

Matija Murko and Structural Aesthetics

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At first glance, the connection between the positivist-oriented Murko and structural aesthetics may seem inappropriate and paradoxical. However, his unpublished correspondence with his student, the renowned Czech Slavist and comparatist Frank Wollman (1888–1969), shows the convergence of thematic areas and disciplinary intersections that foreshadowed structural aesthetics. As the editor of Slavia, Murko made it possible for the key figures of Czech structuralism to publish in this journal even before the founding of Slovo a slovesnost (e.g., R. Jakobson, P. Bogatyrev, etc.). At the same time, as the main organizer of the First International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague in 1929, he agreed to set up a thematic section in which the theses of the Prague Linguistic Circle were announced. In the first issue of Slavia in 1922–1923, a survey study by Jakobson and Bogatyrev entitled “Slavjanskaja filologija v Rossii za gody 1914–1921” was published. Wollman, who after Murko was to become a candidate for the Chair of South Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Arts in Prague, oriented himself towards the study of versology and stylistics, as reflected in his article “Njegošův deseterec” on the evolution of verse forms in the Serbo-Croatian verse (Slavia 1930–31). Murko also encouraged his student to write Slovesnost Slovanů (1928), a pioneering work that focused on the structural history of Slavic literatures as a history of timeless forms and structures.

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At first glance, the connection between the positivist-oriented Matija Murko and structural aesthetics may seem inappropriate and paradoxical. Although Murko is not currently one of the frequent sources of inspiration, and during his more than seventy years of development he advanced revivalist Slavic philology, his contacts with the Prague Linguistic Circle founded in 1926 and the areas of contact with his

structural-functional point of view should not be overlooked.¹ A hitherto unpublished correspondence with his student, the leading Czech Slavist and comparatist Frank Wollman (1888–1969), who was a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, shows thematic breadth and disciplinary intersections that anticipated structural aesthetics. Wollman praised Murko as being permeated by “versatile curiosity and fluidity, a kind of vibrant practicality” (Wollman, “Murkova vědecká osobnost” 1). This is why he bridged the gaps between generations, antagonistic personalities and their intellectual orientations. The label of positivist obsession with facts can be relativized by pointing to the creative ability of the insightful philologist, who chose different working methods according to the nature of the subject and thus always achieved the desired goal, despite the apparent thematic distraction.

Murko’s erudition at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represents an ideal combination of Western and Eastern sources of thought: the impulses of the Russian positivist school (A. N. Pypin, W. Spasowicz, etc.), historical poetics (A. N. Veselovskij) and philological interpretation of the text (N. Tichonravov) with Taine’s sociologism developed by H. M. Posnett and some other French ideographically-oriented comparative literature (L.-P. Betz, F. Brunetière, J. Texte, etc.). To this orientation were added the impulses of German literary history, especially the biographical method of A. Scherer and his students (R. Heinzl, E. Schmidt, etc.). The Czech Slavist Jiří Horák generally appreciates the analytical approach resulting from the philological basis and tradition built by F. Miklošič and later developed literary-historically by V. Jagić and his contemporaries (A. Brückner). Along with this he lists Murko’s strengths exhaustively: methodological grounding in the material, the absence of unproven hypotheses, and the precise development of the topic (Horák vii). Although in his literary-historical studies the researcher often numerically accumulates “influences” and “dependencies” and makes parallel comparisons of the authors’ life histories, at the beginning of the twentieth century he switches from the factual descriptiveness of the externally contacted sphere of relations, and overall from genetic “influenceology” to an intuitive typology of verb forms and structures presented within the framework of a synthesizing conception of the reciprocity of Slavic literatures (Zelenka, “Matija Murko” 30).

¹ Frank Wollman wrote 233 items of correspondence to Matija Murko between 1922 and 1951 which are stored in the Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature (Matija Murko Fonds and *Slavia* Fonds). These letters are being prepared for critical edition publication by A. Zelenková (see Zelenková, “Komparativistika”).

This thesis applies in particular to *Geschichte der älteren südslavischen Literaturen* (*History of the Older South Slavic Literatures*, 1908), in which Murko, even before P. Van Tieghem, attempts a theoretical definition and literary-historical justification of a larger interliterary whole, in this case a specific *littérature générale* of the South Slavic literatures. At the forefront of the researcher's attention is not only the minutiae of textual interpretation and philological acrobatics, but especially the conditioning of the genesis and existence of verbal creations by cultural and political history and the reconstruction of the so-called literary culture in the broadest sense, which was later elaborated in detail as a theoretical category by modern sociology (see Krejčí). Murko's concern here is not with partial surveys of literary sections in diachronic outline, but with grasping a transnational literary whole determined geographically, linguistically, and ethnically, but above all by similar ideas and currents of thought formed over centuries in contact with both Byzantium and Western European writing. Murko aptly characterizes his method with the statement "from the history of the letter to the history of the spirit" (Wollman, "Pražská škola" 53). He therefore sees the essence of comparative and literary history as an intensive penetration into the inner meaning of verbal creation and an actualization of new ideas and values of a living philology developing in close cooperation with related sciences, such as cultural and political history, ethnology, and ethnography.

As is well-known, Murko was awarded an honorary doctorate from Charles University in 1920 on the initiative of the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, T. G. Masaryk, as a replacement for the ill Jagić at the Chair of South Slavic Languages and Literatures. He was also involved in the establishment of the Slavic journal *Slavia* and served as the second director of the Slavic Institute. As the editor of *Slavia*, Murko facilitated the publication of works by young Russian formalists working in Czechoslovakia, including R. Jakobson and P. Bogatyrev, prior to the establishment of the journal *Slovo a slovesnost* in 1935. At the same time, Murko, as the main organizer of the First International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague in 1929, agreed to create a thematic section in which the theses of the Prague Linguistic Circle were announced (Zelenka, "Rôle" 47–48). In the first issue of *Slavia* in 1922–1923, a survey study by Bogatyrev and Jakobson, "Slavjanskaja filologija v Rossii za gody 1914–1921" ("Slavic Philology in Russia in the Years 1914–1921"), appeared. Jakobson's last essay in *Slavia*, at the time already under censorship of the Nazi regime, was published after his forced departure in April 1939 for emigration under

the pseudonym Olaf Jansen. It is a little-known fact that Murko, at Jakobson's invitation, attended some meetings of the Prague Linguistic Circle as a guest. The archival records show that in 1928–1936 Murko listened to about ten lectures by foreign and domestic linguists and literary scholars (Jakobson, Vinokur, Mathesius, Mukařovský, etc.), where he actively participated in the discussion (see Čermák et al.). On the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Prague Linguistic Circle on November 3, 1936, he participated in a festive meeting where he delivered a keynote speech evaluating the founding contribution of the chairman of the Prague Linguistic Circle, the Czech linguist and Anglicist V. Mathesius (215).

The theses of the Circle, presented at the First International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague in ten sections, summarized the functional conception of language, that is, the investigation of language as a system and its components in terms of realized functions (Vachek 37). Despite the individual authorship of each section, the theses as a whole were the collective work of the Circle. Jakobson conceived the introductory passages: sections 1 and 2a dealing with language as a system, the synchronic method, the phonetic side of language, etc. Also, section 9 dealing with language culture reflected some of Jakobson's views. The one-sided focus on the linguistic aspect of philology logically meant a certain suppression of the literary-critical issues that appeared in section 3c "O jazyce básnickém" ("On Poetic Language") written by J. Mukařovský following Jakobson's reflections on poetry from the mid-1920s. Here Mukařovský demanded a synchronic description of poetic language and an analysis of its relations to the language of communication. Jakobson's thesis that poetic language is "aimed at expressing itself" (Jakobson, "Nové možnosti" 4) was developed into the idea of the antithesis of automation and actualization of linguistic means. Murko regarded the theses of his younger colleagues in the Prague Linguistic Circle as an explicitly specialized linguistic matter, yet he was interested in the overlap with the theory of poetic language. Above all, however, he was bothered by the absence of a Slavic and comparative aspect, since in his view these were theses submitted to the Slavic Congress. In fact, the theses were clearly directed towards a theory of general linguistics for which the Prague School drew its linguistic material exclusively from Czech, Slovak and, thanks to Jakobson, Russian. If the collective of authors took a skeptical stance towards Slavic philology, it reflected a common view of the autonomy of linguistics and literary criticism, which separated itself from the complex of traditional cultural-historical Slavic studies by a newly defined subject and the use of specific

methods. The emphasis on the linguistic basis also led to a different understanding of the comparative method. If the aesthetically oriented Mukařovský, in the conclusion of his passage on poetic language, generally states the need for comparative research in the field of predominantly divergent structural facts, the linguistically oriented Jakobson in section 1c entitled “Nové možnosti užití srovnávací metody” (“New Possibilities for the Use of the Comparative Method”) conceives of comparative research as a necessary means to analyze the lawful connection between divergent and convergent linguistic facts, namely connecting the comparative method not only with the genetic systematization of correspondences and analogies, but also with synchronic differences against the background of common (Slavic and non-Slavic) and divergent developments. From here, according to Jakobson, the path led to typology, namely to “the summing up of a series of interrelated changes into a single whole” (Jakobson, “Nové možnosti” 5).

In contrast to the narrower conception of Slavic philology defined by the Prague Linguistic Circle, Murko’s “Řeč při zahájení I. sjezdu slovanských filologů 6. X. 1929 v Praze” (“Speech at the Opening of the First Congress of Slavic Philologists on 6 October 1929 in Prague”) introduced a broader definition which prevailed in the Czech context. Murko understood Slavic philology as the history of Slavic literatures, including folklore, Slavic linguistics, and also its methodological and didactic aspect, including the teaching of languages and literatures in secondary schools (Murko, “Řeč” 841). Related disciplines, such as material culture, ethnography, cultural history, mythology, etc. were to be integrated into the congress program, with the strict exclusion of political issues, only insofar as they were directly related to Slavic literatures or linguistics. Nevertheless, in his opening speech, which in this sense described the congress as that of philologists-Slavists and not philologists-Slavs, Murko outlined the vision of a synthetic construction, that is, the idea of educational and cultural cooperation between the West and the Slavic East (842). This orientation corresponded to the official line of Czechoslovak foreign policy in the field of the Slavic question influenced by the philosophical conception of T. G. Masaryk under whose ideological patronage the first Slavic Congress in Prague was held. Masaryk considered the Slavs to be an autonomous “organism” of a group of peoples defined by their own language and history, national literature, and a specific spirit of Slavic consciousness which is manifested only in relation to the whole Slavic organism and which is closer in linguistic and intellectual terms than that of the Germanic-Romanic complex (Masaryk 518). Despite this opinion, it was evident

that Murko's abstract understanding of Slavic philology appealing to Masaryk's "humanistic ideals" was directed more towards the practical and utilitarian Slavic studies and towards organizational and cultural-political matters without asking more fundamental questions about the methodology of the field, as was the case with the younger group of Slavists from the Prague Linguistic Circle, including Jakobson, who at the turn of the twentieth century had been involved in the Slavic studies of the Czechoslovak Republic. In the late 1920s and 1930s, Jakobson critically questioned the existence of Slavic studies as a gnoseologically cognizable system with a uniformly defined subject and methods of investigation (Zelenka, "Roman Jakobson" 165).

Murko, who counted on Wollman as his successor at the Chair of South Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Arts in Prague, oriented his student towards the study of versology and stylistics, which was reflected in Wollman's article on the evolution of verse forms in the Serbo-Croatian verse (see Wollman, "Njegošův deseterec"). Murko's studies of the heroic oral epic were based on the knowledge of rhythm and accents, i.e., purely on the study of rhythmic-syntactic peculiarities. Murko, like Jakobson in *Základy českého verše* (*Fundamentals of Czech Verse*, 1926), approached the structuralist starting point that the investigation of Slavic metrics and verse systems cannot be mechanically derived from a comparative lexicon of Slavic languages, but must be based on a mutual confrontation of the differentiations of these systems with the differentiations of the respective languages, on the basis of existing linguistic correspondences and analogies. Thus, verse as a form of certain violence on natural language makes it possible to establish the ratio of variation and invariance of linguistic phenomena and to define the relationship between form and material.

In his analyses of South Slavic oral verse epics, Murko intuitively realized that language in its poetic function applies three rhythmic (rhythm-forming) factors: (a) emphasis or dynamic accent, (b) pitch or musical accent, and (c) quantity as temporal accent. In a strictly structuralist understanding, however, only one of these elements becomes the constitutive moment of the prosodic system, into which external, extra-phonological stimuli, such as the aesthetic tradition, the relation of the poetic movement to that tradition, and foreign cultural influences enter as a whole. According to Murko, verse rhythm in the performance of folk guslars is not a monotonous symmetry; thanks to its variable rhythmic tendency, it is not a modified practical language, but a specifically functional realization of poetic language. From here, Murko's path led to a systematic effort to capture the still living

epic tradition in a functioning environment as a kind of “ethnographic structure”: “From the verbal epic theme, Murko thus proceeds to the ethnographic structure of the epic, and his records are therefore invaluable and are, in time, among the first works of this kind” (Wollman, “Murkova vědecká osobnost” 15).

In this context, we can recall Jakobson’s opinion in the *Základy českého verše*, where among other things a polemic with the quantitative conception of the Czech positivist versologist Josef Král appeared. The latter derived the regularity of accentuation from practical language, not from specific poetic texts. Král’s mechanical parallel between practical and poetic language led to the enforcement of prosodic rules based on normative aesthetic canons, according to which the most artistically significant poets of the nineteenth century were paradoxically classified by Král as “negligent versologists” while poets versifying with minimal deviations were historically insignificant authors. Wollman, at Murko’s instruction, chose Njegoš’s ten-syllable line in his composition *Gorski vijenac* (*The Mountain Wreath*, 1847), its rhythmic-syntactic structure and overall rhythmic tendency producing an intense aesthetic effect. In a polemic with several previous theorists, such as M. Rešetar, P. Popović, T. Maretić, K. Šrepel, Ć. Ćorović, etc., these authors acknowledged the high artistic value and poetological originality of the poetic text, but they understood this epic as a reverberant transformation of the heroic epic supposedly written in either syllabic or tonically decasyllabic verse.

Overall, Wollman refused to take into account the deviant accentuation found in the spoken dialect of the Cetinje area (see also Balžalorsky Antić). In this matter, Wollman informed Murko in a letter dated 6 October 1930, written from Cetinje, that he had been inspired in writing his study by the Russian formalists B. V. Tomaševskij (*Russkoe stichosloženie*, 1923; *O stiche*, 1929) and B. Eichenbaum (*Melodika ruskogo liričeskogo sticha*, 1922):

[W]hen I approached my own topic a few days ago, I see that nothing has actually been done in Serbo-Croatian literature—except those works that caprice themselves on some exclusive versification principle (like Maretić, Matić). However, the situation is far worse than it was in Czech literature before Jakobson’s writings; in our country, at least, it was possible to build on facts already established, and our material does not show the accentual and quantitative difficulties of the Serbo-Croatian material. For the time being, I have analyzed about 200 verses of *The Mountain Wreath* and found that we can speak of neither syllabic nor accented verse, as it is stated in the school “theories of literature.” Repentantly, I return to philological methods and find out empirically, as Njegoš himself probably read his ten-syllable line, by the

differential method of yours: I compare the present-day accentuation with the living dialectical declamation. (Wollman, Letter II)

According to Wollman, it is an artificial verse that oscillates between the dactyl-trochee and iambic-anapest traces, and which is only inspired by the dialect verse, because the original syllabism, typical of the South Slavic national epic, is replaced by a distinct rhythmic structure that breaks down into three structural parts with their own intonation. The first part is always four-syllabic, with the interword division after the first rhythmic member is superior to the division after the second member. The essence of Njegoš's rhythm is that "the first interword prefix corresponds to the syntactic pause that ends the verse; thus, its grammatical nature is transformed into a rhythmic one" (Wollman, "Njegošuv" 761). Njegoš creates a particular set of functional words and pauses, a kind of unique sound wave, which in the reflective parts has its basis in a specific dramatic speech. *Gorski vijenac* can therefore be considered a poetic drama organically placed in the development of South Slavic balladic drama. Here, in line with Murko, Wollman proceeds from a rejection of previous prosodic doctrines, with which he settles his "accounts" in the study, especially in the methodological introduction. In contrast to the graphicological, objective-kinetic and acoustic-metrical prosodic doctrines, the researcher highlighted a phonological, that is, structuralist versology based on the functional differentiation of disjunctive and non-distinctive prosodic elements.

As we have already pointed out, Wollman's study was intended to support his candidacy for the Chair of South Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Arts in Prague. Murko asked Jakobson, as a theorist of modern versology, for his expert opinion in this context. Jakobson replied to Murko in a letter:

I consider this work to be symptomatic of contemporary literary scholarship directed towards the problems of artistic form. ... It is the first time that the formal peculiarity of literary works in comparison with folklore works has been significantly taken into account. ... As far as I know, it is the first time that the question of the evolution of verse forms in the work of a poet has been raised in the scholarship on Serbian verse. (Jakobson, Letter)

Jakobson appreciated the methodological contribution of Wollman's study and spoke positively about the use of a comparative perspective, using concrete material from various national literatures. He also praised the dialectical conception of elements and structure in Njegoš's poetry, but believed that Wollman could have paid more attention to

a general linguistic analysis. Murko also prompted Wollman to write *Slovesnost Slovanů* (*Literature of the Slavs*, 1928), essentially the only attempt to conceive a structural history of Slavic literatures as a history of atemporal forms and structures. This genre principle was later reflected in the so-called eidographic method, which Wollman used to enrich contemporary comparative thinking about literature. This method was also reflected in the monographic series devoted to South Slavic drama (Zelenková, “Frank Wollman” 242–243). These titles (*Srbochorvatské drama*, 1924; *Slovinské drama*, 1925; *Bulharské drama*, 1928; *Dramatika slovanského jihu*, 1930) were written under the direct influence of Murko, who, as we have already noted, counted on Wollman as his successor to the Chair of South Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Arts in Prague after he received a full professorship in 1928. Wollman was therefore to devote himself systematically to South Slavic literature along with Bulgarian literature; he was generally expected to become a good mediator of cultural contacts with the Slavic South. Murko considered South Slavic drama to be the least explored in comparison with other prose and poetic literary types, and therefore, through his influence, secured his pupil a scholarship from the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment for study trips and archival research in the Balkans; indeed, he assumed that Wollman would publish in this area. The notion of structure appeared for the first time in the introduction to the book *Dramatika slovanského jihu* (*Drama of the Slavic South*, 1930), and therefore Wollman himself placed the loose genesis of literary structuralism at the beginning of the early 1930s, that is, before the publication of Mukařovský’s study on M. Z. Polák (1934–1935), which is considered the prologue to structuralism in the Czech intellectual context (Zelenková, “Frank Wollman” 243–244). Wollman eschewed a conventional history of theatre or biographical data of dramatists in his oeuvre, instead interpreting dramatic texts as “the variable structures of literary eras and the function of the components in a certain area in individual types” (Wollman, *Dramatika* vi). This led to the establishment of an “internal developmental regularity” (vi). According to the author, the given eidographic approach “is all the more appropriate in drama the more autonomous this genre is in comparison to other verbal genres” (vi).

It is possible to conclude that Murko’s inspirations contributed to the gradual formation of Wollman’s research method as one of many relevant factors. In contrast to the aesthetically oriented structuralism of Mukařovský, Wollman represented an eidological, form-oriented

structuralism, which, with reference to Husserl's phenomenology, conceived of *eidōs* as a valuable and general essence abstracted from the phenomenon under investigation. *Eidōs* manifested itself here as an open (absent) structure, as a "network of relations" in the form of a substantial structure that makes visible the thing itself. *Eidōs* in this conception represented "a transcendental reduction to pure phenomena, but only a reduction to appearance, an *eidōs* where essence is sought by variation in what remains unchanging" (Rieger 222). This opened the way to a methodological bridging of the gap "between the notion of essence and the time-varying aspects of things" (222). A work is a verbal form created at the "intersection of several layers of structure" (Wollman, *K methodologii* 109), a material existence, an intentional totality with a series of functions, layers, and emergent values. Wollman called his method "comparative structuralism" derived from the comparative study of evolving forms. The form aspect must be combined with an evolutionary procedure: the duration and transformation of forms, the convergence and divergence of verb forms, and change over historical time.

Murko invited Wollman to participate in the First International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague in 1929. Wollman's paper "Nové směry literární vědy a eidografická metoda" ("New Directions in Literary Studies and the Eidographic Method"), although not included among the theses of the Circle, refined his definition of eidography as a comparative morphology derived from the study of verb forms and structures. The relation of eidography to Russian formalism and philology was characterized by Wollman in a letter to Murko of 3 December 1929:

I consider myself fortunate that I came out of traditional studies and that I have thus, with the basic conception of literary history as an intellectual science, ... remained with my eidographic approach in philology, and that (even before the elaboration and spread of Russian methods in our country in recent times) I have also combined in this eidography an aesthetic-linguistic consideration. ... I broke with purely literary methods, and therefore I pleaded ... so much for eidography, in which I summarized philology and aesthetic-linguistic questions as a necessary prerequisite of any work of literary history. (Wollman, Letter I)

In literary-historical application, this meant that Slavic vernacular is an autochthonous organic system manifesting itself not only in its concrete manifestations (in national literatures), but also in its ideal essence (*eidōs*), that is, in its forms and structures respecting the immanence of "inner form." Modern comparative literary history should therefore examine not the closed "organisms of small literatures, but the individual forms in their structural relations" (Wollman, *K methodologii* 10), that

is, the self-movement of literary structures within a diachronic framework. The notion of structure thus brought a historical and sociological dimension to the static essence, balancing in dialectical tension “the static nature of fixed forms and concepts with the dynamics of the temporal variability of phenomena” (Rieger 222). The “dynamic” and “dialectical” conception of open structure meant the investigation of analogies in literary forms without regard to mediation by contact, influence, and action, thus laying the foundations for a “comparative structuralism” based on the comparison and syntax of literary works. In this way, Wollman was in retrospect closer to Murko than to Mukařovský, who at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s maintained a more reserved attitude towards comparative literature: the unresolved relationship between literary theory and comparative literature as an “influenceological” literary-historical discipline reflected the dichotomy of synchrony and diachrony resulting from the absolutization of the immanent development of national literature as a relatively closed system, in which overlaps from other systems intervene randomly and insignificantly. Murko, on the other hand, never doubted the function of comparative literature, although it was limited by Slavic material and positivist assumptions.

Wollman first demonstrated these methodological principles in practice—even before his memorable presentation at the Slavic Congress in 1929—in *Slovesnost Slovanů*, where he originally placed inter-Slavic literary relations in the context of European and world literature in the spirit of the eidographic approach. Wollman thus distinguished himself from his teacher, Czech Slavist J. Máchal, who wrote *Slavanské literatury* (*Slavic Literatures*, 1922–1929) and captured the history of Slavic literatures individually in isolated parallels. Although Wollman lacked the factual breadth of Máchal, the synthesizing view, which the scholar modestly described as “an attempt at a synoptic-ideographic collection of Slavic verbal production” (Wollman, *Slovesnost* 237), makes this handbook—even from a great temporal distance—modern history of Slavic literatures in their mutual relationships and contexts, in form, content, and aesthetic-philosophical analogies, which scientifically document the gradual birth and growing consciousness of Slavic affiliation. The nine chapters of this small handbook, in comparison to the thematic scope of Máchal’s encyclopedic overview, capture in a condensed form the history of Slavic literature from the first Great Moravian monuments to 1914. Murko recommended P. Van Tieghem’s foundational work *La littérature comparée* (*Comparative literature*, 1931) to Wollman. Wollman elaborated this concept in detail in a functional application to Slavic literatures, which he understood as the specific literary

structure of an international community identified in a particular area. This “general literature” was understood as a precursor of a world literature into which only individual forms and structures enter, not national literatures as a certain whole. He divided the field of comparative research according to the tasks and research methods, in accordance with Van Tieghem’s dichotomous division between comparative literature (*littérature comparée*) and general, generic literature (*littérature générale*). While comparative literature is a binary exploration of the individual forms of two national literatures through direct and indirect influences or contacts, general literature conducts research on forms regardless of place, time, and national language.

Murko’s contacts with the Circle—again mediated by Wollman—are evidenced by his indirect support in a dispute with the German Slavists K. Bittner and J. Pfitzner from the German University of Prague. Bittner, an associate professor at the German University of Prague and a propagator of Nazi ideology (he served as a cultural advisor to Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich during World War II), had already questioned the specificity of Slavic literatures as a distinct and historically legitimate entity at the Second International Congress of Slavic Philologists in Warsaw in 1934. Bittner escalated this position in his parodic book *Deutsche und Tschechen* (*Germans and Czechs*, 1936). Murko, as the father of European Slavic studies (he was more than seventy-five years old at the time) and an expert on the German intellectual milieu, devoted his professional life, especially after his arrival in Czechoslovakia in 1920, to the study of Slavic literatures and especially their contribution in the field of oral literature to the pantheon of world literature. In doing so, he partially distanced himself from the conclusion of his 1897 monograph *Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Anfänge der böhmischen Romantik* (*German Influences on the Beginnings of Bohemian Romanticism*), to which Bittner purposely referred. However, the whole affair had deeper political and organizational overtones. Bittner was also an associate of the Slavic Institute and editor of the journal *Germanoslavica*, which was founded in 1931 thanks to Murko’s initiative. His writings in this journal aroused the resentment of Czech Slavists for their “hyper-positivism” and underestimation of the “Slavic world,” as Wollman complained to Murko in a letter of 28 October 1935 (Wollman, Letter III). The editors of *Germanoslavica* refused to publish a critical response by Wollman, who was a proponent of the structural, internally differentiated unity of Slavic literatures. Wollman decided to respond to Bittner’s conclusions with the monographic study *K metodologii srovnávací slovesnosti slovanské* (*Towards a Methodology of*

Comparative Slavic Literature, 1936). In a later complaint addressed to the editors of *Germanoslavica* and to the presidium of the Slavic Institute, dated 13 November 1936, Wollman stated that he was “exposing the politicized method” of Bittner’s book which, in his judgment, must not “serve the conniving anti-Slavic tendencies” (Wollman, Letter VI). In his study, Wollman attempted to defend the historical community of Slavic literatures and the validity of inter-Slavic literary relations in which the consciousness of Slavic belonging was formed as an integrating element in the constitution—in Van Tieghem’s terminology—of a Slavic general literature.

Its legitimacy in the concept of Wollman is evidenced by the fact that if general literature can be defined as a ratio of verb forms and structures, then the justification for a synthesizing study of Slavic literatures is demonstrated by the fact that structures occur there that are general. The reciprocal inter-Slavic literary relations—especially in the oral vernacular—do not support the thesis of a cultural schism of Slavic verbal production into the Latin West and the Byzantine East. In the cultural-historical and literary development of the Slavs, Slavic integrative and disintegrative dominants operate dialectically, which from a structural and formalistic point of view are manifested in specific texts as different types of “Slavisms” (Old Church Slavonic Slavism, social and moral reform Slavism, Baroque Slavism, Polish Messianism, Czech Austro-Slavism, Illyrianism, Yugoslavism, Russian Slavophilism, Neoslavism, revolutionary Slavism), characterized among other things by an analogous manner of reception of foreign artistic influences and thought impulses. These Slavisms do not only appear as modern binary links between individual Slavic literatures, but also figure as a general Slavic (inter-Slavic) vernacular, which is an organic part of the general (world) literature.

Wollman considered the permanent presence of folk culture an essential feature of Slavic literatures with regard to world literature: the genetically demonstrable connection between oral production and written texts supports the thesis of Slavic literature as a structurally organic and historically constituted synthesis. The researcher further assumed that the peculiarity, and therefore the superiority, of Slavic literatures lies in their “agency,” that is, political commitment to national and social emancipation, which the most important works of Slavic literatures fulfill by striving for “ethical realism” (Wollman’s term) and moral values. The advantage of Wollman’s comparative conception of the Slavic literatures is its interdisciplinarity and, in modern terminology, its areal foundation: the Slavic literatures are understood not only as a whole, but also as a historically changing, internally diverse, and

yet integral entity (*eidos*). The Slavic literatures reflect not only the ethnicity of the Slavs, but also geographical administrative categories: the author shows the Slavic cultural world as open to various Eastern and Western influences, taking shape, as we have already noted, at European cultural crossroads as a product of a Mediterranean cultural type.

In this context, it should be noted that Murko's enduring interest in South Slavic heroic poetry, and Slavic folklore in general, prompted Wollman to undertake extensive collections of folklore in Slovakia (Gašparíková, "Wollmanovská zberateľská akcia") and in Moravia with his Bratislava and Brno students as part of his Slavic seminars.² Although Wollman did not concentrate, as Murko did, on questions of folk customs or on manifestations of material culture, he generally understood folklore as a reproductive art in which a syncretic combination of variable, thematic and genre elements was applied as a basic procedure. He proceeded from the fact that a folklore text, by its structural construction, is a carrier of a specifically receptive quality that encourages constant reproduction and transformation of the invariant into a new variant. He understood oral vernacular to be only that part of the tradition "which attaches itself by its form to the vernacular, where it can be compared with the artificial forms of the literary, narrative, lyrical, and dramatic" (Wollman, *Uvedení* 59). The notion of literature as a unity of written and oral production represents a "totality of forms," in which substances, forms, and, to some extent, ideas are constantly exchanged. This creative relationship "makes oral rhetoric a coherent part of the literary whole" (2). Wollman thus followed up with his paper "Problémy srovnávacího studia literatur slovanských a lidového podání slovanského, jeho cíle a metody" ("Problems of Comparative Study of Slavic Literatures and Slavic Folk Performance, Its Aims and Methods") which he presented at the Slavic Congress in 1929. According to him, "the research on folk traditions has abolished the boundaries between so-called artificial, written and folk, and oral creations, between literature in the narrower sense of the word, namely, literary verbiage, and traditions (i.e., oral verbiage) and has discovered a continuous fluctuation of synopses, motifs, characterological and formal elements, and fabulation in both vertical and horizontal directions" (Wollman, "Problémy"). The author's structuralist foundations

² The Moravian folklore collection took place in 1929–1933. Compared to the more extensive Slovak collection, it amounts to around 1,100 pieces. The collection was thought to have been lost and was only discovered by A. Zelenková in the estate of Frank Wollman in 2016. It is currently being prepared for critical publication (see Zelenková, "Frank Wollman v kontextu").

were particularly evident in his view that the most important aspects in the study of forms of folk literature are not originality and duration, but reception and individual reproduction, namely communicative aspects. The researcher acknowledged a certain improvisational nature that allowed for genre variation in oral expressions, but did not address the syncretic function of folklore texts, such as their relationship to dance and/or musical components. In his methodology of collecting, he focused primarily on the textual record of folk tradition, which he understood as a distinct literary text. Apart from the formation and morphological aspect, he gave priority to the receptive and existential (communicative-semiotic) being of folklore, namely its reproductive phase. In the relationship between creation and reception, he also highlighted the primary moment of reception and processing, that is, the question of the recorder, the editor of the text, which was related to the sociology and psychology of the collective perception of the folklore text. According to the Slovak literary theorist P. Koprda, Wollman associated the process of reception with creation as “a mechanism that leads to the correspondence or similarity of the resulting transformed shapes with the stimuli” (Koprda 116). Thus, he understood the process of reception and action of folklore texts as a functional transformation and modification of shapes or plots which allowed for the creation of typological analogies across large temporal and geographical distances.

Murko did not directly intervene in the dispute, only in private correspondence urging the polemically inclined Wollman to restrain himself, especially after the successful discussion in the Prague Linguistic Circle. In a letter to Wollman dated 3 January 1937, he wrote that “the best correction of Bittner’s and similar blunders is in the critical discussion that quickly and successfully emerged” (Murko, Letter). In this appeal for restraint, Murko was responding to the discussion between Czech Slavists and their German colleagues on the floor of the Circle. This debate was initiated by Murko himself, who through Frank Wollman appealed to the chairman of the Circle W. Mathesius to ask whether this association of generally respected linguists and literary scholars would not organize a public academic discussion where the plans of the German Slavists would be exposed. Bittner’s lecture with the subsequent debate took place on 7 December 1936 at the premises of the Circle: Mukařovský, P. Eisner, B. Havránek, F. Trávníček, and the young R. Wellek took part in the discussion. Wollman and Jakobson were appointed as the main opponents on the advice of Murko, who was unable to attend the meeting due to illness. If Wollman reproached Bittner with misinterpretation of historical

facts and a distorted conception of Czech-German relations (Wollman, "Literárněvědné metody"), Jakobson in his essay "Usměrněné názory na staročeskou kulturu" ("Curtailed Views of Old Czech Culture") polemicized with the main thesis of his opponent consisting in the formulation of a kind of "law of scales," that is, in the doctrine of the alternating cultural domination of Czechs and Germans. Jakobson used untypical literary-historical argumentation to prove that "it is not the law of scales that governs Czech cultural events, but the simple law of the inseparable connection between the fate of the Czech land and the cultural development of the Czech nation. In fact, the development curve of German cultural production in the Czech lands coincides with this development" (Jakobson, "Usměrněné názory" 221). Wollman and Jakobson jointly emphasized the ideological embeddedness of Bittner's historiosophical reflections on German influence on old Czech culture, which with their terminology and semantics, were set in the context of the Third Reich to the slogan *Blut und Boden* ("Blood and soil"). Wollman reported in detail to Murko about the lecture at the Prague Linguistic Circle in a letter dated 22 December 1936, writing among other things: "We so dissected Bittner that I felt sorry for him in the end, although he deserves no pity" (Wollman, Letter IV).

Murko confirmed his polemical and personally courageous attitude towards German Slavists during the celebration of his eightieth birthday in the altered (unfavorable) political conditions on 8 February 1941 in the hall of the Municipal Library in the center of the Old Town, where Bittner spoke on behalf of the coerced rector of Charles University in Prague, W. Saure (Bečka 115). His speech was greeted with cold silence without any applause. According to a contemporary memoir, Murko did not publicly react to Bittner's speech, which contained denunciations against the Slavic Institute, and only a month later, on 4 March 1941, he sent a letter to the rector Saure in flawless archaic German in which he protested German plans to take over the *Slavia* magazine and the demise of the Slavic Institute. According to the memoirs of Slavomír Wollman:

In it the author, with a formal, deliberately offensive politeness, insists on legality, on compliance with the rules, regulations and statutes of the institution in which he works, and he directly justifies his position by the fact that he acts as a nationally conscious Slovene and native Yugoslav, and that he is accustomed to such compliance with legal rules at universities in the German-speaking area. ... A man, a scholar of world renown, a patriot and an educated descendant of tenacious farmers, towering over his opponents with persistence and moral superiority. (S. Wollman 12)

The following events have been sufficiently documented in Slavic literature: Murko announced his resignation in October 1941 because of his advanced age, and thus the Slavic Institute ceased to function in practice, legally ending in 1943 as constituent of the Reinhard-Heydrich-Stiftung (Roubík 515–520).

If we are to summarize Matija Murko's relationship to structuralism, it must be said that this apparent "paradox" has its justification. This is evidenced not only by individual examples of external contacts and rich organizational activity, but above all by the character of Murko's work which has managed to bridge the intergenerational gaps between opposing types of scholarship and intellectual orientations, and which symbolically embodies the developmental stages of Czech, Slovenian, and European Slavic philology. Despite his methodological grounding in positivist assumptions, the researcher has stimulated the development of the younger generation of scholars, especially Frank Wollman, and positively influenced its direction. Like Murko, Wollman, despite generational and methodological differences between them, emerged in Czech literary studies at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s as an innovative scholar who completed the contemporary anti-positivist turn (in this aspect, he complemented and surpassed Murko), while his texts prepared the methodological transformation of Russian formalism and domestic structuralism. Although his membership of the Circle committed to the methods of structural aesthetics in accordance with its statutes, Wollman never permanently succumbed to this doctrine and remained receptive and open to a diversity of thought. It consisted above all in the view that literary history had to transcend a closed national horizon, that it had to be conceived "metonymically," that is, on a geographic-administrative principle as the specific structure of a certain international community established in a specific area. This principle was later used by modern comparative literature, especially in the work of D. Ďurišin, building on Wollman's legacy (Zelenka, "Concept" 16–17). Of Murko's methodological virtue of not closing himself off from new scientific impulses and inspiring his pupils, Wollman wrote admiringly of his model in a letter of 14 January 1937: "I am very glad that you, Professor, who could be called the father of the positivist school of Slavic studies, have come to this conviction. There will come ... younger ones who can already do it with more courage than we—girded by so much caution—could do" (Wollman, Letter V).

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Matija Murko in strukturalna estetika

Ključne besede: slovenski literarni zgodovinarji / Murko, Matija / strukturalna estetika / Praški lingvistični krožek / verzologija / južnoslovansko ljudsko pesništvo / Wollman, Frank

Povezava med pozitivistično usmerjenim Murkom in strukturalno estetiko se na prvi pogled zdi neprimerna in paradoksalna. A njegova neobjavljena korespondenca z njegovim učencem, priznanim češkim slavistom in komparativistom Frankom Wollmanom (1888–1969), razkriva preplet tematskih področij in disciplinarnih stičišč, ki so anticipirala strukturalno estetiko. Murko je kot urednik *Slavie* omogočil ključnim osebnostim češkega strukturalizma, da so v tej reviji objavljale še pred ustanovitvijo revije *Slovo a slovesnost* (npr. R. Jakobson, P. Bogatyrev idr.). Hkrati je kot glavni organizator prvega mednarodnega slavističnega kongresa v Pragi leta 1929 odobril tematsko sekcijo, v okviru katere so bile predstavljene teze Praškega lingvističnega krožka. V prvi številki revije *Slavia* (1922–1923) sta Jakobson in Bogatyrev objavila članek »Slavjanskaja filologija v Rossii za gody 1914–1921« (»Slavistika v Rusiji v letih 1914–1921«). Wollman, ki naj bi nasledil Murka na Katedri za južnoslovanske jezike in književnosti Filozofske fakultete v Pragi, pa se je raziskovalno usmeril v verzologijo in stilistiko, o čemer priča njegov članek »Njogošuv deseterec« (»Njogošev deseterec«) o razvoju verznihi oblik v srbohrvaški poeziji (*Slavia* 1930–1931). Murko je svojega učenca spodbudil tudi k pisanju pionirskega dela *Slovesnost Slovanů* (*Književnost Slovanov*, 1928), ki se osredotoča na strukturalno zgodovino slovanskih književnosti kot zgodovino brezčasnihi oblik in struktur.

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