a reflection of mankind’s impetus towards reproduction, then his erotic interpretation of defamiliarization falls into place. One of the facts of life under War Communism that Shklovsky returns to repeatedly is the desexualization of men and women under conditions of extreme privation.<sup>98</sup> One of his more telling renditions of this fact focuses on the meagerness of the romantic “plot” under trying circumstances: “wait until the temperature in Russia drops to about 15 degrees,” he writes, “then take a man and a woman with anywhere from one to twenty years’ difference in their ages, put them in the same apartment and they’ll become man and wife. I don’t know any sadder truth than this” (1984: 209) (“если поселить в России приблизительно при 10 градусах мороза в одной квартире мужчину и женщину с разностью возраста от одного года до двадцати лет, то они станут мужем и женой. Я не знаю истины более печальной” (2002: 207)). Considered against this backdrop, as the *fabula* for Shklovsky’s theory of prose, the devices of deceleration which slow down and complicate the plot take on another layer of significance. Shklovsky, referring mainly to folkloric material, suggests that plot devices are analogous to courtship. Recall the extended example of defamiliarization provided by Jakobson’s ethnographic observation of the erotic “trial nights” ritual. Shklovsky also uses a series of questions to juxtapose the literary and the romantic, asking: “Why does King Lear fail to recognize Kent? [...] Why is it that in dance a partner requests ‘the pleasure of the next dance’ even after the woman has already tacitly accepted it?” (1990: 15).<sup>99</sup> These devices create and prolong pleasure in life, putting off and creating art from the *fabula* of an inevitable outcome—“more children.”

This conception of *fabula* is central to understanding Shklovsky’s approach to Sterne in *Theory of Prose*. As Todorov remarks, in “his analysis of *Tristram Shandy*, Shklovsky argues that ‘in this book everything is distanced and displaced,’ and this displacement is presumably felt to be so in relation to some hypothetical pre-ordained unfolding of the action” (13). In this instance the *fabula* that is continually displaced is actually quite specific. It is the very same “engine” of forward motion that Shklovsky sees underlying prose more generally. The progression that is continually displaced, in Shklovsky’s analysis, is the moment of conception that engenders the novel’s hero. “The paronomastic motif of coitus, associated with a particular day” Shklovsky writes, “pervades the novel. Appearing from time to time, it serves to connect the various parts of the novel” (149). The entire plot of the novel he suggests is spun out of an “anecdote” relating the interruption of Shandy’s parents’ sexual act. I would argue that it is this aspect of the novel’s construction and theme that compels Shklovsky to claim that “*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel in world literature” (170).<sup>100</sup>

To summarize, Shklovsky’s theory of prose, which seeks to explain the universality of literature as a human phenomenon, rests on folklore theory. This foundation leads Shklovsky to treat written literature in terms developed to describe oral creativity. As a result, Shklovsky

<sup>98</sup> He repeatedly mentions that, when starved and frozen, “men were almost completely impotent and women ceased to have their periods” (2005: 13).

<sup>99</sup> Shklovsky includes a romantic example in his often-cited description of defamiliarization, writing: “A crooked road, a road in which the foot feels acutely the stones beneath it, a road that turns back on itself- this is the road of art. One word fits another. One word feels another word, *as one cheek feels another cheek*” (1990: 15 italics added).

<sup>100</sup> This well-known claim has been interpreted variously. For example, Fredric Jameson writes: “I believe that above and beyond the impudence, this sentence is to be taken literally: *Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel because it is the most novelistic of all novels, taking as its subject-matter the very process of story-telling itself” (76). My analysis differs in that I suggest that Shklovsky posited an essential basis for literature beyond “story-telling” in man’s biological drives.

theorizes plot structure as open-ended and organized in a processual, additive manner. Shklovsky's view of the chronotope of prose fiction, like Bakhtin's, places the author in the moment of creation. Yet, unlike Bakhtin, Shklovsky interprets the pressure of unfolding time in biological terms rather than philosophical ones. The movement of the plot (the *fabula*) is understood, at its root, to reflect the pressure to reproduce and further the human race. Art, then, for Shklovsky, emerges from the devices that impede and complicate this drive. These devices are seen as innately connected both to aesthetic pleasure and the sexual. Moreover, they become that element of human nature that, by complicating and drawing out pleasure, elevates life from its most animal, biological, foundation. The devices of plot construction could be said to reflect, in artistic terms, Tylor's "culture" as a universal, anthropological phenomenon.

### Conclusion

Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*, like much of his fellow formalists' work uses language as a model to create a science of literature. As I hope to have shown, the folkloristic theory that Shklovsky drew upon was modeled on the speech act. Shklovsky's theory of prose relies on the concept of a collectively-held "fund" of devices that operate much like *langue* in Saussure's terminology. Moreover, the concept of verbal creativity based on this fund is generally analogous to the production of speech. In *Theory of Prose* the "laws of plot formation" that govern the organization of these elements can be understood as a type of grammar. Like the folklorist Vladimir Propp's (1895-1970) celebrated *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), which treats characters as agents of the action, Shklovsky is interested almost exclusively in the syntactic (or syntagmatic) analysis of verbal structure. Shklovsky's rejection of the personal and the psychological is an element of his insistence on the fact that the "material" of literature is conditioned by the laws of structure. The idea that the hero plays only a structural role in the composition of a literary plot epitomized this aspect of Shklovsky's work. This approach was not just an attack on a perceived over-emphasis on personality in literary studies, but was an element of his efforts to create a universal theory of prose. It was necessary to dismiss details relating to the setting of a work or the personality of its characters in order to reveal the laws of plot construction that Shklovsky posits to be valid for literatures all over the globe.

Shklovsky's use of language as a model for literary theory is, however, *more metaphorical* than that of his linguistically grounded colleagues in OPOIaZ or the MLC. The collision between these two viewpoints was evident at Shklovsky's first recorded presentation in the Moscow Linguistic Circle on September 1, 1919. He presented a paper titled "Plot construction in cinematic art" ["Siuzhetoslozhenie v kinematograficheskom iskusstve"] which drew pointed critique on this point from G. O. Vinokur and R. Jakobson.<sup>101</sup> Both scholars, linguists by training, appear to have been dismayed by Shklovsky's suggestion that defamiliarization is not a purely linguistic phenomenon. The protocol reports that "Винокуру представляется непонятным выражение 'неязыковое, бытовое остранение.' 'Остранение,' сам термин, указывает на языковой факт, как же языковой факт может быть неязыковым?" (Barankova 1997: 82) ("Vinokur finds the phrase 'non-linguistic defamiliarization of life' incomprehensible. The very term 'defamiliarization' refers to a linguistic fact, how can a linguistic fact be non-linguistic?"). Jakobson concurred, stating: "выйдя в своей интерпретации художественных фактов за пределы «выражения», докладчик внес безнадежную путаницу" (Barankova 1997:83) ("having extended his interpretation of artistic

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<sup>101</sup> See Shklovsky's subsequently published "Siuzhet v kinematografe" in his book *Literatura i kinematograf* (1923).

facts beyond the boundaries of ‘expression,’ the presenter has made a hopeless blunder.”<sup>102</sup> In fact, Shklovsky had suggested the possibility of separating poetics from language per se several years earlier in his essay “Poetry and transrational language” (1916). In a statement that certainly would have provoked outrage among the more linguistically oriented formalists, Shklovsky had suggested: “возможно даже, что слово является приемышем поэзии. Таково, например, мнение А. Н. Веселовского. И кажется уже ясным, что нельзя назвать ни поэзию явлением языка, ни язык – явлением поэзии” (1990: 57) (“it is even possible that the word is the adopted child of poetry. Such is, for example, the opinion of A. N. Veselovsky. It seems clear then that one may not claim that poetry is a phenomenon of language, nor language a phenomenon of poetry”). It is instructive that Shklovsky cites Veselovsky in his suggestion that “poetry” may in fact come before the “word.” This position is a logical correlate of a theory of poetic language that assumes that anthropological constants (primitive psychology) are responsible for the appearance of similar poetic forms in the unrelated languages of the world. In the next two chapters I discuss how the adherence to a more literal application of language as a model for literary study meant that literary theory (theories of poetic language and semiotics) was bound to issues of territorial spread, and national versus local identity. Shklovsky’s approach allowed him to create a theory that was more universal. While Prague School semiotics and Jakobson’s linguistic poetics are ideas that have arguably seen their heyday, the continued popularity of Shklovsky’s work to this day raises the question as to whether its appeal is related to his efforts to create a theory of universal applicability.

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<sup>102</sup> Jakobson seconded Vinokur’s opinion; citing approvingly Shklovsky’s definition of *ostranenie* as “называние вещи не своим именем,” he objects to the fact that “теперь он уже говорит, что остранение не языковой факт. Шкловский растерялся перед фактом «реализации словесного построения» он готов допустить, что параллелизм – языковой факт, но метаморфоза, т.е. развертывание параллелизма во времени, почему-то оказывается внеязыковой” (Barankova 1997: 83).

## Chapter Two

### Roman Jakobson: Literary Value and the Epic Past

This chapter treats the development of Roman Jakobson's (1896-1982) formalist poetics from the 1910s to the 1930s as a product of his intellectual biography. It focuses on his first major work, written and presented in Moscow in 1919, *The Newest Russian Poetry* [*Noveishaia russkaia poeziia*] (NRP), comparing its central ideas to those circulating in the scholarly societies that Jakobson belonged to as a student at Moscow University (1914-1918). I then turn to follow the evolution of these concepts in Jakobson's extensive work on the history of Czech poetry completed during his years spent in Czechoslovakia (1920-1939). Placing Jakobson's early work in this context highlights the fact that his literary theory was shaped by intellectual traditions and disciplines which are relatively foreign to the contemporary study of "high" literature today. Of primary importance was the philological study of the Russian oral epic [bylina]. A second, related, source of influence was Jakobson's association with two scholarly societies while a student; the Commission for Folklore Study [Komissiiia po narodnoi slovesnosti] (CFS) and the Moscow Dialectological Commission [Moskovskaia dialektologicheskaiia komissiiia] (MDC).

In my analysis of Jakobson's writings from this period, I see that he was torn between two different modes of literary evaluation. Jakobson's NRP reflects this tension and, I argue, illustrates the incompatibility between the two. These two modes can be associated with (1) the traditional philological study of the epic, and (2) with the then-novel study of contemporary folklore according to a theoretical framework provided by dialectology. Jakobson's understanding of literary *value*, I contend, was derived from the first model—the philological tradition. His efforts to craft a new, scientific *method* for the study literature, what he calls "poetic dialectology," reflects contemporary enthusiasm for the second model. The concept of "poetic dialectology," I argue, reflects Jakobson's training in the Commission for Folklore Study (CFS) in the 1910s. The result was that in his NRP Jakobson proposes a methodology that is at odds with his conception of literary value.<sup>1</sup>

"Value," as Terry Eagleton has pointed out, "is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes" (10). In order to succinctly encapsulate the mode of evaluation that Jakobson applied to all verbal art (high literature as well as folklore), and which he adhered to consistently in his writings in this period, I borrow the term "epic past" as it was articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) in his study "The Epic and the Novel" (1941). "The world of the epic," Bakhtin wrote, "is the national heroic past: it is a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'" (13). This valorized conception of a foundational moment as "first" and "best" had a corollary in the

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<sup>1</sup> Jakobson's understanding of literary value was different from that of his colleague in the Prague Linguistic Circle, Jan Mukařovský. Mukařovský approached artistic value through the concept of aesthetic norm and function. He argued in 1936 that "aesthetic value" emerges "where the aesthetic norm is more violated than observed." This is, he stressed, a "basically social phenomenon" (95). For a more contemporary treatment of the question of literary value, see the recent number of *Modern Language Quarterly* on this subject. For an overview see Joseph Luzzi "Introduction," in *Modern Language Quarterly 2011 Volume 72, Number 3*, 277-291.

comparative method, the basis for philology in the German and Russian academic traditions. In the philological analysis of texts or languages, the foundational moment valued was conceived as a proto-language (*Ursprache*) or proto-text. This conceptual paradigm shaped Jakobson's teacher V. F. Miller's (1846-1913) approach to the Russian oral epic [bylina]. Miller posited a lost, more complete version of the epic as a proto-text which was to be reconstructed according to the comparative method. This reconstructed text was valued for what it would reveal about the origins of Russian national history. The comparative method relied heavily on historical linguistics and its procedure was understood to be objective in that it focused on the comparison of variants rather than aesthetic judgments. Jakobson's conceptions of literary scholarship and literary value owed much to this tradition. He celebrated the linguistic, comparative method as objective science and as a result he did not turn a critical eye to the moments of evaluation on which this method was based. The evaluation of some literary facts as "first," and thus "best," or, in Jakobson's terms most "essential," was the lynchpin of his approach to verbal art. In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that an important source for Jakobson's adherence to this mode of evaluation was V. F. Miller's Historical school of *bylina* study. I argue that Jakobson applied this mode of evaluation not just to the oral epic but to subjects as various as the avant-garde poetry of Velimir Khlebnikov and fourteenth-century Czech spiritual poetry.

In its most *literal* interpretation Jakobson's proposal of a "poetic dialectology" arguably never found application in Jakobson's writings. His articulation of this idea in NRP is, nevertheless, a revealing moment that reflects the extent to which Jakobson's early thinking on verbal art was conditioned by his work in folkloristics and dialectology. It represents, moreover, an explicit attempt on Jakobson's part to revolutionize the conception of the "author function" in literary studies.<sup>2</sup> He began his NRP with the claim that "the development of poetic language will be possible only when... a kind of poetic dialectology is created. From the point of view of this dialectology, Pushkin is the center of a poetic culture of a particular time, with a definite zone of influence" (1992: 175). This assertion, which does not find obvious application in Jakobson's subsequent work, has not been discussed in the scholarship on Jakobson and Russian formalism.<sup>3</sup> Jakobson suggests that a poetic dialectology will revolve around the identification of certain authors as dialectal "centers of gravity." This means that the author's name was not to be applied literally as a type of authorizing stamp as was placed on works deemed to have been penned by Pushkin. Instead, "Pushkin" would serve as a point of gravity that organizes a larger sphere of literary language.

In his NRP, Jakobson describes "poetic dialectology" as a method to be applied to the *synchronic* axis of analysis—that is, to contemporary poetry. This is the "literal" interpretation of his approach that was never carried out, for reasons I will discuss in further detail. This is not to say, however that the claim is irrelevant for Jakobson's work on verbal art. This conception of the "author function" articulated by a poetic dialectology was, in fact, a fundamental aspect of Jakobson's *diachronic* (historical) work on Czech literature in the 1920s and 30s. In my analysis of this work, I argue that Jakobson treats the Old Church Slavonic canon created by the Saints Cyril and Methodius as an historical, authorial "center of gravity" for the Czech literary tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> In my discussion of this point I use the concept of the "author function" as advanced by Michel Foucault in his seminal essay "What is an Author?" (1969).

<sup>3</sup> An exception is J. Toman's *Magic of a Common Language*, which devotes some attention to this claim. Toman writes: "it is clear that the passage offers extraordinary insight into the mechanics of Jakobson's scholarly imagination. He is transferring the perspective used in dialectology, including some very specific concepts of dialect theory, to literary history—an area rather removed, at first glance. For the first time in Jakobson's writings, linguistics is raised to the level of a model of research" (13).

In this work there is a more harmonious consistency between Jakobson's method (comparative philology) and his conception of literary value associated with the epic past. The parallels between Jakobson's work on Czech literary history and V. F. Miller's treatment of the Russian *bylina* suggest that Miller's "Historical school" of folkloristics was a central influence for both Jakobson's understanding of literary value as well as his approach to the function of the author in literature.

Like Shklovsky's "laws of plot formation," Jakobson's "poetic dialectology" was an attempt to create a scientific methodology for the study of literature. Both based their efforts on the conception of literature as "verbal art" [slovesnost'] that underlay work in philology and folkloristics in the Russian academy at the turn of the century. Shklovsky, as I have argued, folklorized literature by applying concepts from the study of oral tales and their mode of creation to high literature. Jakobson folklorized poetic language in a different way. He drew his conception of poetic value from a model that was based on the study of the oral epic. This was reflected in his understanding of the literary author as a gravitational point which acts as an organizing force over the *longue durée* of history.

### The Concept of the Literary

One of the most frequently cited lines from Jakobson's, or indeed the formalists', writings is the declaration that "предметом науки о литературе является не литература, а литературность, т.е. то, что делает данное произведение литературным произведением" (1979 [1921]: 305) ("the subject of literary scholarship is not literature but literariness [literaturnost'], that is, that which makes of a given work a work of literature" (1992: 179)). This statement is so frequently cited because it can be seen as pithily summarizing the formalists' contribution to the foundations of modern literary theory. It claims for literary studies the status of an autonomous discipline akin to linguistics, sociology or psychology. Jakobson's statement, which appears towards the beginning of *Noveishaia russkaia poeziia* (NRP), is juxtaposed with a critique of Russian "literary historians" [istoriki literatury], whom he faults for having cast the net of their scholarship too broadly: they rely on an array of "adjacent disciplines," and study too broad a range of phenomena.<sup>4</sup> "Literary scholars up to now," Jakobson writes "have often behaved like policemen who, in the course of arresting a particular person, would pick up, just in case, everybody and anybody who happened to be in the apartment, as well as some people who happened to be passing by on the street" (179).

Jakobson's programmatic argument for an autonomous field of literary studies is largely accepted today without question; literature departments approach literary texts differently than historians, for example, do. Yet if we return to this moment of emancipation it becomes clear that, while its conclusions are still embraced, the methodological assumptions that attended Jakobson's claim have been largely forgotten. His 1919 proposal to study what makes a work literary (*literaturnost'*) purposefully leaves the definition of literature as a class of texts open-

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<sup>4</sup> Jakobson writes that "до сих пор историки литературы преимущественно уподоблялись полиции, которая, имея целью арестовать определенное лицо, захватила бы на всякий случай всех и всё, что находилось в квартире, а также случайно проходивших по улице мимо. Так и историкам литературы все шло на потребу-быт, психология, политика, философия. Вместо науки о литературе создавался конгломерат доморощенных дисциплин" (1979: 305). A. Byford comments on this tendency: "what seemed important to literary historians was [...] to place literary history into a network of already institutionalized humanities academic disciplines that they could then in one way or another relate to their own science. These other disciplines were commonly referred to as 'adjacent' and/or 'auxiliary' sciences (*smezhnye* and *vspomogatel'nye nauki*)" (2005: 148).

ended. His approach suggests that we retreat from the study of acknowledged works of “literature,” and turn our attention to the study of the linguistic structures of which they are constituted. In this way, Jakobson advocated the study of the literary as a natural science. It is to be studied as if under the microscope, at a lower level of organization. He articulated this as the study of the literary “device” [priem] as an elementary unit in the structure of works. The expectation is that an understanding of literariness will emerge from this inductive approach to what he called the “verbal mass” [slovesnaia massa]—the raw material of literature.<sup>5</sup>

Jakobson attempted to part ways with the study of literature based on aesthetic criteria or normative categories; that is, with the approach to literature that predominated in the century preceding and following Jakobson’s pronouncement. This widely accepted view is that of literature as a social fact—the recognition of the category of “literature” as part of the history of thought. Jakobson’s posture is registered in his disregard for culturally defined categories such as the distinction between folklore and written, high literature or between works of different time periods. Because Jakobson believed that the search for literariness must begin on a more elemental level of analysis than that of the socially-constructed categories of ‘work,’ ‘genre,’ or ‘artistic movement,’ he juxtaposed examples that a scholar operating within a social definition of literature would keep separate. In correspondence with Jakobson following the publication of NRP in 1921, N. S. Trubetskoi (1890-1938) forcefully objected to this point. Jakobson, he claimed, displayed a “слишком большое пренебрежение эстетическим критерием. Пушкин, народная словесность, футуристы-- всё это совершенно разнородные величины именно в силу их совершенно различных эстетических подходов, взглядов (бессознательных или сознательных) на задачи поэзии” (Jakobson 1975: 17) (“overly careless attitude towards aesthetic criteria. Pushkin, folklore, futurists--these are all completely heterogeneous quantities precisely in view of their completely different aesthetic approaches, and their views (conscious or unconscious) of the concept of poetry”).

Jakobson replied to Trubetskoi, clarifying his method and goals in NRP.<sup>6</sup> Peter Steiner observes that this work “contains *in nuce* most of Jakobson’s ideas about verbal art” and argues that it is possible to “extract from it the basic principles that came to underlie Jakobson’s ‘literary science’” (1984: 200).<sup>7</sup> As a condensed explication of Jakobson’s thinking, Jakobson and Trubetskoi’s correspondence on the book’s central premises can be read as a debate regarding Jakobson’s formalist, or linguistic, approach to literature more generally. In a second letter to Jakobson on this subject, dated March 7, 1921, Trubetskoi appears more favorably inclined to Jakobson’s position, but he continues to articulate this important reservation:

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<sup>5</sup> In NRP, for example, he defines poetry not just as a “set towards expression,” but as a set towards the “verbal mass.” Jakobson writes: “Та установка на выражение, на *словесную массу*, которую квалифицирую как единственный, существенный для поэзии момент, направлена не только на форму словосочетания, но и на форму слова” (330 italics added). The phrase “verbal mass” appears in the writings of the Russian futurists. В. Livshits, a founding member of the futurist group Hylaea, used it to describe Khlebnikov’s manipulations of the raw material of language as a naturally-occurring phenomenon: “мы уничтожили знаки препинания... Мы этим способом подчеркиваем непрерывность словесной массы, ее стихийную космическую сущность. Единственно доступная поэту одержимость веществом есть одержимость материалом его искусства, погружение в стихию слова” (487).

<sup>6</sup> See M. I. Shapir. “Iz istorii filologicheskoi nauki.” *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk SSSR* 50 (1991): 43-57 for Jakobson’s response.

<sup>7</sup> V. Erlich calls NRP “undoubtedly the most important contribution to poetics to come out of the Moscow Linguistic Circle,” and a work representative of “the early Formalist conception of poetry and literary studies” (65).

Мне кажется, нельзя упускать из виду, что литература есть фактор социальной жизни. А как только Вы подойдете к ней с этой стороны, то сейчас же Ваша точка зрения окажется недостаточной, неисчерпывающей. Для того, чтобы данное произведение стало фактом социального порядка, надо чтобы оно победоносно прошло через это ‘испытание вкусом.’ Только тогда оно удовлетворяет читателей и порождает подражание хотя бы в потенции. И, строго говоря, только при таких условиях оно и становится литературным произведением и входит как звено в историю литературы (22).

It seems to me that one must not lose sight of the fact that literature is a factor of social life. And as soon as you approach it from that perspective then your viewpoint immediately turns out to be insufficient, incomplete. In order for a given work to become a fact of the social order it necessary that it pass victoriously through the ‘test of taste.’ Only then will it satisfy readers and evoke imitation, even if only potentially. And, strictly speaking, only under these conditions does it become a work of art and enter as a link into the history of literature.<sup>8</sup>

Trubetskoi remarks that Jakobson will not be successful in reforming literary studies because his approach does not overlap with the discipline, which is based on these socially defined criteria. Trubetskoi writes, “в Вашей науке и Пушкин, и дядя Митяй и гимназистка пытающаяся писать стихи-совершенно одинаково равноправные предметы изучения” (23) (“in your scholarship both Pushkin, and uncle Mityai and the schoolgirl trying to write poetry--these are all completely equal subjects of study”). This type of radical relativity, Trubetskoi suggests, will be an overwhelming barrier to Jakobson’s project, in that it is impossible to study literature without any evaluative criteria. Because literature is a social category, Trubetskoi insists, literariness cannot be studied in a purely inductive, objective manner by approaching the linguistic units that underlie the creation of a literary work. In his response Trubetskoi was taking Jakobson’s claim to study not literature, but literariness at face value. Jakobson, however, was never actually operating with a value-free approach to the literary. For reasons I will come to, Jakobson’s writings on poetic language may have included folklore, but they never would have referenced the “schoolgirl trying to write poems.” This is because Jakobson, despite what he would have his readers believe, was not starting anew with his conception of a formalist literary science. His approach, I will demonstrate, followed upon the academic, philological tradition of literary scholarship in the Russian academy.

Trubetskoi recognizes Jakobson’s relationship to academic literary scholarship in as much as he assumes that what Jakobson is trying to do is to “reform” this tradition.<sup>9</sup> The field of scholarship that Trubetskoi relates Jakobson’s work to, what he calls “literary scholarship”

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<sup>8</sup> The recognition of literature as a “social fact,” would become an important point marking the evolution of Czech structuralism beyond Russian formalism, which was based on the embrace of semiotics as a basis for literary analysis and literary history. Nevertheless, Jakobson continued to make statements into the 1940s that suggest that he was reluctant to view literature as a “social fact” in this sense. See, for example, Jakobson’s “On Russian Fairy Tales,” 89. Interestingly, Jakobson would subsequently paraphrase this passage of Trubetskoi’s letter in his “Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity” (1929) in which he applies this reasoning to folklore, *in contrast to* literature.

<sup>9</sup> Trubetskoi writes, “что в той науке, которая до сих пор называлась ‘литературной наукой’ и ‘историей литературы’ необходимо произвести реформы, т.к. она смешивает в себе самые разнородные и неотносящиеся к делу дисциплины, с этим я вполне согласен” (23).

[literaturnaia nauka] or “history of literature” [istoriia literatury], paved the way for Jakobson’s formalism in two important aspects. It provided the criteria for scholarliness [nauchnost’] in literary study and a corresponding method for achieving this goal. The method in question is the philological study of (usually ancient) texts based on the techniques of comparative linguistics. I will return in detail to Jakobson’s grounding in this methodology in subsequent sections of this chapter. The literary historians’ concept of scholarliness as it was understood at the turn of the century is relevant to understanding why Jakobson adhered to the philological method and how he sought to transform it into a modern, more broadly applicable, theory of literature.

Although Jakobson was frequently critical of his predecessors, and rejected important aspects of the literary historians’ approach, he shared their assumptions regarding objectivity in literary scholarship. In his study of the institutionalization of Russian literary scholarship in the nineteenth century, Andy Byford demonstrates that a concern with scholarliness in literary studies long predated the emergence of Russian formalism. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, he argues, academic literary scholars were concerned with legitimizing the field in relation to the agenda of the Russian Imperial Academy. This meant, generally speaking, that scholars stressed not the autonomy and specificity of literature, but its connection to and relevance for understanding Russian history and the national spirit. One aspect of defining the field as scholarly involved contrasting academic scholarship with the writings of amateur literary critics. Byford reveals that this distinction was reflected in the types of texts considered legitimate for scholarly (as opposed to amateur) study, and in the avoidance of aesthetic approaches to literature.

The avoidance of foregrounding the artistic aspect (*khudozhestvennaia storona*) of literature was... a conscious strategy of drawing a distinction between (professional) literary scholarship and (amateur) literary criticism. Scholars labeled the criticism of Belinskii, for example, ‘aesthetic’ in a pejorative way because Belinskii as a journalistic literary critic was dismissive of the literary value of medieval writings and folklore. It was precisely in contrast to this apparently non-scholarly ‘aesthetic’ mode of literary evaluation that academic literary historians of the late nineteenth century insisted on defining their own approach and methodology as ‘historical’ (2007: 34).

Academic historians of literature thus created an understanding of scholarliness that was based on the dichotomy between aesthetic judgment and historical, linguistic-based scholarship. The first type of work was deemed “subjective,” the latter “objective.” This dichotomy was a fundamental assumption that underlay Jakobson’s understanding of scholarliness in literary study.

In conjunction with their rejection of aesthetic approaches, the academic tradition avoided an overly narrow delimitation of their subject matter. Because, Byford writes, “literary scholarship... defined itself as the study of the ‘national spirit,’ embodied in the language and literature of ‘the people’ [...it kept the distinction between the values of ‘the literary’ and ‘the national’ strategically blurred” (2007: 161). As a result, academic literary scholars referred to their subject matter by various names. When focused on older texts, they termed their work the study of “literary monuments” [pamiatniki literatury]. The range of material they covered,

however, was encompassed by the term ‘verbal art’ [*slovesnost*’].<sup>10</sup> Of the discursive categories that academic scholars used to describe their subject matter, Byford writes, “*slovesnost*’ probably was the widest frame of reference to poetic verbal artifacts.” This term “could incorporate the notion of poetic language or discourse in general, and was often used specifically as a way of legitimately including folklore in the realm of ‘literature’, as in the phrase ‘*narodnaia slovesnost*’” (2007: 32).

Jakobson’s caricature of the literary historians as overzealous policemen belies the fact that the breadth of the academic approach was not without rationale. The category of *slovesnost*’ was expansive, yet still had a common denominator in its perceived national-historical relevance. *Slovesnost*’ would include “naïve” folk songs, but would not extend to include the amateur attempts at versification by Trubetskoi’s “schoolgirl.” In general, this category was made up of ancient texts or folkloric works which were often anonymous, and which were understood to be worthy of study for what they were presumed to reveal about national history and identity. Jakobson, in keeping with the academic conception of scholarliness, avoided a priori aesthetic categories characteristic of subjective literary criticism. Just as importantly, the broader, “objective” conception of the literary that he adopted was largely that of *slovesnost*’. Jakobson’s proposal to study the “verbal mass” in an inductive fashion was not the “scientific” study of “raw material,” but was based on the application of a linguistic (philological) methodology to the category of *slovesnost*’—that is, a broad category of verbal art defined by its perceived national relevance.

Jakobson’s approach to literature, beginning with the “verbal mass,” did, however, expand the literary historians’ conception of *slovesnost*’ in a significant way. He extended it to include contemporary literature. In rejecting aesthetic considerations, academic literary historians generally avoided writing on newer literature. In NRP Jakobson pointedly attacks this aspect of their method, claiming that attention should be turned to the study of the most recent literature. Thus Jakobson’s approach can be described as an attempt to bring new subject matter (high, contemporary literature) into the realm of material (*slovesnost*’) studied through an anti-aesthetic, inductive method. This arguably contributed to Trubetskoi’s sense that Jakobson’s juxtaposition of “Pushkin, Khlebnikov and folklore” was misguided. Jakobson was not treating high literature (Khlebnikov, Pushkin) according to the aesthetic conventions established for this subject matter. Furthermore, his inclusion of high and contemporary poetry into the looser category of verbal art (folklore), prevented Trubetskoi from recognizing that his colleague was adopting an approach akin to the literary historians’ use of *slovesnost*’.

The academic tradition thus provided Jakobson with a model for objective scholarship that was based on an avoidance of a priori aesthetic categories, paired with a broader, more inductive approach to literature broadly defined as *slovesnost*’. Objectivity in this sense, however, was grounded in the historical-national evaluation that defined this work—and the categories it operated with were taken for granted.<sup>11</sup> Jakobson, who saw himself as making the academic approach more rigorous by severing its ties with the “adjacent disciplines” of

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<sup>10</sup> The core of this work was, however, oriented towards these ‘monuments of literature’. Byford writes that “they processed even modern literature (for purposes of authoritative academic editions, for example) on the model of medieval manuscripts” (2007: 34).

<sup>11</sup>G. Tihanov makes this point in his article on the reasons for the emergence of modern literary theory in Central and Eastern Europe. He argues that there was a “foundational paradox inherent in some of the best examples of early literary theory” which he formulates as follows: “it is possible to think about and theorize literature per se, beyond national constraints, yet the importance of literature per se as a subject of theory is validated by analyzing texts that had been—or are being—canonized as nationally significant” (2004: 76).

philosophy, history or theology, nevertheless continued to operate with an understanding of scholarliness and objectivity that was in fact based on a national-historical mode of evaluation. In order to see this in more detail, it is necessary to turn to the question of value in linguistic analysis.

### Formalism, Futurism and Literary Value

Cultural and historical relativism was an important theme in Jakobson's writings from the interwar period. In his discussion of Jakobson's early writings Jindřich Toman describes this work as characterized by a "relativistic discourse," which "typically converged with an emphatic refusal to pronounce value judgments, especially in matters of culture and history" (1995: 26). This stance is proclaimed in the opening of NRP. Building towards his proposal that poetic dialectology should serve as the new method for literary studies, Jakobson refers to linguistics as a model discipline in that it entails an objective approach to its subject matter: "лишь тогда станет возможна научная поэтика когда она откажется от всякой оценки, ибо не абсурдно ли лингвисту, как таковому, расценивать наречия сообразно с их сравнительным достоинством" (1979: 301) ("scientific poetics will be become possible only when it refuses to offer value judgments. Wouldn't it be absurd for a linguist to assess values to dialects according to their relative merits?" (1992: 175)). Jakobson's insistence that it is absurd to evaluate dialects would seem to fly in the face of the understanding of a dialect as a non-standardized, usually "substandard," variant of the language spoken by urban elites. There is, however, a second, less obvious, moment of evaluation that linguistic analysis entails which is more relevant here for understanding Jakobson's approach to literature. He also appears to turn a blind eye to this type of evaluation as part of his uncritical conception of linguistics and dialectology as objective, value-free scholarship. This second moment, which occurs at a methodological level, was carried over from the historical-philological method which was so closely associated with objectivity and scholarliness in the Russian academic tradition.

Jakobson's self-identification as a "Russian philologist"—he famously had this epithet engraved on his tombstone—has been noted by scholars.<sup>12</sup> Jakobson was trained in the methods of comparative philology while a student at Moscow University. He recalls in particular the instruction of L. V. Shcherba, A. A. Shakhmatov, and N. N. Durnovo in the study of medieval texts, primarily the national epic, the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* [*The Song of Igor's Campaign*].<sup>13</sup> Jakobson writes for example that, when he was a student, Shakhmatov "insistently advised me to investigate the linguistic pattern of the ancient text (of the *Slovo*), which, as he believed, distinctly transpires through the easily removable cloak of its late copy" (1966: 654). As this quote suggests, the philological or "comparative method" was based on a close association between the study of ancient texts and the study of the history of language. In both instances comparison was used to adduce genealogies leading back either to a presumed *Ursprache* or to an original text. This history was envisioned as a "family tree" whose forking branches denote

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<sup>12</sup> M. Holquist, for example, recently dedicated an article to the meaning of philology in Jakobson's career. He notes that "philology... understood to be the *combined* study of language and literature,... is arguably an idea whose time has passed" (81 italics in original).

<sup>13</sup> Jakobson reportedly passed on to his own students at Harvard Shcherba's adage that "philology is the art of reading slowly" (Watkins 25). Jakobson recalled that in N. N. Durnovo's class, "any Russian parchment studied... was treated as a multifunctional, organized whole, and he [Durnovo] repeatedly urged the junior researchers to excel both himself and other teachers by clinging even more consistently to a law-seeking and systematic science" (1966: 654).

the progress of language evolution away from a single common stem in the direction of increasing diversification.

In an overview of the history of the comparative method, one scholar suggests that the historical linguist August Schleicher's (1821-1868) more rigorous application of the family tree metaphor to historical language study may have been inspired by the philologist Friedrich Ritschl's (1806-1876) method for *textual* reconstruction.<sup>14</sup> Ritschl instructed his students, including Schleicher, in a procedure for reconstructing a lost original text by organizing extant and reconstructed manuscripts according to a "pedigree" (Hoenigswald 8). The basis for this method was the identification of correspondences between textual or linguistic variants which would allow the scholar to discriminate between elements of a text or language understood to have been retained from a previous version, and those which have accrued more recently through innovation or error. Philologists would then eliminate these more recent innovations or textual discrepancies and retain the grammatical/textual features which could be said to be more archaic. The information retained after the repeated application of this process was used to reconstruct the proto-text or proto-language. This method produced a clear criterion for the evaluation of different linguistic and textual elements. Commonalities which derived from an older stage of linguistic or literary evolution were preserved because they were valued for their proximity to ethnic or national origins. Later accretions, on the other hand, were discarded as elements of lesser value. In "The Epic and the Novel" Bakhtin articulated the logic of this type of evaluation. The categories "'beginning,' 'first,' 'founder,' 'ancestor,' 'that which occurred earlier,' and so forth are not merely temporal categories," he wrote, "but *valorized* temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree" (15 italics in original).<sup>15</sup>

This mode of evaluation in textual analysis is clearly manifest in a metaphor that Jakobson used to describe philological work on ancient texts. In a retrospective essay from 1966 he wrote that,

The gradual efforts to clear frescoes and icons of the age-old deposits and soot, and especially their painstaking deliverance from the arbitrary retouches abundantly intercalated by restorers throughout the last century, asked for a similar philological inquiry into the Russian medieval masterpieces of verbal art and, first and foremost, into the *Slovo*. [...] Explorers of early Russian literature, like those of fine arts, are faced with the pivotal question of a legend we recorded in 1914 from Trusov, an old peasant in the village of Smolinskoe of the Vereja district 'Отчего бога были светлые, а стали тусмяные' 'Why were icons [literally 'gods'] bright but are dusky now?' (1966: 564).

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<sup>14</sup> See Henry Hoenigswald. "On the History of the Comparative Method," *Anthropological Linguistics* 5 (1963): 1-11. A. Schleicher's genealogical linguistic model is referred to as the *Stammbaumtheorie*. R. H. Robins writes that this "genealogical tree model, by which he [Schleicher] set out the relations between the parent language and the known Indo-European language, owes something to the methods of botanical classification of species and groups in the Linnaean system" (197).

<sup>15</sup> I am borrowing Bakhtin's term only as it describes a widespread mode of thinking about a moment of historical or linguistic origins. More specifically, Bakhtin's argument is critical of the understanding of the epic [bylina] that was characteristic of V. F. Miller's historical school of epic scholarship (to which Jakobson adhered). Bakhtin argued that "the epic never was a poem about the present, about its own time" and he suggested that the reverential, retrospective attitude towards the epic past is in fact "a formally constitutive feature of the epic as a genre" or an attribute of the "authorial position of [...] the one who utters the epic word" (13). This is a statement with which V. F. Miller and Jakobson would have fundamentally disagreed. Their position was in fact that the *bylina* reflects actual events as described by contemporaries.

In this passage it is clear that, when faced with an ancient artifact, Jakobson views it through the evaluative lens of the philologist. In comparing the *Slovo* to an icon, Jakobson likens the philological sorting of linguistic facts to the work of cleaning an icon. Later linguistic accruals are thus like “soot” while the source-text gleams with the “bright” value of perhaps the gold or jewels of the icon case. Jakobson’s tendency to value the Russian *bylina* or the *Slovo* for what they reveal about their historical moment of origin is made clear in his extensive writings on the oral epic. The principle goal of his work on the epic “Sobaka Kalin Tsar” (1938) or on “The Vseslav Epos” (with Marc Szeftel, 1949), for instance, is to reveal the historical personage or the original layer of historical everyday life (*byt*) that inspired the original composition of the epic song. The first essay, dedicated to V. F. Miller, argues that “Sobaka Kalin,” a protagonist of several Russian *byliny*, is in fact a historical reference to the thirteenth-century ruler of the Golden Horde, Nogai Khan. In the second work Jakobson suggested that the epic hero Volkh Vseslavich has as his prototype the eleventh-century grand prince of Kiev, Vseslav of Polotsk. Jakobson’s goal, as he put it, was to get at the “historical kernel” of the *bylina* (1966 [1949]: 357). In order to do this, later additions to these works are stripped away—the historical moments that these additions refer to are clearly considered of secondary or inconsequential philological value.

Jakobson employed this mode of evaluation in interpreting contemporary poetry as well. The possibilities for the slippage of a philological mode of evaluation into the study of modern literature were provided both by the cultural context of the 1910s as well as by a similarity between the diachronic and synchronic analysis of language and verbal art. As applied to the study of verbal art, this leakage could have been facilitated by a basic parallel between the processes of synchronic and diachronic analysis.<sup>16</sup> As explained above, philological work was based on the distinction between elements or traces pointing back to an original, often hypothetical, “source” and those deemed later “accretions,” factors which contributed to the distortion of the original source-text. Using Jakobson’s metaphor, these elements are symbolized by the gold of the icon versus the soot that has accumulated on it. Synchronic linguistic analysis is also based on the distinction between factors of two different degrees of importance for the scholar. Looking at a cross-section of contemporary language usage, Jakobson distinguished between “invariants” and “variants.” The first category is understood abstractly, roughly as an idealized “Form” in the Platonic sense.<sup>17</sup> Restated using Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1857-1913) terms, invariants belong to the abstract system of *langue*—the system of rules speakers of a language must internalize in order to produce speech. Variants then are the concrete manifestations of speech in all of their multiplicity and redundancy. These variants were termed *parole* by Saussure. Thus in both cases the structural linguist or the philologist is faced with the act of sorting facts into two categories. Some belong to a class of *abstract*, more “essential” elements—relating to a “source” or to a grammatical system as an “invariant.” Others are classed as the *concrete*, larger group of “accretions” or “variants.” The fusion of these two types of

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<sup>16</sup> My argument is based on the effects of Jakobson’s application of linguistic categories to verbal art. His use of the categories of variant/invariant on the level of the analysis of the sound structure of language (i.e. his study of the phoneme) entails an additional level of complexity which I do not think is necessary to discuss in order to understand the basic thrust of Jakobson’s approach to poetic language.

<sup>17</sup> “Plato thought that in addition to the changeable, extended bodies we perceive around us, there are also unchangeable, extensionless entities, not perceptible by the senses, that structure the world and our knowledge of it. He called such an entity a ‘Form’ (eidos) or ‘Idea’ (idea), or referred to it by such phrases as ‘the such-and-such itself’. Thus in addition to individual beautiful people and things, there is also the Form of Beauty, or the Beautiful Itself” (Brennan).

abstract value creates the power of the epic past as a concept that articulates both invariant “essence” and “source” value.

In Jakobson’s writings on verbal art—on both folklore and high literature—these linguistic methodological procedures were the basis for value judgments. He saw that only the first, more “abstract” category was worth scholarly attention. To express this judgment Jakobson often used the term “essence.”<sup>18</sup> As Steven Cassedy has put it, the “search for essences is utterly typical of Jakobson’s thought” (127). This aspect of Jakobson’s thinking is often considered in connection with Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenology. Phenomenology, according to scholars interested in the Husserl-Jakobson connection, can be described as a search for essences—“the search for invariants in all the variations, for the general in everything particular” (cited in Cassedy 127). The extent of Jakobson’s familiarity with Husserl’s writings in his Moscow and Prague periods, is, however, disputed.<sup>19</sup> Without entering into this debate, I would like to suggest that Jakobson’s interest in essences is bound up with the moment of evaluation inherent in the philological method in which he was trained. This manifests itself in the fact that, even as Jakobson sought to identify the essence of modern poetry through a method he describes as synchronic analysis, he still tends to value this essence in terms of its relationship to a distant, “epic” past as a moment of linguistic origins.

Given Jakobson’s longstanding insistence that the diachronic and synchronic axes of linguistic analysis need to be understood as interpenetrating, it will perhaps come as no surprise that there was some contamination between the two axes in the sphere of evaluation.<sup>20</sup> In other words, that his evaluation of invariants is couched in terms of their relationship to origins. There was also an important cultural source for an association between historical and contemporary cultural value; though their art, the Russian futurist movement sought to connect the very oldest and the newest strata of language or culture. Nils Nilsson, in an article on the “primitivist” strain in the Russian futurist movement, describes the reigning sentiment of the 1910s as a “dissatisfaction with the present” which took the “avant-garde movement in two directions: on the one hand, a return to periods or stages of culture when poetry was ‘pure’ and ‘unspoiled’ and, on the other hand, a look ahead, towards a future when art will again be ‘pure’ and able to create a new world” (479-480). The tendency to merge these primitivist and utopian discourses was

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<sup>18</sup> There is no one term that Jakobson consistently used in Russian to denote essence – in his early works he used “literariness” [literaturnost’] or “poeticity” [poetichnost’] to articulate the essence of these categories. In Jakobson’s English-language work, e.g. “Quest for the Essence of Language” (1965), he used the word “essence.”

<sup>19</sup> P. Steiner treats Jakobson’s focus on *essence* as a product of Jakobson’s acquaintance with Husserlian phenomenology: “his [Jakobson’s] conception of literary studies closely parallels the procedures of eidetic phenomenology, which in Holenstein’s account ‘is concerned with the grasp of the essential features common to objects of the same category’” (1984: 201). Elmar Holenstein’s *Roman Jakobson’s Approach to Language: Phenomenological Structuralism* (Indiana University Press, 1976) argues for the profound impact of Husserlian phenomenology on Jakobson. Other scholars argue that Husserl’s influence was negligible. See E. F. K. Koerner’s “Remarks on the Sources of R. Jakobson’s Linguistic Inspiration.” *Jakobson Entre l’est et l’ouest Cahiers de l’ILSL* No. 9 (1997), 164. J. Toman belongs to this camp, writing: “well into the 1930s there are virtually no explicit references in Jakobson’s writings to Husserl. Moreover, for a long time Husserl appears in Jakobson as a simple anti-psychologist” (30). For a treatment of Jakobson’s essentialism in the context of the Russian tradition of philosophy of language see Steven Cassedy’s *Flight from Eden: The Origins of Modern Literary Criticism and Theory* (University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> An axiomatic statement of this was point four of Jakobson and Tynianov’s “Problems in the Study of Language and Literature” (1928), which argues for replacing the “opposition between synchrony and diachrony” with the recognition that “every system necessarily exists in an evolution, [and] evolution is inescapably of a systemic nature” (4). The ramifications of Jakobson’s concept of synchronicity are discussed in Holquist’s “Roman Jakobson and Philology,” 85-89.

particularly strong in the futurist group Hylaea, with which Jakobson was associated in this period.<sup>21</sup> Their “primitivism” inhered in the tendency to associate poetic creativity with the retrieval of “pure,” ancient, or folkloric sources. Creativity was thus related to the reconstruction of an intensely valorized primordial past. This process was, moreover, typically associated with the retrieval of a specifically Russian or Eurasian cultural tradition in opposition to more recent artistic movements associated with Western influence.<sup>22</sup> In 1915, Vladimir Mayakovsky, then a member of Hylaea, expressed this sentiment, arguing that Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh’s poetry “вытекла не из подражания вышедшим у ‘культурных’ наций книгам, а из светлого русла родного, первобытного слова, из безымянной русской песни” (quoted in Nilsson 479) (“does not follow from the imitation of books produced by the ‘cultured’ nations, but flows from the bright channel of the native, primitive word, from the anonymous Russian song”). While the futurists saw their work as uncompromisingly modern, a force that would bring about revolutionary change in Russian literature, they nonetheless sought inspiration in the depths of a Russian, Slavic or Eurasian past.

This desire to connect the old and the new is reflected in Jakobson’s intellectual biography from the 1910s.<sup>23</sup> In this period he divided his time between collaborating with the futurists and publishing, under the pseudonym Aliagrov, his own trans-rational poetry (in the collections *Zaumniki* (1914) and *Zaumnaiia gniga* (1915)), and writing scholarly articles on versification in Old Church Slavic (“Zametka o drevne-bolgarskom stikhoslozhenii” (1917)) or on the influence of folklore on the eighteenth-century poet and theorist V. K. Trediakovskii (“Vliianie narodnoi slovesnosti na Trediakovskogo” (1915)). Interest in Old Church Slavic, folklore, the *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, and in the Russian literary tradition of the eighteenth century was widespread amongst the Russian avant-garde in this period as these were seen as fresh sources of linguistic inspiration—overlooked by their immediate predecessors and freer from Western influence. The desire to probe the connection between Russia’s oldest literary heritage and its newest experimental poetry is exemplified by Jakobson’s decision to translate Mayakovsky’s poem “Nichego ne ponimaiut” [“They don’t understand anything”] into Old Church Slavic for an event organized by the poet on May 1, 1918.<sup>24</sup> In his study of Jakobson’s translation, M. Shapir points out that Jakobson applied conclusions from his 1917 study of versification in Old Church Slavic (of a Bulgarian recension) to his innovative translation (1989: 75).

<sup>21</sup> This group centered around the brothers D. and V. Burliuk, V. Khlebnikov, A. Kruchenykh, and V. Mayakovsky. Hylaea is discussed in detail in Vladimir Markov’s classic *Russian Futurism: A History* (University of California Press, 1968). Jakobson recalled that he introduced himself to Khlebnikov in the winter of 1914 by presenting him with a list of incantations he had copied out of a textbook (Jakobson 1966: 642).

<sup>22</sup> On primitivism and the Russian avant-garde see Jane Sharp. *Russian Modernism between East and West: Natal’ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde*. (Cambridge University Press, 2006). On the anti-Western sentiment in Hylaea see Harsha Ram. “Futurist Geographies: Uneven Modernities and the Struggle for Aesthetic Autonomy: Paris, Italy, Russia 1909-1914.” *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 313-340.

<sup>23</sup> Jakobson elaborates on the “rehabilitation of the Middle Ages” in his 1927 booklet *Two Old Czech Poems on Death* [originally: *Spor duše s tělem - o nebezpečném času smrti*]. Here he claims a “link between the present and the Middle Ages” in the spheres of philosophy, natural history, and in particular art (590).

<sup>24</sup> Jakobson and two other members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle translated Mayakovsky’s poetry into English, French and German. V. Neishtadt, who read Jakobson’s translation at the event, recalled that the “старославянская бомба” provoked uncomprehending indignation from the crowd (Shapir 1989: 66). Shapir analyzes Jakobson’s translation as an attempt to find analogies between the very different verse systems of Old Church Slavic and Mayakovsky’s futurist poetry (75).

Finally, a compelling source of influence for Jakobson's conflation of diachronic and synchronic value would have been his intense engagement in this period with the work of Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922). Jakobson described Khlebnikov as the greatest poetic genius of the twentieth century and he, like many others, was fascinated by the eccentric poet's highly-original work. The ties between formalist literary theory and the futurist movement have been the subject of many scholarly studies.<sup>25</sup> Viktor Shklovsky's defense of futurist poetry in a talk titled "The Place of Futurism in the History of Language," delivered in December 1913 at the Stray Dog cabaret, can be said to have been the public debut of Russian formalism.<sup>26</sup> Like Shklovsky's early work, Jakobson's NRP combines a defense of futurism with the articulation of basic theoretical principles of literature. In the spring of 1919 Jakobson was formulating his theory of poetic language while simultaneously involved in the process of organizing Khlebnikov's poetry for an edition of his collected works.<sup>27</sup> NRP, which has been received as a programmatic statement of Jakobson's thinking on verbal art, was originally intended as the introduction to this publication. As a result, NRP vacillates between being a treatment of Khlebnikov's futurist poetry and an exposition of the principles of poetry more generally. Perhaps most importantly, this approach produced a sense of uncertainty as to whether "baring the device" [obniazhenie priema] is the favorite device of Khlebnikov and the futurists, or whether this gesture is, itself, the essence of poetic language for Jakobson. The lack of clarity on this point piqued Osip Brik, who was present at Jakobson's presentation of the essay, to ask:

Чего хотел достичь докладчик? Установить ли некоторые законы поэтического языка вообще, или же вскрыть поэтику Хлебникова? [...] По-видимому, как вывод из доклада приходится принять то положение, что вся поэтика Хлебникова – есть лишь обнажение доселе уже существовавших приемов. Где же в таком случае творчество Хлебникова? Где новые приемы, им созданные? (Shapir 1991: 45).

What did the lecturer want to achieve? To establish some of the laws of poetic language in general or to reveal Khlebnikov's poetics? [...] It appears that based on the presentation we have to accept the assertion that the entirety of Khlebnikov's poetics is

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Aage Hansen-Löve, *Der russische Formalismus: Methodologische Rekonstruktion seiner Entwicklung aus dem Prinzip der Verfremdung* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978); Stephen Rudy, "Jakobson-Aljagrov and Futurism," *Language, Poetry and Poetics*, 277–90; Boris Gasparov, "Futurism and Phonology: Futurist Roots of Jakobson's Approach to Language," *Jakobson entre l'Est et l'Ouest*, 109–30.; Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and its Poetic Ambiance*. (Mouton, 1968). On Czech Structuralism and Czech avant-garde, see Jindřich Toman, "A Marvellous Chemical Laboratory...and Its Deeper Meaning: Notes on Roman Jakobson and the Czech Avant-Garde between the Two Wars," *Language, Poetry, and Poetics*, 313–46; Thomas Winner, "The Czech Interwar Avantgarde and the Prague Linguistic Circle," *Semantic Analysis of the Literary Texts*, (Elsevier: 1990), 637–47.

<sup>26</sup> Shklovsky published this presentation in 1914 as "Voskresenie slova." Jakobson himself outlined this early connection between futurism and formalism in his university lectures from 1935. He argues that Shklovsky's early works and the first of the *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (1916) were the product of the close relationships between Brik, Shklovsky and Mayakovsky. He also mentions his own NRP in this context. (2005: 71)

<sup>27</sup> In his tape-recorded conversations with B. Jangfeldt from 1977, Jakobson recalled that he worked with Khlebnikov in the spring of 1919 on a two-volume edition of his works. The book was unrealized in part, Jakobson suggests, because Khlebnikov left Moscow unexpectedly in late April of 1919. Their collaboration included the list of works to be included and Khlebnikov's preface. As a result of this work Jakobson was left in possession of Khlebnikov's manuscripts after the latter's departure and subsequent death in 1922 (1992: 56-60).

merely the baring of preexisting devices. Where in this case is Khlebnikov's creativity? Where are the new devices he has created?

Brik's observation highlights the fact that Jakobson, indeed, values Khlebnikov's poetry in this essay not for the new poetic devices that he introduces, but for his ability to bare devices that are often described as ancient. For example, Jakobson writes that "этот прием [the threading of motifs] освящен *многовековой давностью*, но для Хлебникова характерна его обнаженность--отсутствие оправдательной проволоки. *Мы всячески подчеркивали одну типично хлебниковскую черту--обнажение приема*" (1979: 319 italics added) ("this device has an *ancient sanction*, but in Khlebnikov's case it is 'laid bare,' that is, no line of justification is provided. *We have stressed in particular one typical feature of Khlebnikov's work--the baring of the device*" (1992: 188-89 italics added)).<sup>28</sup> In this work Jakobson defines poetic language by virtue of its self-reflexivity; poetic language differs from practical speech in that, in it, the communicative function of language is reduced to a minimum and the reader's attention is drawn to the language itself. It thus follows that Jakobson values Khlebnikov for the reflexivity of his poetry—its ability to draw the reader's attention to the devices of literary language.

All of this reflexivity becomes somewhat problematic, however, in that it would seem that there is little place for the literary theorist in Jakobson's approach to poetry in NRP. This is because the work of revealing the devices of literature—the task that Jakobson sets as the work of literary studies—is already being performed by Khlebnikov. This problem arguably arises from the fact that Jakobson's understanding of literary value and the aim of literary studies derives from philology. There is a basic similarity for Jakobson between the work of the philologist, who removes the deposits from ancient literary artifacts, restoring the original source, and the work of the modern literary theorist, who "reveals the device." This parallel is underscored by the metaphors for value that Jakobson uses to describe futurist poetry. In two articles written in 1919, Jakobson contrasts worn-out, familiarized poetry with avant-garde art through the metaphorical comparison of "kreditki" [promissory notes] or "fal'shivye kerenki" [false *kerenki*] to "zolota" [gold] and "zvonkaia moneta" [metal money].<sup>29</sup> Both the epic, compared to the gold of the icon, and the avant-garde poem have intrinsic value for Jakobson, in contrast to the familiarized "Pushkinesque" [Pushkinopodobnye] poems that are likened to false banknotes (thus doubly devalued). The use of gold or specie to describe the value of futurist poetry is in line with Jakobson's frequent use of the adjective "samotsennyi" [literally: self-valuable, i.e. inherently valuable] to refer to the futurist "word." "Поэзия есть," Jakobson writes, "оформление самоценного, 'самовитого', как говорит Хлебников, слова" (305) ("poetry is the formation of the self-sufficient, 'selfsome,' word, as Khlebnikov puts it" (179)). Thus, if the task of the philologist is to clear away the accretions that obscure the value of ancient texts, he has no work to do when it comes to contemporary, futurist poetry, which is self-revealing—it bares the device. It would thus appear that Jakobson's understanding of "baring the device" is largely oriented towards a "primitivist" understanding of literary value. That is, futurist poetry is valued for its revelation of linguistic devices which derive from a primordial

<sup>28</sup> Or, another example: "Игра суффиксами *издавна ведома поэзии*, но лишь в новой поэзии, в частности у Хлебникова, становится осознанным, узаконенным приемом" (1979: 330 italics added).

<sup>29</sup> These comparisons come from the article "Futurizm" and "NRP." In "Futurizm" Jakobson writes: "коротко говоря: для него [someone who doesn't understand avant-garde art] не существует самоценного восприятия. Он предпочитает золоту кредитки, как более литературные (осмысленные) произведения" (417). In NRP Jakobson writes: "Пушкиноподобные стихи сейчас так же легко печатать, как фальшивые керенки: они лишены самостоятельной ценности и лишь имеют хождение взамен звонкой монеты" (300).

past. In NRP the ultimate value of poetry does not result from novelty, but from revealing the essence of poetry, which is associated with the origins of language.<sup>30</sup> In Jakobson's analysis, Khlebnikov did not, as Brik pointed out, create new devices, but revealed ancient ones. This observation does not deny the futurist-formalist insistence on radical innovation, but I would argue that the goal of innovative creation was understood, in Jakobson's case, as reconstructive. Poetic innovation was understood to "resurrect," as Shklovsky put it, what had been lost, as opposed to inventing something entirely new.<sup>31</sup> This view is, moreover, consistent with Khlebnikov's own understanding of his poetry as a linguistic reconstruction of a forgotten world language.

The various futurist poets understood the meaning of their linguistic experimentation, called trans-rational [*zaum'*] language, differently. An interest in Adamic language was a widespread theme within Russian modernism; the Symbolists, the Futurists and the Acemists all sought, from different perspectives, to recreate through their poetry the moment when Adam named the objects of Eden for the first time. Kruchenykh, who frequently collaborated with Khlebnikov, understood *zaum'* largely as uninhibited creativity; the existing names for objects had lost their evocative power and the poet needed to give them new ones.<sup>32</sup> Khlebnikov, in contrast, appears to have viewed his literary method in historical and philological terms, and he approached *zaum'* through a reconstructive approach. In his more theoretical writings he described his method as a search for patterns in the language of modern Russian in order to recreate a lost protolanguage that was once universally comprehensible.<sup>33</sup> In an article from April 1919, "Khudozhniki mira!" ["To the Artists of the world!"], Khlebnikov described his *zaum'* as "a common written language. . . that can be understood and accepted by our entire star" (cited in Wachtel 154).<sup>34</sup> Andrew Wachtel observes that this language "is not so much a creation as a rediscovery," and he summarizes Khlebnikov's linguistic vision as follows:

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<sup>30</sup> The association of poetry with linguistic origins was a central argument in A. A. Potebnia's work on poetics, which was highly influential at this time both for Jakobson and for Russian poets associated with symbolism and futurism. On Potebnia's influence see Steven Cassedy's *Flight from Eden: The Origins of Modern Literary Criticism and Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. The idea of poetry as pointing to the origins of language is frequently traced more generally to the Italian thinker Giambattista Vico (1668–1744).

<sup>31</sup> I am referring to Shklovsky's 1914 essay "Voskreshenie slova" ["The Resurrection of the Word"].

<sup>32</sup> One of the best-known examples of this understanding of *zaum'* is Kruchenykh's explanation that "the artist has seen the world in a new way and, like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names. The lily is beautiful, but the word 'lily' has been soiled and 'raped.' Therefore, I call the lily 'euy' – the original purity is reestablished" (quoted in Lawton, 67). This Adamic naming process is based on an subjective interpretations of sounds.

<sup>33</sup> His earliest writing on the subject took the form of a dialog between "Teacher and Student" (1912) where he discusses the laws of "internal declension" in Russian. He then proposes to use these observations of sound patterns in modern Russian to recreate a *zaum'* protolanguage. See B. Livshits' description of Khlebnikov's work (couched in a comparison with the poetry of the "West"): "Самые отважные дерзания Рембо--ребяческий лепет по сравнению с тем, что делает Хлебников, взрывая тысячелетние языковые напластования и бесстрашно погружаясь в артикуляционные бездны первозданного слова" (487).

<sup>34</sup> Although he often described his project in universalist terms, Khlebnikov usually approached the reconstruction of this language via Russian. Khlebnikov further describes his goal: "языки изменили своему славному прошлому. Когда-то, когда слова разрушали вражду и делали будущее прозрачным и спокойным, языки, шагая по ступеням, объединили людей [...] в один разумный мир, союз меняющих ценности рассудка на одни и те же меновые звуки. Дикарь понимал дикаря и откладывал в сторону слепое оружие (153). He then provides a list of linguistic invariants relating to orthography: "Пока, не доказывая, я утверждаю, что:1) В на всех языках значит вращение одной точки кругом другой или по целому кругу или по части его, дуге, вверх и назад. 2) Что X значит замкнутую кривую, отделяющую преградой положение одной точки от движения к ней другой точки (защитная черта) [...] Конечно, эти опыты еще первый крик младенца, и здесь предстоит работа, но общий образ мирового грядущего языка дан. Это будет язык «заумный»" (154-158).

the goal of poetic creation and historical/linguistic research is to rediscover this original human protolanguage. The poet, therefore, must abandon linguistic history in favor of linguistic prehistory; the historian of language becomes an archaeologist. Poetic creation in this new/old language will lead to universal understanding and the re-creation of paradise lost (154).

Jakobson was of course a more sober thinker than Khlebnikov, but he appears to have shared Khlebnikov's understanding of the futurists' project, in that he believed that the value of poetry lay in its capacity to reveal language's origins/essence. This approach to language as an operation of historical recovery aimed at retrieving Indo-European or another, once widely comprehensible, protolanguage would have been familiar to both Jakobson and Khlebnikov as the central precept of historical linguistics as it was studied in Russia and Europe at the turn of the century. As Wachtel suggests, the revelation of linguistic essence is associated with prehistory rather than history. The lost protolanguage or proto-text is separated from subsequent historical periods by its ancientness and its physical absence, and also by its attribution to a separate category of abstract, more essential value. The futurist poet or the formalist theorist reveals the ancient laws or beginnings of language which are valuable as a source and also because they are eternal, or essential. Avant-garde poetry "as such" [kak takovaia] is understood to be the *langue* of poetic language by virtue of its return to the source of poetry. In this, Jakobson's affiliation with the primitivist Hylaea allowed him to operate in NRP with an understanding of poetic value based on historical origins even while discussing the most modern poetry.

### Poetic Dialectology and the Poet as a Cultural Center

In this next section of the chapter I focus on Jakobson's proposal of a new, formalist "method" for the study of poetic language in his NRP—what he called "poetic dialectology." This is a significant moment that represents an attempt to conceive of a method for the study of *contemporary* poetry according to Jakobson's philological conception of literary value. His idea is not easy to follow, however, and appears not to have been understood by his contemporaries. I will attempt to shed some light on Jakobson's proposal, which, while not considered a highlight of his intellectual career, allows us to situate his early formalism in the context of pre-revolutionary Russian folkloristics. His proposal for a "poetic dialectology" reflects two competing approaches in Russian folkloristics which coexisted at this time. The Commission for Folklore Study, whose meetings Jakobson regularly attended beginning in November 1914, embraced a new methodological approach, based on dialect study, which was seen to be the cutting edge in scientificity. Jakobson was trained in this method and espouses its application to high literature in NRP. This approach, however, I will argue, did not sit very well with Jakobson's conception of linguistic (and poetic) value, discussed above. Jakobson's NRP, as a result, is a text which advances a method (poetic dialectology) that is at odds with Jakobson's assumed conception of literary value. This tension between value and method is diffused in Jakobson's subsequent work carried out after moving to Czechoslovakia in 1920, which was devoted to more traditional philological subjects—e.g. the "oldest Czech poetry." The fact that Jakobson's "poetic dialectology" was, to some degree, an aborted effort probably explains the

relative lack of interest on the part of scholars of formalism in this aspect of his NRP.<sup>35</sup> I would suggest that Jakobson's claim is, however, worth investigating in that it provides useful insights into how Jakobson's conception of literary value was translated into a new "author function" for literature. Jakobson sought to displace the individual author associated with modern, "high" poetry with a conception of the "author" adapted from the study of the *bylina* as a product of the epic past. This move continued to find application in Jakobson's subsequent work.

In the opening paragraphs of NRP, Jakobson makes an emphatic argument for a new method of literary study, what he calls a "poetic dialectology":

Развитие теории поэтического языка будет возможно лишь тогда, когда поэзия будет трактоваться как социальный факт, когда будет создана своего рода *поэтическая диалектология*. С точки зрения последней, *Пушкин есть центр поэтической культуры, определенного момента, с определенной зоной влияния*. С этой точки зрения, поэтические диалекты одной зоны, тяготеющие к культурному центру другой, подобно говорам практического языка, можно подразделить: на диалекты переходные, усвоившие от центра тяготения ряд канонов, диалекты с намечающейся переходностью, усваивающие от центра тяготения известные поэтические тенденции, и смешанные диалекты, усваивающие отдельные инородные факты, приемы (1979: 301 italics added).

The development of a theory of poetic language will be possible only when poetry is treated as a social fact, when a kind of *poetic dialectology* is created. From the point of view of this dialectology, *Pushkin is the center of a poetic culture of a particular time, with a definite zone of influence*. From this point of view, the poetic dialects of one zone, when they gravitate toward the cultural center of another, can be subdivided, like dialects of practical language, into: transitional dialects which have adopted a set of canons from the center of gravity; semi-transitional dialects which adopt certain tendencies from the center of gravity; and mixed dialects which adopt occasional alien elements or devices (1992: 175-76 italics added).<sup>36</sup>

I have quoted this passage at length as it reveals that Jakobson anticipated applying the categories worked out in dialectology to the field of literature with some precision and detail. The terms "*perekhodnyi*," "*namechaiushchiasia perekhodnost*," and "*smeshannyi*" ["transitional," "semi-transitional," and "mixed"] were taken from the official method for classifying dialects within the Moscow Dialectological Commission [Moskovskaia dialektologicheskaiia komissiiia ] (MDC). The MDC was formed in 1904 with the purpose of producing a dialect map of European Russia. Such a map was published in 1915, though this was not seen as a final product.<sup>37</sup> Jakobson joined the MDC as a first-year university student and he

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<sup>35</sup> Toman's discussion of this point in *Magic of a Common Language* is an exception, although he limits himself to the observation that Jakobson was using the terminology of the Moscow Dialectological Commission and that this is the first instance of his application of linguistic concepts to literature (12-13).

<sup>36</sup> Jakobson refers, more briefly, to the possibility of applying the classification of dialects to literary language in another article from this period, "Briusovskaia stikhologiya i nauka o stikhe" (1922). A version of this essay was presented at the MLC on September 23, 1919 in a talk titled "Obrazchik nauchnogo sharlatanstva."

<sup>37</sup> The Moscow Dialectological Commission was part of the Russian language and literature section [otdelenie russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti] of the Russian Academy of Science and was formed from a group of scholars studying the history and dialects of Russian language in Moscow with the special goal of creating a dialectological

led the formation of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (MLC) as a student sub-group within the MDC in March 1915.<sup>38</sup> The influence of the MDC on the MLC is evidenced in the goals of the student Circle. In a report composed by Grigory Vinokur, the secretary of the MLC, in 1919 he lists the Circle's accomplishments for 1915-1919 as follows:

из коллективных работ кружка, в первый период его жизни, следует отметить: 1) собрание дополнений и поправок к карте русского языка, выпущенной Московской диалектологической комиссией, 2) собрание материалов по изучению московского говора, 3) изучение былинного языка, 4) поездки с диалектологической и этнографической целью (*Khronika* 289).

of the collective projects of the Circle in the first period of its existence the following should be mentioned: 1) the collection of additions and corrections for the map of the Russian language published by the Moscow Dialectological Commission, 2) the collection of materials relating to the study of the Moscow dialect, 3) the study of the language of the *bylina*, 4) expeditions with a dialectological and ethnographic purpose.

Jakobson's rebellious stance towards intellectual authorities did not extend to the Dialectological Commission; Toman writes "his loyalty to his teachers and peers in the commission is striking" (1995: 11). He wrote a favorable review of the dialectological map in 1916 and he evidently formed a close relationship with N. N. Durnovo, the vice-chairman of the Commission.<sup>39</sup> The quote from NRP above reveals that Jakobson adhered to the MDC's conception of dialect into the 1920s. As late as 1929 Jakobson continued to raise dialectology to the status of an "avant-garde scholarship," an argument which Toman points out was somewhat anachronistic in that the advantages of dialect study had been advocated in linguistics since the 1870s (cited in Toman 1995: 12).

The most important ideas Jakobson attempted to carry over from Moscow dialectology into the sphere of literary study are those of a "cultural center" [kul'turnyi tsentr] and its "gravitational pull" [tiagotenie]. These concepts were central to the understanding of linguistic structure and language spread in the MDC. In a programmatic article from 1917, Durnovo argued that contemporary (largely German) linguistic theory did not sufficiently appreciate the importance of cultural centers in the creation of dialectal differentiations in a language. He explained that any individual fact of language could spread "только при поддержке известного культурного центра" (4) ("only with the support of a specific cultural center"). Moreover, "отдельные диалектические черты в языке в своем образовании и распространении не могут стоять особняком, а должны группироваться по говорам и наречиям, области которых совпадают с областями тяготения населения к разным центрам" (4) ("individual

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map of the Russian language. On the MDC see "Khronika" in *Nauchnye izvestiia: Akademicheskii tsentr narkomprosa. Sbornik 2: Filosofiia, literatura, iskusstvo*. (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo: 1922), 287-290.

<sup>38</sup> See Jakobson's "Toward the History of the Moscow Linguistic Circle" *Selected Writings VII* (1972), 279.

<sup>39</sup> Jakobson published an favorable review of the MDC's methodology in the composition of a linguistic atlas: "Opyt dialekticheskoi karty russkogo iazyka v Evrope," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 1-2 (1916): 102-107 (signed. R.Ia). Jakobson later organized a Czechoslovak research grant for Durnovo in 1924 and devoted considerable efforts to promoting his teacher's work, attempting to find an academic position for him in Czechoslovakia. Jakobson's letters to Durnovo from the period the latter was in Czechoslovakia (1924-1927) have been published in J. Toman's *Letters and other materials from the Moscow and Prague Linguistic Circles*. (Michigan Slavic Publications, 1994). On Jakobson and Durnovo's relationship see 76-79.

dialectological traits in a language in their manifestation and diffusion cannot stand alone and must group themselves according to smaller and larger dialects, the areas of which coincide with the areas of gravitation of the population towards various centers”). The size of the linguistic unit—dialect [govor], larger dialect [narechie], language [iazyk]—is associated with the size of the cultural center and the corresponding strength of its gravitational pull. For example, “вокруг мелких центров-торгового села, фабрики, монастыря и т.п.—группируется отдельные говоры; крупные областные центры иногда содействуют образованию наречий; наконец выделение известных областей в целые государства способствует созданию языка” (5) “individual small dialects [govory] group around minor centers such as a trade settlement, factories, monasteries, etc.; major regional centers sometimes facilitate the formation of a larger dialect [narechie]; finally the grouping of certain regions into entire states facilitates the creation of a language [iazyk]”). Jakobson replicates this basic model in his suggestion for a poetic dialectology when he writes that poetic dialects, like the dialects of practical language, gravitate towards “cultural centers.”<sup>40</sup>

The crucial adjustment that Jakobson makes to this model—what makes it a theory of *poetic* language and dialects—is his substitution of the concept of a “central” author for the concept of a cultural center. Jakobson makes this clear: “Пушкин есть центр поэтической культуры, определенного момента, с определенной зоной влияния” (301) (“Pushkin is the center of a poetic culture of a particular time, with a definite zone of influence” (175)). He outlines the transposition of dialectology to the study of poetic language in relatively precise ways. And while he leaves much to be explained, his detailed description here stands in contrast to the enigmatic style that characterized his and other formalists’ writings in this period.<sup>41</sup> Jakobson appended a footnote to this paragraph where he stresses that “фрагментарность нижеследующего... ни в коем случае не опорочивают *метода*: поскольку не накоплено научно интерпретированного материала, возможны только рабочие эскизы типа диалектологических заметок ‘об особенностях’” (301 italics added) (“the fragmentariness of the following ... does not in any way invalidate *the method*: as long as scientifically interpreted material has not been gathered, only working drafts such as dialectological notes ‘on some features’ are possible” (italics added)). It thus appears incontrovertible that Jakobson sought to approach poetic language (or at least Khlebnikov’s poetics) from the standpoint of Moscow dialectology, and that he considered “poetic dialectology” to be his “method.” This point is worth stressing in that this element of Jakobson’s formalism has been largely dismissed. This is likely because, on first glance, it is not at all clear what Jakobson meant by stating that “Pushkin is the center of poetic culture,” in other words, by equating Pushkin with a dialectological “cultural center.”

The transcript of the meeting of the MLC on May 11, 1919, when Jakobson presented a version of NRP to the Circle, reveals that his ideas met largely with skepticism. It appears that Jakobson did not convince his colleagues of the legitimacy or utility of his method. The sharpest critique came from Brik, who began the discussion with the challenge: “доклад не имеет темы, не имеет ясно поставленной задачи: чего хотел достичь докладчик?” (“the lecture doesn’t have a topic, doesn’t have clearly set goals: what did the lecturer want to achieve?”) To which

<sup>40</sup> Jakobson writes: “*поэтические диалекты* одной зоны, *тяготеющие к культурному центру* другой, подобно говорам практического языка, можно подразделить...” (1979: 301, italics added).

<sup>41</sup> In his response to NRP, Trubetskoi, for instance wrote: “Как *книга* – это не хорошо и даже пожалуй не стоило печатать.” His criticism largely relates to stylistic and organization failures – he mentions its “неудачн[ая] форм[а], беспорядочн[ое] изложени[е], тяжел[ый] язык[ ] и т.д.” (17).

Jakobson countered: “доклад обладает вполне определенной темой и задачей. Задача эта – есть задача поэтической диалектологии” (45) (“the lecture has a thoroughly defined topic and goal. Its goal is the task of poetic dialectology”).<sup>42</sup> Bogatyrev then further questioned this concept. The protocol states: “Богатырев возражает против применения термина ‘диалектология’ к изучению поэтического языка лишь одного поэта. Это есть язык индивидуальный, диалект же есть язык известного класса людей. Можно было бы лишь известную школу поэтов объединить термином ‘диалект’” (Shapir 46) (“Bogatyrev protests against the application of the term ‘dialectology’ to the study of the poetic language of only one poet. This is individual language, a dialect is the language of a certain class of people. One could apply the term ‘dialect’ only to a school of poets”).<sup>43</sup> Jakobson’s response to Bogatyrev is largely evasive; leaving us with the unanswered question—how indeed is the language of an individual author to be understood as a dialect, or more specifically a dialectal “cultural center”?<sup>44</sup>

The issue at stake in these responses is Jakobson’s understanding of the figure of the author. In suggesting that he is treating the author, e.g., “Pushkin” or “Khlebnikov,” as a cultural center, he is attempting a significant departure from the general conception of an author held by his contemporaries. V. V. Vinogradov, in a review of NRP, also focused on this point, stating that,

необходимо пожалеть, что автор не задумался глубже над принципиальным различием двух отделов лингвистики--диалектологии, которая изучает языковые шаблоны, характеризующие тот или иной диалектический коллектив, и стилистики, которая исследует индивидуально-творческие системы употребления и расположения слов в их преемственности и взаимодействии, не создавая абстракций более широких, чем ‘стиль школы’ (464).<sup>45</sup>

it is necessary to regret that the author didn’t expend more thought on the principle difference between two branches of linguistics--dialectology, which studies the linguistic clichés that characterize one or another dialectological collective, and stylistics, which researches the individual creative systems of the use and arrangement of words in their succession and interaction, not permitting abstractions greater than the concept of the ‘style of a school.’

<sup>42</sup> Jakobson continued to state that “задача эта – есть задача поэтической диалектологии, и имеет ввиду дескрипцию поэтических языковых фактов и поэтических приемов Хлебникова [...] К чему ведет такая дескрипция? Она ведет к установлению на основании фактов поэтического языка – *его законов, с проекцией в историю*” (45 italics added).

<sup>43</sup> Bogatyrev’s argument regarding “individual” as opposed to “collective” language could also be termed a distinction between “idiolect” as opposed to a “dialect.” See K. Hazen’s entry for “Idiolect” in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics* (Second Edition), 2006, 512-513.

<sup>44</sup> Jakobson’s response to Bogatyrev reads: “Якобсон указывает, что он не определяет границ фактов. А единственный источник научного познания и есть ведь язык индивидуальный. Диалект – всегда, более или менее, фикция” (46). This response is interesting in that it presents an idea that Jakobson would later place in the mouths of his “opponents”—his former colleagues the folklorists B. M. and Iu. M. Sokolov and their teacher V. F. Miller. In an article published in 1929 Jakobson argued that “a typical product of naïve realism was the widespread thesis of the Neogrammarians that the language of the individual is the one and only real language. Epigrammatically stated, this thesis asserts that, in the final analysis, only the speech of a particular person at a particular point in time represents an actual reality” (1980 [1929]: 3).

<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that Bogatyrev suggests that a “school” could be a “dialect,” while Vinogradov identifies a “school” as the largest unit approachable through the discipline of stylistics—the study of *individual* languages. This suggests that the concept of the school was open to a wider range of interpretations than the categories of “individual” or “collective” languages and could be attributed to either category.

The key to understanding Jakobson's poetic dialectology lies in deciphering his attempt to link the concept of the author evoked by the name "Pushkin" to an approach to language usually reserved for a larger social group. Bogatyrev and Vinogradov based their distinction between the language of the poet and that of a larger collective on a given understanding of the literary author, one that remains largely in place to the present day. This is the use of a historically, psychologically conceived individual as mental shorthand for setting aside a group of texts as a special category of discourse. Michel Foucault famously described this in a 1969 lecture "What is an Author?" in terms of what he called the "author function." The attribution of this function to certain texts, he argued, results from

a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call 'author.' Critics doubtless try to give this individual being a realistic status by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power or a 'design,' the milieu in which writing originates. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize or the exclusions that we practice (110).

In other words, Foucault suggests that we recognize that the popular conception of a literary author is influenced by the traits that we wish to find in the text or body of texts that has been designated as "literary" or of special value. This value is largely equivalent to various types of *consistency*—the text (or group of texts) is seen to form a unit defined in terms of intellectual, stylistic, or historical markers distributed consistently throughout.

In Jakobson's attempt to remake literary studies according to the dialectological model the author's name functions differently. The "author function" that Bogatyrev and Vinogradov assume is that of the circumscription of a group of texts or a literary style by anchoring the continuities found throughout this material in the biographical-psychological person of "Pushkin." Jakobson in contrast is interested in using "Pushkin" as a gravitational point that anchors a much wider expanse of the literary/linguistic realm. In this second model, the organizing force of the author function is not strictly applied to a bounded class of the texts that come under his name/pen, but extends outwards into the field of literary language and the historical development of literature as a broader phenomenon. In other words, the two concepts differ in that Jakobson interprets the person of the author in linguistic and historical terms rather than psychological ones. The structure that the "author" imparts to literature is not defined by works he "authors" by signing his name to them, but by his impact over time on the larger realm of literary production.

This understanding of the author function is much closer to the approach to authorship in the field of *bylina* scholarship than it is to the conception of the author in literary studies. Indeed, scholarship on the Russian oral epic conceived of the "author" of an epic not as a single, biographical individual, but as an argot of literary devices, which was developed in the context of a historical cultural center and whose influence could be traced over time and across geographic space. In a study first published in 1895, V. F. Miller argued that the *bylina* had artistic value, and that this value was the product of the continual reuse of a core of artistic devices that stemmed from a moment of creation in the epic past. He writes that:

Понятие ‘безыскусственной,’ которое обычно прилагается к народной поэзии, вообще должно быть значительно ограничено по отношению к нашим былинам. Конечно, в них почти не проявляется личность слагателя, но он наследует известные искусственные приемы, и эти приемы можно наблюдать как в планах былин, так и в традиционных частностях их построения (62).

The term ‘unsophisticated,’ which is usually applied to folk poetry in general should be significantly restricted in relation to our epics [byliny]. Of course the personality of the composer is hardly manifest in them, but he inherits well-known artistic devices, and these devices can be found both in the designs of the epics as well as in the traditional details of their construction.

This quote reveals how, in the Russian work on the epic, the concept of artistry usually reserved for works of an “individual” was found to reside in a poetic dialect or argot that originated in the heroic past and that was faithfully passed down by generations of epic singers. Separate from a biographical “author,” in this case it is the literary devices themselves, and ultimately their connection with a moment in the epic past, that imbue works with artistic value. Jakobson’s attempt to extend this approach to the realm of contemporary literature anticipates Foucault’s pronouncement of “death of the author” in 1969. Jakobson’s formalism, already in 1919, sought to abandon the individual biographical author in favor of an approach adapted from philology as a method designed to establish the authority of authorless, anonymous texts. Tracing Jakobson’s intellectual biography allows us to appreciate how the disappearance of the author was conditioned by Russian formalists’ debt to folklore studies. In Jakobson’s case, his relationship to the philological study of the epic meant that the author was displaced in favor of a nationally significant poetic tradition. This can be contrasted with Foucault’s suggestion that the unity of the person of author is directly displaced into the “unity” of the “work.”<sup>46</sup> This type of displacement could be said to be a product of the application of a formalist, linguistic analysis of literary texts *within a social conception of literature* that breaks the poetic “verbal mass” up into the a priori categories of genre, author and authored work. Jakobson’s approach, which emerged from debates in folkloristics as to the nature of the “author,” subjected assumptions regarding the literary author to more fundamental questioning.

Jakobson’s attempt to reconceptualize “Pushkin” as a dialectal center can be seen as a response to the methods available to students of folklore in Moscow in the 1910s. This was a period in folklore study when the concept of a psychologically conceived individual author was raised and juxtaposed with a linguistically defined, more abstract, authorial function located in a distant past. The collision of these two modes of evaluation could be said to have loosened these concepts, thus enabling Jakobson to attempt to creatively recombine them. In order to understand Jakobson’s response to this situation it is necessary to stress that dialectology, as a field of study, was understood in a particular way at this time. While dialect study, like any branch of linguistics, can be approached from a historical (diachronic) as well as a structural (synchronic)

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<sup>46</sup> In his article “Why the Russian Formalists had no theory of the Literary Person” Daniel Rancour-Laferriere argues that the formalists’ literary theory operated with a “*fallacy of misplaced personification*” which resulted from “their efforts to displace the person from literature... [permitting] the person to appear elsewhere, as if in compensation” (334). Speaking of formalism in broader terms, he doesn’t specify in detail how this displacement occurred.

perspective, in the 1910s dialectology was championed as a field which shifted scholars' focus to the synchronic axis. This is evident from the opening paragraphs of NRP which associate "dialectology" with a Saussurean revolution in linguistics—with the "прием временного разреза, так называемый синхронический метод" (299) ("the device of temporal cross-section, the so-called synchronic method"). For Jakobson, the move away from the study of the past is associated with "the study of contemporary dialects." "Диалектология," Jakobson asserts "становится главным импульсом раскрытия основных лингвистических законов, и лишь изучение процессов живой речи позволяет проникнуть в тайны окаменелой структуры языка былых периодов" (299) ("Dialectology is becoming the main impulse in the discovery of basic linguistic laws, and only the study of the processes of live speech allow us to penetrate the secrets of the petrified structure of language of bygone ages").<sup>47</sup> In defining dialectology as a synchronic approach to language and suggesting the application of dialectological principles to the study of poetic language, Jakobson is giving voice to then-current sentiments in folkloristics. In this field, the most scholarly, scientific work was being done by folklorist-ethnographers who were increasingly studying the material they gathered through the lens of dialectology. As I will demonstrate, however, this led to an understanding of the author function of verbal art which clashed with Jakobson's philological evaluation of linguistic and poetic facts.

While Jakobson's dialectological approach to the literary author was a radical departure from assumptions regarding high literature, the application of dialectology to verbal art was a centerpiece of Russian folkloristics in the 1910s. This was a period when folklore and dialect were increasingly studied in tandem. The decade, moreover, saw a shift from a historical approach to dialect and folklore to an embrace of the "living" folklore of the current moment, what Jakobson and Bogatyrev described as the "текущий материал" ("fluid material") of folklore in their work in folk theater from this period (Bogatyrev 1923: 22). This shift brought approaches which saw literary value in historical versus individual terms into an uneasy cohabitation. Placing Jakobson's NRP in this context allows us to see that his proposal for a method based on "poetic dialectology" and the gap between this method and Jakobson's actual analysis of Khlebnikov's poetics, reflects the state of prerevolutionary folkloristics.

The close association of the disciplines of folkloristics and dialectology in the Russian academy in the early twentieth century is exemplified by the scholarly activities of Jakobson and his peers while students at Moscow University. Between the years 1914 and 1917 Jakobson and a group of fellow students regularly attended the meetings of two scholarly Commissions – the Commission for Folklore Study (CFS) and the Moscow Dialectological Commission (MDC). Among those of the younger generation who belonged to both groups were Jakobson, Bogatyrev, Trubetskoi, Iu. M and B. M. Sokolov, A. A. Buslaev, and B. V. Shergin, G. G. Dinges and N. F. Iakovlev. It is interesting to note that there were considerably fewer senior scholars who belonged to both groups; it appears that only N. V. Vasil'ev regularly contributed to both Commissions, while N. N. Durnovo and D. N. Ushakov only very occasionally attended meetings of the CFS. In their separate reminiscences Bogatyrev recalls that it was Jakobson who "постоянно меня водил к лингвистам" ("constantly led me to the linguists"), and Jakobson recalls that he was introduced to the CFS through Bogatyrev.<sup>48</sup> The attendance records of the

<sup>47</sup> Recall that Jakobson anachronistically referred to "dialectology" as an "avant-garde scholarship" as late as 1929. This claim arguably reflects the fact that he understood dialectology as a synchronic approach to language.

<sup>48</sup> The attendance records of the CFS show that Bogatyrev first joined on April 21, 1914 and that Jakobson joined on November 29, 1914. The CFS stopped meeting regularly in the spring of 1917; both Jakobson and Bogatyrev attended virtually every meeting held between 1915 and 1917. Trubetskoi attended less regularly, but had joined

meetings of the CFS reveal that members of the younger generation appear to have made a point of attending each other's presentations, so it is perhaps reasonable to surmise that the overlap between these disciplines was reinforced by personal bonds of scholarly solidarity in these years.<sup>49</sup> The membership records of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (MLC) reveal that its core membership was made up of these students who belonged to both the MDC as well as the Commission for Folklore Study.<sup>50</sup> The topics for discussion in the MLC, as a result, represent a cross between folkloristics, dialectology and literary studies.<sup>51</sup> Recall that in its early years, the MLC listed among its tasks not only work on the dialect map, but the study of the language of the *bylina*, which would not have been a priority set by the Dialectological Commission.<sup>52</sup> In addition to being populated by some of the same scholars, the overlap between the folklore and the dialectological Commissions was a product of the similar nature of their work; both sponsored fieldwork to collect data on the language and lore of rural communities. Jakobson, Bogatyrev and Iakovlev went on an expedition to the Vereiskii uezd of the Moscow guberniia in the summer of 1915. Jakobson colorfully recounted in his later years that they were taken for German spies in one village and that they barely escaped with their lives.<sup>53</sup> The students

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earlier on November 14, 1911. Gosudarstvennyi literaturnyi muzei (GLM), Fol'klorny arkhiv 23 ed. khr. 1. Jakobson later told Jangfeldt "Bogatyrev took me to the Commission on Folklore, where I later read my first lecture, as well as to the Dialectological Commission. It seemed that there was a completely different atmosphere there" (1992: 31). Bogatyrev recalled "еще будучи студентом, я посещал Комиссию по народной словесности [...] но Роман Осипович постоянно меня водил к лингвистам, что не могло не отразиться на моей работе" (cited in Leshchak 47).

<sup>49</sup> Trubetskoi, for example, appears to have attended the CFS meetings selectively, coming when Jakobson or Bogatyrev were presenting their work. GLM, Fol'klorny arkhiv 23 ed. khr. 1. Trubetskoi, who never belonged to the MLC, immediately asked about what had happened to the CFS and MDC and their mutual acquaintances in his first letter to Jakobson after he escaped Russia during the Civil War (dated December 12, 1920) (1). A. Liberman in his biographical "Postscript" writes that Trubetskoi and Jakobson first met at a meeting of the CFS. The archive confirms that he was present when Jakobson made his first presentation there (on Trediakovskii) on April 3, 1915. (GLM), Fol'klorny arkhiv 23 ed. khr. 1. Trubetskoi left Moscow and then Russia in the early fall of 1917 (Liberman 307-308).

<sup>50</sup> A number of young scholars who attended the meetings of the CFS became members of the MLC. These included P. G. Bogatyrev, A. A. Buslaev, G. G. Dinges, Iu. M. Sokolov, B. V. Shergin, R. O. Jakobson, N. F. Iakovlev, and B. I. Iarkho.

<sup>51</sup> Presentations read and discussed in the MLC on overtly folkloric topics included: N. F. Iakovlev "Russkaia istoricheskaia lirika XVI-XVII vekov April 5, 1919; P. G. Bogatyrev "O narodnykh anekdotakh" April 20, 1919; P. G. Bogatyrev "O Gusare Pushkina" and "Trud Poznanskogo o zagovorakh" April 25, 1919; Iu. M. Sokolov "Soobshchenie o narodnykh legendakh, svyazannykh s tekushchimi sobytiiami" May 17 and May 25, 1919; N. F. Iakovlev "Iz metodologii zapisi pesen" August 11, 1920; Beseda s sobiratelem i ispolnitelem narodnykh pesen P. G. Iarkovym March 20, 1921; N. F. Iakovlev "Elementy fol'klora u Lermontova" April 17, 1921; P. G. Bogatyrev "Opyt izucheniia zagovorov (Povtoreniia v zagovorakh)" April 24, 1921. IRIa Arkhiv MLK Fond 20, ed.kh. 2 Protokoly zasedanii 1918-1923 gg. For a list of the contents of the archive see G. S. Barankova "K istorii moskovskogo lingvisticheskogo krughka: Materialy iz Rukopisnogo otdela Instituta russkogo iazyka." *Iazyk. Kul'tura. Gumanitarnoe znanie. Nauchnoe nasledie G.O. Vinokura i sovremennost'*. (Nauchnyi mir: 1999), 359-382.

<sup>52</sup> Vinokur listed "изучение былинного языка" as the third point in his list of the collective work of the Circle completed before 1919 (*Khronika* 289).

<sup>53</sup> Jakobson's account is interesting in that it also reveals some of his personal feeling about folklore and perhaps a source of his conviction that it is a product of "collective creation." He recalls "when at the end of May [1915] all three of us started our gathering of ethnographic materials in the village Novinskoe, the rumors about the Moscow disorders and looting of allegedly German stores were spreading to the country in amazingly swollen and distorted form. [...] Our mentioned report of 1915 contains a brief account of the rural efforts to enlist us among the villain characters of this nascent folklore. The espionage fictions circulating in Novinskoe were applied to all three of us by an inventive local woman [...] we were 'heard' talking German to each other, we were 'seen' poisoning wells. [...] Our documents were declared to be fake and our glasses were considered evidence of our Germanity. New people

presented the results of this trip both to the CFS and the MDC; both societies appear to have provided funding for the expedition.<sup>54</sup> The joint study of linguistics and folkloristics was reflected in their approach to their subject matter. The protocols from the meetings where Jakobson and Bogatyrev presented their work at the CFS reveal that they were particularly interested in evidence of an urban, Muscovite, influence on the verbal culture of the region. They mention references to the World War in the tales recorded, the impact of factory work, literacy and the penetration of urban genres into the repertoire of the village performers.<sup>55</sup> In the field of dialectology, Jakobson wrote and later published an article on the dialect of the region where they had collected data in which he described the spread of Muscovite pronunciation into the dialect of the Dmitrovskii uezd in the Moscow guberniia.<sup>56</sup> The common theme of their work—folkloristic or dialectological—was the evidence of the impact of the “cultural center” of Moscow on the speech and folklore of the surrounding region. This fieldwork and analysis done for the Commissions in 1915-1916 would have sparked Jakobson’s interest in the application of linguistic concepts to the study of verbal art and arguably suggested to Jakobson the use of dialectology as a method for literary study, i.e. a “poetic dialectology.” Their research at this point focused on the spread of urban culture into rural communities, and stressed the vitality of local traditions and their flexibility in incorporating new stimuli. Bogatyrev would continue this type of work, focusing on the way in which folk cultures transform borrowings in order to make them their own. Jakobson, on the other hand, remained more interested in the element represented by “Moscow” in this process. His subsequent writings reveal that he was continually drawn to the *source* of influence, rather than to its reception by more peripheral forms of language and culture.<sup>57</sup>

The use of dialect in the study of folklore was not, however, a unified approach in the 1910s. There were two different rationales for combining the study of folklore and dialect—one was represented by the “Historical school” of *bylina* scholarship, led by V. F. Miller (1848-1913), the other was an emerging ethnographic approach which was exemplified by the work of D. K. Zelenin (1878-1954). Miller used dialect data, along with other sources, to establish the

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arrived and were provided by the company with more and more elaborated and fantastic information about the three unmasked ‘Germans.’ We were witnessing a drastic example of the rise, multiplication and diffusion of formulaic responses to the burning topics. As it stated in our report, ‘something sprang up that probably might be called collective creation’. [...] A corporal who happened to be near at hand managed to prevent violence, but the tricks of the three malefactors whose perfidy deceived people’s vigilance remained a trite and commonplace topic of horror stories, told with an ever-growing set of new adornments not only in Novinskoe but also in surrounding villages (1966: 643-644). Jakobson insisted that small genres of folklore (proverbs, tales, rumors) did not have inherent value in the way that literature does. He based this argument on the fact that they represent “collective” rather than “individual” creation.

<sup>54</sup> See “Kratkii ocherk deiatel'nosti Postoiannoi Komissii po Dialektologii Russkogo Iazyka za 12 let (ianvar' 1914 g. - ianvar' 1926 g.)” *Trudy Komissii po Dialektologii Russkogo Iazyka* 9 (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR), 1927 and “Khronika: Otchet' o deiatel'nosti Etnograficheskogo Otedela i ego Komissii za 1915/16 god.” *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 1-2 (Moscow: Tipografiia Riadushinskikh), 1916: 138-151.

<sup>55</sup> GLM, Fol'klorny arkhiiv 23 ed. khr. 1.listy 46, 48.

<sup>56</sup> This essay, “Fonetika odnogo severno-velikorusskogo govora s namechaiushcheisia perekhodnost'iu,” was written in 1916 but first published in 1927 in Prague (SW I: 571-613). The essay adheres to the methods for dialect categorization worked out by the MDC.

<sup>57</sup> An example (to which I will return) is Jakobson’s work on Czech literary history, which often returned to the subject of the Old Church Slavonic tradition initiated by the Saints Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century. Jakobson approached the Czech literary tradition of the tenth-fourteenth centuries as a reflection of this moment of origin.

historical migration of the *bylina* tradition from the south of the Russian Empire to the north. Jakobson summarized Miller's argument in a paper presented in 1956:

Since Vsevolod Miller's paper of 1894 on the geographical spread and limits of the Russian oral epic tradition, folklorists have repeatedly broached this subject. [...] Within the European region of the Russian language, the territory of living rhapsodic tradition coincides with the area of two closely cognate dialectal varieties of North Russian, namely the Archangel. . . and the Olonets group. [...] Since the Archangel and Olonets dialects point to an old Novgorodian colonization, *any speculations about modern social and cultural conditions responsible for the preservation of the byliny in the Archangel and Olonets area appear futile and groundless* (38 italics added).<sup>58</sup>

Miller's thesis, which Jakobson also largely adopted, is that the epic tradition migrated to Novgorod after the fall of Kiev in the thirteenth century and then, following the collapse of the Republic of Novgorod in the fifteenth century, was preserved in the outlying regions that had previously belonged to the cultural center of Novgorod. In this approach, the dialectal markers found in the language of the *bylina* are useful as a means of tracing its history. Since Miller and his followers believed that the essence or cultural, scholarly import of the *bylina* lay in the moment when they were originally composed, their focus was on "removing layers" of linguistic sediment found in modern renditions of the epics in order to reconstruct them according to an earlier stage. As Jakobson's quote above states, the fact that the *bylina* was preserved in the Olonets dialect does not imply that the folklorist should pay particular attention to the culture of the region today. The presence of the dialect in the language of the epic is understood as an accretion to its structure, useful only for what it tells the scholar about an earlier stage in the history of the genre.

At the turn of the century this approach to dialect and folklore coexisted with a second mode of analysis which led to a different evaluation of the individual facts of language or works of folklore collected. The impetus for this second approach can be traced to the interest in dialect study and its sponsorship by the Russian Academy of Sciences. In her history of Russian folkloristics, T. G. Ivanova writes that

В рассматриваемый период [1900-1916] Академия наук развернула масштабную работу по исследованию русских народных говоров. По диалектологическим программам, ею разработанным, в разных концах России работали сотни профессиональных филологов и любителей, увлекавшихся народной культурой. Одним из методов собирания материалов по народным говорам программа предлагала запись произведений народной словесности. [...] Публиковавшиеся как образцы народных говоров, объективно эти записи песен, сказок, пословиц, загадок, и т.д. входили в сферу фольклористики (22-23).

In this period [1900-1916] the Academy of Science initiated work on the study of Russian popular dialects on a large scale. Hundreds of professional philologists and amateurs, interested in folk culture, worked according to the dialectological programs developed by the Academy. One of the methods for the collection of materials relating to

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<sup>58</sup> Jakobson's short presentation focuses on "the striking formal correspondences" between ballads recorded in different parts of the South Ladoga Basin and the *bylina* tradition. (39).

popular dialects proposed by the program was the transcription of works of folklore. [...] Published as examples of popular dialects, objectively these transcriptions of songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, etc. belong to the sphere of folkloristics.

The Academy's initiative coincided with, and quite conceivably promoted, the emergence of a new trend in folkloristics. This was the collection of a *wide variety* of verbal lore which was organized *geographically* rather than according to genre. The leading figure for this approach in folkloristics was D. K. Zelenin, an ethnographer who began his scholarly career as a dialectologist.<sup>59</sup> Zelenin dedicated a significant amount of his work to the study of his native Viatka (now the Kirov Oblast, Russia); first publishing a dictionary of the local lexicon, later a collection of the tales of the region. In the introductions to his volumes of tales collected from the Perm and Viatka gubernii published in 1914 and 1915, Zelenin comments on the flora and fauna, economic conditions and the dialect of the area. He published the tales according to their dialectal transcriptions, with notes on the biographies of individual tale-tellers. Zelenin's work thus aimed to provide a maximally complete picture of the folk culture of the region.<sup>60</sup> His precision and scholarliness in noting the dialect and biography of his informants influenced the younger generation of folklorists, particularly Bogatyrev, who is seen as the leading exponent of this tradition.<sup>61</sup> This method, which was designed to capture the specificity of a local culture, entailed a different evaluation of folkloric and linguistic material. In contrast to Miller and Jakobson's view of the Olonets dialect as the outermost layer *to be removed* in the course of comparative analysis, in Zelenin's work dialectal material was seen as a reflection of local identity—*valued for its own sake*. Whereas in the past folkloric expeditions had been motivated by a desire to find relics of a certain genre, often the prized *bylina*, now the folklorist collected a much broader range of smaller, "living" genres such as riddles, incantations or *chastushki*.<sup>62</sup> This was reflected in the organization of folklore publications. Rather than catalog material by subject or genre, in the 1910s it was increasingly organized by region.

The CFS, whose meetings Jakobson and Bogatyrev regularly attended, was a milieu in which Miller's approach to language and folklore and the newer trend represented by Zelenin coincided. The Commission, a sub-group within the *Obshchestvo liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii* [Society of lovers of natural history, anthropology and ethnography] (OLEAE), was founded in 1911 with V. F. Miller as its Chairman. Of its three senior, position-holding members, two are counted as students of Miller's or practitioners of his historical

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<sup>59</sup> On Zelenin's dialectological work see N. I. Tolstoi and S. M. Tolstaia, "D.K. Zelenin – dialektolog," *Problemy slavianskoi etnografii*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1979, 70-83.

<sup>60</sup> Zelenin, born in the Sarapul'skii uезд of the Viatskaia guberniia, began collecting folklore as an amateur while employed in the Sarapul'skii seminary (Ivanova 84). One of the primary goals of Zelenin's influential tale collections was to detail the "influence of local conditions on the repertoire of the given region" (Ivanova 85). Considering that Zelenin dedicated considerable efforts to documenting his own native region (Viatka), it appears reasonable to surmise that the mode of evaluation that drove Zelenin's pioneering work was a sense of local, as opposed to national, pride and identity. The titles of his tale collections are: *Velikorusskie skazki Vaitskoi gubernii* (1915) and *Velikorusskie skazki Permskoi gubernii* (1914).

<sup>61</sup> I discuss Bogatyrev, Zelenin and the further implications of using dialect as a model for ethnography in detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>62</sup> The "chastushka" is humorous rhyme sometimes compared to a limerick. The folklorist E. N. Eleonskaia, who was the secretary of the CFS and hosted its meetings in her home, could also be called a cross-over figure in folkloristics at this time. Ivanova describes her as an exponent of Miller's school, but at the same time she devoted much of her energies to the collection and publication of volumes of *chastushki* and *zagovory* (incantations)—small genres which she organized according to geographical region.

method.<sup>63</sup> Among the younger members, the twin brothers Iu. M and B. M. Sokolov (1889-1941, 1889-1930) were particularly close to Miller.<sup>64</sup> The Sokolovs' work from this period played an influential role in Jakobson's thinking on the subject of literary value in that they articulated a view which Jakobson eventually reacted against. Their most important contribution to folkloristics in this period, the hefty 1,500-page *Skazki i pesni belozerskogo kraia* [*Tales and songs of the Belozersk region*] (1915), can moreover be said to exemplify the collision between the historical and the synchronic modes of folkloristics that met in the CFS. The Sokolovs were members of MDC as well as the CFS, and Iu. Sokolov was a leading member of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in its post-revolutionary period. Their work is interesting in that it attempted to remain faithful to Miller's historical method while at the same time embracing Zelenin's synchronic interpretation of folklore.

*Skazki i pesni* was the product of the Sokolovs' expedition to the Russian north in 1908 and 1909, undertaken under Miller's direction and with the purpose of seeking out further traces of the *bylina* tradition. The extensive material they published in 1915 illustrates the divide at the time in the evaluation of regional language and lore. The Sokolovs' choice of destination was motivated by the historical narrative Miller's work sought to establish; the Belozersk region was seen as a last preserve of the *bylina* tradition. This material formed a chapter in their book titled "epic songs" [epicheskie pesni], in which songs were listed according to their subject title, e.g. "Alesha Popovich," "Dobrynia Mikhitits'," etc. At the same time, they approached their survey of the region with the breadth and thoroughness of Zelenin's studies. This led them to include a variety of genres in addition to the *byliny* (tales, proverbs, riddles, incantations, etc.), and a chapter on the dialect of the area. Finally, their thoroughness led them to note particularities in the language and mannerisms of each individual performer.<sup>65</sup> This level of detail in their collection technique may have inspired them to dedicate a major section of the book to the question of the "роль личности в народном творчестве" ("the role of personality in folk creativity") in which they sought to "подчеркнуть... насколько старинная по сюжету сказка отражает вкусы, симпатии, чувства, духовное 'я' отдельного современного 'сказателя'" (93, 94) ("emphasize... the extent to which the tale with its age-old plot reflects the tastes, sympathies, feelings, the spiritual 'I' of the individual, contemporary 'talleteller'").

The gap between the motivation for choosing the Belozersk region and their approach to much of its lore is clearest in their treatment of the performers of different genres. In the case of the *bylina* the peasant was "bearer" [nositel'] of an older tradition, which, in the best case

<sup>63</sup> These include the Commission's treasurer N. V. Vasil'ev and its secretary E. N. Eleonskaia. Other members of the CFS considered proponents of the historical school were the Sokolov brothers and A. S. Iakub. On the activities of the CFS see E. V. Pomerantseva. "Komissiiia po narodnoi slovesnosti Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii (1911-1926)." *Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii folkloristiki i antropologii* 2 (1963): 197-206.

<sup>64</sup> According to Ivanova, the brothers "восприняли все основные идеи главы «исторической школы» и в дореволюционный период своей научной деятельности, особо подчеркнем, не подвергали фундаментальные постулаты Вс. Миллера никакому сомнению" (136). V. A. Bakhtina points out that this connection was also a personal one, "для Б. М. и Ю. М. Соколовых Вс. Ф. Миллер был не только учителем, но и другом семьи, близким знакомым М. И. Соколова, взявшим на себя после его смерти ответственность за судьбу его детей. Чувство признательности и любви к Вс. Ф. Миллеру Б. М. и Ю. М. Соколовы пронесли через всю жизнь, сохранив его и тогда, когда провозглашать себя учеником 'буржуазного' исследователя было небезопасно" (19).

<sup>65</sup> Bakhtina suggests their method was to begin with the notation of regional linguistic particularities, then to move to the collection of folklore. In the process of recording a performance, the brothers would attempt to also capture the specific language of the performer (128-29).

scenario, he or she had done an exemplary job of memorizing. Deviations from what the folklorists expected to hear were interpreted as evidence that the *bylina* tradition was dying out (Howell 178, 188). When dealing with the epic, the singer was not an “author”—this function was filed by the authority of the historic epic moment the *bylina* was understood to reflect. The tales [skazki] they collected, however, were evaluated in the synchronic mode that Zelenin was pioneering. The Sokolovs went beyond Zelenin, however, to stress that, not only did the region possess a unique identity, but each of the tales collected and the personalities of the tale-tellers were also unique. This eventually led to the conclusion that the tale-teller was a genuine, individual “artist.”<sup>66</sup> In the section of the book on the *byliny*, the material is entirely decontextualized and listed by subject matter. In the section devoted to the *skazki*, the tales are organized first by district, then by performer. The Sokolovs provided the name and a short biographical sketch for each tale-teller. This sharp differentiation in the treatment of their material was not only dictated by the different genres themselves, but reflected different methodological approaches and conceptions of literary value. Moreover, these approaches are manifested in different views of the folk performer. For the *bylina*, a genre whose value is located in the past, the singer is treated as a nonessential “bearer” giving voice an author function, or a source of value, located in the epic past. The often-fantastic subject matter of the *skazki* was understood to be the product of fantasy, not a reflection of historical events. The fact that they were not valued in historical terms allowed the Sokolovs to argue that their synchronic diversity could be seen as interesting in its own right. This led the brothers to value each tale-teller as a unique psychological individual.<sup>67</sup>

The same year the Sokolovs’ book was published Jakobson and Bogatyrev set out on their first expedition. Like the Sokolovs, Jakobson and Bogatyrev were sponsored by both the CFS and the MDC and they collected a wide range of folkloric, ethnographic and dialectological material. Their approach could also be said to be oriented towards providing a maximally thorough account of the region they traveled to—the Veria district of the Moscow guberniia. These correspondences were noted at the time. As Bogatyrev later recalled: “помню, что после первого моего и Романа Осиповича доклада в Этнографическом отделе Общества любители естествознания, антропологи и этнографии (i.e. the CFS - JM) кто-то не без иронии назвал нас ‘школа братьев Соколовых’” (cited in Bakhtina 5) (“I remember that after my and Roman Osipovich’s first lecture in the Ethnographic section of the Society of lovers of natural history, anthropology and ethnography (i.e. the CFS - JM) someone, not without irony, referred to us as ‘the school of the brothers Sokolov’”). Their fieldwork in the rural areas outside of Moscow led Jakobson and Bogatyrev, as I have mentioned, to focus on the influence of urban culture on village lore and dialect. In the following years (1918-1919) they focused on folk

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<sup>66</sup> See Howell’s chapter “The Study of Tale Tradition: Folklore as Art” in *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics*, 152-175.

<sup>67</sup> Howell explains this division between the understanding of the *bylina* and the *skazka* in the work of the Sokolov brothers. “In studying the *byliny*, they worked with a well-developed and firmly entrenched view as to the state and the fate of this part of oral tradition...namely, that oral art was dying and that its contemporary peasant performers were retainers, but not creative contributors to the tradition. [...] *Bylina* performance was solemn and ritualized, with a greater proportion of any performance dictated by formulae than in the case of other genres of oral lore. This...reinforced the idea that the contemporary peasant performer was only repeating, to the best of his or her memory, a pre-existing ‘text’. [...] In observing tale-telling, the Sokolov brothers recognized very much what other tale scholars saw: a lively and flexible genre of oral art, which lent itself to a wide range of performers, with varied attitudes towards their material. Looking at tale-tellers, the Sokolovs...were struck by the creativity of the contemporary performer. They recognized these performers as artists rather than merely as ‘bearers,’ ‘transmitters,’ or ‘retainers’ of tradition” (148).

theater, collecting material and assembling an extensive “program” to guide others in collecting further material. It was in regards to the publication of this work that a conflict reportedly emerged between Bogatyrev and Jakobson as to the interpretation of folkloric creativity. Jakobson recalls that the source of this conflict was his rejection of the synchronic approach to folklore, described above, that was rapidly gaining adherents in the early 1920s.

In short, Jakobson did not follow the Sokolovs (and others) in their enthusiasm for the study of the individuality of the tale-teller. In their embrace of the dialectological, synchronic approach to folklore, Jakobson saw that they had lost sight of the “essence” of folklore. Jakobson approached folklore from a linguistic standpoint and saw tales and other small genres as operating according to the laws of language.<sup>68</sup> He claimed that “the Romantics were right in emphasizing the ‘herd nature’ of oral poetic creativity and comparing it to language,” and saw the Sokolovs’ work as misguided empiricism on the part of “opponents of this romantic viewpoint” (1980 [1929]: 12; 1966 [1945]: 89). “Absorbed,” he writes, “by the problem of the individual features in the repertoire of the story-teller, . . . Boris and Jurij Sokolov . . . have gone so far as to identify a tale variant with an individual literary work” (1966 [1945]: 89). By approaching folklore from the standpoint of language, Jakobson applies to folklore the criteria of linguistic evaluation based on the separation of variants from invariants. As with language, for Jakobson, the “essence” of folklore lies in its invariant grammatical structure. This led him to argue: “of course, in the composition of the folk tale there are, besides constants, also variables that the teller is free to alter; but these variations must not be overestimated. [...] Attempts at biographical interpretation, when applied to the poetics of the tales, are unconvincing” (1966 [1945]: 91).

The focus on the personality of the folk performer was a unique attribute of Russian folkloristics, with a tradition that dated from the 1870s.<sup>69</sup> The effort to see in the folk individuals and even artists drew on Russian populist movements, and the upsurge in this type of study between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions likely reflects a corresponding rise in democratic, populist sentiments amongst the intellectual classes. In rejecting this tendency Jakobson was going against the tide. Although he only formulated a counterargument to the Sokolovs’ approach in the late 1920s, following Vladimir Propp’s renowned publication of a morphology of plot tales in 1928, Jakobson and Bogatyrev reportedly disagreed on the concept of collective as opposed to the individual creativity of folklore around 1922.<sup>70</sup> Jakobson recalls that, as it was being prepared for publication in 1922, Bogatyrev struck from the proofs of their jointly

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<sup>68</sup> In a later essay on folklore Jakobson commented: “according to the experience of modern linguistics, language patterns exhibit a consistent regularity. The languages of the whole world manifest a paucity and relative simplicity of structural types, and at the base of all these types lie universal laws [...] Similar phenomena of schematism and recurrence in the structure of folk tales throughout the world have long astonished and challenged investigators” (1966 [1945]: 90).

<sup>69</sup> For an overview of the development of “performer study” in Russian folkloristics between 1860 and the 1917, see Howell’s *Development of Soviet Folkloristics*, 21-34. A good overview this approach can be found in Mark Azadovsky’s “A Siberian Tale Teller.” *Center for Intercultural Studies in Folklore and Ethnomusicology*, University of Texas, 1974; originally *Eine sibirische Märchen Erzählerin* (1926).

<sup>70</sup> Jakobson rejected the Sokolovs’ approach to the tale in “Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens,” co-authored with Bogatyrev (1929). Although Jakobson doesn’t cite Propp, and I am not aware of evidence that Jakobson read Propp’s study before he and Bogatyrev wrote their article, it would seem likely that Jakobson, who was in close contact with Soviet scholars in this period (Iu. Tynianov came to Prague, for instance, in 1928), would have known of the work. The correspondence between his argument that folklore is like *langue* (i.e. the invariant grammar of folkloric production), and Propp’s feat in deriving an invariant string of functions for all wonder tales is striking.

prepared work on folk theater the argument that folklore is “collective creativity,” prompting Jakobson to remove his name from the book.<sup>71</sup>

Jakobson’s rejection of the Sokolovs’ approach to verbal art can be brought to bear on his approach to Khlebnikov in NRP. His study reflects some of the tensions between a historical and synchronic mode of analysis and evaluation that we have seen in the Sokolovs’ *Skazki i pesni belozerskogo kraia*. If we recall Jakobson’s outline for a poetic dialectology, his argument begins with the statement that Pushkin is the “center” of a poetic culture and that further “poetic dialects” could be classified according to their relationship with such “centers.” The time he spends listing the different classes of dialects suggests that a poetic dialectology would focus on classifying these types of “secondary” poets (those who are not themselves centers of influence) according to the extent to which they reveal the influence of these, central poets, in their works. In contrast to this, however, Jakobson proceeds to focus on the poetics of the center itself—that is, on the devices of Khlebnikov’s poetry. In fact, it could be suggested that the type of “mixed” poetic dialects that would group themselves around Khlebnikov’s influence could be considered “familiarized” poetry, in that they reuse old devices (in contrast to *baring* old devices). Jakobson denigrated such derivative work. Recall that, using the example of “Pushkinesque” [Pushkinopodobnye] poems, Jakobson dismissed this type of literary product as only as valuable as false *kerenki* (bank notes). Or, in diachronic terms, they are “soot” to be removed from the self-valuable source. Neither in NRP, nor in his subsequent work on poetry, did Jakobson devote his energies to the study of what might be called a “secondary” poet in these terms. This is because, according to Jakobson’s mode of linguistic evaluation, only poets or works which could themselves be said to be centers of influence are valuable, and thus legitimate subjects of literary analysis.

On the synchronic plane, then, Jakobson’s approach leads to something of an impasse. He suggests a method that, if followed according to the logic of synchronic, dialectological analysis, would lead to the study of “variants” (e.g. Pushkinesque poetry) as valuable and worthy of study in their own right. This was the approach that the Sokolovs took towards the *skazki*. According to the logic of Jakobson’s concept of value in verbal art, however, these are secondary manifestations. Jakobson asserts in NRP that he would like to study literature as a “social fact” akin to language.<sup>72</sup> His inclination to study only the essential “centers” of poetic language, however, makes it difficult to do this on the synchronic plane. Rather than looking at the poets who fall under Khlebnikov’s sphere of influence, he chooses to treat him as a type of poetic *langue*. This corresponds to his analysis of Khlebnikov as a meta-poet; his poetry is treated as more “essential” than that of other poets. Jakobson’s thesis that the key element in Khlebnikov’s poetics is his *baring* of poetic devices raises his poetry to a level of abstraction. Stated differently, he sees Khlebnikov’s creative work as akin to that of the philologist or the formalist literary theorist.

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<sup>71</sup> They worked on the book together in 1919 before Jakobson left for Czechoslovakia in 1920. The book was then prepared for publication, with Bogatyrev’s additions, while he was in Berlin with V. Shklovsky. In his *Dialogues* recorded with K. Pomorska Jakobson stated that “этот новый взгляд (regarding collective creation) настолько расходился с господствующими воззрениями, что даже Богатырев печатая в 1922 в Берлине подготовленную еще в Москве 1919 года нами обоими «Программу изучения народного театра», вычеркнул из корректуры пункт о коллективном творчестве и этим побудил меня изъять из печати ссылки на мое участие в подготовке нашей программы” (25-26.)

<sup>72</sup> “Развитие теории поэтического языка будет возможно лишь тогда, когда поэзия будет трактоваться как социальный факт, когда будет создана своего рода поэтическая диалектология” (301 italics added).

The contradictions between Jakobson's proposed method and his actual approach to Khlebnikov stem from the fact that he is operating with an author function and a evaluation of verbal art that is closest to Miller's work on the *bylina* or the philological study of the *Slovo o polku Igoreve*. In NRP Jakobson attempts to extend this mode of scholarship to include the current moment. The tensions which emerge from this, sketched above, result from the fact that the philological conception of authorship and value he adhered to (epitomized by the concept of the epic past) is best suited to a historical narrative. This is borne out by the tenor of Jakobson's subsequent projects. Following his move to Czechoslovakia in 1920, Jakobson turned to the analysis of Czech poetry and he suggested early on (1923) that his goal was to establish a dialectological "cultural center" for the Czech literary tradition. To do this he turned back to the study of the "oldest" Czech poetry.<sup>73</sup> His approach to the Czech tradition reveals more clearly his debt to V. F. Miller's work on the *bylina*.

### Cultural Centers and Cultural Origins: History as Continuity

There are a series of parallels between Jakobson's use of a literary "author function" (I continue to appeal here to Foucault's concept), and Miller's "Historical School" of *bylina* study. Miller's approach to the epic was initially shaped by his opposition to the "mythological school" in folklore study, which was dominant from the 1840s through the 1860s.<sup>74</sup> He belonged the generation of scholars who starting teaching after the reforms of Alexander II and who rejected "mythological explanations... as self-indulgent, airy-fairy Romanticism" in favor of an "apparently more down-to-earth paradigm associated with historical positivism" (Byford 2007: 30). Miller's background was in classical philology. He studied comparative linguistics and Sanskrit at universities in Berlin, Prague, Tübingen and Paris in 1874-75, and he cited German philological studies of the 1880s and 1890s on the Homeric epics as precedent for his approach to the Russian *bylina* (77).<sup>75</sup> Miller focused on the linguistic structures of the epic tradition and on a body of "obshchie mesta" or "loci communes" in the language of the epic tradition.<sup>76</sup> These repeated passages, along with an established canon of "artistic devices" [iskusstvennye priemy] were taken as proof that the *byliny* were composed by a "corporation" of professional singers akin to the wandering minstrels [skomorokhi], who Miller argued succeeded them as producers and bearers of the epic tradition (62, 81). The professionalism of the "authors" of the original epics was understood as a function of the milieu in which they performed. The original composition of the epics, the "prototype" [pervoobraz] for later epics, according to Miller, occurred in the context of the Kievan Court:

<sup>73</sup> One of his publications on this subject was "The Oldest Czech spiritual songs" ["Nejstarší české písně duchovní"] (1929).

<sup>74</sup> Iu. Sokolov in his *Russian Folklore* names F. I. Buslaev, A. N. Afanas'ev, O. F. Miller, and also A. A. Potebnia as Russian scholars whose work was done in the "spirit of the mythological theory" (64-77).

<sup>75</sup> Miller refers to work of the schools surrounding the eminent German philologists Karl Lachmann (1793-1851) and Adolf Kirchhoff (1826-1908) devoted to the study of the Homeric epics and their "component parts" (77, 81). He cites in particular the work of C. Roth *Die Bedeutung der Wiederholungen für die Homerische Frage* (Leipzig 1890) and his argument that the repetitions in the epic texts are the result of the fact that the composers of the works that went into the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* had, at their disposal, a "fond poeticheskikh formul" (77).

<sup>76</sup> Miller defined these "obshchie mesta" as "эпические описания, которые отлились исстари в определенную форму (напр., описание процесса седлания) и переносятся свободно из одного сюжета в другой, если есть для этого какой-нибудь случай" (cited in Khrolenko 15).

Эти сказания, прототипы позднейших былин, окружили имя ‘старого’ Владимира в XI веке. В этом веке выработался уже определенный тип этих поэтических сказаний, выработался их стиль, образный язык, стихотворный склад. [...] Песни складывались в высшем классе общества, в богатой, привилегированной по своему общественному и экономическому положению дружинной среде. Они прославляли выдающихся дружинников, идеализируя их подвиги и прикрепляя их к Киеву и кн. Владимиру (quoted in Ivanova 114).

These legends, prototypes of the later epics, surrounded the name of the ‘old’ Vladimir in the 11th century. The definite type for these poetic legends was already worked out in this century; their style, figurative language, metrical composition were worked out. [...] The songs were composed in the upper class of society, in the wealthy, socially and economically privileged milieu of the princely retinue [druzhina]. The songs glorified the eminent members of this retinue, idealizing their feats and attributing them to Kiev and to Prince Vladimir.

Miller argued that after the fall of Kievan Rus’ in the thirteenth century these prototypes, which he referred to as the original “Vladimir cycle,” migrated north in a state of decline to the territories of the Kingdom of Galicia–Volhynia and the Republic of Novgorod. Here the tradition was preserved by the *skomorokhi* as an element of the urban entertainment culture of Novgorod.<sup>77</sup> It was only relatively recently, Miller and his followers argued, that these *skomorokhi* had disappeared leaving the *bylina* tradition to the peasantry. The peasant singers, from whom the *bylina* had been largely recorded, were understood to be contributing to the destruction of the epic tradition, which was widely acknowledged to be dying out. This history of the genre was understood to be present in the epics, however, even as they were found at the turn of the century.<sup>78</sup>

Miller’s narrative was to be proven through the analysis of the linguistic layers found in the *byliny* themselves. In the language of the epic Miller discerned layers of historical strata, and described the work of the folklorist as akin to that of an archeologist. As Miller wrote in 1892:

Наш былевой эпос представляется мне грандиозной развалиной, обширным многовековым сооружением, полным таинственных ходов и переходов, с пристройками и надстройками от разных времен. В этом здании жили некогда князья, пристраивая к нему терема и вышки, украшая его византийской мусией и восточными коврами. В свое время пограбили в нем половцы и татары; в свое время проживали в нем московские бояре, ночевали казаки и, наконец, в кое-каких еще обитаемых закутах устроился непрехотливый олонецкий крестьянин. И вот, бродя по загадочной руине, *археолог открывает следы разных эпох, разных наслоений*: то перед ним византийская фреска, то восточный орнамент, то

<sup>77</sup> On the *skomorokhi* and their imprint on the *byliny* see V. F. Miller’s *Narodnyi epos i istoriia*, 2005, 82-91.

<sup>78</sup> The most important collections of *byliny* were *Ancient Russian Poems Collected by Kirsha Danilov* (1804), and *Songs Collected by P. V. Kireevsky* (1860-74), followed by the “discovery” of the tradition in the Russian north by P. N. Rybnikov in 1860, which resulted in the four-volume *Songs Collected by P. N. Rybnikov* (1861-8167), followed by *Onega Bylinas Recorded by A. F. Gilferding in the Summer of 1871* (1873). These collections were done by amateurs, and were succeeded by many scholarly collections that began to appear in the 1870s, but these early publications represented the core of the recorded tradition at the turn of the twentieth century (Bailey and Ivanova xv-xvii, xxix-xxx).

расписанный свод московской палаты, то деревянная крестьянская клеть (quoted in Azbelev 34 italics added).

Our epic seems like a grandiose ruin to me, a vast centuries-old construction full of secret entrances and passageways, with annexes and additions dating from various periods. At one time princes lived in this building, attaching tower-rooms [terema] and watchtowers, decorating it with Byzantine mosaics and eastern carpets. In due time it was plundered by Polovtsians and Tartars; in due time Muscovite boyars lived there, Cossacks spent the night and, finally, in some still-habitable recesses the modest Olonets peasant settled in. And thus, wandering around this mysterious ruin *the archeologist discovers traces of various epochs, different stratifications*: at one moment he sees before him a Byzantine fresco, at another an eastern bit of ornamentation, now the painted vault of a Muscovite hall, now the wooden peasant storeroom (italics added).

Miller and his students thus approached the epic in the way that historical linguists approached language. The material the scholar applies himself to is seen in terms of a historical genealogy or a branching tree. Its surface layers [nasloeniia], the newest additions, are removed to arrive at its roots. Miller's metaphor concretizes the work of the philologist in the way that Jakobson did with the image of the icon; both imagine the proto-text as a material object. The philological method Miller and his followers relied on, in contrast, led ultimately to the speculative reconstruction of a *lost Vladimir cycle* or proto-text. The method of the historical school entailed comparing versions of the "same" epic song and collating this material with accounts found in medieval chronicles. The process relied not only on correspondences in subject matter, but on identifying dialectal and archaic linguistic markers in the language of recorded epics. These allowed the researcher to trace the history of this oral genre over time and space.

This method was designed to identify a line of continuity leading from the ancient past to the current moment. This continuity was guaranteed by the understanding that the *bylina* had been passed down within the community of professional singers via a conservative process of careful memorization.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the tradition was understood to be maintained by the *gravitational force* that the tropes and style of the original Vladimir cycle possessed. On the level of subject matter, this meant that even as the epic spread away from its source, accruing new material, events and names were attributed to Vladimir and his retinue. As Miller writes, the force of the poetic tradition initiated by the Vladimir cycle, meant that, "к этому центру [к Киеву] тянули и сказания местные--черниговские, переяславские, ростовские..." (quoted in Ivanova 114) ("towards this center [towards Kiev] gravitated local legends as well—those from Chernigov, Pereyaslavl, Rostov..."). According to this theory, the poetic tradition of Kiev, located in the epic past, functioned as a center of gravity, which secured the continuity of the history of the genre. Thus the language and commonplaces of the epic, as well as the names of some of its heroes could be traced back to the "cultural center" of Vladimir's court in the eleventh century. This understanding of a poetic cultural center, which serves as a point of origin towards which a broader poetic tradition "gravitates," is remarkably close to Jakobson's

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<sup>79</sup> Miller explains this continuity as a product of the singers' approach to their craft: "Слагатели имели в своем распоряжении наследованные истари типические стихотворные места. Такой фонд поэтических формул, выкованных долгим употреблением, существовал уже у слагателей (певцов) самых древних, достижимых нашему анализу, песен, и они усвоили его памятью при тщательном изучении наизусть" (cited in Khrolenko 128-129).

conception of the function of the author as a cultural center which organizes poetic language into various dialects, or which, as he asserted, reveals the “laws of poetic language and their projection into history” (quoted in Shapir 1991: 45).

There would have been abundant opportunities for Jakobson to familiarize himself with Miller’s writings. His “historical school,” Ivanova writes, “without a doubt occupied the leading position in folkloristics of the beginning of the twentieth century” (110). This approach owed its popularity, to a degree, to the influential positions Miller occupied at academic institutions. He was a professor at Moscow University, Chairman of the Ethnographic section of the OLEAE and editor of the journal *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* [*Ethnographic review*] from 1881 until his death.<sup>80</sup> Jakobson would have come under his immediate influence as a student at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages between 1903 and 1914, where Miller was a professor and director of the Institute between 1897 and 1911.<sup>81</sup> In an interview, Jakobson later recalled: “Miller impressed us, and his works interested me since childhood: at the age of eleven or twelve years, or so, I already had read his studies on epic poetry and its history” (quoted in Toman 1995: 9). As mentioned above, Jakobson and Bogatyrev would have felt Miller’s influence in the CFS, as he was the Chairman of the Commission and most of its senior members were his students. Yet in his writings from this period, Jakobson did not acknowledge Miller as freely as he did his seniors in the Moscow Dialectological Commission. Instead he relegated the scholarship of the 1890s to a lost era which he denigrated in favor of the Romantic approach to language and folklore which he sought to “rehabilitate” (1980 [1929]: 12).

In the 1920s and 30s Jakobson’s most vitriolic attacks were saved for the scholarship of the late-nineteenth century, which he often described as positivist or as exemplified by the Neogrammarian school in linguistics. Jakobson’s claim to have united the Romantic and the futurist worldviews in opposition to “naïve Realism,” can be reinterpreted in light of his position on linguistic and literary value. His account conceals important continuities between his own work and the academic philological tradition of late nineteenth century. His attacks on the Neogrammarians, for example, focused mainly on one aspect of their approach. He reproaches this school for its “naïve realism,” which he interpreted as the view that “only the speech of *a particular person* at a particular point in time represents an actual reality” (1980: 3 italics added). In a talk given in 1934 in Prague, Jakobson described the latter half of the nineteenth century as “a period of a sudden, violent inflation of linguistic signs.” According to Jakobson, intellectual trends such as positivism, realism and liberalism attempted to “conceal this inflation at any cost and shore up faith in the paper word [důvěru k papírovému slovu] with all available means [...] to bolster the credit of the word and strengthen confidence in its value” (1981: 748-49). This passage returns to the opposition between some poetry as worthless “paper” currency as opposed to genuine, inherently valuable, poetry. Moreover, Jakobson’s view that nineteenth century positivism resulted in an “inflation” of literary value, recalls his opposition to the “neogrammarian” Sokolovs in their evaluation of the individual *skazka*, as the speech of a

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<sup>80</sup> He was at Moscow University from 1884-1911 where he taught “*ustnaia narodnaia slovesnost*” for many years (Ivanova 116).

<sup>81</sup> At the Lazarev Institute, Jakobson wrote, “V.F Miller... was for all of us the moving spirit of zeal for folk poetry” (1966: 642). Rudy writes of this school: “Jakobson’s early preoccupation with language as a creative phenomenon and with folklore received a significant stimulus from the unique school he attended from the age of seven to graduation at age seventeen (1903-1914), the Lazarev Institute of Eastern Languages (Lazarevskii Institut Vostochnykh Iazykov). Founded in 1815 by a wealthy Armenian to encourage cultural contacts between the Armenians and Russians, it was a primary and secondary school with a student body evenly divided between Russians and Armenians, many of the latter on generous stipends” (5-6).

*particular person*, as a work of art.<sup>82</sup> It thus appears that, according to Jakobson, nineteenth-century realism was most at fault for its excessive empiricism, epitomized by the Sokolovs' "inflation" of the concept of literary value. They did this by studying the *skazka* (a variant, or fact of *parole*) as interesting in its own right, which led to the view that it possessed "self-sufficient" value and was thus a work of literary art. Jakobson consistently criticizes the Sokolovs in this light; he never objects to their work on the *bylina*, which closely adhered to Miller's approach. Thus, I would suggest that when Jakobson calls Miller a "typical neogrammarian" it does not follow that he rejected Miller's work on the essence of the epic (1980 [1929]: 7-8). Miller's efforts to reconstruct the lost "center" of the epic in the courtly culture of Kievan Rus', for example, find clear echoes in Jakobson's own work on the history of Czech verse.

The affinities between Jakobson and Miller's approach to verbal art stand out once we turn to Jakobson's work on Czech literature. His first major work on Czech poetry, *O cheshskom stikhe preimushchestvenno v sopostavlenii s russkim* [*On Czech Verse primarily in comparison with Russian*] (1923), begins with an overview of the state of the field of Czech prosody. Jakobson returned here to his analogy between the study of "practical" and "poetic" language and to the terminology of dialect study:

История чешского поэтического языка несколько напоминает... историю языков, не знающих *кoiné*, лишенных длительного культурного центра и в виду этого сильно подверженных дроблению на диалекты. Чешская поэзия не знала канонизованной поэтической школы, призванных классиков стиха, той навязчивой принудительной ритмической традиции, которая характеризует примерно историю поэзии французской, либо отчасти русской (12 italics added).<sup>83</sup>

The history of Czech poetic language somewhat resembles ... the history of languages lacking a *koiné*, devoid of a protracted cultural center and as a result extremely liable to fragmentation into dialects. Czech poetry didn't have a canonical poetical school, acknowledged classics of poetry—that fixed compulsory rhythmic tradition which characterizes, for example, the history of French or in part also Russian poetry (italics added).

In the subsequent paragraph he suggests that this situation is the result of the fact that Czech versification has been subject to a variety of *foreign* influences.<sup>84</sup> This fragmentation is then contrasted with the traditional approach to Russian prosody, which armed itself with the idea of

<sup>82</sup> Indeed this empiricist logic was taken to its natural conclusion by Bogatyrev, who, in his strictly synchronic approach to ethnography, understood any manifestation of culture that was "unique" to be a work of "art." I discuss this aspect of Bogatyrev's approach to folklore and semiotics in Chapter Three.

<sup>83</sup> In applying the concept of a *koiné* to poetic language, Jakobson may be borrowing from A. N. Veselovsky. In Jakobson's Brno lectures from 1935 he attributes this usage of the term to Veselovsky, saying that Veselovsky grasped a very important "problem," that is the "problém poetického dědictví nebo *národně poetické koiné*, podle vlastního termínu Veselovského. Badatel má tu na mysli tu velkou zásobu běžných tvárných prostředků, hotových schémat, rozmanitých klišé, která má k dispozici každý básník" [the problem poetic heritage or national poetic *koiné*, according to Veselovsky's own term. The researcher here has in mind that large stock of regular malleable resources, ready schemas, assorted clichés, which every poet has at his disposition] (2005: 55 italics added).

<sup>84</sup> This paragraph reads: "чешское стихосложение находилось под разнообразными интенсивными влияниями (средневековым латинским, античным в интерпретации ренессанса, немецким, наконец последнее время французским). Это положение находится с предыдущим [i.e. on dialectical fragmentation] в тесной связи" (13).

“Pushkin’s infallibility” [pushkinskaia nepogreshimost’] (15). This book does not return explicitly to the Czech’s lack of a “cultural center,” although he suggests in a footnote that he is working on the problem in a separate publication. Jakobson’s correspondence with Trubetskoi reveals that Jakobson’s subsequently published work on old Czech verse was intended as the “second part” of *O cheshskom stikhe*.<sup>85</sup> These remarks suggest that Jakobson, having identified the lack of a cultural center in Czech literary history, sought to provide an answer to the problem by turning to old Czech poetry. In the 1920s and ‘30s Jakobson wrote hundreds of pages on the subject of old Czech literature.<sup>86</sup> A recurring theme in these writings was his argument that the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition in Czech literary culture did not die out after 1097 with the destruction of the Sázava Monastery, a legendary repository for the Old Church Slavonic tradition in the Czech lands, as was commonly thought, but continued to exert its influence on the Czech literary tradition. He argued that Old Church Slavonic provided the basis for the flowering of Czech gothic literature in the fourteenth century and that the Saints’ vernacularization of the liturgy provided the foundations for the Hussite movement of the fifteenth century. His work on the subject began with the study of orthographical and linguistic particularities of old Czech poetry, which Jakobson claimed revealed elements of a Czech recension of Old Church Slavic. Over the course of the 1930s, as Jakobson increasingly argued for the more profound, long-lasting influence of this center, he moved from philological reconstructions to an argument based on his understanding of a “Church Slavonic ideology” (1945: 39).<sup>87</sup> This work can be seen as an element of Jakobson’s attempt to locate for the Czechs a poetic “cultural center” in the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition.

Jakobson’s approach to this tradition combines attributes of the Moscow Dialectological Commission’s understanding of a dialectal cultural center with Miller’s use of the concept to describe a point of historical origin. In commenting on the longevity of the eleventh-century Czech spiritual song, “Hospodine, pomiluj ny,” [“Lord, Have Mercy on Us”] Jakobson argues: “in order for such a song to have taken hold as in the popular sung repertoire and have outlived Church-Slavonic literature... that song must have emerged in an environment capable of cultural expansion, armed with clear authority” (1929: 20).<sup>88</sup> This is the logic of dialect spread; as Durnovo argued, “one or another dialectal feature gains the possibility for greater or lesser dissemination... only with the support of a certain cultural center” (4). Like Miller, however, Jakobson placed this center in the remote epic past. Miller’s influence is registered in a series of parallels between Jakobson’s description of a Cyrillo-Methodian “center” and Miller’s approach to the *byliny*: 1) both posit a historical cultural center which is associated with the culture of the medieval “aristocracy”; 2) in both narratives the center in question is destroyed by the invasion

<sup>85</sup> Jakobson remarks that this part, “Contributions to the History of Old Czech Verse,” was handed to the Czech Academy of Sciences at the end of 1924, but “met there with annoying postponements and handicaps and remained unpublished with the exception of a few scattered sections” (1975: 38).

<sup>86</sup> Much of this work was collected and published in Jakobson’s *Selected Writings VI: Early Slavic Paths and Crossroads: Comparative Slavic Studies* (1985).

<sup>87</sup> For an overview of Jakobson’s work on this subject see Jindřich Toman’s “Jakobson and Bohemia/Bohemia and the East,” *Jakobson Entre l’est et l’ouest Cahiers de l’ILSL*, 9 (1997): 237-247. Jakobson’s work in this vein culminated in his little-known 220-page book, *Moudrost starých Čechů [The Wisdom of the Ancient Czechs]*, published in New York in 1943. The book continues to argue for the impact and the uninterrupted continuity of the importance of the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy. The book builds on his earlier scholarly work, but is also in large part a response to the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany. Toman compares the book to the Czech President Eduard Beneš’s writings on Slavic commonality.

<sup>88</sup> “aby se taková píseň ujala v lidovém zpěvu a přežila církevně-slovanské písemnictví... musela tato píseň vzniknout v prostředí, schopném kulturní expanse, ozbrojeno jistou autoritou“ (1929: 20).

of an infidel—the Tartar horde or the German Latinizers; 3) this incursion is seen to cause the geographical dispersion of the core culture, which is then traced using the comparative method; and 4) the lost center or core culture is valued as an absolute “epic past” which is understood to be the source of national identity.

Miller, as discussed above, understood the *bylina* tradition to be a product of the princely [kniazheskii] culture of Kievan Rus'. The stress he laid on professionalism and the fact that the epics represented an “elite” culture made his theory, called the “theory of aristocratic origin” of the *byliny*, a target for criticism in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>89</sup> In study written in 1912 Miller summarized:

the [epic] songs were composed by singers of the princely court and the *druzhina* wherever there was a demand for them, or where the pulse of life beat stronger, or where there was prosperity and leisure, or, where the flower of the nation was centered, that is, in the wealthy cities, where life went on with more freedom and gaiety. [...] Celebrating the princes and the members of the *druzhina*, this poetry bore an aristocratic character; it was, so to speak, the elegant literature of the higher, more enlightened class, which, more than other groups in the population, was permeated by a national consciousness, a feeling of the unity of the Russian land, and, in general, a sense of political interests” (cited in Sokolov 117).

Jakobson likewise specified that “the Moravians and, *above all, their ruling class*, mindful of the interests of the state, demanded Christian instruction in the native language” (1985 [1939]: 130 italics added).<sup>90</sup> He further argued, in a 1935 article on Hussite poetry, for a direct correspondence between the strength of the native Czech aristocracy and the flourishing of the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy, concluding that:

the close *connection of the Church Slavonic tradition with the life of the Old Czech state* is clear. The stages in which this tradition progressed obviously coincide with periods of political ascendancy, the stages in which it declined—with political setbacks [...] the glorious years of Vratislav’s rule [915-921] are the time of the flowering of Slavonic liturgy in the Sázava Monastery, and its extinction coincides with the beginning of a prolonged period of political decline (1985: 712-13 italics in original).

In attributing the roots of Czech national identity to the culture of the medieval aristocracy, Jakobson was departing from the Czech nationalist discourse that had emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. The German Romantic tradition, which attributed the essence of the nation to its *Volk*—the culture of the peasantry—had innate appeal for the Czechs, whose sense of national solidarity was conceived in opposition to the largely German-speaking aristocracy in

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<sup>89</sup> For an overview, and justification, of this theory, see Felix J. Oinas, “The Problem of the Aristocratic Origin of Russian *Byliny*,” *Slavic Review* 30 (1971): 513-522.

<sup>90</sup> He saw that the lasting impact of the Old Church Slavonic liturgy in Czech culture resulted from its “far-reaching influence on the language of *educated* Czechs” in the tenth and eleventh centuries (1929: 17 italics added). Jakobson generally embraced the idea that the evolution of culture and the arts is led unilaterally by the elite classes. He found support for this view in the German folklorist Hans Naumann’s theory of “*gesunkenes Kulturgut*” which argued that folklore is the sunken cultural goods that once belonged to the upper classes. Jakobson cited Naumann’s thesis repeatedly in the 1920s and ‘30s.

the Hapsburg Empire.<sup>91</sup> The aristocratic narrative of national identity, however, was consistent with Miller's work on the *bylina* which excluded the peasantry from any substantive role in the creation of the epics. Miller's identification of the medieval aristocracy as the source of the epic tradition reflects the slant of the dominant school of historiography at Moscow University in the late nineteenth century centered around the work of S. M. Solov'ev and V. O. Kliuchevskii.<sup>92</sup> Ivanova points out, for example, that Miller's focus on the migration of the *bylina* tradition to the north reflected the historiographical interest in questions of Russian colonization of new lands (112). This background suggests that the approach to verbal art that Jakobson drew on was based on the imperial understanding of Russian identity. To borrow the formulation of the historian Geoffrey Hosking, this identity was an elite one: "for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," he summarizes, "the nobility were the principal bearers of the empire, the one social stratum that embodied its spirit, and was responsible for its defense and administration" (153). It is this understanding of identity that Jakobson applies to Czech literature, thus overriding the Romantic definition of the Czechs as a *Volk* in favor of resurrecting a lost aristocratic culture that began with the Cyrillo-Methodian mission.

Both Miller and Jakobson identified an era in which the native Russian/Czech aristocracy enjoyed a period of sovereignty as its cultural center. Furthermore, in both the Russian and the Czech narratives they create, a Court culture with ties to Constantinople was tragically lost due to the incursions of a foreign power. Miller's narrative does not allow for much overlap between the impact of the Tartar invasion and the epic tradition. According to Miller, the events the *byliny* refer to a time before the Russians were defeated, and subsequently the tradition was preserved in territories where Russian culture maintained its sovereignty.<sup>93</sup> The foe in Jakobson's narrative, the German Latinizers, represented a much more current threat than the Mongol hordes, and his writings go to greater lengths to recuperate a thread of Czech history that is, if not free of German influence, then consistently conceived of in opposition to it.<sup>94</sup> The fragmentation of the Czech Church Slavonic literary tradition is seen, for instance as a result of the fact that "the Latinizers doggedly and thoughtlessly destroyed the Church-Slavonic literary monuments following their triumphs over the Cyrillo-Methodian line" (1929: 19).<sup>95</sup> These destructive foreign

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<sup>91</sup> The understanding of the Czech nation as synonymous with the a peasant or working-class, has been commonly explained as a result of the fact that the native Czech aristocracy had been largely vanquished and forced into exile following the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. For an overview of the Czech nationalist movement see Joseph Zacek's "Nationalism in Czechoslovakia," *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, University of Washington Press, 1969, 166-206.

<sup>92</sup> S. M. Solov'ev (1820-1879) was a proponent of the "*gosudarstvennaia shkola*" in Russian historiography. Miller cites V. O. Kliuchevskii (1841-1911) particularly abundantly in his writings on the history of the epic.

<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note that Jakobson questioned specifically this element of Miller's history of the Russian epic. See Jakobson's "Sobaka kalin tsar'," *Selected Writings IV*, 64-81 (originally 1939).

<sup>94</sup> This anti-Germanic, anti-Western aspect of Jakobson's argumentation suggests the influence of N. Trubetskoi and the Eurasianist movement and there are significant points of overlap between their work on these subjects in the 1930s. One difference, however, between the larger cultural spheres of Trubetskoi's Eurasianism and Jakobson's focus on the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition is their stance regarding the Western Slavs. Trubetskoi was convinced that the culture of the Western Slavs, falling in the realm of the Catholic Church, was alien to the Eurasian sphere. Jakobson, on the other hand, sought to include the Western Slavs by situating his point of common culture in the history of the ninth to fourteenth centuries. For a comparison of Jakobson and Trubetskoi's approach to the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition, see Benjamin Stolz's and Jindřich Toman. "Philologia Militans: Trubetskoy and Jakobson on the Church Slavonic Heritage." *American Contributions to the Eleventh International Congress of Slavists*. Slavica, 1993, 414-424.

<sup>95</sup> "houževnatě a bezohledně ničili latiníci církevně-slovanské památky po svých vítězstvích nad směrem cyrilometodějským" (1929: 19).

incursions placed a screen between the philologist and the “core” of the tradition that he sought to reconstruct, placing it in an “absolute” past. They also, however, precipitated the geographical dispersion of the original cultural center. Miller, as mentioned, sought to prove the migration of the epic to the north. Jakobson devoted much work to documenting, not only the strength and importance of the Church Slavonic tradition in Czech culture, but the spread and subsequent influence of an Old Church Slavonic of Czech recension in Bulgaria, Poland, Croatia and Kievan Rus’.<sup>96</sup>

Finally, Jakobson and Miller similarly invoke a *lost* cultural center to create an author function for a genre of literature that is defined by anonymity and antiquity. The theoretical, reconstructed quality of the poetic “center” allows them to posit the medieval aristocracy as its “author.” The identity that this author possesses, and which is used to anchor the value of the literary works attributed to it, is not personal or psychological, but is rather that of the nation as a whole. Both Jakobson and Miller speculate about the existence of a lost “canon” or “cycle” of verbal art, and the physical lack of this material allows them to propose that what was lost was of greater artistic value than what was preserved. Although Jakobson admits that “not even one monument of indisputably Great Moravian origin ha[s] been preserved in a native manuscript,” he argues that “all scholarly efforts force us to surmise that that the Czech poetic repertoire was incomparably wider and richer than that which remains from it” (1985 [1939]: 131, 1929: 8).<sup>97</sup> The assumption that the lost cultural core was of greater value than what has been retained from it is a central premise of the evaluation of the epic past. The milieu of these lost “monuments” is that which Bakhtin describes as “an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times” (15). Following Goethe and Schiller, Bakhtin describes this valorized, “absolute past” as a moment sealed off or “completed” from the perspective of the modern subject.

Yet Miller and Jakobson are not Romantic scholars. They combined the “gravitational” force of a lost core culture with an historical positivism that they employed to link this epic past with the more recent iterations of this culture that have been preserved. Their positivism also extended, to a degree, to their understanding of the original cultural center itself, in that they specified for their prototypes a moment of composition, a historically accurate subject matter, and a concrete class of sponsors. In other words, they attribute the “author function” to this moment of initial composition by allowing the epic past to be personified. This approach can be seen as a product of a change in paradigms in the study of folklore and the *bylina* in Russia. The Romantic, “mythological school” *assumed* that the epic was a product of a pre-historical past. The succession of an historical positivist approach in the 1860s and 1870s questioned these assumptions, opening the door for philologists to date the epic to much more recent times or to attribute it to less-hallowed “authors.”<sup>98</sup> Miller, who was taught by the Romantic scholar F. I. Buslaev and graduated from Moscow University in 1870, can be said to have attempted to reconcile these two approaches. Through the methods of a hardnosed positivist philology he

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<sup>96</sup> Jakobson writes, for instance in 1938, that “with the destruction of the original center of Cyrillo-Methodianism comes the expansion of its range of activity” (134-35). He provides an overview of this spread in *The Czech Part in Church Slavonic Culture*, SW IV Mouton: 1985 [1939], 129-152.

<sup>97</sup> “všechny úvahy nás nutí k domněnce, že český básnický repertoár byl ještě nesrovnatelně širší a bohatší, než je to, co z něho zbylo” (1929: 8).

<sup>98</sup> In fact V. F. Miller entered the arena of academic scholarship at a time when the study of the epic was dominated by the “violent conflict” that followed the publication V. V. Stasov’s 1868 “The Origin of the Russian *byliny*.” Stasov, inspired by Theodor Benfey’s *Panchatatntra*, argued that the epics were not unique or of Russian origin, but were filled with borrowings from the Persian East (Sokolov 82-83).

sought to prove beyond a doubt the value and authority of the Russian epic tradition as a relic dating to the beginnings of Russian history.

The transition that Miller responded to can be described, I think, in more general terms, using Foucault's reminder in "What is an Author?" that

there was a time when the texts we today call 'literary' (narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author; their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status" (109).

Miller's school thus provided a means of reasserting the value of the epic, still as a product of its "ancientness," but now through the logic of what Foucault called the literary author function. His method was based on answering the questions that, as Foucault suggests in his time, denote the workings of the author function. "We now ask of each poetic or fictional text", Foucault writes, "from where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, with what design?" (109). If we substitute "compose" for "write," these questions were those that Miller sought to answer for the *bylina*. In a work of contemporary literature, the "author" functions to root the meaning (value) of the text in the individual's identity; in the *bylina* the "author"—as the medieval aristocracy—functioned to equate the value of the work with the identity of the nation. Jakobson approached the anonymous fragments of old Czech poetry according to the same paradigm. He attributed them to an analogous "author," and interpreted their value in terms of the identity of the Czech (or Czechoslovak) nation. The narrative that Jakobson labored to construct through his analyses of old Czech literature was one of historical continuity that would begin with the Moravian mission of the ninth century and continue to the present day (the 1940s).<sup>99</sup> In this, the continuities that characterize literary value for Foucault's personal author function—the unities of style, logic, and quality that are attributed to the psychological unity of a single individual—are in Jakobson's case projected onto a literary historical narrative. Jakobson's author function, described as a canonized dialect affiliated with a cultural center, does not just provide the unity of a work or an artists' oeuvre, but organizes a much larger literary realm. This unity is most clearly manifest on the diachronic axis in the form of historical continuity.

### **Conclusion: The History of Generals?**

As we have seen, Jakobson's work on Czech literary history in the 1920s and 1930s attempted to provide continuity by identifying a literary "cultural center" and tracing it forwards in time first on a linguistic level, then on an ideological one. Because this view of history was based on the study of the history of *language* or oral tradition, Jakobson's approach to literary history was more conservative than that of fellow formalists Iu. Tynianov or V. Shklovsky. Jakobson's work was nearly always based on the close, linguistic analysis of texts, that is, on a level of study that was seen to be more fundamental than analysis focusing on the discrete texts

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<sup>99</sup> The two most radical statements of this claim were written and published in the context of World War II after Jakobson had fled Czechoslovakia following the Nazi invasion of 1938. See Jakobson's *Moudrost starých Čechů* [*The Wisdom of the Ancient Czechs*], (New York, 1943) and his "The Beginnings of National Self-Determination in Europe." *The Review of Politics* 7 (1945): 29-42.

or individual authors.<sup>100</sup> When tracing the “influence” of Old Church Slavonic, he identifies individual linguistic markers in newer texts that suggest that they belong to this gravitational zone. This approach is based on an understanding of the way in which language or folklore evolves; because language (as well as commonly-known tales or oral literary devices) is repeatedly used by many people, its evolution is slow, often imperceptible, and was understood to occur in a lawful manner. These expectations arguably affected Jakobson’s understanding of literary evolution. In a lecture on formalism delivered to his students in Brno in 1935, Jakobson summarized the achievements of Russian formalism by stating that the formalists’ works on “individual periods of Russian literary history” have, as a whole, resulted in the understanding that “Russian literary history substantially changes; it becomes incomparably richer and at the same time *more monolithic, more synthetic and ordered*, than were the *membra disjecta* of previous literary scholarship” (1978: 85 italics added). The conception of history as monolithic or synthetic is closer to the understanding of linguistic evolution than to the literary history of other formalists.

Jakobson’s stress on continuity and unbroken tradition stands in contrast to Iu. Tynianov’s view of literary history based on parody or V. Shklovsky’s suggestion that literary devices are passed “from uncles to nephews.” In the opening of *O cheshskom stikhe*, Jakobson cites the Czech poet Viktor Dyk’s assessment of the sorry state of Czech literary history as illustrating of his own diagnosis of the Czechs’ lack a “cultural center.” Dyk asks: “Где духовный сын Махи? Где кровь от крови и дух от духа Врхлицкого? [...] Мы встречаемся в нашей литературе с трагической духовной бездетностью” (12) (“Where is Mácha’s spiritual son? Where is Vrchlický’s flesh and blood? [...] In our literature we are faced with a tragic spiritual childlessness”). Jakobson’s response is that he is currently working on this problem, that is the “проблем. . . трагической бездетности’ в чешской поэзии” (12) (“problem... ‘of tragic childlessness’ in Czech poetry”).<sup>101</sup> While “childlessness” is not originally Jakobson’s term, the fact the he reuses it suggests that, if asked to translate linguistic or literary evolution into genealogical terms, he may have agreed with Dyk’s view that literary history is based on bonds represented by “sons” or “brothers.” This view would moreover be in keeping with the philological use of biological terminology, e.g., the “family tree” or the “pedigree.” The turn to biology was essential to the conception of linguistics as a discipline based on a natural science model.<sup>102</sup> Jakobson, by applying linguistic concepts to literature, perpetuated this approach in his argument that literature can be studied as a “science” as well. While Jakobson and Miller’s reference to selective, self-perpetuating social classes that sustain the continuity of tradition (the nobility or professional corporations of singers), derived from

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<sup>100</sup> Jakobson described his work in 1935: “the particular properties of Church Slavonic literature of Czech recension, its specific lexical, phonological, morphological and orthographic features, Czech particularities in the form and connecting of Glagolitic letters (which ligatures, like the vocabulary and ideology, betray a Western veneer), are being ascertained” (710).

<sup>101</sup> The footnote reads: “‘У нас есть,’ говорит один чешский поэт и критик Виктор Дик, ‘ряд интересных и заслуживающих внимания индивидуальностей, но отсутствует связная традиция. Где духовный сын Махи? Где кровь от крови и дух от духа Врхлицкого? Кто продолжал путь Зейера? Где брат, принявший вино сильных из чаши, поданной Отакаром Бржезиной? [...] Мы встречаемся в нашей литературе с трагической духовной бездетностью.’ (Журн. Lumír, 1922, стр. 45). В отдельной статье, приготовленной к печати, я останавливаюсь на этой проблеме «трагической бездетности» в чешской поэзии” (1969 [1923]:12).

<sup>102</sup> On the use of biological systems of classification in nineteenth-century linguistics see Anna Davies *History of Linguistics, Volume IV: Nineteenth-Century Linguistics* (Longman, 1992), 91-97.

historical sources, these theories complement the biological basis for the philological view of evolution.

In contrast, Tynianov saw parodic response as a key generator of literary historical change.<sup>103</sup> Parody, unlike “blood ties,” is a concept which belongs to the realm of social and aesthetic categories. In this sense it can be said that, while Jakobson and Tynianov famously collaborated on a statement on literary evolution in 1928, they were operating with very different assumptions about the nature of literature and expectations for literary history. Shklovsky’s well-known claim that literature passes from uncles to nephews, evokes the genealogical approach only to reject it:

История литературы двигается вперед по прерывистой переломистой линии. Если выстроить в один ряд всех тех литературных святых, которые канонизованы, например, в России с XVII по XX столетие, то мы не получим линии, по которой можно было бы проследить историю развития литературных форм. [...] дело в том, что наследование при смене литературных школ *идет не от отца к сыну, а от дяди к племяннику* (1929: 227 italics added).

The history of literature progresses along a broken path. If we were to arrange all of the literary saints canonized since the seventeenth through the twentieth century along one line, we would still fail to produce a single line of decent that might allow us to trace the history of literary form. [...] No, the real point is that the legacy that is passed on from one literary generation to the next moves *not from the father to the son but from the uncle to nephew* (1990: 189-190 italics added).

Shklovsky’s view of literary history would refute the notion of continuous tradition that Dyk’s lament evokes. The claim that literary history will *not* present a “line” along which one can follow the “evolution of literary form” is, moreover, in direct opposition to the work done on literary history in the Prague School in the late 1920s and early ‘30s. While Shklovsky stresses the “revolutionary” role of the incursions of literary outsiders into the history of literature, Jakobson’s model is essentially one that harkens back to stability and unbroken genealogical lines of national heritage.<sup>104</sup>

In an unpublished version of NRP, Jakobson began his essay with the claim: “только тогда станет возможна научная поэтика, когда история поэзии перестанет быть историей генералов” (“a scientific poetics will become possible once the history of poetry ceases to be the history of generals”).<sup>105</sup> Jakobson’s reference to the “history of generals” evokes A. N.

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<sup>103</sup>The relationship between literary history and parody was the subject of his first published essay “Dostoevsky and Gogol’ (Towards a Theory of Parody)” (1921).

<sup>104</sup> Shklovsky writes that “каждая новая литературная школа — это революция, нечто вроде появления нового класса” (1929: 227).

<sup>105</sup> RGALI Fond. No. 611, Opis No. 107, *Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo pri Narkomprose RSFSR* list 1. Jakobson removed this line from the subsequent publication of NRP in Prague. There were only a few small changes made between the 1919 version of the text and the 1921 publication. This phrase is generally attributed to Tynianov, who writes in the opening of his 1927 essay “O literaturnoi evoliutsii”: “Теория ценности в литературной науке вызвала опасность изучения главных, но и отдельных явлений и приводит историю литературы в вид «истории генералов». Слепой отпор «истории генералов» вызвал в свою очередь интерес к изучению массовой литературы, но без ясного теоретического осознания методов ее изучения и характера ее значения” (270). That Jakobson uses the term eight years earlier suggests that it was in general circulation prior to the publication of Tynianov’s article.

Veselovsky's "historical poetics," which called for the replacement of the study of the "great men" of literary history with a turn to the "hidden springs of the historical process" (1967: 35). Veselovsky thus, like Jakobson after him, conceived of a scientific approach to literary history as beginning with a more elemental level of analysis. To do this, Veselovsky focused on the basic elements of the language of folklore—parallelisms, motifs, formulas. Jakobson also attempted to replace the "generals" of literature with the linguistic analysis of poetic language. The difference between their approaches lay, however, not only in the fact that Jakobson further dissected poetic language—going beyond tropological analysis to the role of the phoneme—but in Jakobson's reliance on Muscovite scholarship that approached this language as organized around cultural centers. These centers were those of the Russian state (Kiev, Novgorod, Moscow). In keeping with this aspect of his training, Jakobson's history of Czech poetic language fused the stability of the history of verse with the autonomy of the state. As I hope to have shown, Jakobson's application of a linguistic mode of evaluation to the study of poetic language entailed a conception of poetic value that refers back to the national epic past. His innovative attempts to rethink the study of poetics by replacing the biographical author with a poetic "center" tended to associate a linguistically defined author function with the authority of the nation's elites. It is in this sense that we must ask whether, in the final analysis, Jakobson's formalist poetics succeeded in breaking with the "history of generals."

## Chapter Three

### Petr Bogatyrev and Jan Mukařovský: Prague School Semiotics and the Concept of Collectivity

The modern study of semiotics is commonly traced to its founding fathers Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), who developed the linguistic and philosophical underpinnings of the study of human signs in the late nineteenth century. Beginning in the late 1920s, Saussure's concept of the linguistic sign, mediated by the writings of Valentin Voloshinov and Sergei Kartsevskii, was taken up by the Prague Linguistic Circle [Pražský lingvistický kroužek] (PLC) where it was applied to the study of contemporary art and culture.<sup>1</sup> The two leading theoreticians in this development were the Russian ethnographer Petr Bogatyrev (1893-1971) and the Czech aesthetician Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975).<sup>2</sup> Both men joined the Circle at its third meeting in December 1926, becoming its first two members who were not primarily linguists by training. Bogatyrev and Mukařovský shared a particular position in the history of the Circle in their seniority and their bold attempts to apply the Prague School structural-linguistic platform to the study of material culture and the arts.<sup>3</sup> As pioneers in the field with such close ties to linguistics, the semiotic theory they developed was based on a more literal application of linguistic concepts to the realm of culture than was the case in subsequent developments in semiotic theory.

This chapter will analyze Bogatyrev and Mukařovský's work towards establishing a semiotic approach to the study of ethnography and aesthetics. Their theoretical developments reflect the growing interest within the Prague Linguistic Circle in the relationship between language and society. Jurij Striedter has suggested that this development can be seen as a product of the open debate between Marxist cultural theorists and the Czech structuralists in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the development of semiotics in the broader Czech context see P. Steiner and B. Volek's "Semiotics in Bohemia in the 19th and Early 20th Century," in *The Sign: Semiotics around the World*, Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications: 1978, 206-26.

<sup>2</sup> As far as I am aware there is no scholarship comparing these men's work in detail. On exception is S. Sorokina's discussion of Mukařovský's *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (1936) in comparison to Bogatyrev's "La chanson populaire de point de vue fonctionnel" (1936) in her "Funktsional'no-struktural'nyi metod P.G. Bogatyreva." She points out these two scholars unique, shared, position in the history of the Circle: "Я. Мукаржовский и П. Г. Богатырев стали в ПЛК теми исследователям, которые осуществляли столь важное для направления изучение специфики структурных и функциональных отношений в несобственно языковых социальных феноменах и возможных их взаимосвязей с языковой структурой" (43).

<sup>3</sup> Amongst the first, founding, generation of Circle members, those who worked on subjects other than linguistics included Roman Jakobson, Miloš Weingart and Jan Sedlák. Jakobson was not as interested in cultural semiotics, though his contributions to the development of Bogatyrev's and Mukařovský's theories will be discussed. Weingart and Sedlák, who joined the Circle in 1927, both parted ways with the Prague School and its methods in the early to mid-1930s. The second generation of Prague structuralists who joined the Circle in the late 1930s or early 1940s and who worked on literature or theater included Jiří Veltruský, Felix Vodička and Jindřich Honzl. A third generation of notable Prague School semioticians and structuralists included Lubomír Doležel, Miroslav Červenka, Květoslav Chvatík, Mojmir Grygar, Emil Volek, Oleg Sus, Zdeněk Pešat, and others.

<sup>4</sup> Striedter reminds us that "Czech Marxism in the thirties, unlike Russian Marxism in the twenties (in its altercations with Formalism) and unlike Czech Marxism after 1948, was not yet the binding political philosophy. This facilitated open discussion and made it possible to accept or reject critical arguments by reason of their systematic validity..."

In the 1930s, Praguian semiotics approached culture from a standpoint that was in polemical opposition to a Marxist perspective. Prague School theorists were committed to developing a history of art based on the idea of the immanent evolution of artistic form, as opposed to a view of cultural history shaped by economic or political forces. Mukařovský found in semiotics a means to discuss aesthetic perception as a social fact without sacrificing this concern. I demonstrate that the groundwork for this approach was pioneered by Bogatyrev, who developed a structural-functional ethnographic theory in the late 1920s which posited that the collective consciousness of rural collectives is structured in a manner akin to language. By adopting this concept of the collective consciousness as developed by Bogatyrev, Mukařovský was able to argue that social conventions are organized within a holistic structure and that they evolve immanently as a result. This intellectual exchange between Bogatyrev and Mukařovský meant that the Prague School semiotics Mukařovský founded rested to some degree on an understanding of collectivity drawn from work on “primitive mentality.”

The second half of the chapter demonstrates that, despite commonly held structuralist principles, Bogatyrev and Mukařovský differed in their understanding of the borders of the semiotic collective. Both Mukařovský and Bogatyrev closely based their semiotic theory on contemporary linguistics. Rather than focus on their interpretation of the sign itself—a subject which has garnered much attention—I am interested in their interpretations of the concept of the linguistic collective. Language, understood abstractly as a complex network of facts (words and rules for their usage) is a product of a social community. In their pioneering efforts to translate the mechanisms of a linguistic system into analogous systems of codes regulating the meaning of non-verbal artifacts, such as art or costume, the Praguians assumed that these codes are the products of communities. Decades later, in the 1970s and ‘80s, the Soviet semiotician Iury Lotman specified that signs can only function if “immersed in a specific semiotic continuum,” and that the “the border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic mechanism” (2005: 206, 210). In their early articulations of a semiotic approach to culture in the 1930s, Bogatyrev and Mukařovský did not discuss the nature of these borders explicitly—rather they were assumed based on their operative understandings of language as a product of a social collective. I focus on this point because their understanding of these borders differed, and the way in which they differed can be shown to have affected their (differing) definitions of “art.”

I locate the sources for this divergence in the different national scholarly traditions that each drew on, as well as in the different positions each held in the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930s. Bogatyrev understood the semiotic collective to be a small, autonomous unit—one among many, whereas Mukařovský approached collectivity as a large, all-encompassing whole. The small, dispersed view of collectivity, I demonstrate, reveals the legacy of pre-revolutionary Russian ethnography and dialectology. This scholarly tradition was based on the study of regional, local, identities as self-sufficiently valuable and interesting in their own right. On a more general level this work could be said to reflect the reality of the social situation in Russia in the early twentieth century. The historian Geoffrey Hosking emphasizes that, in this period, “rather than moving toward consciousness of itself as a nation, [Russia] was on the contrary fragmenting in almost every conceivable way” (Hosking 261). Mukařovský’s unified view, in

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Thus, this early dialogue with Czech Marxism impelled Mukařovský to broaden the scope of questions concerning the conditions of aesthetic perception beyond the structure of a work and the psychic state of the social collective; and to investigate the aesthetic function in its interaction with other social functions” (86). Marxist cultural theorists who were close to the PLC included Kurt Konrad, Karel Teige and Bedřich Václavěk.

contrast, was influenced by prevailing conceptions of the Czech language as an organic and ancient whole. This was a view that gained currency with the National revival movement of the nineteenth century and which continued to shape popular conceptions of Czech identity on the eve of the emergence of Czechoslovakia as an independent nation in 1918.

In comparing Bogatyrev and Mukařovský's semiotics it is also necessary to consider their respective relationships to the PLC as an institution with clearly delineated leadership roles and intellectual goals. In the period central to the rise of Prague School semiotics, the early to mid-1930s, Bogatyrev and Mukařovský occupied different positions in the Circle. Mukařovský held an important leadership position after 1930 as the head of the Circle's Commission for the Study of Poetic Language.<sup>5</sup> A comparison of his theories of poetic language and art with the collective statements of the Circle from this period (which he co-authored) reveal that the development of his work was closely interrelated with that of the Circle. Mukařovský's definition of art was thus to some degree an established position which increasingly characterized Prague School doctrine. Bogatyrev, on the other hand, was never a member of the executive committee, and was, moreover, absent from Prague between 1930 and 1933, having accepted a teaching position in Münster.<sup>6</sup> His area of research—folklore and ethnography—was not as close to the central interests of the PLC and, in comparison to Mukařovský, he undoubtedly played a more marginal role in the development of the Circle.

In light of their different relationships to the Circle as an institution I treat the aesthetician and the ethnographer's work slightly differently. Where appropriate, Mukařovský's statements are allowed to stand in for the official standpoint of the PLC, and those of other leaders of the Circle (e.g. Jakobson, V. Mathesius, B. Havránek or B. Trnka) are brought to bear on the analysis of Mukařovský's theoretical development. In describing Bogatyrev's work, particularly his view of semiotic boundaries, the focus will be on how he departs from a more canonical PLC standpoint, and his perspective is thus treated as an important alternative. Bogatyrev's ideas can be shown to have affected Mukařovský's development, and, because Bogatyrev shared the PLC's methodological basis, his work is representative of Prague structuralism. Yet on the subjects of the semiotic boundary and the definition of art his work can be said to represent a path not taken by the leadership.

### **The Common Platform - Prague School Semiotics**

The emergence of Prague School semiotics is usually dated to 1934.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, we can see the period of 1934-36 as one in which Bogatyrev and Mukařovský developed a distinctly structural-functional semiotics anchored in common PLC linguistic tenets. These years

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<sup>5</sup> The first pages of the unpaginated notebook with the protocols of the Executive Committee of the PLK [výborová schůze PLK] list the elected positions within the Committee. Mukařovský is listed as the "svolavatel...komise pro stud. básn. jazyka" (convener of the commission for the study of poetic language) as well as a member of the conciliation court. "Výborová schůze PLK" AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 1, i. č. 7.

<sup>6</sup> On Bogatyrev's Münster period see Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers. "Petr Bogatyrev am Slavischen Seminar der Universität Münster (1931-1933)." *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 44 (1999): 218-227.

<sup>7</sup> This date coincides with Mukařovský's presentation of his seminal essay "L'art comme fait sémiologique." Both Frantisek Galan and Peter Steiner date the rise of Prague semiotics to 1934. Galan writes that "the rise of semiotics...which furnished the conceptual basis for the Prague School's theory from 1934 on, betokens the final break with the ideas of formalism" (82). Steiner describes the "second period, roughly 1934 to 1938" of the Circle's development as that in which it turned to the "issue of literary development," now viewed through a semiotic lens (1982: 177).

can be seen as a period of maximum overlap between the work of the aesthetician and the ethnographer, in which both grappled with the challenge of reconciling structure, understood in linguistic terms, with the sociological study of culture. A rapprochement between their work in these years resulted from two separate developments within the Circle. The first was the growing interest in the sociology of language in the Circle in the first half of the 1930s, which played an important role in Mukařovský's intellectual development. The second was Mukařovský's selective borrowing from Bogatyrev's work after the latter's return from Münster in 1933, which strengthened the convergence between their functional-structural semiotics.<sup>8</sup> Identifying the reasons for and the extent of this overlap will allow the points on which Mukařovský and Bogatyrev disagree in their approach to the borders of the semiotic collective to stand out more clearly.

Although the PLC was founded in 1926, the years 1929 and 1930 saw its theoretical and legal institutionalization in the "Theses presented to the Slavic Convention in Prague" and, in the following year, its induction as an officially-registered group. The establishment of an official method that unified and defined Prague School research was a central element in these developments. The purpose of the 1929 "Theses" was to lay out the theoretical repercussions of the "conception of language as a functional system" (5). The first paragraph of the Circle's bylaws, drafted and codified in the following year, stipulated loyalty to the "structural functional method," stating that "the purpose of the PLC is to work towards progress in linguistic research on the basis of the functional structural method."<sup>9</sup> Two decades later, this two-part approach was still the Circle's defining method:

The Prague linguistic conception has two designations which are both equally important and both emphasize what is new in the Prague School. First of all, it is structuralism; i.e. the Praguians introduce into linguistics the problems of structure, the problem of how language is shaped, and how its parts are related to each other. Secondly, and this is not to be forgotten, Prague linguistics is functional—where the term function, of course, means a task, not dependence; i.e. Prague linguistics studies the semiological problem (Vachek 76).<sup>10</sup>

Bogatyrev and Mukařovský's cultural semiotics was "Praguian" in this sense in that it sought to explore the linkages between the structure of cultural artifacts (e.g., poetry or folk costume) and their social functions. Function for them meant primarily a cultural product's semantic load, i.e. the meanings attributed to it by a group of people. This approach to function brings the question of community into play. It evokes a community in that the function (meaning) of a social fact

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<sup>8</sup> While Mukařovský's references to the Bogatyrev's work suggest that he was inspired by central components of the latter's methodological apparatus, Bogatyrev's citations of Mukařovský are more passing in nature. These can be found in: "Le chanson populaire" (1936), "Znaky divadelní" [Theatrical signs] (1938) and in "Hra a divadlo" [Play and Theater] (1937).

<sup>9</sup> J. Toman discusses the stringency of this clause, calling attention to paragraph 9 of the bylaws which states that "Each member of the Circle has the right of proposing to the executive committee the exclusion of a member whose conduct is at variance with the purpose of the Circle" (1995: 155). Toman speculates that the exclusion of J. V. Sedlák and estrangement from M. Weingart may have arisen from the strictness with which the Circle adhered to this explicitly stated methodology and "purpose" (1995: 155-58).

<sup>10</sup> The understanding of "function" in the interwar period was relatively broad, and referred both to a dependence established between the elements of a structure, and also, on a semantic level, to the meaning structural elements have for an individual or, more frequently, a collective.

either creates a collective, or is created by a pre-existing collective. In other words, the group of individuals who agree on an artifact's function is either taken as a collective on this basis, or, the function of an artifact is seen as determined by a pre-existing community with shared views, one of which is said function. For reasons that I will come to, Bogatyrev and Mukařovský tended to prefer the first option, which thus can be termed an 'artifact-centered' approach to social community. Mukařovský expresses this in a 1933 lecture, where he explains the concept of a cultural semiotic collective through the example of musical appreciation: "using the system of music as an example," he writes, "those who are capable of adequately perceiving [it] are predisposed towards it by psychophysical dispositions, for example education, etc. These people create a collective altogether similar to a linguistic one" (1995: 77-78).<sup>11</sup> It is their capacity to understand *music* (a cultural "artifact") that would, in this example, create a semiotic "collective."

In the period between 1929 and 1935 the Circle's interest in the sociology of language dramatically expanded. This is reflected both in its institutional activities as well as in its theoretical developments. The institutional turn to social concerns was part of an increased interest in local, Czechoslovak, questions and debates. The Circle's activities were initially focused almost entirely on purely linguistic (largely phonological) work, which had an international orientation, and which was, beginning in 1929, published in French in the series *Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Prague*. Beginning in the early 1930s, however, the Circle expressed a growing interest in questions of language politics and the social functions of language. These concerns were oriented towards the domestic audience and, starting in 1935, found a platform in the Circle's journal *Slovo a Slovesnost* [*The Word and Verbal Art*], published in Czech.<sup>12</sup> The intensification of this domestic, social engagement can be traced to a meeting of the Circle's leadership (e.g. Mathesius, Jakobson, Havránek, Mukařovský, Trnka, Weingart) held on May 28, 1931.<sup>13</sup> The notes from this and a subsequent meeting report that the leadership decided to restructure the Circle in a manner that refocused its energies on questions of Czech language usage. They decided to create a new commission for the study of language pedagogy and language culture, and the minutes note that "outstanding writers and poets [are to] be invited to meetings dedicated to these topics"—a move which would strengthen the Circle's connections with the intellectual elite in Prague.<sup>14</sup> The leadership described this restructuring as a "shift in the

<sup>11</sup> "tak např. systém hudby ti, kdo jsou schopni adekvátně vnímat, jsou k tomu predisponováni psychofyzickými dispozicemi, popř. vzděláním atp. Tito lidé tvoří společenstvo docela podobné jazykovému" (1995: 77-78).

<sup>12</sup> The initial orientation of the Circle was decidedly international; their first formative, collective work was presented at the First International Linguistic Conference in The Hague (1928) and at the First International Conference of Slavic Philologists in Prague (1929). In 1930 the Circle hosted an International Phonological Conference in Prague, and in subsequent years the Circle prepared presentations for international linguistic, phonological and Slavic conferences in, for example, Geneva (1931), Amsterdam (1932), Rome (1933), London (1934), Warsaw (1934), and Copenhagen (1936) (*Zpráva o činnosti*, 10-11). The shift in focus in the Circle's work to questions of local importance did not diminish this international orientation, as is evidenced by the Circle's extensive international correspondence. Protocols from meetings of the Executive Committee and extensive official correspondence attest to the fact that establishing and maintaining contacts with foreign scholars was of great importance to the Circle's leadership. "Foreign and domestic correspondence." AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 2, i. č. 18, 19.

<sup>13</sup> The Circle's first organized event illustrating an interest in local politics was held prior to this meeting on March 25, 1929, when Jakobson and Mukařovský gave (subsequently published) talks on president T. G. Masaryk's language at an open meeting of the PLC commemorating the president's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. See "Programy schůzí a přednášek" AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 1, i. č. 9. Galin Tihanov compares this event to the Russian formalists' 1924 publications on Lenin's language and style (Tihanov 2004: 66).

<sup>14</sup> "Výborová schůze PLK" AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 1, i. č. 7.

focus of the Circle's work [přenesse se těžiště práce] to the Commissions [for Language Culture and Poetic Language - JM]."<sup>15</sup>

The fruits of this restructuring were born in January and February of 1932 when the Circle organized a highly successful lecture series on the subject of "Literary Czech and Language Culture" ["Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura"] in which its leaders made a case for their understanding of "correct Czech" and, more emphatically, the need for linguists to take an active, shaping role in the development of "literary" or standard Czech. A second milestone in the PLC's turn to domestic language politics was the emergence of its journal *Slovo a Slovesnost*. In the programmatic "Introduction" to the first issue, the Circle insisted that Czech linguistics

musí se chopit iniciativy v řešení časových otázek jazykové kultury [...] To je program i cesta časopisu *Slovo a Slovesnost*. Pražský lingvistický kroužek chce v něm přispěti k všestrannému popisu, kritice a regulaci dnešní spisovné češtiny v jejích rozmanitých kulturních úlohách a uvést tak ve skutek zásady formulované v dosavadních svých pracích, zvláště ve sborníku „Spisovna čeština a jazyková kultura“ (4).

must seize the initiative in solving current questions of language culture [...] This is the program and path of the journal *Slovo a Slovesnost*. In it the Prague Linguistic Circle wants to contribute to an all-around description, criticism and regulation of current literary Czech in its various cultural tasks, and to turn into reality the principles formulated in its previous work, especially in the collection "Literary Czech and language culture" (4).

The institutional goals expressed here—the need to engage with current debates, to not only describe but to *regulate* the literary language and *realize* their theoretical principles—indicate an intent to play a shaping role in contemporary culture. This turn to technocratic goals was reflected in the theoretical statements of the Circle and in Mukařovský's work on poetic language and aesthetics. The shift in the Circle's interests manifested itself in two theoretical trends: one was the mounting interest in the question of influence, e.g. how poetic language or art influences the broader social sphere; the second was a sharpened focus on the concrete, contemporary social context—on, broadly speaking, the sociology of language.

The developments between 1929 and 1935 outlined above reveal a general progression from abstract theoretical tenets to a bold plan for intervention in the evolution of literary Czech.<sup>16</sup> The evolving theoretical conception of *poetic* language in this period also reflects this turn towards language in its concrete social context. In the section of the 1929 "Theses" on poetic language, which Mukařovský co-authored with Jakobson, poetry, as language in its poetic function, is merely defined against the "background" of non-poetic, communicative language.<sup>17</sup> In 1932, Mukařovský's lecture on the relationship between poetic language and standard, communicative language described this same relationship as one of diffused *influence*. He argued that, "poetry... multiplies and refines linguistic ability in general, it gives language the

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<sup>15</sup> "Výborová schůze PLK konaná dne 6 října 1931" AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 1, i. č. 7.

<sup>16</sup> I base my analysis here on the three landmark collective statements by the Circle in this period: the "Theses" of 1929, the "Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura" [Literary Czech and Language Culture] debate and book of 1932, and the "Introduction" to the first issue of *Slovo a Slovesnost* of 1935.

<sup>17</sup> F. Galan establishes that "Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský...were in reality the principle authors of this section of the 'Theses'" (21).

possibility to adapt more flexibly to new tasks and a richer differentiation of means for expression” (146).<sup>18</sup> This general movement within the PLC towards questions of social context and influence is most powerfully reflected in Mukařovský’s developments in the field of semiotics.

Beginning in the early 1930s, Mukařovský increasingly turned to the concept of the sign. In a paper presented at the International Philosophical Congress in Paris in September 1934, “L’art comme fait sémiologique,” he drew on theories from the fields of aesthetics and semiotics to describe the art object as a sign—as an “intermediary between its creator and the community” (3). With this move he identified the artwork as a social fact dependent on the “collective consciousness” of a social body of perceivers for its meaningful form.<sup>19</sup> In his three-part study published in 1935 and 1936, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (AFNV) [*Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty*], Mukařovský moves beyond this philosophical claim to situate his semiotic model in sociological terms. Building on the semiotic apparatus he presented in 1934, he claimed that “collective consciousness should not...be understood abstractly, i.e. without considering the concrete collective in which it is manifested” (1970 [1936]: 20). In the first half of the 1930s, the interests of the PLC (including Mukařovský as a closely integrated leader of the group) were thus characterized by a growing demand for an understanding of the relationship between the linguistic (in Mukařovský’s case—the poetic) and the social. Mukařovský answered this call with sociologically oriented aesthetic theory based on the understanding of art as sign. These developments set the stage for a meeting of the minds between the ethnographer Bogatyrev and Mukařovský, the aesthetician.

The second factor in the convergence between Bogatyrev and Mukařovský’s work at this time was the latter’s selective use of Bogatyrev’s ethnographic theory. The ease with which Mukařovský was able to incorporate some of Bogatyrev’s ideas was not fortuitous—both had already, to a certain degree, built their work in their respective fields on the tenets of Prague School linguistics. As structuralists, the ethnographer and the aesthetician relied on several Saussurian concepts as interpreted by the PLC—namely *langue*, *parole*, and the sign—as building blocks for their work on culture.<sup>20</sup> To fully appreciate the common foundations on which the two founders of Prague School semiotics built, it is useful to acknowledge two, more fundamental, shared assumptions that resulted from their use of PLC linguistics as a model for reforming of their respective disciplines. One was the understanding that in order to arrive at the essential properties of the subject at hand (e.g. art or folklore), the scholar need focus only on the structure of his subject matter. This meant that even the Praguians’ more socially oriented, semiotic investigations focused on cultural artifacts largely in isolation from their broader cultural-historical context. Using linguistics as their model, they assumed that, as with language, a body of structural and evolutionary laws could be derived from this approach.

The second, related, assumption was that the structure of the field of art (or of culture more generally) was analogous to that of language. This meant not only that the body of cultural

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<sup>18</sup> “básnictví ... rozmnožuje a zjemňuje schopnost zacházení s jazykem vůbec, dává jazyku možnost pružnější adaptace k novým úkolům a bohatší diferenciaci výrazových prostředků” (146).

<sup>19</sup> In this programmatic essay Mukařovský presents his theory of the artwork as neither the material artifact itself, nor the state of mind it evokes in its producer or receiver. Instead, it is an immaterial “aesthetic object,” which is “registered in the collective consciousness” (9). I will return to discuss this essay in more detail.

<sup>20</sup> In their 1929 article “Folklore as a Special Form of Creation” Jakobson and Bogatyrev introduce these terms as follows: “Alongside the individual, particular speech act—*parole* according to Saussure’s terminology— modern linguistics also recognizes *langue*, that is, ‘a collection of necessary conventions adopted by a social body to permit the exercise of that faculty [language] among individuals’” (4).

products under observation would form a rich network of regular, interdependent connections, but that this structure could be seen as evolving in a systemic manner. This last point was formulated in the 1929 “Theses” as a rejection of the idea that linguistic systems evolve randomly in favor of the view that evolution is systemic.<sup>21</sup> On the most elementary level, this concept merely asserts that, in the evolution of a system, pre-existing elements of structure will play a role in the absorption of new elements, or in developmental paths taken. A stronger view of this point, however, results in a greater emphasis on a potential force of agency imbedded in structure. This logic led structuralists to argue that systems evolve “immanently” according to their own “needs”—following a path of evolution that is optimal in relation to its extant structural makeup.<sup>22</sup> Bogatyrev’s view of culture reveals an inclination towards this strong view of systemic evolution. He argues that, in the “collision” of two cultures, “the receiving [culture] rejects in the foreign [culture] everything, that may subvert its cultural heritage, and it accepts only that which aligns with its framework, which contributes to its development and can contribute to the creation of new values” (1971 [1936]: 96). He thus suggests that each culture possesses a unique structure which propels it forward along its own, unique, path.

Bogatyrev, a co-founder of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (MLC) in 1915, recalled in an interview that he owed his initial introduction to linguistics to Roman Jakobson: “еще будучи студентом, я посещал Комиссию по народной словесности [...] но Роман Осипович постоянно меня водил к лингвистам, что не могло не отразиться на моей работе” (Leshchak 47) (“while still a student I attended the meetings of the Commission for Folklore Study [...] but Roman Osipovich continually led me to the linguists, which naturally had an impact on my work”). Jakobson, a leading propagator of the structuralist method in linguistics, was a frequent co-author of Bogatyrev’s in the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>23</sup> It is thus not surprising that Bogatyrev integrated these fundamental linguistic assumptions into the foundations of his ethnographic work. Beginning in the late 1920s, he published a number of theoretical essays in which he introduced the goals and methods for a structural, and then a “structural-functional,” ethnography. Bogatyrev returned to Czechoslovakia from Münster in the fall of 1933, and appears to have provided Mukařovský, likely through their interaction at Circle meetings, with a model for theorizing the relationship between culture and society that was highly amenable to the latter’s work on a structuralist, yet also “sociological” aesthetics which he was developing between 1934 and 1936. Looking at the attendance records of the PLC in these years it is

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<sup>21</sup> Point (d) of the “Theses,” on “The Regularity of Linguistic Evolution” reads: “In disciplines concerned with evolution, linguistics among them, the notion of the accidental origin of phenomena is now giving way to that of the regularity of evolutionary phenomena (nomogenesis). This is why the theory of convergent evolution is gaining ground from the theory of mechanical and accidental expansion in the explanation of grammatical and phonological changes” (7). The term “nomogenesis” comes from the Russian paleontologist Lev Semenovich Berg’s 1922 *Nomogenesis; or, Evolution Determined by Law*. This concept played a role in the development of Eurasianism. On the use of Berg’s ideas in this movement see Patrick Sériot chapter “Biologicheskaja model” in *Struktura i Tselostnost’*, 214-231.

<sup>22</sup> The “Theses” tell us that: “Linguistic changes often reflect the *needs* of the system, its stabilization, its realignment, and so forth” (6 italics added).

<sup>23</sup> The two friends co-authored works in the fields of ethnography, folkloristics, dialectology and formalist literary theory and undertook two field expeditions together in the summers of 1915 and 1916. Works co-authored include: *Cheshskii kukol’nyi i russkii narodnyi teatr*. Berlin: OPOIaZ, 1923; *Slavianskaia filologija v Rossii za gody vojny i revoliutsii*. Berlin: OPOIaZ 1923; and “Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens,” *Domum natalicium Schrijnen*. Nijmegen-Utrecht, 1929. As students they presented reports of their joint field expeditions to the Komissiiia po narodnoi slovesnosti pri Obshchestve ljubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii and to the Moskovskaia dialektologicheskaja komissiiia.

apparent that the two scholars would have had abundant opportunity to exchange ideas. Both were among the most frequent attendees of Circle meetings in the mid-1930s. Of a total of 66 meetings held between October 1933 and December 1936 for which there are attendance records, Bogatyrev and Mukařovský each attended 58 times; (Jakobson, for the sake of comparison, was present at 48).<sup>24</sup> Bogatyrev and Mukařovský were present at the same meeting 46 times, and between October 1934 and December 1935 both attended virtually every meeting held.<sup>25</sup>

Mukařovský was at both meetings where Bogatyrev presented his structural-functional method—on May 11, 1928 and then on June 25, 1934. The timing and content of the second presentation, titled “On the problem of structural ethnography” [K problému strukturálního národopisu], suggest that it may have prompted the aesthetician to use Bogatyrev’s idea of a “structure of functions,” as a basis for his own approach to the sociology of art.<sup>26</sup> The talk appears to have been received within the PLC as an indication of the general validity of the structural-functional method outside the sphere of linguistics.<sup>27</sup> In a lecture delivered at Charles University towards the end of the spring semester of that year Mukařovský paraphrases an earlier article of Bogatyrev’s in order to explain to students his own understanding of “sociology.” It is to be understood

nikoli jen jako vztah literatury nebo jiné řady ke konkrétnímu rozvoji společnosti [...]. Prozatím: sociologie řady jako soubor jejích vztahů ke všem řadám možným. Mnoho funkcí. Tyto funkce dohromady tvoří zase strukturu, strukturu funkcí. Tedy: *sociologie*

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<sup>24</sup> I begin with October 1933 because this marks the period when Bogatyrev returned to Czechoslovakia and end with 1936 because the archival records for meeting attendance break off at this point, resuming only in 1947. “Zápisy o schůzích” AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 1, i. č. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Published and unpublished correspondence suggests a warm relationship between the two scholars. In a letter to Havránek dated June 19, 1945, Mukařovský recounts a meeting with a mutual acquaintance of Bogatyrev’s (Alexandr Michajlovič Jegolin), saying: “Jegolin clearly likes him very much, we almost fell into each other’s arms once we’d finished talking about Petr” (Havránková 2008: 383). See also Mukařovský’s warm obituary for Bogatyrev, “O Bogatyreve” in *Petr Grigor’evič Bogatyrev: Vospominaniia. Dokumenty. Stat’i.*, 16-18. There is correspondence from Bogatyrev in Mukařovský’s personal archive in the LA PNP which indicates that the former continued to send Mukařovský his publications and greeting cards as late as 1967 (Bogatyrev died in 1971). “Bogatyrev Petr Mukařovskému” LA PNP, Jan Mukařovský, č. inv. 66/86, č. přír. 713-716. and “Tisky cizí Bogatyrev, Petr” LA PNP, Jan Mukařovský, č. inv. 66/86, č. přír. 4772-4792.

<sup>26</sup> The talk likely served as the basis for the subsequent article “Funkčné-strukturálna metoda a iné metóde etnografie a folkloristiky,” [The Functional-Structural Method and other methods in Ethnography and Folkloristics] published in 1935. An original offprint of this article, with notations marking passages of interest, can be found in Mukařovský’s personal archive in Prague. “Tisky cizí Bogatyrev, Petr” LA PNP, Jan Mukařovský, č. inv. 66/86, č. přír. 4774.

<sup>27</sup> Bogatyrev’s presentation is described in an article in the Prager Presse: “Die weitreichende Bedeutung der strukturellen Methode ging besonders anschaulich aus dem letzten Vortrag des diesjährigen Zyklus hervor [June 25, 1934 „K problému strukturálního národopisu”], den P Bogatyrev über strukturelle Gesichtspunkte in der volkskundlichen Forschung hielt. Er ging von dem System der Funktionen der Volkstrachten aus und zeigte die Fruchtbarkeit des neuen Gesichtspunktes auch in der Ethnographie, dessen Verwertung allerdings noch viele Vorarbeit, vor allem hinsichtlich des zu sammelnden Materials, erfordern wird. Jedenfalls aber zeigte diese Applikation bereits zur Genüge den Wert der Methode der Prager Linguistische Zirkel zu seinem Fundament gemacht hat” (Prager Presse 13.VII.1934). “Výstrižková kniha” AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 4, i. č. 26. The first presentation, on May 11, 1928, is titled in PLC notes from the meeting as “O nových proudech v ethnografii a o jejím poměru k linguistice.” [On new tendencies in Ethnography and their relationship to Linguistics]. It appears that Bogatyrev presented in Russian, with Jakobson providing a resume in Czech. “Zápisy o schůzích” AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 1, i. č. 6.

*nějaké řady, vývoj struktury jejich funkcí.* Na objasnění upozorňuji na článek P. Bogatyreva... (1995 [1934]: 140, italics added).

not just as the relationship between literature or other series and the concrete development of society [...] For now: sociology of a series is a collection of its relationships to all series possible. Many functions. These functions together create yet another structure, a structure of functions. Thus: *the sociology of a series, [is] the development of the structure of its functions.* For clarification I turn your attention to P. Bogatyrev's article... (1995 [1934]: 140, italics added).

Mukařovský goes on to describe at length the main points of Bogatyrev's 1931 article "A Contribution to Structural Ethnography" [Příspěvek k strukturální etnografii], which contains an early description of the structure of functions, but without using this term. The above citation reveals that, as a structuralist, Mukařovský preferred this idea to a historical-materialist approach, which might derive literary history from the "concrete development of society" in an overly simplistic manner. The idea that society can be understood as a structure of functions provided an alternative that allowed the collective to be defined by its understanding of art (or cultural artifacts) rather than as shaped by economic or political forces. This approach provided the theoretical foundations for Mukařovský's sociology of aesthetics in AFNV.

In his 1931 article Bogatyrev argues that the functions clustered around a cultural artifact (he uses the example of a woman's headdress) are organized in relation to each other in a manner similar to the way in which perceptions are organized in the psyche of an individual according to Gestalt psychology. Thus, if the headdress goes out of fashion, positive characteristics previously attributed to it by a member of the community (e.g. beauty, comfort) will be replaced by negative ones (e.g. ungainliness, discomfort) in a manner that suggests the structural interrelation of these characteristics. This model is then implicitly expanded as a structure of social functions; i.e., an overarching structure of meanings that a cultural object or ritual obtains in a collective. This structure is seen as determining both the functions possible for an element of culture as well setting parameters for the material, formal changes a cultural artifact can undergo.<sup>28</sup>

Mukařovský used the concept of a structure of functions as a means of applying his semiotics of art to concrete historical examples without introducing extra-aesthetic (e.g. economic, political) causal explanations into his approach. This was the advantage presented by Bogatyrev's methodology. It was, after the linguistic model, designed to ascertain the laws by which social facts are adopted or resisted in their movement between collectives by studying the cultural life of the collectives themselves. For example, a key question that drove Bogatyrev's research was the puzzle as to why, within a larger region, an element of urban culture will be adopted by most villages, but will leave "islands" of resistance which do not adopt, for example, a new item of clothing (2006 [1928]: 82). Bogatyrev's research method implies that the answer lies in the different structure of functions that existing forms of culture have in each village; some are open to the new (urban) element, while others cannot accept it due to structural

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<sup>28</sup> Bogatyrev provides another example in his book *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia [Funkcie kroja na moravskom slovensku]* (1937): "We have seen how village women who replaced their headwear with city-style combs nonetheless continued to distinguish themselves from town women by means of the color of the combs. The social status distinction remained strong in the village women's attitude, and despite their almost complete identity with the city women in question of dress, they still retained a conscious desire to show their own social position" (94). This example reveals how the structure of functions in the village (headwear as a means of distinguishing status) determines how a new item (combs) will be interpreted once adopted into this cultural milieu.

constraints. In order to ascertain how these structures of functions differ he stresses two principles: first, that the researcher place the receiving collective and its structure of functions at the center of his study; and second, that the ethnographer limit the scope of his analysis to a small area. He advises, for example, comparing the forms of folklore and their functions in two neighboring villages as this allows the researcher to control for external factors such as “climatic, economic and aesthetic preconditions” which will be common to both villages (2006: 89).<sup>29</sup>

In AFNV Mukařovský attempts to place aesthetics on more objective ground by drawing on the fields of sociology and anthropology. He reinterprets the concepts of aesthetic function, norm and value as socially determined facts rather than eternal constants or universal aesthetic requirements. In this approach the concept of “function” is the lynchpin of the book—the aesthetic function allows Mukařovský to talk about art in social terms, but from a structuralist perspective, that is, while also preserving the structuralists’ investment in the systemic “regularity” of the evolution of artistic form.<sup>30</sup> The book does this by replacing the immanent history of artistic form with that of artistic function. As Mukařovský put it, the “aesthetic function...both situates the aesthetic in relation to social phenomena and stresses with its character of energy *the uninterrupted immanent development of the aesthetic sphere*” (1966: 18 italics added).<sup>31</sup> It appears here that Mukařovský is attempting to sit on two chairs. His sociological understanding of the aesthetic means it must be defined by social consensus as a function. As a structuralist however, he wants to see the aesthetic function as an immanently evolving series.

The means to bridge the gap between the two positions was provided by Bogatyrev’s structure of functions as a product of a unified collective consciousness. The view of the collective mind as a systemic whole was developed from the study of “primitive” cultures. This theory interpreted the collective consciousness as organized like a language, and thus, like language it was seen as developing in a systemic, “immanent” manner. Mukařovský adopted this theory of collective consciousness and posited an “aesthetic sphere” within this structure as the substructure of objects deemed to have an aesthetic function. The “uninterrupted immanent development of the aesthetic sphere,” referred to above, is thus a product of the view of the collective consciousness as a closely integrated system. This is made clear in the following quote:

The aesthetic sphere develops as a whole and is, in addition, constantly related to those aspects of reality which, at a given point in time, do not exhibit the aesthetic function at all. Such unity and integrity are possible only if we assume a collective awareness [kolektivní vědomí] which combines the ties among objects bearing the aesthetic function and which unifies mutually isolated individual states of awareness (1970: 19).

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<sup>29</sup> The full sentence reads: “Ограничивая себя определенным материалом, нам гораздо легче, насколько при данных климатических, экономических и эстетических предпосылках в данной местности целесообразны были предметы старого обихода и предметы, его заменившие” (2006: 89).

<sup>30</sup> Defining the “aesthetic function” as a social fact represented an important departure from the previous usage of the term “function” in Czech aesthetics. Emil Utitz had, for example, used the term in only in the sense of “functional emotions.” See his *Die Funktionsfreuden im ästhetischen Verhalten* (1911).

<sup>31</sup> This quote comes from the 1936 introduction to AFNV, which was not included in M. Suino’s translation. The original reads: “východiskem studie ovšem učiněn rozbor estetické funkce, která zároveň zaraduje estetično mezi jevy sociální, i zdůrazňuje svým energetickým charakterem nepřetržitost imanentního vývoje estetické oblasti” (1966: 18).

Mukařovský uses an essentialized conception of collectivity, based ultimately on Bogatyrev's study of folk culture, to posit the immanent development of the aesthetic function in place of the immanent development of the formal properties of the art objects themselves. The view of the artwork as a structural whole has been superseded by the, related, understanding of the collective consciousness as a whole.

Mukařovský's use of the concept of collective consciousness was seen as a weak point in his theoretical apparatus by certain contemporaries. Jakobson suggested that it was an unfortunate "metaphor" and that more appropriate terms might be "convention" [konvence] or "ideology of the collective" [ideologie kolektiva] (Kronika, 192). The Czech sociologist I. A. Bláha, who was otherwise enthusiastic about AFNV, spent a considerable portion of his 1937 review of the book explicating contemporary sociology's understanding of society in effort to suggest a less "static" and "metaphysical" view than Mukařovský's "collective consciousness" (245). This response can be seen as a reflection of the fact that Mukařovský was inspired to some degree by Bogatyrev's work. The essentialized view of community which is articulated in the idea of a structure of functions was accepted in the fields of folkloristics or ethnography, but was seen as too "metaphysical" when applied to society more generally.

Bogatyrev's understanding of primitive collectivity was based on an admixture of readings drawn from the fields of anthropology, Gestalt psychology and linguistics. More specifically, it appears that his approach was based on connections drawn between the work of Saussure and the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939). This association was facilitated by the fact that both Saussure and Lévy-Bruhl based their theories on the premise of a collective consciousness as articulated by Émile Durkheim. In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), for example, Durkheim wrote that "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the *collective* or *common consciousness*" (79 italics in original). Bogatyrev was introduced to Lévy-Bruhl's work as a student, and the latter's concept of a "primitive mentality" clearly informs Bogatyrev's writings from the 1920s and 30s. Lévy-Bruhl understood primitive mentality to be based on a "law of participation," which is "expressed in an intricate set of interpenetrations among all the parts (human and otherwise) that go to make up a collective representation" (Littleton xiii).<sup>32</sup> This view of collective mentality has clear points of correspondence with Saussure's concept of *langue*. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), he described *langue* as "a fund [of word patterns] accumulated by the members of the community through the practice of speech, a grammatical system existing potentially in every brain, or more exactly in the brains of a group of individuals; for the language [*langue*] is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity (13)."<sup>33</sup> The concept

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<sup>32</sup> Lévy-Bruhl's most influential book *How Native's Think* [*Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*] (1910) is considered "the culmination of over a decade of close association with Durkheim, Mauss and the rest of the L'année sociologique group" (Littleton xii). In *The Functions of Folk Costume*, Bogatyrev, using the example of the healer-magician (shaman), describes the "distinctive structure of rational, aesthetic, religious, etc., creativity" of "the so-called 'primitive' peoples" as a "conglomeration of all these elements" which is "in the final product... different from that of the European scholar-scientist, poet or clergyman" (95). See also Bogatyrev's "Lévy-Bruhl a etnografie evropských národů" [Lévy-Bruhl and the ethnography of European peoples] (1930) in *Souvislosti tvorby*, 55-57.

<sup>33</sup> The connection between Saussure and Durkheim is not as obvious as in Lévy-Bruhl's case. Many scholars, however, refer to the similarities between their ideas. One notable study is W. Doroszewski's "Quelque remarques sur les rapports de la sociologie et de la linguistique: Durkheim et F. de Saussure." *Journal de Psychologie* 80 (1932): 82-91. Doroszewski provides a detailed argument outlining the parallels between Durkheim's treatment of a

of a collectively created and stored grammar can be seen in this context as another way of envisioning the system that orders and binds the collective consciousness.

As a result of their affiliation with the Commission for Folklore Study [Komissiia po narodnoi slovesnosti] Bogatyrev and Jakobson were introduced to Lévy-Bruhl before they were to Saussure, and their thinking on collective consciousness was first done in the spirit of their folkloristic endeavors.<sup>34</sup> This is reflected in their now-canonical essay “Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens” (1929).<sup>35</sup> In this work they use Saussure’s concept of *langue* metaphorically to describe the nature of *folkloric* creativity. This analogy was further developed by Bogatyrev, who, as we have seen, described folk collectivity as a complex collective consciousness which creates stable, interconnected relationships between the elements of that shared mentality, allowing it to slowly evolve in a systemic way like language. Mukařovský’s semiotics, like Jakobson and Bogatyrev’s *Schaffen* article, was also based on the application of Saussure’s *langue* to the social collective consciousness—but in his case he extended this analogy to society more broadly. In his AFNV, for example, this assumption is manifest in his use of the phrase “social morphology” [společenská morfologie] to describe social structure (1966: 35). As we have seen in the case of Mukařovský’s use of Bogatyrev’s concept of a structure of functions, the aesthetician built on the Russian’s application of linguistics to the sphere of ethnography and folkloristics, attempting to create a more broadly-applicable semiotic aesthetics. In doing so he carried over into Prague School semiotics some of the essentialism that accrued to the concept of collective consciousness via its transmission from Durkheim to Lévy-Bruhl to Bogatyrev and Jakobson.

There is one last point on which Bogatyrev and Mukařovský’s work overlaps, and it is particularly important because it highlights the crucial differentiation which leads them in different directions in defining “art.” This split stems from a difference in perception regarding the dichotomy of “high” versus “low” art. Bogatyrev’s approach to art and culture was based on a methodology that was developed in the study of folklore, although he applied his approach to art more generally, eschewing a strong division between “high” and “low” art. Mukařovský, as we have seen, borrowed aspects of the theoretical basis that Bogatyrev developed, applying them to his studies of “high” art. When faced with Bogatyrev’s more inclusive definition of “art,” however, Mukařovský parts ways with the ethnographer, choosing to define the two modes of creation as opposites of each other. In AFNV, for example, he cites Bogatyrev’s argument that the density of tradition in the rural milieu both prevents change and requires the functional transformation of borrowed cultural goods. The citation reads: “in ethnographic research we encounter facts having several functions, and often these various functions are so closely dependent upon one another that we are unable precisely to determine which function in a given situation is most strongly in evidence” (1970: 55, fn. 44). In citing this statement, however, Mukařovský omits a parenthetical from Bogatyrev’s quote. The original reads: “in ethnographic

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social fact in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) and Saussure’s treatment of language. See also Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (Hill and Wang: 1968), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Jakobson and Bogatyrev would have been acquainted with Lévy-Bruhl’s *How Native’s Think* as junior members of the Komissiia po narodnoi slovesnosti in the 1910s. Jakobson later remarked in conversation with Kristina Pomorska that he did not read Saussure until 1920 after arriving in Prague (Jakobson and Pomorska, 41).

<sup>35</sup> “Like *langue*,” they write, “the folkloric work is extrapersonal and leads only a potential existence; it is only a complex of particular norms and impulses, a canvas of actual tradition, to which the performers impart life through the embellishments of their individual creativity, just as the producers of *parole* do with respect to *langue* (9). There is a marked copy of an original publication of this essay in Mukařovský’s archive. See “Tisky cizí Jakobson, Roman” LA PNP, Jan Mukařovský, č. inv. 66/86.

research, *as in the study of other social phenomena*, we encounter facts having several functions...” (1971 [1931]: 64 italics added).<sup>36</sup> While this omission may appear trivial, it is characteristic of his treatment of Bogatyrev’s work as a whole. The ethnographer’s theories regarding cultural products in general are recast as claims about folkloric culture alone. This is important, because Mukařovský uses Bogatyrev’s observation about the multiplicity of functions in folklore and other phenomena to create a different statement—he argues that this plentitude is characteristic of non-art in opposition to “art.”<sup>37</sup>

Art, for Mukařovský, is defined by the dominance of a single—the aesthetic—function. This definition was that of the PLC more broadly, yet Mukařovský goes beyond the statement that “poetry is language in its aesthetic function,” to correlate different structures of functions with different strata of society.<sup>38</sup> In AFNV the “truly untouched folkloric milieu... studied by the Russian ethnographer Bogatyrev,” in which there is little or no functional differentiation, provides the backdrop against which “art” is defined (1970: 38). This move is analogous to the definition of poetic language against the backdrop of communicative speech, understood as functionally undifferentiated.

Mukařovský’s approach to art and society is thus more complex than Bogatyrev’s. He relied on the latter’s structure of functions to theorize the basic relationship between culture and the social consciousness as a universal mechanism. But where Bogatyrev simply posits that each social collective has its own structure of functions, Mukařovský attempts to theorize a social whole that incorporates several different cultural “strata,” with different structures of norms. This differentiation is significant in that Mukařovský links the definition of art with the structure of norms in the leading strata of society. I will argue that this departure was, in part, a result of the fact that the two semioticians adhered to different concepts of the semiotic boundary. The intellectual influences for Bogatyrev and Mukařovský’s understandings of collectivity are treated in the remainder of the chapter.

## Two Concepts of Collectivity and their Historical Origins

The fundamental difference between Bogatyrev and Mukařovský’s approach to the concept of collectivity can be illustrated through their responses to the German folklorist Hans Naumann’s (1886-1951) model for the relationship between high art and folklore. Naumann’s theory of *gesunkenes Kulturgut* was one of the most influential in folkloristics of the 1920s and

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<sup>36</sup> Bogatyrev returned to this argument in his 1935 “Funkčně strukturální metoda a jiné metody etnografie a folkloristiky” [The Functional structural Method and other methods of Ethnography and Folkloristics]; in which he writes that in traditional collectives a social fact stays in place longer, but its functions are more plentiful and change more often than those of social facts in an urban environment. He suggests that in all European cities a similar fact will perform more or less the same function (1971: 89).

<sup>37</sup> A sources for this approach to high and low culture could be seen in the “Theses,” which recommend studying: “those forms of speech in which one function totally predominates and those in which manifold functions interpenetrate. The different hierarchy of functions in each case is essential here” (12). Mukařovský often made use of folkloric examples in this vein throughout the 1930s and returned to this topic in the early 1940s and then again in the 1960s-70s. In his latest, post-WWII, work, he appears to have abandoned this idea.

<sup>38</sup> The definition of poetry as language in its aesthetic function was a basic precept of Prague School structuralism. Jakobson, for example, defines poetry using these basic terms (“Поэзия есть язык в его эстетической функции”) as early as 1921 (1978: 305).

30s. It argued that folklore is the “sunken cultural goods” of higher spheres of society.<sup>39</sup> Bogatyrev, who repeatedly returned to the relationship between high and low (or urban and rural) culture, argued that Naumann’s claim, “Das Volk produziert nicht, es reproduziert,” was a “mistake” that he sought to correct by illustrating that the cultural goods that frequently pass from high to low spheres of culture are fundamentally transformed by the structure of functions in the receiving milieu (2006 [1935]: 150). Mukařovský’s references to the concept of *gesunkenes Kulturgut* in ANFV incorporated Bogatyrev’s argument that the folk were not passive receivers. Yet Mukařovský retains the sense that culture passes predictably in one direction, from high to low, claiming that the history of art is a “cycle of artistic norms.”<sup>40</sup> Mukařovský, citing Naumann on an adjacent page, argues that, “generally speaking,”

As it grows older and more rigid the aesthetic norm also sinks lower in the ranks of the social hierarchy. [...] In addition it frequently happens that a canon which has sunk to the lowest periphery is suddenly elevated to the very center of aesthetic activity and becomes – in an altered form, of course – once again a new and vital norm....In this sense we could speak of the rotation of aesthetic norms (1970: 51).<sup>41</sup>

Bogatyrev, on the other hand, refers to the relationship between high and low as an interpenetration; in his critique of Naumann he insists that “it is necessary to accept the more fitting view of the relationship between of so-called high and folk art as one of continual permeation” (1940: 22).<sup>42</sup> This view differs from Mukařovský’s in that it presents the relationship as one moving potentially in either direction, *without a larger structural apparatus*. This distinction highlights the difference between their views of collectivity; Mukařovský works with the assumption that society makes up a single whole that is organized by a dominant structural element that gives it shape, internal coherence and directs its (cyclical) evolution. Bogatyrev views collectivity as an endless, largely unstructured, expanse of individual units each of which is unique and is defined by its own structure. These models are both based on language—one, I will argue, on national language and the other on dialect. Each scholar’s orientation towards one view or the other can be traced back to his intellectual background prior to the foundation of the PLC.

Bogatyrev’s assumption that social collectives can be theorized as akin to dialects is evident in his interest in applying the methods of linguistic geography to ethnography. The late-1920s saw a renewed interest in the field of linguistic cartography, and the Eurasianist faction of the PLC was intensively pursuing the correspondences between linguistic and other “anthropo-

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<sup>39</sup> Ehlers comments on the role this theory played in the development of Jakobson and Bogatyrev’s thinking on folklore and the “Schaffen” article in particular, see “Petr G. Bogatyrev: Leben und Werk” in *Funktional-strukturelle Ethnographie in Europa*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> This idea that hearkens back to the formalist view of literary evolution as a cycle between familiarized and defamiliarized art.

<sup>41</sup> It worth noting that Jakobson also utilized Naumann’s idea of “sunken cultural goods” in describing the relationship between high art and the broader cultural sphere: “just as the paperboy hawking the Monday headlines doesn’t know that he regurgitates the once-innovative slogans of world philosophers, thus the majority of our contemporaries haven’t an inkling about Hamsun, Šrámek, or Verlaine, but at the same time love according to Hamsun, Šrámek or Verlaine. Modern ethnography calls this sunken cultural goods [kleslá kulturní hodnota]” (1972 [1934]: 416).

<sup>42</sup> “je nutno přijmouti pravdě více odpovídající teorii o stálém prostupování umění t. zv. vysokého a umění lidového” (1940: 22).

geographic isograms” in this period.<sup>43</sup> Citing the fact that boundaries for ethnographic traits often coincide with the territorial spread for certain dialectological characteristics, Bogatyrev suggested the compilation of “maps,” which

дадут нам возможность сгруппировать целый ряд этнографических черт, имеющих одни и те же районы распространения, воедино и составить карты, приблизительно отвечающие диалектологической карте, разработанной Московской диалектологической комиссией (2006 [1928]: 91).

allow us to group a whole series of ethnographic features which have one and the same areas of distribution, and at the same time to put together maps roughly according to those produced by the Moscow Dialectological Commission.

The reference to the Moscow Dialectological Commission (MDC) here reflects the fact that Bogatyrev’s orientation towards dialect as a model for collectivity had its roots in the pre-revolutionary tradition of folkloristics and ethnography in which he was trained. If we return to Bogatyrev’s student years, the reasons why he might have assumed that the folkloric community was akin to a local dialect become clearer. Two particularly formative influences on the young ethnographer were the work of the ethnographer D. K. Zelenin (1878-1954), and his own participation in the Moscow Linguistic Circle (MLC) and the Dialectological Commission (MDC). Zelenin provided an ethnographic method with affinities to a dialectological approach. The MDC, in turn, produced a theory of dialect that arguably influenced Bogatyrev’s view of not only dialect, but of local community.

Although dialectology was increasingly seen as a separate discipline in late nineteenth century Tsarist Russia, it was still essentially valued as part of a more general complex of disciplines oriented towards the historical description of Russian language and culture.<sup>44</sup> The lack of sharp disciplinary boundaries between the fields of history, ethnography, folkloristics, linguistics and dialectology in Russia allowed methodological advances in one of these fields to find their way into the study of another with greater ease. One example of this was the work of Zelenin, who wrote his masters dissertation on a dialectological topic and collected extensive data on the local dialects of his native Viatka (now the Kirov Oblast, Russia), but who is mainly known as an ethnographer.<sup>45</sup> Zelenin’s influence was extremely important for Bogatyrev, and scholars of Russian folkloristics stress the extent to which the younger scholar can be seen as

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<sup>43</sup> Eurasianism was a political and cultural movement among Russian émigrés which flourished in the late 1920s and the 1930s. The most important models for linguistic mapping at the time were the Marburg School’s *Deutscher Sprachatlas*. Bd. 1-6. Marburg, 1926-1932, or J. Gilliéron and E. Edmont’s *Atlas Linguistique de la France*, Paris, 1902-1910. The Prague School “Theses” contain the following statement on linguistic geography: “Just as comparison with heterogeneous developmental phenomena is allowed in the history of a language, the spatial expansion of linguistic phenomena can fruitfully be compared to other geographic isograms especially to anthropo-geographic isograms (the boundaries of facts pertaining to economic and political geography, the boundaries of the expanding phenomena pertaining to material and spiritual culture), but also to isograms of physical geography (soil, flora, moisture, temperature and geomorphology)” (21).

<sup>44</sup> In an essay on Zelenin’s dialectological work, N. I. Tolsotoi and S. M. Tolstaia tell us that, “И хотя все настойчивее и яснее вырисовывались контуры новой диалектологии [...] причастность диалектологии к широкому комплексу народоведческих дисциплин ощущалась еще четко и незаблемо” (70).

<sup>45</sup> His masters dissertation [магистерская диссертация] was titled “Великорусские говоры с неорганическим и непереходным смягчением заднебных” (Tolstoi and Tolstaia 71).

continuing a methodological trend which Zelenin founded.<sup>46</sup> A dialectological orientation reveals itself in two aspects of Zelenin’s ethnographic work that, in turn, influenced Bogatyrev’s functional-structural ethnography.<sup>47</sup> These were the stress on the synchronic, geographic, study of language and culture and an interest in the *local* meanings (or functions) of ethnographic objects and rituals. Zelenin’s work on a local dictionary of the Viatka dialect (1902) can be seen as an early version of Bogatyrev’s structural-functional approach. A dictionary of local terms is essentially a list of the “functions” (definitions) of various local products and traditions native to the area.<sup>48</sup> This dictionary is housed in the minds of the local collective—the basic data structured by *langue* or collective consciousness. Zelenin’s alphabetical list of “functions” is essentially analogous to the bare-bones data that Bogatyrev, drawing on linguistics and Gestalt psychology, would organize into a *structure* of functions, seeking to understand how these meanings make up a more complex structure akin to a grammar.<sup>49</sup>

At the time that Bogatyrev and Jakobson were students at Moscow University, the study of dialect was seen as the cutting-edge in linguistics because, in contrast to historical linguistics, it focused on the collection and categorization of current, living language. Bogatyrev’s association with the MLC provided him with a closer acquaintance with dialectology per se. When Bogatyrev joined the MLC at its foundation in March 1915, the Circle was a student group within the Moscow Dialectological Commission.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between these two groups was initially very close, and the effects of this affiliation continued into the post-revolutionary period. Bogatyrev and Jakobson presented the results of their summer fieldwork to the MDC in 1915, and there is evidence that Jakobson fully ascribed to the Commission’s theory of dialect

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<sup>46</sup> The basic elements that Bogatyrev’s approach shared with Zelenin’s are: a focus on living tradition and a comprehensive approach to collection that attempts to take account of the entire local context; an interest in the hierarchical structure of these facts and an attempt to break them down into their basic parts; an interest in the current meaning of traditions for their bearers and an understanding that these meanings are historically relative; and finally, most importantly, an approach that combines the collection of folkloric, ethnographic and linguistic-dialectological facts. S. Sorokina spends some time comparing their approaches to folklore, concluding: “опираясь, во многом, на методику Зеленина (локальный подход, изучение современных функций), Богатырев делает ее как бы еще более «строгой» [...] сознательно ставя в цель выработать объективный научный метод собирания и обработки фольклорно-этнографических материалов” (15). T. G. Ivanova also stresses the connection between these two folklorists in her *Istoriia russkoi fol’kloristiki XX veka: 1900-pervaia polovina 1941 g.*, 752-59.

<sup>47</sup> In his 1935 article on the structural functional method in ethnography Bogatyrev cites D.K. Zelenin as the founder of the method, stating that “the study of the functions of ethnographic and folkloric phenomena was initiated and successfully propagated by prof. D. K. Zelenin” (2006: 80).

<sup>48</sup> The Tolstois comment on, for example, Zelenin’s dictionary entry for “Круглый пирог” saying “В словарной статье *Круглый пирог* по сути дела содержится восемь свадебно-обрядовых терминов, причем многие из них, что особенно ценно, даны во взаимном соотношении – противопоставлении или зависимости – и охарактеризованы с функциональной (обрядовой, этнографической) стороны” (Tolstois and Tolstaia 74).

<sup>49</sup> Zelenin’s work included organizing this data beyond alphabetization of course. Some commentators suggest his work represented an early manifestation of a “synchronic or even systemic” approach (Ivanova 207). Bogatyrev makes the grammatical quality of the structure of functions explicit in *The Functions of Folk Costume*: “The meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of those words which that sentence comprises; on the other hand, the meaning of individual words in the sentence depends on the meaning of the whole sentence. We observe the same thing in the structure of a costume’s functions. [...] The whole structure of functions affects the content and intensity of individual functions. The content and intensity of the aesthetic function will be different in the case of the structures of the holiday costume and the everyday costume” (99).

<sup>50</sup> See Jakobson “Toward the history of the Moscow Linguistic Circle” (Mouton: 1971). He lists the founding members of the Circle as F. N. Afremov, P. G. Bogatyrev, A. A. Buslaev, S. I. Ragozin, P. P. Sveshnikov, N. F. Iakovlev and himself (279).

even after immigrating to Prague.<sup>51</sup> As we have seen, Bogatyrev refers to the cartographic methods of the MDC as the model to be followed in establishing the foundations for a geographic approach to ethnography as late as 1928.

His association with the MDC and the MLC provided Bogatyrev with a theoretical conception of dialect as an organic whole which is both a closed (linguistic) system, yet open to the vicissitudes of history. This view was outlined in a 1917 article, “Perekhodnye govory,” by N. N. Durnovo, vice-chairman of the Commission.<sup>52</sup> Durnovo’s theory of dialect spread is social in that the size, spread and boundaries of a dialect are determined by social forces—what he terms “cultural centers.” These can be anything from the dialect spoken in a monastery settlement to the official language of a national capital, each possessing a correspondingly powerful “gravitational force” which influences the dialects around it. Thus, linguistic traits can spread only from a center outwards, and if more than one dialect falls within the gravitational boundary of a “center,” a hierarchization of dialects occurs with the culturally stronger dialect squeezing out weaker ones (6). At the same time, however, this social-linguistic “gravitational” force is, to a degree, resisted by the innate linguistic structure of lesser dialects:

Звуковые черты, усваиваемые переходным говором из другого говора, [...] как общие черты произношения, не могут быть усвоены этим говором в совершенстве [...] Т.е. фонетические черты, возникающие в одном говоре под влиянием другого, не тождественны с фонетическими чертами этого последнего (8).<sup>53</sup>

Phonic traits adopted by a mixed dialect from another dialect, [...] like general traits of pronunciation, cannot be adopted by that dialect to the point of perfection [...] That is, phonetic traits emerging in one dialect under the influence of another are not equivalent to the phonetic traits of the latter.

According to this theory, each dialect would appear to have a distinct, linguistic identity which allows the dialectologist to trace its history. The socially driven influence of one dialect on another is never complete—it never totally effaces the identity of linguistic structure. This allows the dialectologist to see mixed dialects as containing various historical “layers” [nasloeniia], and

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<sup>51</sup> For Bogatyrev’s presentation see “Kratkii ocherk deiatel’nosti komissii...za 12 let.” *Trudy postoiannoi komissii po dialektologii russkogo iazyka* 9 (1927): 3. The opening, theoretical, paragraphs of Jakobson’s seminal “Noveishaia russkaia poezii” (1921) present a plan to translate the dialectological categories developed by the MDC into poetic terms. He refers to “centers” of poetic/dialectological “influence,” to “transitional” and “mixed” dialects and “dialects with a tendency towards transitionally” (1979: 301). I discuss Jakobson’s “poetic dialectology” in detail in Chapter Two. For an explanation of these terms see (Durnovo 1917), or “Delenie russkogo iazyka na dialekticheskie gruppy.” *Trudy Moskovskoi dialektologicheskoi komissii* (1915): 1-3. Jakobson published an favorable review of the MDC’s methodology in the composition of a linguistic atlas in *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 1916, No.s 1-2, “Opyt dialekticheskoi karty russkogo iazyka v Evrope,” 102-107. (signed. R.Ia).

<sup>52</sup> Toman writes that Durnovo’s “impact on the [Prague Linguistic] Circle is detectable. Durnovo...spent the years 1924-28 in Czechoslovakia with a Czechoslovak study grant arranged by Jakobson for him” (113-114). This episode in his career and his relationship with Trubetskoi and Jakobson were used in accusations against him of an anti-Soviet “Slavists’ plot,” which culminated in his execution in 1937. See M. A. Robinson and D. P. Petrovskii “N. N. Durnovo i N. S. Trubetskoi: problema evraziistva v kontekste ‘dela slavistov’ (po materialam OGPU-NKVD).” *Slavianovedenie* 4 (1992): 68–82.

<sup>53</sup> The reasons Durnovo gives for resistance are: “а) вследствие различной артикуляционной базы в различных говорах, б) вследствие несходства фонетических условий, в которые возникла соответствующая черта в том или другом говоре, с условиями, в которых может возникнуть та же черта в усваивающем говоре, в) вследствие сложности этих условий” (8).

theoretically allows him to thus determine which layer of linguistic structure is “primary” or “original,” and which is a “later” layering (9).

Durnovo’s definition of dialect combines the linguistic and the social in a manner which anticipates Bogatyrev’s approach to ethnographic community. Bogatyrev was also interested in the territorial spread of culture, generally conceived as moving from “high” to “low.”<sup>54</sup> And, like Durnovo, he assumed that these low-culture communities (or dialects) have a unique identity which is manifest in a dense structure of traditions (Durnovo’s “phonetic conditions”) that reshapes the received elements. Durnovo’s view of phonetic structure thus prefigures Bogatyrev’s “structure of functions”; it is the structural identity that determines what will be borrowed from other (high culture) communities and how these elements must be substantially reconfigured to fit into this existing structure.

Bogatyrev’s dispersed view of collectivity had direct implications for his definition of art. He repeatedly claims that folk theater or other forms of folkloric production are legitimately “artistic” due to the fact that they are “unique.” Moreover, it appears that this view of folk art rests on the assumption that each folk collective is defined by a unique structure of functions. The connection between these two ideas is made clearest in his 1923 book on Czech puppet and Russian folk theater:

Что, касается, до народной драмы, то она не окружена никаким пиететом и в силу этого легко трансформируется, отвечая художественным запросам дня, ибо только эстетические требования момента обуславливают ее существование. Она не является данью прошлому. В виду этого каждая отдельная постановка такой драмы есть замкнутое, художественное целое и представляет громадный интерес для изучения (23).<sup>55</sup>

In respect to folk drama, we can say that it is not surrounded by feelings of piety and as a result is easily transformed, responding to the artistic requirements of the moment. For only the aesthetic demands of the moment condition its existence. Folk drama is not determined by the past. In view of this fact, every individual performance of such drama is a closed, artistic whole and is of great interest for scholarly analysis.

Bogatyrev was particularly interested in forms of creativity that all members of the community participate in—what he called “active collective creation.”<sup>56</sup> Focusing on this type of creativity, he saw the vicissitudes of folk life immediately reflected in its products, providing them with their unique and thus artistic character. Bogatyrev’s claim that each performance of folk creativity is a “closed artistic whole” derives from the fact that he understood the community’s “structure of functions” also to be an “organic whole,” and “a unique system” (1971 [1937]: 99).

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<sup>54</sup> Although Bogatyrev did not agree with the unequivocal nature of Naumann’s “sinking” culture, when discussing cultural spread he assumes that it more frequently passes from the city to the country, although he takes pains to acknowledge flow in both directions. See “Několik poznámek o vztazích mezi folklorem a vysokým uměním” [Some Remarks on the Relationships between Folklore and High Art] (1936), in *Souvislosti tvorby*, 94-97.

<sup>55</sup> This claim reappears in his later writings, albeit in a condensed form. E.g. “I repeat – every performance of this or that play is a unique artistic phenomenon differing from earlier performances of the piece. And thus it is necessary to capture and describe such a performance anew every time” (1940: 46).

<sup>56</sup> On “passive vs. active” creativity see: “Aktivně kolektivní, pasivně kolektivní, produktivní a neproduktivní etnografické jevy” [Active Collective, Passive Collective, Productive and Non-Productive Ethnographic Phenomena] (1939) in *Souvislosti tvorby*, 165-166.; also *Lidové Divadlo* (1940), 38-39, *passim*.

Bogatyrev's definition of art is thus a product of his understanding of collectivity; the uniqueness of its social structure is the source of the uniqueness (and thus artistry) of the products that the entire community creates. Although Bogatyrev doesn't state this explicitly, it follows that artifacts which a community "passively" or only partially accepts without transforming (such as factory-made cloth) would not be valued as "art," as they are not unique in the same way.

Bogatyrev's definition of art was seen as unorthodox from the perspective of the Prague School aesthetics, based to a large degree on Mukařovský's writings. Jiří Veltruský, a representative of the second generation of Prague School semioticians, began a critique of Bogatyrev's 1940 book on folk theater by drawing a clear distinction between the PLC definition of art and Bogatyrev's approach. The review, which he "originally read to a small discussion group meeting at Jan Mukařovský's apartment in 1940," takes issue with Bogatyrev's book in that it approaches "folk theater from the standpoint of the general theory of dramatic art" (141, 143). Veltruský states that:

the fundamental differences between art properly so called and the products of folklore must be kept in mind [...] The relative weight of the various functions that a work assumes is not the same in the two cases, because the tendency of the aesthetic function to predominate, which characterizes art, is alien to folklore; so is the differentiation of functions, which is a prerequisite of art (143).

Veltruský's argument is essentially that presented by Mukařovský in AFNV, in which he contrasts the multi-functionality of folklore (via Bogatyrev) with the requirement that in a work of "art" the "aesthetic function" obtains a position of exclusive dominance. As we have seen, Bogatyrev and Mukařovský shared a common theoretical basis in shared assumptions regarding the nature of collectivity and cultural artifacts. Why then did Bogatyrev's view of art differ so dramatically from that of the PLC? Turning to examine Mukařovský's view of collectivity in more detail will allow us to understand the basic assumptions on which his more canonical definition of art stood.

In contrast to Bogatyrev, Mukařovský's view of social collectivity assumed a single, unified, all-encompassing whole. As opposed to a multiplicity of dialects, his semiotic aesthetics was based on the assumption that culture is integrated into a single structure by dominant agent—a view illustrated by his claim that norms rotate through society in a cyclical manner. The development of this concept of community can be broken down into two stages of Mukařovský's early career. The fact that he approached collectivity as a singular entity appears to derive from widespread views regarding the unity and wholeness of the Czech nation and language which were first articulated in the early nineteenth century and would have been keenly felt in Mukařovský's formative years on the eve of the foundation of the Czechoslovak state in 1918. The introduction of the concept of a "dominant," unifying element into this unified model of collectivity can be traced to the approach to language and society most explicitly elucidated in the PLC's "Literary Czech" lecture series of 1932 in which Mukařovský participated.

Mukařovský's view that the semiotic community makes up a single whole is an assumed standpoint rather than an argument he explicitly articulates. While this position can be traced to a certain view of the Czech nation and language which gained currency in the movement for Czech national independence, the general theoretical model of the collective Mukařovský

operated with is not equivalent to Czechoslovakia or the Czech language per se.<sup>57</sup> Rather, it appears that his assumption of a single all-encompassing system is based on a discourse of “wholeness” regarding the Czech language community. In articles spanning from his earliest publications of the early 1920s to articles from the mid-1930s, we find references to the national psyche and language that reveal that Mukařovský appears to have accepted the widespread, primordialist view of the Czech nation as equivalent to the Czech language, and possessed of a unified historical consciousness.<sup>58</sup> With his introduction to Saussure and structuralist linguistics in the late 1920s, the concept of the community as *langue* was incorporated into Mukařovský’s existing view of the collective as based on a shared language.

In two articles he contributed to *Slovo a Slovesnost* in 1935 Mukařovský makes a specific historical argument which reveals his adherence to a holistic view of the Czech nation and language.<sup>59</sup> Referring to the writings of intellectuals of the 1860s, Mukařovský argues that this decade saw a dramatic political shift resulting in the “linguistic unification of the Czech collective,” which was achieved by ejecting the German speaking elites “from the body of the nation” [z těla národního] (1935a: 35, 37). To support this argument, Mukařovský refers to the recurrence of a rhetoric of “wholeness” [celistvost] in the writings of J. Neruda and K. Frič regarding the nation and its language. Mukařovský treats these sources as statements of historical fact. The transition of the Czech collective from a “mere” territorial identity to a linguistic one was an event that Mukařovský saw as synonymous with a higher degree of unity and wholeness (35). These ideas were of course not original to Mukařovský, but can be traced to, among other sources, Josef Jungmann’s 1806 “Two Conversations on the Czech Language” and to the important role that the battle for Czech language rights played in the movement for greater independence within and finally from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.<sup>60</sup>

This rhetoric of wholeness in regard to the Czech national collective can be found in Mukařovský’s earliest published writings— theater reviews in the Plzen weekly *Umění všem* [Art for Everyone]. These reviews, moreover, demonstrate that he was interested in the relationship between art and collectivity well before he joined the PLC or became acquainted with Saussure’s concepts of the sign or *langue*. In a 1920 review of Arnošt Dvořák’s play “Husité” [The Hussites], Mukařovský uses the concept of the nation as a whole as a means of explaining the “wholeness” of a work of art. He argues that achieving the “unity of the dramatic work” [celistvost dramatu] is the essential goal of theater, and he argues that Dvořák’s work is such a whole despite its seemingly fragmentary nature (5-6).

Neboť kdybychom chtěli posuzovat dramatičnost hry jen podle toho, co se děje na jevišti, našli bychom místa málo dramatická, děj málo skloubený a slabě vystupňovaný. Je to

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<sup>57</sup> Mukařovský makes this point in a 1933 lecture in which he explains the concepts of *langue* and language as a system of signs (1995: 75).

<sup>58</sup> Primordialism in nationalism studies refers to the view that nations are ancient, natural phenomena, an idea that is generally traced to German Romanticism. J. G. Herder’s understanding of the primordial nation as synonymous with language would have been a particularly important line of thought in the approach to collectivity that influenced Mukařovský.

<sup>59</sup> The articles are “Poznámky k sociologii básnického jazyka” (1935a) and “Hallek” (1935b). This was the same year in which the first two chapters of AFNH, which treat the problems of a structuralist sociology of art in more detail, were published in the sociology journal *Sociální problémy*.

<sup>60</sup> On the influence of Jungmann’s “Two Conversations” see Miroslav Hroch *Na prahu národní existence*, Mladá fronta, 1999, 144-47. On linguistic nationalism and Jungmann’s role see Derek Sayer’s *The Coasts of Bohemia*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998, 54-57, 70-73.

proto, poněvadž vlastní tragedie se děje kdysi ve výšinách myšlenky v hlubinách národní duše. To, co vidíme na jevišti, jsou jen symboly tajemného [sic] vnitřního dění. A proto je vnitřní i dramatická jednotnost kusu... (6).

For if we wanted to criticize the theatricality of the play only according to what occurs on stage, we would find moments of little theatricality, poorly integrated action and weak escalation. This is because the real tragedy [vlastní tragedie] happens somewhere in the mental heights and depths of the national soul. What we see on stage are only symbols of a secret internal action. And thus the inner and theatrical unity of the piece is...

Mukařovský emphatically stresses that the “entire nation” [celý národ] is intimately familiar with the subject matter of the play (i.e. the Hussite revolution). This leads to the suggestion in the above quote that it is the wholeness of the collective, its common experience and knowledge, that guarantees the wholeness of the work.<sup>61</sup>

Mukařovský’s familiarity with structural linguistics in the 1930s allowed him to restate this relationship between the artwork and the collective in semiotic terms. In his 1934 formulation of art as a sign, as in 1920, he stresses that the sensuous elements of a work of art are only the outer manifestation of a fact that exists in the collective consciousness:

there is always some ‘thing,’ some ‘artifact,’ that represents the work of art in the outside world and may be perceived by one and all. However, it is not possible to reduce the work of art to that ‘artifact,’ [...] The artifact, thus, functions merely as an external signifier... for which in the collective consciousness there is a corresponding signification (often labeled ‘aesthetic object’) given by what is common to the subjective states of mind aroused in individuals of any particular community by the artifact (1976: 3-4).

Despite the fifteen years and sophisticated philosophical apparatus that separates these two statements, both revolve around a similar dichotomy between the mere “thing” that one sees on the stage and the “*real* tragedy,” or the “aesthetic object”—the true essence of the artwork which exists in the collective consciousness or the “national soul.” His later, semiotic work built upon this assumption regarding the relationship between the Czech collective and its art. Because the contemporary discourse on the Czech nation and language had been forged in the process of agitating for political autonomy, it stressed the organic wholeness of the Czech linguistic and cultural identity.

In comparing Mukařovský and Bogatyrev’s approaches to community as derived from a unified, national worldview as opposed to a dispersed, dialect-based one, it is relevant to finally mention the two scholars’ personal experiences. The nature of the ethnographer’s work meant that he spent his student years shuttling between the rural regions of Russia and its capital. This exercise in cultural dislocation only intensified after the 1917 revolution, when he traveled with

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<sup>61</sup> Describing the Hussite revolution Mukařovský repeats the phrase “celý národ” [the whole nation] three times in as many sentences (1920: 4). Other early articles that touch in the subject of the nation include: “O Nerudově divadelní kritice” [On Neruda and Theatrical Criticism] (*Umění všem*, 11.3.1917), “Národní divadlo” [The National Theater] (*Umění všem*, 12.5.1918), “Tylův Jan Hus” [Tyl’s Jan Hus] (*Umění všem*, 8.7.1918), “Jiráskova Husitská trilogie” [Jirásek’s Hussite Trilogy] (*Umění všem*, 19.6.1919).

the Red Army (as the director of a theater troupe) before moving to Czechoslovakia in 1921.<sup>62</sup> Bogatyrev then spent the interwar period migrating between the economically backward regions of Subcarpathian Rus, where he conducted his fieldwork, and the cities of Berlin, Prague, Münster and Bratislava, where he taught and associated with intellectual and cultural elites.<sup>63</sup> Bogatyrev argued that “our whole life is pervaded with theatrical elements, that is... we are here and there forced to transform ourselves into another person and to play in life a role that is sometimes very unfamiliar for us” (1940: 8).<sup>64</sup> This view of life—as a series of different “theaters” or cultural spheres with different codes and rules of behavior, reflects to some degree his life experiences.

Mukařovský’s interests and experiences did not force him to look at culture through the same “defamiliarized” lens.<sup>65</sup> His career took him from the Bohemian town Písek to Prague to Plzeň to Bratislava and then back to Prague; he thus remained largely within the boundaries of a single culture and language. Mukařovský was fluent in several foreign languages and of course interacted with foreign scholars on a regular basis, yet, as commentators have noted, he preferred to write on Czech literature and poetry despite his knowledge of French and Russian. René Wellek, a former—and frequently critical—member of the PLC, goes as far as to call Mukařovský “resolutely provincial,” and speculates that he wrote largely on Czech literature, “convinced as he must be that the art of poetry cannot be taken out of its linguistic context” (1970: 296). This is a sufficient explanation, yet I would venture that the unified view of collectivity with which Mukařovský operated bears on this fact as well. It appears likely that the singularity of Mukařovský’s view of the semiotic collective and his focus on the literature of his native language and culture were mutually reinforcing.

These two approaches to collectivity were not only personal worldviews, they also had different theoretical implications for a structuralist approach to art. Most importantly, the unified view demands that the individual elements within this larger, all-encompassing whole adhere to the laws that define it as a structure. Thus, in Mukařovský’s model, not only songs in an artist’s repertoire, for example, but entire social groups and strata are bound into regular relationships. The demand for an overarching force that would define these relationships found its answer in the concept of the “dominant”—an idea that gained wide currency in Prague School writings on language and culture in the 1930s. The idea of a dominant element in a structure was originally developed by the German aesthetician Broder Christiansen (1869-1958) and was adapted by the

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<sup>62</sup> See R. Jakobson’s biographical sketch “Petr Bogatyrev: Expert in Transfiguration” in *Sound, Sign and Meaning*. Ed. L. Matejka, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976, 35. Jakobson’s focus on the theme of “transformation” in Bogatyrev’s life and work can be read as a theoretical/biographical treatment of his colleague’s distanced, or “dislocated” view of culture.

<sup>63</sup> On Bogatyrev’s relationship with the Czech avant-garde theater, especially the theater director E.F. Burian, see L. P. Solntseva’s *Fol’klornye traditsii v cheshskoi teatral’noi kul’ture*. Saint Petersburg: ALETEIIa, 2004.

<sup>64</sup> “celý náš život je prostoupen divadelními prvky, totiž... jsme tu a tam nuceni se přeměňovati v jinou osobu a hráti v životě úlohu, někdy pro nás velmi nezvyklou” (1940: 8).

<sup>65</sup> Galin Tihanov’s “Why did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central Eastern Europe?” discusses the role of cultural and linguistic defamiliarization in the rise of Russian formalist and Czech structuralist literary theory. He notes, for example, that “the foundations of Formalism were laid by scholars, many of them Jewish, who were steeped in more than one cultural tradition and felt at ease with the ethnic and cultural diversity of both Moscow and imperial St. Petersburg [...] The lives of Lukács, Jakobson, Trubetskoi, Bogatyrev, Shklovsky, and also of René Wellek, urge us to consider the enormous importance of exile and emigration for the birth of modern literary theory in Eastern and Central Europe” (2004: 67-68).

Russian formalists to describe the formal structure of a work of art in the 1920s.<sup>66</sup> In a 1935 university lecture on the subject Jakobson states: “The dominant is the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure” (2005: 87).<sup>67</sup>

In the course of the 1930s, the PLC expanded this concept, translating it into social terms.<sup>68</sup> Society, as a structural whole, was seen as directed and organized by a dominant element in the way that a poem could be organized by rhythm, for example. In a lecture delivered at the Mánes art society in 1934, Jakobson extends by analogy the action of the dominant (poetic) function in organizing the artwork, to poetry’s ability to organize social values in society.

Podobně tomu, jako poetická funkce organizuje a řídí básnické dílo, aniž nutně přečnává a plakátově bije do očí, zrovna tak i básnické dílo v celkovém souhrnu sociálních hodnot nevyčnívá, nepřevažuje ty ostatní hodnoty, ale přes to je podstatným a cílevědomým organizátorem ideologie (1972: 414).

Just as the poetic function organizes and governs a poetic work without necessarily protruding or catching one’s eye as a poster does, so a poetic work in the sum total of social values does not stand out or predominate the remaining values, but is nevertheless a constitutive and unbending organizer of ideology... (1972: 414).<sup>69</sup>

Jakobson’s claim might strike the reader today as somewhat exaggerated, and although there is no reason to doubt that he was invested in this argument, his studies continued to focus primarily on the analysis of concrete texts and he did not pursue this idea further. Mukařovský, on the other hand, placed the question of art’s influence on the broader realm of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic norms at the center of his AFNV.

Like Jakobson, Mukařovský viewed art as a “dominant” in relation to society. Because he is operating with a single, unified, model of community, “high” art is assumed to have the capacity to impact social experience as a whole. Mukařovský claims, for example, that the visual arts and music influence the development of the human senses of sight and sound, that poetry gives man a new feeling for speech, and that theater and film provide new gestures (1966: 33).

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<sup>66</sup> The concept of a “dominant,” which was adopted by B. Eikhenbaum, Iu. Tynianov and Jakobson in the 1920s, was originally developed by Broder Christiansen in his 1909 *Philosophie der Kunst* in which he writes: „Die Dominante ist wie der Knochenbau im organischen Körper, sie enthält das Thema des Ganzen, trägt das Ganze und alles hat darauf Bezug. Nun ist aber a priori nicht gegeben, welches Moment führen soll. Jedes Formale, aber auch das Gegenständliche kann Dominante sein“ (cited in Gerigk 94). For an overview of Christiansen’s ideas and how they were adapted by the Formalists see Horst-Jürgen Gerigk’s “Wer ist Broder Christiansen?” *Figurationen der literarischen Moderne*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2007, 85-105.

<sup>67</sup> In 1932 Mukařovský wrote that “the dominant is that element of the work which sets the remaining elements into motion and guides their relations [...] The dominant gives the poetic work its unity” (128-29).

<sup>68</sup> As far as I am aware, scholarship on Czech structuralism does not treat the parallels between the concept of the dominant as applied to artistic structure and the Prague School’s language politics.

<sup>69</sup> From “Co je poesie?” [What is Poetry?] (1934). This quotation comes from the original ending of the essay which was cut from the translated version included in Jakobson’s *Selected Writings III: Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*. The argument that (high) art has a widespread, yet undetected, impact on everyday life was popular at this time. Mukařovský, for example, twice cites J. Cocteau’s book *Le secret professionnel* (Paris 1922), which he summarizes as follows: “Stéphane Mallarmé today influences the style of the daily papers without the journalists themselves realizing it” 1932: 139; 1966: 38).

Mukařovský's sociological aesthetics is thus based on the premise that, despite its complexity, the strata and milieus of society are linked by an all-encompassing structural fabric. If this holistic view of community first emerged in his pre-structuralist writings, the concept gained a motor for its internal organization from the concept of the dominant. To better understand exactly what a social dominant meant, it is illustrative to return to the Circle's "Literary Czech" lecture series, held in January and February of 1932. The arguments presented here provided a concrete model for the translation of the dominant into social terms.

The lectures read by Mathesius, Havránek, Jakobson, Mukařovský and Weingart (subsequently published in book form), presented the PLC's view of the source and tools for shaping the ideal development of literary language. Their arguments identified specific social groups responsible for the creation and cultivation of literary language, placing them in the position of a dominant vis-à-vis the remainder of society. The relationship envisioned was analogous to that between literary language and the remaining spheres of language use, i.e., colloquial, spoken Czech. This parallel between social and linguistic structure was succinctly encapsulated by Bohumil Trnka in a summary article he wrote at the conclusion of the lecture series:

Spisovný jazyk ve směru vertikálním šíří do širokých vrstev lidových a ve směru horizontálním zatlačuje jako jednotný dorozumívací jazyk různá nářečí. Spisovatelé jsou praktické spisovného jazyka, vytvářejí jeho normu, ale teoretikové přispívají opět k ustálení jazyka tím, že poznávají správnou normu a jí kodifikují.

Literary language spreads vertically into the broad popular social strata, and horizontally, forcing out different dialects as the only mutually comprehensible language. Writers are the practitioners of literary language, they create its norms, but theoreticians contribute to the stabilization of language in that they recognize the correct norm and codify it.<sup>70</sup>

This summary implies that literary language is to language as writers and theoreticians (linguists) are to society. The importance of language experts was a leitmotif of the lecture series. The celebration of writers as the creators of literary language was underscored by the fact that the Circle organized the lecture series as a public defense of contemporary authors in a polemic that had begun between the conservative language "purist," Jiří Haller, and the writer Ivan Olbracht.<sup>71</sup>

In linking literary Czech to the production of writers and poets, the Circle underscored the gap between literary and colloquial, spoken Czech.<sup>72</sup> Bohuslav Havránek's presentation argued that this difference was a "functional" one, asserting that the "functions of literary language are more richly developed and more specifically differentiated; in popular language (of

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<sup>70</sup> Trnka's article "Jazyková kultura" appeared in *Národní listy*, February 1932. Cited from clipping in "Výstřižková kniha" AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 4, i. č. 26.

<sup>71</sup> The four public lectures were attended by many writers, and the final debate was concluded by Vítězslav Nezval, who addressed the Circle in the name of Devětsil, thanking them and expressing the avant-garde's solidarity with their position, see Trnka's "Jazyková kultura," *op. cit.* The PLK, advancing the theory that writers are the source of "literary Czech," attacked the purist view, which sought to provide guidelines for "correct" Czech by replacing Germanicisms with older Czech equivalents. On the "Purism debate" see (Toman 1995: 162-65).

<sup>72</sup> The Circle vocally rejected the "romantic" conception that literary Czech should be based on the spoken language of the people. This point was made most memorably by Jakobson's ridicule of the "purist" suggestion that one "write for the academic Almanac the way you speak with an old woman at the market" (1932: 113).

a specific collective of course) nearly all linguistic means are conjoined” (41).<sup>73</sup> He argued that this difference required linguists to assume a different relationship to the literary language; they must help “create” and “stabilize” the more nuanced norms of literary Czech, while they only observe colloquial Czech (35). These arguments separate the upper and lower strata of language usage, formulating a top-down view of the social forces of linguistic evolution. The “progress” of the Czech language is driven by its artistic implementation, and this process is smoothed by the attention of linguists. This argument places this group of experts in the position of the dominant; as “that element... which sets in motion and directs the relationships between all the other elements” (Mukařovský 1932: 128-29).<sup>74</sup>

Karel Čapek’s response to the publication of the “Literary Czech” lectures honed in on a logical contradiction in this top-down account of literary language. In a 1932 review he asks, “dear linguists, where is the norm for an active writer who values his responsibility in regard to the national language? [...] What is, what should be the linguistic norm for the writer. Here we can’t just simply say that it is contemporary literary language.” Čapek argues that writers require linguistic certainties [jazykové jistoty], and that they look for them in various places, “One will look for them in the history of language; the other in popular speech; the third in the literary tradition...”.<sup>75</sup> This response, in essence, objects to the PLC’s positioning of writers as an autonomous, dominant element in a sociology of language by highlighting the paradox embedded in the concept of a dominant. Translated into social terms, the contradictory role of the dominant becomes more obvious. The elevation of one element of society onto a separate plane places unrealizable demands on it. Writers, as a dominant, are expected to create literary language, but they are provided with no *source* for linguistic norms.

Jacques Derrida, in his seminal critique of structuralism delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, describes this paradox from a post-structuralist position as the “concept of centered structure,” which results from the tendency to give structure a “center” or “a point of presence, a fixed origin” (278).<sup>76</sup> The understanding of the center is, as he puts it, “contradictorily coherent” in that “the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center” (279). Čapek did not find the PLC’s account of literary language useful because it placed him, as a writer, in this paradoxical position of being the “center”—or source of language—while at the same time he protests that he “is not the center.” Separated from the remainder of the (social)

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<sup>73</sup> “funkce spisovného jazyka jsou bohatěji rozvinuty a přesněji rozlišeny; v lidovém jazyce (ovšem určitého celku) jsou skoro všechny jazykové prostředky společné” (41). This distinction between a “higher” form of production and a “lower” based on former’s more nuanced functional differentiation anticipates Mukařovský’s division of art from folklore on these terms. This idea was also expressed in Veltruský’s rejection of Bogatyrev’s treatment of folklore as art, cited above.

<sup>74</sup> “ta ze složek díla, která uvádí v pohyb a usměřuje vztahy všech složek ostatních” (Mukařovský 1932: 128-29).

<sup>75</sup> “Páni linguisté, kde je norma pro tvořícího spisovatele, který si uvědomuje svou odpovědnost vůči národnímu jazyku? [...] Co je, co má být jazykovou normou pro spisovatele. Tady nelze jen tak prostě říci, že soudobý spisovný jazyk [...] Jeden je bude hledat v historii jazyka; druhý v lidové řeči; třetí v literární tradici...” Čapek’s review “Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura” appeared in *Lidové noviny*, December 4, 1932. Cited from “Výstřižková kniha” AAVČR, PLK, Kart. 4, i. č. 26.

<sup>76</sup> Derrida further states: “the function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure--but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure” (278).

structure, writers were theorized as an independent font of creation—as a dominant social/structural element.

Mukařovský's contribution to the "Literary Czech" debate employed this model of "centered structure" in his description of the relationship between poetic and communicative language. The two forms, or "functions" of language exist as part of a single, unified, linguistic structure, the "total system of linguistic unity" ["celkový systém jazykové jednoty"], yet the former inhabits the position of a dominant in this system (123). Poetic language is "not a type of literary language," but "literary language is for poetry a backdrop, against which the aesthetically intentional violation of literary norms is reflected" (1932: 124).<sup>77</sup> The means by which a dominant element is both of the system while at the same "autonomous" within in it, was described by the concept of "*aktualizace*" (translated as "topicalization" or "foregrounding"), that is, the intentional violation of artistic or linguistic norms.<sup>78</sup> As a dominant element, poetic language impacts the entire system of language or the entire social collective; it can shape and change not only individual elements but the entire system (1932: 146).

This description of poetic language is recognizable in Mukařovský's account of the emergence of new aesthetic norms and their impact on everyday life in AFNV. He describes the process by which norms escape from art and seep down into everyday experience as follows:

a powerful work of art cannot be repeated and its structure is, as we noted above, indivisible...As time passes, the feeling of dissonance—which was forcibly reconciled by the structure—disappears. [...] Structure becomes divisible into individual details of the norm, and they can be applied, without harming them, outside the area of the structure in which they originated, and even completely outside of the realm of art. [...] Everything which we have said here regarding the creation of norms is valid, of course, in its entirety, only for one kind of art which, for lack of a better term, we will call "high" [vysoký] (1970: 37-38).

Here the "total system of linguistic unity" has been replaced with a total social system. High art (and the milieu that creates it) exists in the same relationship to the social whole as poetry does to the national language. Thus, in his semiotic, sociological aesthetics, Mukařovský defines art as the product of a specific milieu that *creates* artistic norms by virtue of its position as a dominant social element. Art is described in social terms as the source of new norms and values; it is capable of producing them because it occupies a position of a dominant in relation to the social system.

## Conclusion

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<sup>77</sup> "jazyk spisovný je pro básnictví pozadím, na kterém se odráží esteticky záměrné porušování spisovné normy" (1932: 124).

<sup>78</sup> Mukařovský's foregrounding [aktualizace] can be seen as a variation on the formalist concept of defamiliarization [ostranenie]. For Mukařovský it is "the opposite of automatization, that is the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed, the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become. Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event, foregrounding means the violation of the scheme" (quoted in Garvin, 19).

Through this comparison of Bogatyrev and Mukařovský's semiotics I hope to have demonstrated the connection between their concepts of collectivity and definitions of art. A theory which sees "high" art as a dominant, defamiliarizing agent in relation to society finds support in a view of collectivity that is systemically integrated through the dominant role of the leading class. A dispersed view of collectivity, on the other hand, leads to an apprehension of "art" as reflecting various local identities rather than primarily that of the leading class. Mukařovský's sociological aesthetics in AFNV explicitly defines art in elitist terms. He begins his book with the statement that, "the number of people who come into direct contact with art is... quite restricted, both by the comparative rarity of aesthetic talent... and by the obstacles of social stratification" (1970: 1). This is reflected both in the conditions for its production as well as in his view of the essence of the artwork itself. Art, for Mukařovský, is the product of a milieu which enables an independence from and disregard for social norms and constraints. The art object which results from the deformation of these norms is defined as existing at a remove from social life; it is an "autonomous sign which directs attention to its internal organization," and which "relates to reality only figuratively, only as a whole" (1978 [1943]: 124, 119).

Mukařovský's theory of artistic structure reflects a view of society that informed the Prague School's language politics more broadly. As we have seen, the Circle went to great lengths to forge bonds with the intellectual and artistic elite of interwar Czechoslovakia. Their approach to "Literary Czech" was based on their self-identification as a dominant social element that would set norms and guide the evolution of the national language in a profitable direction. Jakobson and Mukařovský led the Circle in defining poetic language in terms of its autonomy and guiding role in relation to the larger structure of practical language or even, to use Jakobson's term, "ideology." The PLC's view of art thus reflects the self-perception of intellectual elites who associated themselves with modernist movements in art. Art is defined as a product of a sphere of society that sees itself as autonomous, and it is valued as a result of its ability to break with the aesthetic norms of lower cultural strata.

Bogatyrev's structuralist ethnography, although it had much in common with Mukařovský's semiotics, did not subscribe to a definition of art as an "autonomous sign" or to the aesthetic of disinterested contemplation that this definition evokes.<sup>79</sup> His view of culture was multiple rather than singular, dispersed as opposed to organized, and as a result he had no need for a dominant element that would unify various cultural systems within a single structural whole. Bogatyrev's approach was essentially relativistic, which is reflected in the fact that he stressed the role of education (as opposed to autonomy) when describing aesthetic experience. In an essay on theatrical signs he wrote, for example:

in practical life we have to learn the signs of military uniforms in order to recognize them, to distinguish quickly a captain from a lieutenant-colonel. The same holds true for art. In order to correctly perceive the signs of impressionist painting, we must recognize them. [...] *We must learn new artistic signs and teach them to others* (1982 [1937]: 62, italics added).

This approach to an artistic sign-system as one among other dialects, taught and learned within the confines of a collective, is quite different from Mukařovský's description of art as a special type of autonomous sign, a claim which was meant to be universally valid.

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<sup>79</sup> One of the continual themes of his work was the mutual relationships between the aesthetic function and other functions relating to a work's religious, magical or practical import.

The logical conclusion to which Bogatyrev's approach leads is most clearly articulated in the final chapter of ethnographer's work on folk costume. He speculates about "the function of the structure of functions"—the "*Gestaltqualität*," or quality emerges as more than the sum of a group of structurally-organized facts (1971: 95).<sup>80</sup> In the case of costume, Bogatyrev explains, "the folk sometimes designate this function of the structure of functions with the term 'our costume' [náš kroj]—which indicates not only the regionalistic function, but some kind of special function which cannot be derived from all the other functions which make up the structural whole" (96).<sup>81</sup> He concludes that this Gestalt quality is essentially "the emotional coloring originating in the closeness of the costume to its respective community." The function of 'our costume' thus, for Bogatyrev "has a great deal in common with concepts of 'our language', 'our literature', 'our art', 'our culture' 'our class' and 'our people'" (97-98).<sup>82</sup> In other words, his structural functional semiotic theory is designed, in the final analysis, to lead the researcher to a complex understanding of sense of self-identity that cultural or aesthetic codes express.

Bogatyrev's semiotics, with its non-structured approach to society, presents a more relative definition of art than Mukařovský's. Whereas the ethnographer comes to the conclusion that the agreed-upon meaning of artistic structure is a reflection of a group's identity, the aesthetician's definition of art reproduces the identity of the modernist elite to which Mukařovský and the Prague School belonged. This realization has implications for theorists who seek to understand or define "art" in relation to its historical or national contexts. Bogatyrev and Mukařovský's approach to art and community differs from the more familiar sociological study of art which gives primacy to economic and material conditions as the source of different cultures of aesthetic appreciation. Neither Mukařovský's totalizing, elitist semiotics of art, nor Bogatyrev's atomized view of society likely correspond with the way we view society today. What Praguian semiotics offers, however, particularly when we take the aesthetician and the ethnographer's theories together, is a more diverse and flexible body of texts that provide us with an approach to understanding social identities beginning with cultural products, as opposed to political or economic theory.

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<sup>80</sup> On the use of the concept of *Gestaltqualität* in Prague structuralism, see P. Steiner's "The Conceptual Basis of Prague Structuralism" in *Sound, Sign and Meaning*. Ed. L. Matejka. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1976, 353.

<sup>81</sup> Bogatyrev stresses that this function of 'our costume' may be present in instances where the costume possess neither regional, nor nationalistic functions, nor serves to distinguish social position (1971: 96-97).

<sup>82</sup> The function of the structure of functions is the feeling of "our costume." Mukařovský referred to this idea in a 1940 essay where he attempts to explain the aesthetic response evoked by "mother tongue." See "Estetika jazyka" in *Slovo a slovesnost* 6 (1940): 14.

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