

Berührung dieser Körper dargestellt. Diese Disjunktion blieb auch für die Erzählkunst im Deutschland der 19. Jahrhundert bis in sein letztes Drittel maßgebend. Dafür gibt es mannigfache Gründe auch außerhalb der Logik der Dichtung, wie etwa die verschärfte Zensur, die politische Uneinigkeit, die reale Abwesenheit rotierender Maschinen. Es ist dennoch in diesem Zusammenhang bemerkenswert, dass Agathe Tyche zuerst von der Pädagogik demoliert wurde. Der Erfinder des Kindergartens, Friedrich Froebel, hatte nämlich erklärt, dass in der haptischen Entwicklung des Kleinkinds der Übergang vom reinen Rund des Balles zu Rationalität des Bauklotzes nur durch den Zylinder bewerkstelligt werden könnte. Seine Anhänger haben ihm in einem anderen Park ein Monument gebaut, in dem der Zylinder zwischen Sockel und Kugel vermittelt. Es hat eine eigene Pikanterie, dass, was sich in den Maschinen der sich industrialisierenden Länder drehte, in Deutschland Spielzeug in der Hand von Kindern war.

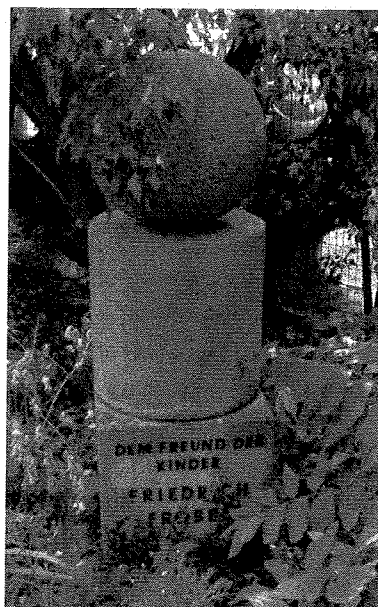


Fig. 2

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## Comparative Literature and Revolution

or the Many Arts of (Mis)reading Alexander Veselovsky

### *Towards a critical historiography of literary knowledge*

This essay, which seeks to highlight a particular theory of cross-cultural and cross-historical comparison, is intended as a contribution to what may be described as a critical historiography of literary studies. By this unwieldy phrase I mean to suggest one possible direction for the field of comparative literature, whose perennial quest for self-definition has more recently led to what appears to be an intellectual impasse. As the guiding light of critical theory is becoming, in the eyes of many, ever more elusive, comparatists – who are also, and now perhaps primarily, generalists – seek to make their readings resonant with the evolving conditions of the contemporary world and issues (such as globalization, cultural hybridity, post-colonialism, or cosmopolitanism). The «issue-paradigm» does not need a critical tradition to posit its object of inquiry (which is taken for granted), thus rendering theory at best subsidiary and at worst ornamental. It also obviates the need for inquiry into the preexistent theoretical corpus: whatever earlier engagements with the current issues can be excavated from the past are bound to appear as fragments fit (at best) to spur on the thought of a modern scholar. Theory is increasingly judged by the criterion of «usefulness» to the analytic task at hand, while questions of method are pushed outside the field of scholarly reflection.

There is no reason, one may object, to regard the exigencies of the contemporary world as a privileged set of concerns – that is, unless the contemporary world is itself the object of analysis. Indeed, to adopt such a view means to subscribe implicitly to the notion of superiority of the «civilized» subject of knowledge over her unwitting object

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of analysis (without the excuse – for those of us in the humanities – of appealing to objective scientific progress). Needless to say, this view goes against the principle, generally respected in social sciences today, of attending to the «emic» (indigenous) perspective, and contradicts the historian's ideal task of reconstructing the human past in all its peculiarity (rather than in those aspects in which modern scholars recognize themselves). I would venture to say that few literary scholars would be willing to embrace explicitly the methodological position implied by the «issue-paradigm».

A theory should uncover a piece of reality that is not otherwise visible (or as easily observable); a method should guide a compelling analysis of that piece of reality. (For better or for worse, the two are not easy to pry apart in the study of literature.) To make headway, theoretical discourse around an issue such as, e.g., cultural hybridity needs to become conscious of itself as a set of competing theories of cultural hybridity that select for methodologies of reading texts for cultural hybridity. It stands to reason that the objects of analysis that are proper to literary studies are constituted by theories and rendered accessible by methods that have been generated in the past and remain viable today. Whether or not these theories/methodologies are recognized for what they are or simply internalized, they are a *sine qua non* of the continued existence of literary studies as a field of knowledge. A weariness with theory, such as can be observed today, may lead to a shrinking awareness of the genealogy of our scholarly apparatus, and thus ultimately of the true shape of the objects of our study. The time, I believe, is ripe for an introvert move, a turn inward, toward the history of how the objects of literary analysis – and the objects of comparative literary analysis – were constituted, maintained, revised, rejected, or neglected. It is from within the history of critical traditions, no less than from the raw challenges of the contemporary world, that fresh insights on how to read texts are likely to emerge.

And it is only on the condition that literature is not taken for granted, but continuously interrogated as a genealogically complex, culturally variable, and historically constituted phenomenon that we may fruitfully engage with comparative epistemologies of literature – that is, the questions of how literature as one particular kind of knowledge coexists with, is influenced by, and affects other kinds of knowledge. A remarkably lucid formulation of this problem is found in the opening pages of Earl Miner's *Comparative Poetics*, a study of how literature as an autonomous domain was differently theorized in Western and Asian critical traditions:

[A] poetics presumes the existence of other distinct, autonomous kinds of knowledge. Of course the autonomy of poetics, economics, religion, and other kinds of knowledge is not complete. Various kinds of knowledge can be transferred, for given purposes, from one category to another. [...] [Compared to his-

tory,] the utility of literature to other classes of knowledge is even less (although still far from negligible), whereas it is a kind of knowledge that seems able to incorporate – in one version or to one degree or another – every other kind of knowledge. [...] The positing of the literary autonomy necessary for a poetics to exist does not, then, involve a black hole but a constellation of kinds of knowledge. For literature itself to exist, other kinds of distinguishable knowledge must also. It is a necessary corollary that certain factors specific to the literary and perhaps to the aesthetic more generally must give it the means to exist, and that a major purpose of poetics is to identify them.<sup>1</sup>

Within this quotation, the reference of the word *poetics* shifts from an emic (a theory of literature immanent to the particular cultural tradition) to an etic perspective. Indeed, inasmuch as what we call literature is attested in many different cultures, only an outside viewpoint can posit literature as an object of cross-cultural comparison. Yet, the soundness of this viewpoint in turn depends on the extent to which the scholar who adopts it is conscious of the critical tradition(s) that have molded literature – as well as posited it as an object of inquiry – in different cultures. It is, no doubt, literature's distinctive nature as the most absorbent kind of knowledge, so sharply discerned by Minor, that ultimately accounts for the necessity – as well as the bewildering multifariousness – of literary theory.

My interest in what follows is in uncovering an important strand in 20<sup>th</sup> century literary scholarship, one indebted to Alexander Veselóvsky's *Historical Poetics*. On the one hand, it is an exercise in hypothetical history: I will seek to describe the intellectual and ideological conditions that prevented this paradigm from being perceived as foundational to modern literary studies. These conditions are of diverse nature, ranging from the self-proclaimed originality of the Russian Formalists and the prevalence of New-Critical assumptions in the US to structuralism's disregard for history and the institutional impact of a nationalist backlash in the post-war Soviet Union. At the same time, I will point to the formative influence of the Veselovskian paradigm on some of the most celebrated achievements of 20<sup>th</sup> c. literary theory: Viktor Shklovsky's theory of prose, Vladimir Propp's morphological method, and Mikhail Bakhtin's work at the intersection of literary and cultural history. Indeed, it appears that even the current use of the term *poetics* derives from Veselovsky. The word – in its non-normative, Aristotelian meaning of scholarly investigation into literature – was resurrected by Veselovsky and Wilhelm Scherer more or less at the same time, in the 1880s. Yet the word's popularity in the West was due primarily

<sup>1</sup> Earl MINER, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature*, Princeton 1990, 15.

to Roman Jakobson's mediation of the Formalist use of *poetika*, which was in turn indebted to Veselovsky; Scherer's posthumously published *Poetik*, by contrast, had no detectable impact on the field.<sup>2</sup>

As my title somewhat facetiously indicates, I will seek an uneasy balance between Soviet Russia and the West. I begin by focusing on an episode in Veselovsky's reception that appears particularly consequential: Shklovsky's early work on narrative theory. I then provide a cursory summary of Veselovsky's historicist method by placing it in relation to important theoretical paradigms current in the 20<sup>th</sup> century outside the Soviet Union. Finally, I return to Veselovsky's *Nachleben* in his homeland and comment on his Soviet-Marxist reception in the years that followed the crisis of the Formal Method and preceded its vindication in Soviet and French structuralism.

### *Viktor Shklovsky and the conspiratorial origins of narrative theory*

In 1923, Victor Shklovsky, the founder of the Formal Method and at that time a political émigré based in Berlin, published *A Sentimental Journey*, a memoir recounting his close involvement in the military action and politics in Russia in the volatile years leading up to and following the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>3</sup> Within the autobiographical narrative, Shklovsky embeds the story of an unnamed friend, who participated in the Civil War as a member of the Red Army. At one point this largely matter-of-fact account is interrupted by an oddly poetic passage:

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.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. REISS, «Germanistik im Kaiserreich. Wilhelm Scherers «Poetik» als wissenschaftsgeschichtliches Dokument», in IDEM (ed.), W. SCHERER, *Poetik: Mit einer Einleitung und Materialien zur Rezeptionsanalyse*, Tübingen 1977, xi: «eine Wirkung im offiziellen Kanon der Literaturwissenschaft ist kaum feststellbar».

<sup>3</sup> The significance of the Sternian subtext in the title derives from Shklovsky's own pioneering work on narrative in *Sterne* and the theory of the novel. For a closer look at Shklovsky's engagement with *Sterne*, see Emily FINER, *Turning into Sterne: Viktor Shklovskii and Literary Reception*, London 2010, esp. 112-120.

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. He was riding with a comrade.

The comrade jumped on his horse and rode with all speed to their lodging to fetch cocaine.

One had to make a final effort. They took the communist and sent him to the front against Poland.<sup>4</sup>

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. Он ехал с товарищем.

Товарищ вскочил на лошадь и погнал ее гоним на квартиру за кокаином.

Нужно было сделать последнее усилие. Коммуниста взяли и отправили на фронт против Польши.

What primarily interests me in this passage is the citation, enclosed in parentheses in the middle paragraph. Before trying to interpret it (at the end of this section), however, we need to make a triple detour that will take us through Shklovsky's style, biography, and scholarship.

First, a few comments are due on the tongue-in-cheek pseudo-epic coloring of the passage. Shklovsky constructs this micro-narrative using ring composition, the quintessential device of oral poetics: the passage begins and ends with the sentence «One had to make a final effort», which ironically recasts a bit of contemporary political discourse. By assigning the quotation to Trotsky, the head commander of the Red Army at the time of the events described, Shklovsky seeks to foreground the intrusion of history into epic. This is not the only instance in this passage of what Shklovsky himself famously theorized as «the baring of the device». Note, for example, the phrase «Snow and a fir tree or a pine», where the author's apparent vacillation forcefully draws the reader's attention to the text's fictional quality, its constructed-ness.

<sup>4</sup> Viktor SHKLOVSKII, *Sentimental'noe puteshestvie*, Moscow-Berlin 1923, 251. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

On the level of form, Shklovsky exposes the dilemma of any narrative that aims at historical authenticity – that of reconciling the real and the literary, the referential mode and the mode of signifying obliquely, through conventions of discourse. The two collide in the second sentence in the third paragraph, resulting in a syntactic breakdown, a run-on sentence: «Sitting on a stone represents despair in epic (see A. Veselovsky, vol. 3), he sat down on a real stone and wept».

The communist sat down on a stone. Could this – in a stretch of discourse so strongly evocative of epic narrative – be a reference to an actual event? No – Shklovsky seems to imply when he cites Veselovsky, only then to insist that the communist did in fact sit down on a *real* stone. Yet is the epic genealogy of the image thereby rendered irrelevant? Why then was it so piously conjured up? Was the spirit of epic – and that of Veselovsky – invoked only to be dismissed?

Let us make another step back so that we can take into view Shklovsky's biographical circumstances and theoretical preoccupations at the time.

Having taken an active role in the 1917 February Revolution – the bourgeois revolution that preceded the Bolshevik Revolution – Shklovsky was dispatched to various locations as a high-standing army superintendent. Upon his return from Central Asia in 1918, Shklovsky was involved in an Anti-Bolshevik conspiracy, lived on false documents, and periodically changed cities and apartments. The narrative of *A Sentimental Journey* ends spectacularly, with Shklovsky approaching his house in Petrograd and seeing the windows of his room lit. He suspects an ambush, goes into hiding, and eventually crosses over to Finland over the ice of the Finnish Gulf.

It was during the time he spent in Bolshevik Russia before his escape that Shklovsky worked on the study that would lay the foundation of 20<sup>th</sup> century narrative theory and form the core of his *Theory of Prose*. (The book was published in 1925 after Shklovsky's return to the Soviet Union where he would reside, as a respected member of the literary establishment, until his death at the age of 91 in 1984.)

As Shklovsky himself points out repeatedly in *A Sentimental Journey*, the article «On the relation of devices of emplotment to general devices of style» was written during the most adventurous period of his conspiratorial activities. At one point, Shklovsky travels from Saratov to Moscow, and is stripped of his money and documents while purchasing hair dye he would use to avoid recognition. In Saratov, to minimize the risk of exposure, Shklovsky lived under another person's name and worked as a cobbler. «It is good to lose oneself», – he comments – «to forget one's family name, to fall out of one's habits. ...If not for my desk and work, I would have never become Viktor Shklovsky again. I was writing the book *Plot as a phenomenon of style*. As for the

books needed for quotations, I brought them with me in the form of disparate bits, having un-sewn them into separate pages».<sup>5</sup>

We may suspect that among the books that accompanied Shklovsky during that time were some volumes of Alexander Veselovsky's collected works, an edition in progress starting in 1908. Veselovsky's works on parallelism and the poetics of the plot – included in volumes 1 and 2 – were the central object of critique, and a common source of quotations, in Shklovsky's study on the devices of emplotment and style.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, Shklovsky approaches the plot as a product of self-generating principles of narration – an account that he puts forward as an alternative to the historical explanation of the origin of plots within what he calls «the ethnographic method», represented by Veselovsky.

Veselovsky proposed to distinguish between basic elements of the plot, which he referred to as motifs – such as, for example, cross-culturally widespread myths explaining the origins of the dark spots on the moon – and non-trivial sequences of motifs, which he called plots proper. Whereas motifs can arise spontaneously in unrelated traditions, a non-trivial sequence of motifs often betokens cross-cultural borrowing.<sup>7</sup> Shklovsky sought to complicate this distinction, by pointing to plots that recur in different traditions but cannot, for historical reasons, be plausibly explained by borrowing from one tradition to another. The existence of such similarly constructed narratives points to the need for an immanent theory of narrative, in particular, for an inquiry into the devices of emplotment that constitute a universal property of narration. In short, the work of comparing specific texts should be superseded by a general poetics of prose. Laying the groundwork for such a poetics, Shklovsky proceeded to identify widespread devices of what he called narrative deceleration, including parallelism, epic repetition, and the use of narrative frames.

<sup>5</sup> ШКЛОВСКИЙ, *op. cit.*, 175. «Хорошо потерять себя. Забыть свою фамилию, выпасть из своих привычек [...] Если бы не письменный стол, не работа, я никогда не стал бы снова Виктором Шкловским. Писал книгу «Сюжет, как явление стиля». Книги, нужные для цитат, привез, расшив их на листы, отдельными клочками.»

<sup>6</sup> Curiously, in the passage quoted in the beginning of this section Shklovsky provides a misleading citation of Veselovsky's discussion of the topos of sitting on a stone as an expression of grief. This discussion is found in vol. 1 of Veselovsky's collected works (*Sobranie sochinenii*, Saint Petersburg 1908-1938, v. 1., 457), in chapter 3 («The language of poetry and the language of prose»), section 3, of *Three Chapters from Historical Poetics* (note the abundance of threes!). This chapter is part of the Italian translation of Veselovsky's works: Alexandr N. VESELOVSKII, *Poetica storica*, translated and annotated by Claudia Giustini, Rome 1981.

<sup>7</sup> For recent reflections on the relevance of Veselovsky's theory of motifs to the study of the Realist novel, see Ilya KLIGER, «Formal Stratification in Goncharov's *The Precipice* and Veselovsky's *Historical Poetics: The Case of Tragic Realism*», forthcoming. (Delivered as a talk at the conference «Historical Poetics: Past, Present and Future», University of Chicago, May 2011.)

There is much more, however, to this particular intellectual encounter between Veselovsky and Shklovsky. In spite of his polemical vehemence, Shklovsky is clearly dependent on Veselovsky's *Poetics of the Plots* not only for examples from primary texts, but also for crucial conceptual moves.

A good example of this is Shklovsky's analysis of parallelism as a quintessential instance of «the form dictating the content»: the second member of the parallelism is adduced not because of its meaning, but for the sake of parallel structure itself, which serves to decelerate the narrative, thereby making the text's constructed-ness more perceptible.

Parallelism in primitive and archaic traditions was, in fact, one of Veselovsky's signature topics. In particular, he contrasted psychological parallelism and rhythmic-musical parallelism, the latter being particularly common in Jewish, Finnish, Chinese, as well as Old Norse traditions. Here is an example of psychological parallelism from Belorussian folk poetry:

Our small fir-tree is green winter and spring  
Our Malanka is merry every day.<sup>8</sup>

A musical-rhythmical parallelism is illustrated by two lines from an Old Norse text:

The sun did not know where to find his peace  
The moon did not know where to find his strength.

Veselovsky was interested in exposing the origins and the social underpinnings of these two kinds of parallelism. He explained the psychological parallelism as a survival of totemism; as Shklovsky puts it, «if a singer compares a man to a tree, then either he is confusing them or else his grandmother confused them».<sup>9</sup> As for the musical-rhythmical parallelism, Veselovsky traces it instead to the amoibeian mode of performance, i.e. one involving interchange between two (groups of) performers.<sup>10</sup> Veselovsky further pointed out that psychological parallelism may develop into rhythmic-musical parallelism over

<sup>8</sup> Елиночка зиму и лѣто зелена / Наша Маланка нешто дзень весела. Discussion in VESELOVSKII, *op. cit.*, 142-145. Viktor SHKLOVSKII, *O teorii prozy*, Moscow 1929, 35 quotes a corrupt version of the song.

<sup>9</sup> SHKLOVSKII (1929), *op. cit.*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> In the Western tradition, this mode of performance is associated with bucolic poetry. In the English translation of *Theory of Prose* (Champaign and London 1991), which has been reprinted four times, «amoibeian» is consistently rendered as «iambic», making Shklovsky's argument incomprehensible.

time. Shklovsky concludes: «Even Veselovsky acknowledges here, if not an affinity, then at least a pull on the part of each of these types of structure toward each other ... Each of these cases reveals a need for deceleration of the imagistic mass and for its arrangement in the form of distinct steps».<sup>11</sup> *Quod erat demonstrandum*, as far as Shklovsky's case for the existence of universal laws of narrative goes. Yet one retains a sense that Shklovsky's conclusion is based entirely on Veselovsky's corpus of examples and analysis; in essence, it amounts to an essentializing move that declares this particular device to be in service of and representative of the art of narrative as such. This conclusion comes at the cost of erasing distinctions that may arise from differences in performance context or from historical development – the distinctions that Veselovsky, even while focusing his attention on form, always kept in sight.

Another example is furnished by Shklovsky's analysis of the adventure novel – again, one of the focal points of Veselovsky's research. Discussing the persistent formal elements of this genre, Shklovsky cites Veselovsky for the conclusion that the «adventure novel to this day lives on schemata and methods inherited from the genre of folk tale» as well as for the acknowledgment that «novelistic adventures (*avantiury*)» are a stylistic device (rather than a reflection of historical reality).<sup>12</sup>

It is worth stressing that Shklovsky does not univocally argue for the formal genesis of motifs; his analysis is more subtle and again indebted to Veselovsky's ethnographism. Having first chided Veselovsky for reductively explaining motifs by underlying customs, Shklovsky writes:

Without denying the possible emergence of these motifs on a socio-economic basis (*bytovoi osnove*), I note that it is a common practice in the creation of such motifs to make use of a clash of customs – a contradiction between them. The recollection of a custom that no longer exists may be used in the setting up of this conflict.

So we find in Maupassant a whole series of stories («The Old Man» and many others) based on the depiction of a simple, non-emotional (*ne pateticheskogo*) attitude towards death as experienced by a French peasant. It appears that the basis of the construction of the story is a simple depiction of everyday reality (*byt*). Yet in fact, the whole story presupposes a reader from a different milieu with a different attitude towards death [...]

<sup>11</sup> SHKLOVSKII (1929), *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> SHKLOVSKII (1929), *op. cit.*, 48.

After giving one more example from Maupassant («The Return»), Shklovsky draws a conclusion:

Here is another instantiation of the same law, which makes the custom a basis for the formation of a motif when this custom is no longer customary (*kogda obychai etot uzhe ne obychen*).

I would add the following as a general rule: a work of art is perceived against a background of and by association with other works of art [...] *The new form makes its appearance not in order to express a new content, but rather, to replace an old form that has already lost its artistic quality.*<sup>13</sup>

Shklovsky's readiness to draw grand conclusions from just two examples from the same author is astounding, especially seeing that the evidence comes from a late Realist author, who worked within a highly stratified bourgeois society, and whose use of peasant customs does not – one would think – lend itself to an easy comparison with peasant-based folk traditions, which are Veselovsky's focus. Shklovsky's theory of literary form thus contains within it a residual ethnographism – a willingness to engage with Maupassant's work as a record of a peculiar culture, rather than as an individual author's creation, – which derives from his dependence on the Veselovskian tradition.<sup>14</sup>

More specifically, in this case Shklovsky may well be directly inspired by Veselovsky. In a follow-up study, «The Structure of the Short Story and the Novel», he offers the following commentary on Tolstoy's use of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization):

[...] Tolstoy «defamiliarizes» Wagnerian [i.e. grand – B.M.] things, describing them precisely from the point of view of an intelligent peasant, i.e. from the point of view of someone who lacks customary associations, in the manner of «the French primitives». Besides, the same device of describing a city from the standpoint of a peasant has already been used in the ancient Greek novel (Veselovsky).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> SHKLOVSKII (1929), *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, in his 1947 assessment of Veselovsky's method, Shklovsky essentially ascribes to his predecessor his own theory of the plot: «In Veselovsky's definition of the plot there is the evaluation of action, i.e. an internal conflict. The plot, according to Veselovsky's definition, appears as if at the juncture of «customs» [...]» (SHKLOVSKY, «Alexandr Veselovsky – istorik i teoretik», *Oktiabr'* (1947), no. 12, 174-182; quotation on p. 178) This somewhat forced interpretation, as is clear from the larger context, is driven by Shklovsky's desire to make Veselovsky's position appear more «Marxist» (see below for further discussion of this piece by Shklovsky).

<sup>15</sup> SHKLOVSKII (1929), *op. cit.*, 80-81.

In contrast to his earlier treatment of defamiliarization as the essence of all art in the classic essay «Art as Device» (1917), Shklovsky here suggests that Tolstoy's use of *ostranenie* historically derives from the French Enlightenment topos, found in Voltaire and Chateaubriand, of a savage's reaction to civilization.<sup>16</sup> Characteristically, Veselovsky's analysis emerges as an important precedent at the moment when Shklovsky opens the formal method to the consideration of the sociohistorical origins of style.

Completing our lengthy detour, I would like to return to the passage with which I began this section. Shklovsky was not averse to experimenting with his own theoretical ideas in his literary work. In *A Sentimental Journey*, he occasionally uses literary-analytical categories he devised to comment on historical events. For example, he remarks that the retreat of the Russian army during the First World War – a retreat that Shklovsky spent a lot of effort in trying to reverse (he received a near-fatal wound while leading an infantry attack) – was «based on the device which I described in my *Poetics* as deceleration».<sup>17</sup>

More generally, the often chaotic narrative of *A Sentimental Journey* induces a sense of history that has lost its signifying capacity. It is this crisis of historical meaning that allows, indeed calls for, the importation of categories of formal analysis. It is worth recalling that in his (highly consequential) riposte against the Formal Method, reprinted in *Literature and Revolution*, Leon Trotsky singled out Shklovsky for attack, claiming that Shklovsky's assertion of «complete independence of the aesthetic «factor» from the impact of social conditions [...] is aesthetic megalomania which turns on its head our harsh reality».<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The genealogy of this topos, in relation to Shklovsky's theory, is analyzed by Carlo GINZBURG, «Making Things Strange: The Prehistory of a Literary Device», *Representations* 56 (1996) 8-28. Further on the genealogy of *ostranenie*, see Ilona SVETLIKOVA, *Istoki russkogo formalizma: traditsiia psikhologizma i formal'naia shkola*, Moscow 2005, 72-98, who draws on the history of psychology, and Michael HOLQUIST and Ilya KLIGER, «Minding the Gap: Towards a Historical Poetics of Estrangement», *Poetics Today* 26 (2005), 613-636, who emphasize philosophical sources. For readings that are attentive to Shklovsky's leftist politics, see Yuri TSIVIAN, *Na podstupakh k karpalistiche*, Moscow 2010, 150-163 and Svetlana BOYM, «The poetics and politics of estrangement: Viktor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt», in: A. RENFREW and G. TIHANOV (eds.), *Critical Theory in Russia and the West*, London 2010, 98-123.

<sup>17</sup> SHKLOVSKII (1923), *op. cit.*, 258.

<sup>18</sup> «[...] эстетическая мания величия, в которой опрокинута на голову наша жесткая действительность». Trotsky's article was originally published in *Pravda* in July 1923, so it postdates Shklovsky's *A Sentimental Journey* (published in January of the same year and written in two chunks, between June and August 1919 and between May and June 1922; cf. FINER, *op. cit.*, 112). The quote is taken from Lev TROTSKII, *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, Moscow 1991, 144. I am grateful to Robert Bird for pointing out to me the relevance of this essay.



The description of a pointless horseback journey of two Communists, apparently prompted by Trotsky's hysterical call to arms, appears as a literary explication of the deficit of history as the domain of human intentionality and meaningful action. We could thus read this passage as a polemic with the Marxist view of history and of class struggle, which here takes the shape of Civil War, as hermeneutic panaceas. In this light, Shklovsky's resistance to historicism in his theoretical work assumes an additional *motivation* (to use another Shklovskian term).

Up to the penultimate paragraph, this passage is also an instance of a self-consciously decelerated narrative, which uses various devices of repetition to redeem the journey, which was entirely inconsequential from the historical point of view, *as an experiment in form*. It is the echoes of epic, not historical actuality, that endow this episode with meaning. The reference to Veselovsky – such a pseudo-scholarly move is, by the way, unique in the text of *A Sentimental Journey* – is thus essential; it appeals to the cultural memory of the readers of Shklovsky's autobiography, compelling them to think of History in terms of inherited form. Yet at the same time, this citation points to the limits of Shklovsky's notion of universal laws of narrative. The form itself is acknowledged as a historical phenomenon, grounded in conventions of genre and in existing practices of reading.

Taking our reading one step further – but not, I think, beyond plausible authorial intent – this passage may be taken as an illustration of Shklovsky's notion that the literary event emerges out of a collision of perspectives on a piece of social reality – a custom – which is, so to speak, caught-in-the-act of becoming History. If Maupassant invites his reader to confront the alien worldview of a peasant, Shklovsky evokes the perspective of a literary scholar, an avid reader of Veselovsky, on the reality of the modern war. The irony is that, contrary to Shklovsky's argument, no new motif emerges out of this conflict of viewpoints; instead, an old motif is evoked to make sense of new historical content. This, by the way, is in keeping with Veselovsky's ideas about the persistence of formal elements in spite of historical change.<sup>19</sup> As in the case of the study on emplotment and devices of style, Shklovsky appears to be most dependent on Veselovsky precisely when he claims to dismiss him.

<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps possible, as Victoria Somoff pointed out to me, to read the concluding sentence «They took the communist and sent him to the front against Poland» as an instance of a new, genuinely modern motif: the imposition of a task on the hero, who is both absolutely passive (in that he does not seek reward, nor avoids the task) and fully cognizant of the implications of the task (in contrast to a hero who is unaware of the harmful intentions of the author of the task). A new motif can thus be seen to arise as a modification of a preexistent, age-old motif (cf. Aarne-Thompson motif H931 «Tasks assigned in order to get rid of the hero»).

## Veselovskian historicism

Nowadays Alexander Veselovsky, while revered (but not necessarily reread) by many in Russia, is completely unknown in the West outside the field of Slavic studies. The profound impact of his work on 20<sup>th</sup> c. Russian criticism is, too, something of 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. In this section, I attempt to chart the extent (and the limits) of the influence of Veselovsky's method, known as Historical Poetics, and its methodological opponents and counterparts in the Western academy. This exercise in critical historiography will, I hope, serve to indicate the significance Veselovsky's legacy could assume today. Indeed, I believe that Veselovskian historicism is particularly likely to spur methodological reflection at a time when a fatigue with theory has left many literary scholars with one basic guiding principle: to read literature alongside history – as well as alongside other kinds and fields of knowledge *qua* historical phenomena. In this context, Historical Poetics could encourage a renewed critical engagement with literary form not merely as a product of history, but as a unique kind of historical *evidence* that attests to the history of consciousness as well as to various sociohistorical processes.

It will be obvious from the preceding analysis that, in spite of being a target of Shklovsky's polemical zeal, Veselovsky was Shklovsky's ally in the Formalist battle against psychologism and aestheticism. Another eloquent testimony to the influence of Veselovsky's poetics of the plot on Russian critical discourse of the 1920s is the concluding paragraph of Vladimir Propp's path-breaking *Morphology of the Folktale*, published in 1928, where Propp humbly asserts that his «propositions, although they appear to be new, were intuitively foreseen by none other than Veselovsky» and ends his study with an extensive quotation from Veselovsky's *Poetics of Plots*.<sup>20</sup> Propp did not regard himself as one of the Formalists, and did not share their revolutionary rhetoric; he was also more outspoken about his intellectual debts.

Alexander Nikolaevich Veselovsky (1838-1906) is now primarily associated with *Historical Poetics*, his *magnum opus* that was left incomplete at the time of his death.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Vladimir PROPP, *Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Laurence Scott, revised by Louis A. Wagner, Austin 1968, 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> The best critical introductions to Veselovsky's work are Boris ENGEL'GARDT, *Aleksandr Nikolaevich Veselovskii*, Petrograd 1924; and Viktor ZHIRMUNSKII, «A. N. Veselovskii i sravnitel'noe literaturovedenie» (1940), in: IDEM, *Sravnitel'noe literaturovedenie: vostok i zapad*, Leningrad 1979, 84-136 (Italian translation of a shorter version of this study is included in Alexandr N. VESELOVSKII, *Poetica storica*, Roma 1981). For discussions in languages other than Russian, see Victor ERLICH, *Russian Formalism: History – Doctrine*, The Hague 1969, 26-32, Dionýz ĎURIŠIN, *Theory*

Veselovsky himself conceived of this study as a summation of his life's work, which comprised numerous monographs (including books on Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Zhukovsky) and studies on topics as diverse as Italian Renaissance culture, Slavic folklore, comparative epic, the Ancient Greek novel, and East-West literary ties. An empiricist at heart, Veselovsky dedicated the earlier, longer part of his career to in-depth investigations of particular issues in folklore, particularly the cross-cultural transmission of motifs and plots, as well as literary and cultural history. As he repeatedly asserted, a higher-order intellectual synthesis should have an inductive nature (that is, it should avoid importing preexistent concepts) and should be based on the principle of comparison, or juxtaposition, of many different kinds of data (different national/linguistic traditions, genres, authors, as well as various kinds of evidence coming from cultural and social history).<sup>22</sup>

In the 1890s, Veselovsky turned to the task of constructing a theory of historical poetics, which focused on the persistence, transmission, and evolution of literary forms viewed in relation to the sociohistorical *longue durée*. The three major works Veselovsky wrote in the last decade of his life are *Three Chapters from Historical Poetics* (1899), *Poetics of Plots* (1897-1906), both of which focused on primitive and ancient literatures, and a monograph on the 19<sup>th</sup> c. poet Vasily Zhukovsky (1904), whose literary output Veselovsky interpreted as a belated product of the «Sentimentalist age» (and of the kind of subjectivity that was peculiar to that age). Apart from the continuing vitality of Veselovsky's theoretical insights, his work has retained its value as a veritable storehouse of individual facts, observations, and juxtapositions. In the words of René Wellek, Veselovsky «must be classed among the greatest literary scholars of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century in

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of *Literary Comparatistics*, Bratislava 1984, 28-40, Valentina Rossi, «La Poetica storica di A. N. Veselovskij dal 1940 al 1959. La storia delle edizioni di un libro mai scritto», *Annali della scuola normale superiore di Pisa. Classe di lettere e filosofia*. Ser. III. Vol. XX, 1 (1990), 319-361, Igor SHAITANOV, «Aleksandr Veselovskii's Historical Poetics: Genre in Historical Poetics», *New Literary History* 32 (2001) 429-443. Igor Shaitanov's article should also be commended as the best discussion of the reception of Veselovsky's work in 20<sup>th</sup> c. Russian criticism.

A bibliography of Veselovsky's works can be found in A. N. VESELOVSKII, «Spisok trudov akademika A. N. Veselovskogo: 1859-1906», in *Pamiaty akademika Aleksandra Nikolaevicha Veselovskogo: po sluchaiu desiatiletiia so dnia ego smerti (1906-1916)*, Petrograd 1921, 1-68 (special pagination) and in IDEM, *Izbrannoe: Na puti k istoricheskoi poetike*, ed. Igor Shaitanov, Moscow 2010, 654-672 (the latter includes literature on Veselovsky).

<sup>22</sup> These principles are already expressed in Veselovsky's early methodological pronouncement that dates back to 1870: A. N. VESELOVSKY, «On the Methods and Aims of Literary History as a Science», *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 16 (1967), 33-42; translation by Harry Weber. For a more detailed discussion of Veselovsky's method, see: Boris MASLOV, «Historical Poetics as Method: Three Soundings», forthcoming in: I. KLIGER and B. MASLOV (ed.), *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics*.

breadth of knowledge and scope of competence».<sup>23</sup> He should also be regarded as one of the pioneers of the discipline of comparative literature.

In the context of Veselovsky's international reception, René Wellek's assessment merits some closer scrutiny. A former member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, in which Roman Jakobson was also involved, Wellek is widely considered one of the founding fathers of comparative literature in the US.<sup>24</sup> He thus appears to be a likely mediating figure who could have conveyed Veselovsky's historical poetics to the Western academy. In fact, it was Wellek who gave the impetus, and supplied an introductory note, to the publication, in 1967, of the English translation of Veselovsky's 1870 lecture «On the method and tasks of literary history as a field of scholarship», an important methodological pronouncement included as the introduction to posthumous editions of *Historical Poetics*.<sup>25</sup> In spite of this isolated publication, which had no visible impact, Veselovsky's work has remained virtually unknown in the English-speaking world; to the best of my knowledge, Italian is the only language into which a substantial portion of *Historical Poetics*,<sup>26</sup> reprinted multiple times in Russia, has so far been translated. Here is a fuller quotation from the fourth volume of Wellek's *A History of Modern Criticism*, published in 1965:

Veselovsky has assigned a task to scholarship which can hardly ever be solved. The Russian formalists, however, have taken up his challenge. But Veselovsky bears the stamp of his time too strongly to be still relevant with his concrete solutions. He has no proper grasp of the unity of form and content, the organicity of the work of art, and he ignores, too blandly, the problem of individual creation. [...] Veselovsky worships objective facts and science so excessively that he cannot deal with aesthetic value. The central problem of criticism lies outside his ken. He transmitted an all-embracing universalism, an anti-individualistic,

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<sup>23</sup> René WELLEK, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950. The Later Nineteenth Century*, New Haven 1965, 278-279.

<sup>24</sup> According to a recent sourcebook (*The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*, ed. David Damrosch et al., Princeton 2009, 162), Wellek's article «The Crisis of Comparative Literature» «became a manifesto of sorts for what came to be known as the «American School» of comparative literature, which emphasized the importance of literary theory and championed cosmopolitan humanism over cultural nationalism».

<sup>25</sup> VESELOVSKY (1967), *op. cit.* The only other translation of Veselovsky's work into English that I am aware of is: A. N. VESELOVSKII, ««Istoricheskaia poetika («A Historical Poetics») Chapter 1, Section 8», *New Literary History* 32 (2001), 409-428; translation by Ian M. Helfant.

<sup>26</sup> VESELOVSKII (1981), *op. cit.* Veselovsky's reputation in Italy is largely due to his work on the Italian Renaissance (in part published originally in Italian); see Renzo RABBONI, «Per una bibliografia italiana di A. N. Veselovskij: gli studi sulla letteratura e sul folclore», *Schede umanistiche* 16.1 (2002), 7-88.



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 thus finally of its deepest human appeal. Veselovsky is the patron of comparative literature in Russia and one of the originators of Russian formalism.<sup>27</sup>

There is no need to point to disturbing overtones of Cold War rhetoric in this passage. It is worth noting, however, that these lines were written before the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, which in many ways continues Veselovsky's insights (while being quite innocent of «technological methodology»), became known in the West.

More importantly, however, Wellek's rejection of Veselovsky derives from his allegiance to the principles of New Criticism, such as the notion of aesthetic value and the organicity of the work of art – both of which Veselovsky explicitly rejected as ahistorical constructs. Fundamentally, Wellek upholds the Anglo-American paradigm of literary criticism, pitted against the Germano-Slavic literary *Wissenschaft* (*nauka*).

Let us take a somewhat closer look at Historical Poetics as a method, as it was developed by Veselovsky and taken over by the Russian tradition of poetics. I would single out four basic ingredients of this approach: (i) attention to the *longue durée* of literary and cultural history, particularly to the formation and mutation of styles, genres, and literary systems; (ii) historicism, in that texts of the past are approached as cultural products of the period in question, rather than with modern standards (whether grounded in «aesthetic» taste or ideology); (iii) consideration of literary history (literary evolution) as a semi-autonomous domain of social praxis that both involves immanent laws or regularities and must be correlated with the history of culture and the history of consciousness; (iv) preoccupation with those aspects of literary form that escape the attention of the individual author and that therefore defy psychological or narrowly sociopolitical explanation.

In spite of having shared these basic principles, Veselovsky and the Formalists differed in their emphases, with the curious result that Veselovsky's historicism proved indigestible (or unappealing) to New Criticism, whereas the Formal Method, on the contrary, *ex post facto* appeared almost as its mirror-reflection. As a matter of fact, New Criticism and the Formal Method have little in common; in particular, the Russian Formalists, rather than approaching literary texts as self-contained artifacts, analyzed devices and structures shared by different (and often aesthetically incommensurable) texts; had an interest in literary evolution; studied narrative and meter; had little respect for or interest in rhetoric; and in the later 1920s investigated

<sup>27</sup> WELLEK, *op. cit.*, 279-280.

literature's sociocultural contexts. These aspects of the Formal Method align them with Veselovsky's historical poetics, yet this could not be recognized in the West, for the simple reason that Veselovsky's work remained unknown.

One may ask why Roman Jakobson himself did not serve as a conduit of Veselovsky's work in the West. A simple answer is not far to seek: Jakobson's later years were dedicated to structuralism and structural linguistics (of a particular, non-Chomskian variety), both of which marked a turn away from history. Jakobson – like Saussure, a historical linguist – was aware, however, that the concentration on synchrony is a tactical move. As he reminded his readers in the programmatic article «Linguistics and Poetics», first delivered as a lecture in 1959:

Any contemporary stage is experienced in its temporal dynamics, and, on the other hand, the historical approach both in poetics and in linguistics is concerned not only with changes, but also with continuous, enduring, static factors. A thoroughly comprehensive historical poetics or history of language is a super-structure to be built on a series of successive synchronic descriptions.<sup>28</sup>

Jakobson's own work on historical poetics – most importantly, his work on Slavic and comparative metrics – happens to be less well-known than his methodological pronouncements that adhere to a more familiar structuralist paradigm. For example, in his classic study of parallelism from 1966, Jakobson retraced Shklovsky's steps when he engaged closely with Veselovsky's «trenchant» analysis of two kinds of poetic parallelism, but downplayed its historical and evolutionary aspects.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, when Veselovsky's 1866 study on the Late Medieval motif of a «maiden pursued on account of her beauty» was reprinted in Italy in 1977, the editor, D'Arco Silvio Avale, extolled him as a semiotician *avant la lettre*, indeed as «il vero e più geniale fondatore della semiologia applicata ai testi della narrativa»; this title, however, in Veselovsky's case, is as complimentary as it is, ultimately, delimiting.<sup>30</sup> The basic incompatibility of historical poetics and structuralism, resulting no doubt from the latter's fundamentally ahistorical premises, is eloquently revealed by a miscommunication that took place between Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In 1960, Lévi-Strauss praised Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* as a precursor of the structuralist method. Propp published his response as a postscript to the Italian translation of *Morphology*. First, he claimed that the synchronic

<sup>28</sup> ROMAN JAKOBSON, *Selected Writings*, The Hague 1971-1988, v. 3, 20.

<sup>29</sup> JAKOBSON, *op. cit.*, 129.

<sup>30</sup> D'ARCO SILVIO AVALLE, «Da Santa Uliva a Justine», in: VESELOVSKIJ-SADE, *La fanciulla perseguitata*, Milan 1977, 5-33. Quote on p. 21.

analysis undertaken in *Morphology* was a preparatory stage for the historical reconstruction of the evolution of forms of folktale (which was his later project, predictably, of no interest to Lévi-Strauss). Responding to Lévi-Strauss's criticism that in *Morphology* he restricted himself to the analysis of «form» and did not engage with the «content» using the same proto-structuralist apparatus, Propp speaks of a diachronic poetics that would stratify the text into different sociohistorical levels of sedimentation:

Se in tal modo nella letteratura professionale l'opera d'arte in quanto tale è forma d'espressione di un'idea, ciò vale tanto più per il folclore. [...] Soltanto dopo lo studio formale del sistema della favola e la determinazione delle sue radici storiche sarà possibile analizzare oggettivamente e scientificamente nel suo sviluppo storico quel mondo della filosofia popolare e della morale popolare, che rappresenta una delle componenti più interessanti e significative della favola. Questa mostrerebbe, da questo punto di vista, una struttura stratiforme, simile a quella dei sedimenti geologici. In essa gli strati più antichi si combinano con quelli più recenti e quelli attuali.<sup>31</sup>

Propp's allegiance to a version of historical poetics was bound to be perceived at the time as conformism to the demands of Soviet scholarship (as we will see in the following section, the two in fact often went together).

Furthermore, with a sharpness of insight that could not be appreciated in structuralism's heyday, Propp declared that the method he employed in *Morphology* was not designed to be applied to other domains of art and culture in the indiscriminate manner advocated by Lévi-Strauss, who, Propp alleged, is really a «philosopher», not an empirical scholar. Lévi-Strauss was visibly offended by the latter assertion, but withheld from a close engagement with Propp's response, which he brushed aside as a result of misunderstanding.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir PROPP, «Struttura e storia nello studio della favola», in: *Morfologia della fiaba*, Torino 1966, 222-223. The English translation of the quoted passage: «If in professional literature the work of art is the form in which an idea is expressed, it is all the more so in folklore [...] Only when the wondertale has been studied formally and its historical roots have been determined is it possible to analyze objectively and scientifically the historical development of folk philosophy and folk mentality as they are found in the tale. This analysis would reveal a stratified organization, a structure similar to that of geological sediments in which ancient layers are combined with the more recent and even modern ones.» (Vladimir PROPP, *Theory and History of Folklore*, translated by A. Y. Martin and R. P. Martin, edited by A. Liberman, Minneapolis 1984, 78; translation amended.)

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the relation of Propp's morphological method to Lévi-Straussian structuralism, see Anatoly Liberman's Introduction to PROPP (1984), *op. cit.*, xix-xliv. This volume also includes a reprint of the English translation of Lévi-Strauss's two responses discussed here. An assessment of the relevance of Veselovsky's work to modern folklore studies can be found

While hardly of interest to structuralists, Veselovskian historical poetics was even less at home in idealist quarters. Benedetto Croce, for instance, would reject the very idea of literary history, instead regarding literature as a body of creations by individual authors. At his best, the critic experiences the work of art as the author did, by intuitively divining the emotional force behind the literary expression. Moreover, according to Croce, the aesthetic intuition, rather than permeating or informing the whole work, may be present only in some lines or passages, which constitute moments of true poetry. In 1980, Wellek, when speaking, somewhat tentatively, of a great future for the Crocean mode of literary criticism, characteristically downplayed this aspect of Croce's critical practice, which had appeared most incompatible with post-Crocean developments in literary theory and which one could dub his «analytic» aestheticism (in contrast with the «unitarian» aestheticism of the New Critics, on the analogy with the traditional divide in Homeric scholarship).<sup>33</sup>

Veselovsky's historicism, while also «analytic» in its approach to literary texts, is consistently inimical to aestheticism; it does not, however, shun psychological explanations insofar as these refer to historical and sociological factors that determine the culturally prevalent, ambient psychic attitudes in a given stratum or historical period. In light of this interest in what is *characteristic* for a period, we can see how Veselovsky's perspective differs from that of another philologist of great historical breadth of vision, Leo Spitzer. In his famous analysis of Keats's «Ode on a Grecian Urn», itself a response to New Criticism, Spitzer stresses the fundamental importance of both historical ambience (e.g.: however tempting that may be, «metaphysics» should not be imported into a reading of Keats as easily as into a reading of Donne) and established forms of literary expression, such as genre (e.g.: it's a mistake to ignore the ekphrastic logic of Keats's poem, or its concluding reference to the form of the epigram).<sup>34</sup> With these two positions, Veselovsky and Spitzer stand on common ground. There are nevertheless more nuanced differences: for Spitzer, attention to historical context often serves as a corrective, or a frame that constrains the hermeneutic possibilities, rather than as a source of insight into the fundamental problems faced by the poet. Literary conventions that are mastered by the poet are a (largely incidental) vehicle of poetic expression. The scholar must master the historical code in order to access the emotive content of the text, which takes us back to the author's original experience.

For Veselovsky, by contrast, inherited forms employed by the poet – whether a literary author or a traditional oral performer – are valuable not because they

in: G. B. BRONZINI, «Matrice romantica e sviluppi antropologici della 'poetica storica' di A.N. Veselovskij», *La Ricerca Folklorica* 33 (1996), 3-10.

<sup>33</sup> René WELLEK, «Croce als Kritiker der deutschen Literatur», *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse; Sitzungsberichte; Jahrgang 1980, Heft 4*, München.

<sup>34</sup> Leo SPITZER, «The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', or Content vs. Metagrammar», in: *Comparative Literature* 7 (1955), 203-225.

mediate his individual psyche, but because they indicate historical change. Even slight inflections in literary form represent *sedimented* social and cultural history. This process of sedimentation is one of the principal objects of Veselovsky's analysis. In an early methodological pronouncement, Veselovsky expressed his allegiance to the new kind of historiography that had superseded historiography focused on great men. According to that new historical vision, great personalities in history (as well as in art) appear not as individual geniuses but as «reflections of one or another movement generated by the masses, reflections which are more or less bright depending on the degree of self-consciousness [*soznatel'nost'*] with which they related themselves to the movement, or on the degree of energy with which they helped the movement to express itself».<sup>35</sup> Taking this insight further, we may define a «great» poet as one who is most successful in making literary form responsive to changing sociohistorical conditions.

Interestingly, in late reflections on his own methodology, delivered in 1960, Spitzer admits that his turn to the context and away from what he called «immanent» analysis of the work of art was a reaction against the excesses of New Criticism, which pursued this kind of analysis in too «dogmatic» a fashion.<sup>36</sup> Spitzer's ambivalent methodological position is perhaps most lucidly conveyed in a formulation in which he compares his approach to that of Erich Auerbach, who was an intellectual progeny of German historicism and thus, in his critical practice, a kin of Veselovsky (although Veselovsky would have had no sympathy for the teleological, overtly Hegelian underpinnings of *Mimesis*). As Spitzer notes, «[i]f I do not share Auerbach's thoroughgoing historicism, I am even more opposed to the normative, Aristotelian criticism that the so-called Chicago school of criticism has been trying to revive».<sup>37</sup> In this case, it is a residual historicism that goes with philology – understood as a *Wissenschaft*, rather than Anglo-American criticism – that unites Spitzer and Veselovsky.

### *Formalism's Wake*

The story of the reception of the Russian literary-critical tradition in the West finds a curious analogue in the *Nachleben* of Veselovsky's work in Soviet literary scholarship, some of whose major representatives came to seek in historical poetics an alternative both to the perceived radicalism of the Formal Method and to the stifling ideological strictures of state-sponsored Marxism-Leninism.

<sup>35</sup> VESELOVSKY (1967), *op. cit.*, 35 (translation slightly amended).

<sup>36</sup> LEO SPITZER, «Development of a Method» (1960), in: A. K. FORCIONE et al. (eds.), *Representative Essays*, Stanford 1988, 421-448.

<sup>37</sup> SPITZER (1960), *op. cit.*, 442.

By the mid-1920s the Formal method was in a state of crisis, and its original proponents would go their own different ways; Tomashevsky and (eventually) Eikhenbaum became traditional historians of literature, Shklovsky wrote film scripts and sought to influence official policy on art from an avowedly Marxist platform; Tynianov composed historical fiction; Jakobson chose to stay in the West where he co-founded structuralism with Lévi-Strauss.

In the later 1920s and the 1930s, in an increasingly Stalinist culture, scholars who did not affirm the basic principles of Marxism were barred from publication and official recognition. The demise of the Formal Method created a vacuum in which the need for a plausibly Marxist method of literary analysis was acutely felt. It is in this context that Veselovsky's legacy underwent a revival which in part accounts for the high regard in which it has ever since been held in his homeland. In what follows, I will limit myself to cursory readings of a few sources that, in my view, best convey the gist and the limitations of historical poetics disguised as Soviet Marxism.

In 1925, Boris Kazansky delivered a plenary address at the State Institute for the History of the Arts (GIII), where major formalists were on the faculty, entitled «The Idea of Historical Poetics».<sup>38</sup> In this lecture, Kazansky stressed the relevance of Veselovsky's historical poetics to various topics in poetics as they were being investigated in the 1910s and 1920s, both in Germany (the acoustic school of Eduard Sievers) and in Russia (the Formal Method). He also pointed to its potential for constructing a post-formalist, materialist approach to literature.<sup>39</sup> Mentioning Wilhelm Scherer alongside Veselovsky, Kazansky exclaims: «both were left aside, with respect, yet indifferently. As if they were not the direct originators of the new poetics».<sup>40</sup> The «new poetics» is, of course, the poetics of the formalists and their students.

By a «materialist» approach, Kazansky means increased attention to the acoustic nature of verse. It would be too facile to cite this as an example of how scholars, whose work could be – and often was – attacked by orthodox Marxists as hopelessly idealist, appropriated the vocabulary of the time. In the later 1920s, many scholars – including Eikhenbaum, Pumpiansky, and Bakhtin – who were originally inimical to Marxism were earnestly looking for a materialist poetics of one sort or another.

<sup>38</sup> BORIS KAZANSKII, «Ideia istoricheskoi poetiki», in: *Poetika: sbornik statei*, Leningrad 1926 (Reprint: The Hague 1966), 6-23.

<sup>39</sup> In a footnote (*op. cit.*, 10), Kazansky perspicaciously notes that Shklovsky's «development» of Veselovsky's poetics of plot constitutes an exception to the overall tendency of neglecting Veselovsky's work.

<sup>40</sup> KAZANSKII, *op. cit.*, 9: «их почтительно, но равнодушно оставили в стороне. Как будто и не от них непосредственно ведет свое происхождение новая поэтика.»

In 1928, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* was published – originally under the name of Pavel Medvedev, yet now assumed to be in large part written by Mikhail Bakhtin. In the sections that formulate the tasks of literary scholarship, Veselovsky's historical poetics appears as an important – indeed, as a central – aspect of a Marxist theory of literature. In particular, Medvedev/Bakhtin insist that a sociological (Marxist) poetics needs to be in a continuous dialogue with literary history:

In this connection, one can speak of the necessity for a historical poetics to be the intermediate link between theoretical sociological poetics and literary history. However, the distinction between theoretical and historical poetics is more technical than methodological in nature. And theoretical poetics must be historical [...] <sup>41</sup>

As the only example of works that should prepare the ground for a «synthesizing» sociological poetics, Medvedev/Bakhtin cite Veselovsky's «From the History of the Epithet». <sup>42</sup>

What makes the proposed method Marxist, according to Medvedev/Bakhtin, is its dialectical nature, which provides sociological poetics «with an indispensable instrument for the formulation of dynamic definitions, i.e. definitions adequate to the generating system of the development of a given genre, form, etc.» It is by historical inclusiveness, exemplified by Veselovsky's approach, that a Marxist sociological poetics can escape the fate of most poetics – turning into a program of a literary school (a common accusation leveled against the Formal Method was that it was a poetics of Russian futurism).

There is, nevertheless, a notable uncertainty in this section between positing Veselovsky's historical poetics as a mediating term between theoretical poetics and literary history (limiting its role to historical synthesis of literary phenomena) and viewing it as an anticipation of this very sociological poetics. This uncertainty reflects, proleptically, a true critical impasse: the ultimate failure of Soviet Marxist literary theory – and today's perspective permits this characterization – made Veselovsky's historical poetics into an *Ersatz* for the kind of sociological poetics which Medvedev/Bakhtin, in 1928, sought to conjure into being.

<sup>41</sup> Mikhail BAKHTIN and Pavel MEDVEDEV, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (1928), translated by Albert J. Wehrle, Baltimore 1978, 30.

<sup>42</sup> BAKHTIN and MEDVEDEV, *op. cit.*, 31.

For Bakhtin, the acceptance of Veselovsky's legacy coincides with a move toward an explicitly historical approach to literature. <sup>43</sup> The need for an a priori theory of aesthetics, which Bakhtin insists upon in his earlier work in direct polemic with the Formal Method (*Author and Hero in the Aesthetic Activity* [ca. 1920-1923] and «The problem of content, form, and material» [1924]), would clearly demand revising the basic premise of historical poetics, which Veselovsky posited in purely inductive, positivistic terms. Such a revision is indeed underway in Bakhtin's best-known contributions to literary studies, beginning with the analysis of the constitutive features of the adventure novel in the first version of the Dostoyevsky book (1929), to «The Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics» (1937-8), and finally to the revised edition of the Dostoevsky book (1963), in which Bakhtin supplants «creativity» (*tvorchesto*) with «poetics» in the title, puts forward the famous theory of «genre memory», and describes his own method with reference to historical poetics. The evolution of Bakhtin's ideas along this particular path should clearly be seen in the light of the Soviet Marxist reception of Veselovsky's work.

In the later 1930s, Veselovsky's historical poetics emerged not only as basically compatible with materialism, but also as a viable paradigm for a distinctively Marxist approach to literary analysis. A key role in this was played by Viktor Zhirmunsky, a scholar who disagreed with the Formalists on the method while in many respects remaining close to them in his work. One of the most accomplished philologists of his time, Zhirmunsky worked on topics as diverse as Germanic linguistics, Turkic epic, theoretical metrics, and the theory of comparative literature. It was around the one hundredth anniversary of Veselovsky's birth, in 1938, that Zhirmunsky set his mind on the task of restoring Veselovsky's legacy to a new life. <sup>44</sup> In 1939 and 1940, he

<sup>43</sup> Bakhtin's growing interest in a particular kind of historicism, historicism on a grand scale, has been linked to the influence of Cassirer, which is particularly obvious in the Rabelais book (Brian POOLE, «Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism» *South Atlantic Quarterly* 97, 3-4, 1998, 537-578), as well as to the impact of a Hegelian (as opposed to Neo-Kantian) framework, mediated by Soviet Marxism (Galin TIHANOV, «Culture, Form, Life: The Early Lukács and the Early Bakhtin», in: C. BRANDIST and G. TIHANOV (eds.), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, Basingstoke 2000, 43-69); both articles are included in the first volume of the collection edited by Michael E. Gardiner: *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 4 vols., London 2003. These explanations should be seen as complementary to the one offered here. It is worth noting that B. M. Engelhardt (Engel'gart), who published in 1924 a pioneering monograph on Veselovsky's life and method (cited above), occasionally visited Bakhtin's private circle in Leningrad in the 1920s (Katerina CLARK and Michael HOLQUIST, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, MA 1984, 101).

<sup>44</sup> As Arkady Blumbaum points out to me, this move on Zhirmunsky's part is in keeping with his strategy of relying on the academic mainstream (rather than the literary avant-garde, as was the case with the Formalists) in responding to the ideological demands of the time. Thus, in the

edited two collections of Veselovsky's most important work. Alongside V. Propp, B. Kazansky and M. P. Alekseev, among other scholars, Zhirmunsky also edited another volume of Veselovsky's collected works, whose publication had been discontinued in the 1920s.

During this time, Viktor Zhirmunsky produced a critical study of Veselovsky, parts of which were published as Introductions to the two above-mentioned volumes of Veselovsky's selected work.<sup>45</sup> This study is a self-conscious attempt on Zhirmunsky's part to make Veselovsky's historical poetics into a viable paradigm for Soviet literary scholarship. In Veselovsky's student diaries, Zhirmunsky finds evidence for a materialist worldview that agrees with that of the members of the proto-revolutionary movement. He further contrasts a «broadly-democratic» approach characteristic of Veselovsky's work on the Italian Renaissance with the «aristocratic, individualistic, and essentially anti-humanist concept of the Renaissance, which has become accepted in Western literary scholarship since the time of Burckhardt, Nietzsche and de Gobineau».<sup>46</sup> Zhirmunsky claims, moreover, that Veselovsky approximates the dialectical method in his polemic against organic versions of evolutionism. He is praised as a staunch opponent of Romantic nationalism; instead, Veselovsky seeks to explain the historical distinctiveness of a national tradition by cross-cultural interaction and hybridization. Citing Veselovsky's ability to draw systematically on non-canonical literary traditions, Zhirmunsky levels the charge of Eurocentrism at Western bourgeois literary scholarship.<sup>47</sup>

In producing a «Soviet» Veselovsky, a venture in which other scholars (V. F. Shishmaryov, A. N. Sokolov) also participated, Zhirmunsky was treading on thin ice. During the post-War nationalist backlash, known as the «anti-cosmopolitanism» campaign, Party functionaries attacked scholars who underestimated the greatness of Russian literature and looked too hard into its Western sources. Veselovsky was named as the patron saint of these unpatriotic Westernizers. In the first stage of the

later 1920s, the time of the quest for sociological approaches to literature, Zhirmunsky oversees the Russian translation of Levin Ludwig Schücking's *Die Soziologie der literarischen Geschmacksbildung* (1923; Russian trans. 1928; English trans. 1966). In his preface to this translation, Zhirmunsky stresses the virtues of the work of a Leipzig professor over Eikhenbaum's contemporaneous, allegedly more haphazard work on the proximate sociocultural contexts of literature (*literaturnyi byt*). The return to Veselovsky in the 1930s was, in part, similarly prompted by Zhirmunsky's search for a respectable academic correlate to the officially sponsored line of research. Some comments on Zhirmunsky's approach to the editing of Veselovsky's work can be found in Rossi, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> Viktor ZHIRMUNSKII, «A. N. Veselovskii i sravnitel'noe literaturovedenie», in *Izbrannye trudy: sravnitel'noe literaturovedenie*, Leningrad 1979, 84-136.

<sup>46</sup> ZHIRMUNSKII, *op. cit.*, 95.

<sup>47</sup> ZHIRMUNSKII, *op. cit.*, 115.

campaign, in 1947 and early 1948, under the slogan of overcoming «the servility before the West» (*nizkopoklonstvo pered Zapadom*), orthodox critics took Zhirmunsky and his colleagues to task for «camouflaging» Veselovsky as a proto-Marxist.

The anti-Veselovskian campaign was started by Alexander Fadeev, the head of the Writers Union, and Valery Kirpotin, his close associate. It appears that there was an initial confusion between Alexander Veselovsky and his brother Alexei, a specialist in Western European literatures.<sup>48</sup> When charged with the task of supplying the supporting evidence (including the basis for regarding Alexander and Alexei, whose work has very little in common, as intellectual twins), Kirpotin published two lengthy articles directed against Veselovsky and his «disciples and epigones» in *Oktiabr'*.<sup>49</sup> In the last issue of 1947, the journal published polemical responses by Vladimir Shishmaryov, Veselovsky's student, and Victor Shklovsky.<sup>50</sup>

Although all contributions to the discussion in *Oktiabr'* were politically motivated and thus of necessity tendentious, this exchange, surprisingly, contained some real scholarly arguments. At the time, the campaign against the «cosmopolites» – the word would very soon morph into a euphemism for the Jews – in literary scholarship had yet to take a truly ominous turn. In late 1947 it was still possible for Shklovsky, in print, to brush Fadeev's vicious attack on Veselovsky aside as a «misunderstanding».<sup>51</sup> In 1949, Zhirmunsky, alongside M. Azadovsky, B. Eikhenbaum, and G. Gukovsky, who all were Jews, were subjected to a humiliating public chastisement at the Leningrad University for their allegedly «cosmopolitan» scholarship and were barred from teaching. Grigory Gukovsky, a student of the Formalists who switched to Soviet Marxism (and was not involved in the resuscitation of historical poetics), was arrested and died in prison in 1950.

<sup>48</sup> This was a widespread view at the time, as is acknowledged in V. KIRPOTIN, «O nizkopoklonstve pered kapitalisticheskimi Zapadom, ob Aleksandre Veselovskom, o ego posledovatel'nykh i o samom glavnom», *Oktiabr'* (1948), no. 1, 6. In his memoirs, Kirpotin asserts that «Fadeev didn't know anything about Veselovsky before I told him about him» (V. KIRPOTIN, *Rovesnik zheleznogo veka*, Moscow 2006, 660). For a more detailed discussion of the circumstances of the campaign against «cosmopolitanism» in literary scholarship, see Gleb STRUVE, «Comparative Literature in the Soviet Union, Today and Yesterday», *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 4 (1955) 1-20 and K. AZADOVSKII and B. EGOROV, ««Kosmopolity»: Iz istorii otechestvennoi filologii». *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 36 (1999) 83-135.

<sup>49</sup> V. KIRPOTIN, «Ob otnoshenii russkoi literatury i russkoi kritiki k kapitalisticheskomu Zapadu», *Oktiabr'* (1947), no. 9, 161-183. IDEM, (1948), *op. cit.*, 3-27. In another anti-Veselovskian piece published in *Oktiabr'*, Propp's historical work on Russian fairytales was singled out for attack for «using Veselovsky's method of operating with abstract schemata»: I. DMITRAKOV and M. KUZNETSOV, «Aleksandr Veselovskii i ego posledovateli», *Oktiabr'* (1947), no. 12, 170-174.

<sup>50</sup> V. F. SHISHMAREV, «Aleksandr Veselovskii i ego kritiki», *Oktiabr'* (1947), no. 12, 148-184; SHKLOVSKY (1947), *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> SHKLOVSKY (1947), *op. cit.*, 182.

In his two aforementioned articles in *Oktiabr'*, Kirpotin not only mediated official rhetoric, but also took pains to substantiate it.<sup>52</sup> He showed that Veselovsky's approach had little, if anything, in common with the pre-Revolutionary intellectual tradition that was universally acknowledged as paradigmatic for Soviet scholarship, the one represented by the leftist critics Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1845) and Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828-1889). Veselovsky's democratic and even populist presumptions, Kirpotin pointed out, were broadly diffused in the 1860-1870s and were not in contradiction with the ideology of «bourgeois liberalism». Some of Kirpotin's points constitute valuable findings, such as Saltykov's parody of Veselovsky in *A Provincial's Petersburg Diary* (1872) in the figure of Boligolova (Mr. Headache), a narrow-minded comparatist who triumphantly derives a Russian folk ditty from a Western source.<sup>53</sup> Overall, Kirpotin was probably right to assert that Veselovsky would be dismayed by his characterization as a burgeoning dialectical materialist.<sup>54</sup>

Veselovsky's distance from the contemporary radical Left, obviously, does not mean that his historical poetics cannot be brought into a productive dialogue with (neo-)Marxism. Zhirmunsky's rapprochement between Veselovsky and Marxism,

<sup>52</sup> True to the dark irony of many Soviet purge campaigns, Kirpotin, also a Jew, was expelled from the Party and lost his own position at the Moscow Institute for World Literature in 1949. The rhetoric faced by the chastised Kirpotin mimicked the less substantive aspects of his own articles against «Veselovskianism» (e.g. «[in his book] Kirpotin says a lot about Pushkin's love for humanity, but forgets to speak about Pushkin's love for the Russian people»; from Prutskov's speech, quoted in KIRPOTIN, *op. cit.*, 567). Paradoxically, one of the reasons for expulsion was his participation in the polemic around Veselovsky (he was accused of supporting Veselovsky's method!); see his letter to Fadeev in: KIRPOTIN, *op. cit.*, 576-77, also 623. At different points in his life, Kirpotin was an agent of Comintern who taught Communist ideology in Western Europe, the second-in-command at the Writers Union under Fadeev, and a widely-known Dostoyevsky scholar. His memoirs and diaries, published posthumously (V. KIRPOTIN, *op. cit.*), reveal a staunch believer in the Communist ideals, who regarded himself as a victim of the abuse of power under Stalin. Fadeev committed suicide, three years after Stalin's death, in 1956; Kirpotin died in 1997 at the age of 99.

<sup>53</sup> KIRPOTIN (1948), *op. cit.*, 12-14.

<sup>54</sup> An enthusiastic response to Kirpotin's second, more important article by his close friend, Fyodor Gladkov, is preserved in their personal correspondence, and attests to the pro-Party idealism which Kirpotin probably shared: «I think in recent years I have never experienced such joy and excitement as now, when I read this article of yours. Not only is it written by a person of immense personal strength and great knowledge, who employs the dialectical method with consummate skill. The main thing is that it is irresistible because of its fervor and the passion of a confident fighter [*neotrazima svoei plamennost'iu i strast'iu uverennogo boitsa*] [...] All these shishmaryovs, zhirmunskys and other bonzes appear as pitiful pigmies, who defend themselves with their little fingers and hide behind their laughable sophisms» (letter published in: KIRPOTIN, *op. cit.*, 549). Gladkov was a Soviet writer whose novel *Cement* (1925) is occasionally taught in the US in surveys of 20<sup>th</sup> c. Soviet literature but has never been reprinted in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union.

although originally prompted by considerations of ideological convenience, remains a suggestive starting point for such an undertaking, which is clearly a desideratum.<sup>55</sup>

Shklovsky's contribution to the debate, while infused with the spirit of the time, is perhaps one of the most valuable general assessments of Veselovsky's work to date. Pointing out that he himself criticized Veselovsky in *Theory of Prose* and that «Veselovsky is no more responsible for the theory of the Formalists than Aristotle is responsible for Boileau», Shklovsky takes a historicist look at Veselovsky's heterogeneous corpus within which he detects different components (some of which appeared more dated, from the perspective of 1947, than others). His final judgment seeks to preserve a balance between ancestor cult and a severe Marxist historical objectivity:

A. Veselovsky was a great scholar, a patriot. He had an extraordinary memory, but did not have the method. He was a blind Samson, except that he did not destroy the temple, but attempted to erect one. Yet he did not know what he was building [...] Veselovsky was born 110 years ago. We can say that he was ahead of the European scholarship of the time, but we cannot say that he saw what now is already becoming visible from the mountain of our time. [...] He committed a mistake, yet he spoke about the right things. He was a genius, who could have created a historical poetics, a genius, whose work has become indispensable to us. [...] Yet on his example we see that a great literary science can be created without a great philosophy.<sup>56</sup>

Veselovsky's mistake, according to Shklovsky, consisted in his failure to explain the rise of «historical consciousness» by the emergence of class society, which led to his inability to adapt his method compellingly to modern literatures. Yet, as in the case of the 1928 discussion by Medvedev/Bakhtin, the crucial question – how much of Veselovsky's historical poetics is to be incorporated into a proper Marxist approach to literature – remained unanswered.

One widely acknowledged consequence of the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign was a decline of the study of Western literatures in the Soviet Union; it was perhaps due in part to the impact of the campaign that comparative literature never gained an institutional status at Soviet universities. The literatures of fellow Socialist countries were served by departments of Slavic philology; the literatures of Soviet republics were

<sup>55</sup> Intersections between historical poetics and Fredric Jameson's work were debated at the conference on Historical Poetics that took place in May 2011 at the University of Chicago. Pertinent methodological reflections can be found, in particular, in Leslie KURKE, «Pindar's *Pythian* 11 and the *Oresteia*: Historicist Hermeneutics and Contestatory Ritual Poetics», forthcoming in: I. KLIGER and B. MASLOV (ed.), *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics*.

<sup>56</sup> SHKLOVSKY (1947), *op. cit.*, 178-182.



studied at special departmental units. Yet the kind of broad comparative project that was envisioned by Veselovsky and Zhirmunsky was, after 1947, doomed to marginality. From today's perspective, however, one may note thankfully that because of the Fadeev-Kirpotin campaign Veselovsky's name largely escaped the taint of Soviet officialdom.

In the late 1940s, the administration of the Leningrad Institute for Russian Literature (Pushkinskii dom) faced a peculiar problem: even as «Veselovskianism» was being denounced, a large marble statue that represented Alexander Veselovsky (sitting, with a book in his hands) was welcoming, unperturbed, scholars visiting the Institute's manuscript reading room. Due to the insurmountable technical difficulties of relocating the statue, the decision was made to cover it with sailcloth and blockade it with bookcases.<sup>57</sup> During the period of de-Stalinization, Veselovsky again became a *persona grata*, and the statue was disrobed.<sup>58</sup>

As an intellectual presence, Veselovsky similarly proved impossible to ignore or to expel. Although comparative literature lacked a proper institutional basis in the Soviet Union, with the foundation of the International Comparative Literature Association in 1955, it fell to Zhirmunsky, who became a Vice-President of the Association, to be the chief representative of Soviet literary scholarship abroad. In this context, Zhirmunsky would stress the significance of Veselovsky's work for a rigorously Marxist approach, which is capable of explaining similar literary phenomena in different cultures by reference to similar sociohistorical conditions (rather than by influence of one tradition on another). He would also repeatedly point to the Eurocentrism of Western comparative literature.<sup>59</sup>

The post-War period also saw intensified comparatist activity in the Soviet Union in the fields of Slavic philology and literary criticism; this was made possible by the relative

ease of scholarly communication within the countries of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>60</sup> In this context, Russian historical poetics was exported to Eastern European countries, where it gained some followers; the extent of its influence remains to be investigated.<sup>61</sup> The evolutionism of the Marxist variety proved particularly compatible with Veselovsky's stadialism (the view that the history of society passes through the same stages). Particularly curious from today's perspective are the debates on a putative post-Capitalist stage in the development of literature; arguments in favor of a Socialist period style were based on a comparison of works produced in Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>62</sup>

The Veselovsky-Zhirmunsky paradigm of comparative literature is notable, first and foremost, for the aspiration to combine the empirical comparative work in divergent literary cultures with a focus on the theory (and history) of literary forms. And whereas its impact on the field of comparative literature in Western Europe and the US has so far been negligible, in the domain of theoretical poetics the Veselovskian tradition is in many ways fundamental to 20<sup>th</sup> c. literary studies.

It is a telling fact that most modern disciplines – with the exception of the study of literature – boast a founding figure of unshakeable reputation whose intellectual roots lie in 19<sup>th</sup> c. empiricism, such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) in linguistics, Max Weber in sociology (1864-1920), Aby Warburg (1866-1929) in art history. I submit that it is largely due to ideological and political causes, which I tried to outline above, that Alexander Veselovsky has not achieved a comparable reputation in literary studies.

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<sup>57</sup> The story is told in AZADOVSKII and EGOROV, *op. cit.*, 129. Excellent photographs of this statue can be found in Andy BYFORD, *Literary Scholarship in Late Imperial Russia*, London 2007, Illustrations 15 and 17.

<sup>58</sup> In 1956, Nikolay Gudzy and Viktor Vinogradov were the first, in print, to intervene in favor of Veselovsky's legacy; see Gleb STRUVE, «Comparative Literature in the Soviet Union: Two Postscripts», *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 6 (1957), 7-10.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. V. M. ZHIRMUNSKY, «On the Study of Comparative Literature», *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 13 (1967), 1-13; Viktor ZHIRMUNSKII, «Problemy sravnitel'no-istoricheskogo izucheniia literatury» (1960), in *Izbrannye trudy: sravnitel'noe literaturovedenie*, Leningrad 1979, 66-83; Victor GIRMOUNSKY, «Les courants littéraires en tant que phénomènes internationaux», in: N. BANAŠEVIĆ (ed.), *Actes du V<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée*, Belgrade 1967, 3-21. The study of non-Western literatures within comparative programs in the US began at the University of Indiana, under the leadership of Horst Frenz, where the Comparative Literature Committee was founded in 1949. Cf. MINER, *op. cit.*, 10. See also Frenz's own comments on the institutionalization of Comparative Literature in the US in: H. FRENZ, «Three Decades of Comparative Literature: Some Random Thoughts», *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 13 (1980), 57-61.

<sup>60</sup> The international congresses of Slavists, a series that was spectacularly re-founded in 1958 in Moscow – an event that saw Roman Jakobson's first visit to the Soviet Union since 1920 – was an important venue for furthering comparative work in Slavic studies. See an overview in O. N. TRUBACHEV, «Slavianskaia filologiya i sravnitel'nost' ot s''ezda k s''ezdu», in: IDEM (ed.), *Slavian-skoe iazykoznanie. XII s'ezd slavistov. Doklady rossiiskoi delegatsii*, Moscow 1998, 3-33.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., the work of the prolific Slovak literary scholar Dionýz Ďurišin, who emphasizes the centrality of the Veselovsky-Zhirmunsky paradigm for comparative literature (cf.: «our point of departure in studying concrete material should be historical poetics, which examines the elements of the work of art within the system of structure and of history simultaneously, having regard to their social conditioning» [*op. cit.*, 86]), and M. GŁOWIŃSKI, «Theoretical Foundations of Historical Poetics», trans. by B. BRAUNROT, *New Literary History* 7 (1976), 237-245, who claims Tynianov and Jakobson as chief sources for a Polish «historical poetics». It is to a large extent due to Jakobson's involvement that Poland, in particular, became an important meeting place for Soviet and Western scholars; cf. M. GŁOWIŃSKI, «Roman Jakobson v Pol'she», in: H. BARAN et al. (ed.), *Roman Jakobson: Texts, Documents, Studies*, Moscow 1999, 254-261.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. ZHIRMUNSKII (1960), *op. cit.*, 71-72, as well as numerous publications included in the proceedings of the international congresses of Slavists.