Mapping the Intellectual History of Central Europe: The Emergence of Slovenian Literary Studies and the Birth of Literary Theory

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Abstract: The article situates the Slavic philologist Matija Murko within the broader intellectual landscape of the region in which he was active. It examines Murko's relationships with younger Slovenian Slavists (his students) as well as with some of his international collaborators. On the one hand, the article examines Murko's relationship with the linguist Fran Ramovš and the literary historian Ivan Prijatelj, who both worked at the newly founded University of Ljubljana after World War I. On the other hand, it focuses on Murko's relationship with the linguist Roman Jakobson, a central figure of the Prague Linguistic Circle, in the establishment of which Murko played a significant role. The article underscores the epistemological affinities and, above all, divergences among these figures, thereby exploring the implications of Murko's understanding of Slavic philology for the scholarly study of language and literature. By observing Murko's activities, intellectual exchanges, and institutional relocations, the article seeks to reconstruct the specifically historical milieu of Central Europe.

Keywords: Matija Murko, Slavic philology, Ivan Prijatelj, Roman Jakobson, literary studies, literary theory, Central Europe

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Introduction: Intellectual formation—a symptom of the times

In 1935, Prague became host to the French Surrealists.[1] With its innovative variant of Surrealism, the city on the Vltava became a true domicile for André Breton and others. An obscure art group with a scant audience in a supposedly cosmopolitan Paris, where many writers and other artists had fled as if to freedom, attracted hundreds in the centre of Prague. And this continued for several successive evenings. Suddenly, Paris appeared in the light of a province which regarded Surrealists as exotic, while Prague was becoming 'the capital of the 20th century'.[2] After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the young Czechoslovak state soon adopted a political course conducive to many progressive reforms. The Parliament included members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the immediate political representative of the ideas fostered by the avant-garde, especially by the group gathered around artist and philosopher [Karel] Teige.[3]

This period saw the activity of Matija Murko in Prague. In the mid-1930s, he was already a retired professor who had previously, in the decade after the end of the Great War, reformed the Prague Slavic studies with his work at Charles University. Now he presided over the Institute of Slavonic Studies, the most important academic institution of its kind, second only to its older sister organisation in Paris. The Institute had been founded by the postwar Czechoslovak state on the initiative of the President himself. At the political restructuring of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, then, Murko exchanged the Austrian academic centres (Vienna and Graz), by which he had been moulded, for a new European centre, which became the centre of his academic interests in research and elsewhere. It is even more accurate to say that Murko was one of the central institutional personages who made Prague the centre of Slavic philologies in the interbellum period.

He shared the city with the historical avant-garde, which reached beyond the aestheticist communication of

1. An earlier version of this article appeared in Slovenian as Blaž Gselman, "Matija Murko kot predhodnik slovenske slovstvene vede in posrednik pri nastajanju literarne teorije," *Primerjalna književnost* 48, no. 2 (2025): 107–119.

2. Derek Seyer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

3. Teige wrote about the political economy of art, the political role of avant-gardism, the clashes between left-wing artists in the interbellum period, and the complex relationship of these clashes with the Communist movement. See Dave Beech, "On Karel Teige," in *Karel Teige: The Marketplace of Art / Commentary*, ed. Sezgyn Boynik and Joseph Grim Feinberg, vol. 2 (Helsinki and Prague: Rab-Rab Press and Contradictions, 2022), 45–54.

the previous modern art strands, striving instead for fundamental changes in the organisation of society. In this environment, the Slavic philologist did not look to the avant-garde artists, his neighbours, but continued exploring the oral tradition of epic poetry at the opposite end of history, now headed by the Prague Surrealists. While no single reason can be given here why Murko chose to concentrate his research on this particular end of history, we shall try to demonstrate why this decision was only to be expected in his epistemological perspective.[4]

Intellectually, Murko had been shaped by the Viennese Slavic and German studies by the end of the nineteenth century. His knowledge of things Slavic was acquired first from Franc Miklošič and then from the latter's successor, Vatroslav Jagić. Jagić advocated a broad conception of philology which included linguistics, literary history, and even folklore studies. At the Germanic department, his professors were already treating literary history as a separate discipline, which sparked Murko's interest in it as well as informed his positivist method.[5] Not surprisingly, the development of the disciplines reflected the political situation: while Germanic studies enjoyed a privileged status, Slavic studies were marginalised, and their differentiation and specialisation came late and unwelcome to the Austrian university. However, this attitude to Slavic philology changed with the generation of Murko's students. Having examined its vast field of issues, his students appear to have narrowed down their pursuits and found the objects of knowledge for two new humanist disciplines: they concentrated either on linguistics (Ramovš and Nahtigal) or on literary studies (Prijatelj and Kidrič). Murko was limited by the older Austrian epistemological nationalism or, rather, its impact on philologies, while the first professors at the University of Ljubljana were guided by its Slovenian variant. After the Great War, Murko's variant of Pan-Slavism gave a cosmopolitan impression, while his younger colleagues were consolidating their nationalist positions in the institutional environment of the new university (in the former imperial province).

Murko's epistemological disagreements with his students

Differences came to the fore, for example, in the correspondence between Murko and his former Graz student, Fran Ramovš, after the early 1920s, when the former helped to launch and later edit the Prague Slavic Studies journal *Slavia*. This journal emerged during the postwar institutional flowering of Slavic philologies, in opposition to Jagić's older journal *Archiv für slavische Philologie*. In a somewhat heated intellectual discussion, Ramovš advocated the remodelling of Slavic philology into a strictly scientific discipline, i.e. linguistics with its object of knowledge, removing all literary and cultural history. By contrast, Murko continued to uphold tradition: his conception of Slavic philology resembled that of Jagić, his teacher, and Slavic studies were expected to play an important role of social cohesion among the Slavic nations and in their communication with the non-Slavic world.[6]

In terms of intellectual history, the discussion might be tagged as having taken place after the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). His well-known lectures with their 'abstract objectivism'[7] elevated linguistics to the level of science and produced its object of knowledge—language. Ramovš, a linguist, was thus following the epistemological breakthroughs of his time. Murko, on the other hand, considered philology mainly as a technique, a useful tool of cultural erudition in mediating between individuals and social communities. The goal of such techniques is cultivation, and this relationship between discipline and its object of knowledge is not perceived as one of scientific knowledge:

> "Through their particular relations, the arts or humanities thus impart a certain *knowledge* [*savoir*]: not a scientific knowledge of their object, but—in addition to the particular erudition needed for familiarity—a *savoir-faire* or, to be more accurate, a *know-how-to-do* to appreciate-judge, and to enjoy-consume-utilize this object which is properly 'culture': a knowledge invested in a knowing how to do in order to …"[8]

It appears that the young linguist Ramovš attempted, to use Althusser's phrase, to draw an 'epistemological break' between ideological and scientific practice, while the more mature philologist Murko, with his clear-cut defence of the social usefulness of discipline, adhered to the former: 'The ideological is something that relates to practice and to society.

4. Of course, it would be equally possible to address the tendencies running counter to our argument, such as the fact that avant-gardes occasionally appropriated epic poetry as their material.

5. See Darko Dolinar, "Med slovansko filologijo in nacionalno literarno zgodovino: Matija Murko in slovenska literarna veda," *Slavia* 72, no. 1 (2003): 13–26.

6. See Darko Dolinar, "Matija Murko, začetek 'Slavie' in njeni slovenski sodelavci," *Slavistična revija* 53, no. 3 (2005): 401–407.

7. The statement on "abstract objectivism" is of course critical of Saussure, suggesting that his theory is incapable of embracing the social dimension which is 'refracted' in the linguistic sign. To achieve this, Saussure should have replaced *langue* with *parole* as his object of knowledge. See Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

8. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster et al. (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 92–3.

The scientific is something that relates to knowledge [*connaissance*] and to the sciences."[9] Such appears to have been the relation between the two epistemological attitudes. But since it has been mentioned above that the Ljubljana Slavic studies were informed by the local variant of epistemological nationalism, it may be advisable to reconsider the truly scientific nature of Ramovš's linguistic enterprise. When one of Murko's letters recommends the publication of Josip Jurčič's work in *Slavia* with the purpose of introducing him to other Slavs and 'non-Slavs', Ramovš retorts:

> "Your letter suggests in several places that we should work to become known to others, non-Slavs. While certainly important, this work belongs elsewhere rather than in Slavic studies or Slavic journals. Who are we to work for: Slovenians or science and its development? [...] But as *Slavia* is published in Prague in Slavic languages, I believe it can do without Jurčič but not without Slovenian dialects, which form an important link in the development of the Slavic language [...]."[10]

In his letter to Murko, Ramovš makes the break which we have attempted to reconstruct above. In his opinion, the break should run through *Slavia*, and at the same time the 'devoted and grateful disciple' (as he signs his letters to Murko) draws it between himself and his teacher. The latter is adroitly identified as a subject of nationalist ideology with the claim that Murko strives to present the Slovenian nation to the non-Slavic world as a modern entity of its kind. For his own practice, on the other hand, Ramovš claims the domain of science. Assuming that the scientific subject is the national language, he necessarily ignores the fact that it is a systemised 'specific historical formation of speech practices—a national formation, which *makes it seem as if* the national language was working as a stable self-identical matrix of mutual translatability of all possible discourses.[11] What appears to be 'an objective self-identical institution of language' is in fact 'a theoretical formalisation grounded in the unreflected spontaneous ideology of speech practices in a given historical formation, national formation'.[12] We can conclude that Ramovš's epistemology was more up to date but may not have belonged purely to the field of science. In light of Močnik's argument, the reproach which he addresses to Murko applies to him as well.

The birth of Slovenian literary studies

Next to Ramovš, the other central figure of the Ljubljana Slavic studies is certainly the literary historian Ivan Prijatelj.[13] His writings make the production of pre-theoretic knowledge stand out even more than it could in the work of the linguists:

> "But with every word I wrote, I increasingly felt the emptiness and unresponsiveness of everything that I knew about our past from my teachers and our books. I passionately longed to enter a more intimate relationship, a more detailed and direct contact with those who were crafting the thin thread of Slovenian cultural life from era to era. [...] And this longing has stayed with me. I keep tagging behind this thread, the idea of a Slovenian nation, like a Platonic lover. That is all I am fit for."[14]

Prijatelj's essay *V zatišju* [In the Lee] expressed a literary historian's manifesto concisely and poetically. But he was led to found national literary studies by his practice even before he wrote it down.[15] This achievement is attributed to Prijatelj by Rastko Močnik, who traces it to the former's essay *Drama Prešernovega duševnega življenja* (The Drama of Prešeren's Inner Life, 1905). Prijatelj's reading of Prešeren complements the ideological horizon

9. Althusser, *Philosophy*, 99.

10. Fran Ramovš to Matija Murko, Ljubljana, 2 June 1923, The Correspondence of Matija Murko, Literary Archives of the Museum of Czech Literature.

11. Rastko Močnik, *Julija Primic v slovenski književni vedi* (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2007), 225.

12. Ibid.

13. A whole decade before Ramovš, at the end of June 1912, Prijatelj communicates to Murko his disagreement with the latter's plans for a 'Slavic studies professional newspaper'. He adds that he had thought Murko was preparing a monograph collection, and states that he already finds even Jagić's journal *Archiv für slavische Philologie* anachronistic. In his next letter, though, he subdues his tone and claims there has been a misunderstanding about what kind of journal has been envisaged (from Prijatelj to Murko). What is important, however, is the dynamism of the content, which is typical of the later letters by Ramovš as well.

14. Ivan Prijatelj, "V zatišju," in *Izbrani eseji in razprave II*, ed. Anton Slodnjak (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1953) 392–3.

15. Iztok Saksida proposes the term "Slovenian literary studies" to indicate the pre-theoretic knowledge which treats the Slovenian literary corpus when the latter is perceived spontaneously and not reworked into an object of knowledge by a theoretical process: "And finally there is the third addressee, a position which is obscurantist by its very nature and most handily embodied in the figure of the Slovenian studies scholar. Until now, the latter has been convinced—in fact, may go on being convinced—that the national book corpus is entirely his own domain, and *Slovenian literary studies* the only proper name for this activity. Literary theory against literary studies—that is the premise we seek to justify. According to it, the "Slovenian" book corpus is simply one of the many literatures which finally deserve to be reformulated into a theoretical object—either through reworkings of the authors already established in the *corpus* or through inventing new ones." (Saksida, "Uvodnik," 1) The present paper, too, shall examine where "literary theory" was being produced at the time and what role was played by Murko in this process.

of aestheticist interpretations, which began with Josip Stritar's introduction to the second printing of *Poezije* [Poems] in 1866 and established Prešeren as a canonical author, at the same time constituting the Slovenians as a modern European nation.[16] In his text about Prešeren's life and work, Stritar first successfully constitutes the *author* by juxtaposing his life (his supposedly true biography) with his art practice; the author myth is a prerequisite for understanding this practice in the horizon of belletristic reading. Stritar establishes an aestheticist institution within which the so-called works can be interpreted. This he manages to do by subverting positivism: the biography draws on the poem, and becomes harmonised with the text. This gesture enables him to rework Prešeren's poems as works of art (open to aestheticist reading) while transforming their writer into a literary classic. The formation of an aestheticist structure, which is not pre-filled with content but can be filled by any ideology, facilitates the constitution of a nation precisely by its lack of content, one might say, by its universality. According to Močnik, ruminations on whether Prešeren really loved Julija are 'a socially cohesive activity and literally nation-founding'.[17] Thus, Stritar consolidates the mythographer's matrix with the formula: love is a poetic fiction, but Prešeren did not entirely make it up.[18] Stritar struggled for balance between the antagonisms of authentic biographical reality and its transfer into the horizon of a literary artwork (as well as its neglect of empirical facts). In 1901, Stritar's formula is subverted by Murko, who is canonised here by Močnik as a predecessor of Slovenian literary studies: Prešeren's love was no fiction, but it was nevertheless a mere ideal.[19] With this, he attempts the impossible, for he wants to point out the materiality of fiction in the Stritar ideological horizon. In the framework of positivism, the attempt is doomed to failure because it would require a materialist theory of literature. Murko, too, retains the dualism fiction/non-fiction in order to read the poems as works of art, at the same time introducing illegitimate felicitous love to consolidate the power of Prešeren's poetic imagination. The year 1905 sees the decisive step made by Prijatelj: reality, till then an external ideological horizon of the matrix, is introduced into the latter as one of its elements.[20] Thus, even the ideal, which is considered by Stritar to be an external ideological horizon of the matrix, can be transferred into the matrix itself. As the myth has exhausted the possibilities of its matrix, it is relocated to a new field of overdetermination: the field of fin-de-siècle ideology. The matrix can be organised precisely around the opposition between reality and ideal. According to Močnik, Prešeren thus becomes a subject in the matrix, capable of interpellating individuals into subjects (in keeping with the Althusser theory of ideology). This is the beginning of literary studies. The formula is transferred by Prijatelj "from the subject of enunciation of the myth (the commentator, "interpreter") to the subject of the enunciated ('Prešeren'): now Prešeren has to adjust his life to the requirements of the structure of his own hagiographical myth, Prešeren becomes a *bouc émissaire* for the symptoms of his readers."[21]

This extended summary of Močnik's argument about the constitution of Slovenian literary studies shows that the turn of the century failed to open up the field of theory in investigating literature. The subject of literary studies remained an "ideological object of knowledge,"[22] and knowledge of the same kind was reproduced at the university, where Prijatelj and Kidrič, an even more zealous supporter of the positivist ideology, lectured on the earlier as well as the more recent histories of Slovenian (and other Slavic) literature, with a clear focus on the former.[23] With the establishment of Ljubljana University, Murko was not given a professorial tenure for several reasons: initial administrative hindrances were succeeded by political misunderstandings.[24] This, however, appears symptomatic in light of the differences between him and his students, which are examined in this paper. In 1920, he was chosen to teach at Charles University in Prague, a much larger academic environment, which began to develop Slavic studies systematically as part of the nationalist ideology in the new state. In addition to his professorial tenure (which he held until his retirement in 1931) and editorial work at *Slavia,* he was active at the Slovanský ústav (Institute of Slavonic Studies), which he co-founded and led as its second President from 1932 to 1941. In 1929, he assisted in organising the first congress of Slavic philologists in Prague, an event that might well be considered a watershed in history. It was there that the programme of the Prague linguistic circle, a group of linguists which had been active in Prague since the previous year, was publicly presented. Thus, Murko's work provided institutional

16. Močnik, *Julija*, 23–91.

17. Ibid., 52.

18. Ibid., 48.

19. Ibid., 52.

20. Ibid. 65.

21. Močnik, "Amor in Gens," 8.

22. Močnik, *Julija*, 76.

23. Soon it transpired that both were treating mainly Slovenian literature. This choice decisively institutionalised specialisation as opposed to the earlier pan-Slavic and broader philological perspective, and thus confirmed their departure from their teacher Murko (see Dolinar, 'Med slovansko filologijo' [Between Slavic Philology], 21).

24. Dolinar, "Med slovansko filologijo," 17.

support for one of the central linguistic schools of the previous century. But even in Prague his relationship with the circle was analogous to his relationship with his students, now professors in Ljubljana: the Prague structural linguistics concentrated on a narrow field with an object of knowledge which has been labelled above as the *national language*, a subject taken over from Saussure by Roman Jakobson, probably the circle's most prominent representative and the one most important for the history of the humanities. The analytical tools produced by Jakobson and his colleagues had important consequences for their research into literature: more precisely, these concepts of their own making enabled them to recast the field of literary studies. Thus, they were able to discard various aesthetics, positivisms, and other philosophical ideologies, which had until then dominated the research of literature, including that at the Ljubljana Slavic Studies department.

The birth of literary theory

As recently demonstrated by comparative literature scholar Galin Tihanov, the Prague linguistic circle headed by Jakobson was (next to Russian Formalism) a key environment which saw the development of literary theory in the interbellum period.[25] According to Tihanov, literary theory is a humanistic discipline which seeks the specific literariness of literature and thus cannot be reduced to any other discipline. By focusing on its subject, it began to distil itself into independence of the various philosophical currents (monolithic and totalising systems of thought) rampant at the turn of the century.[26] This took place at a particular historical moment in which a national state was emerging after the disintegration of the monarchy. Prague was an environment in which, according to Tihanov, national(ist) enthusiasm went hand in hand with cultural cosmopolitanism. Nationalism was somehow displaced by emigration, by the historical multiethnicity and multinationality of the society, and by international connections. On the other hand, this very nationalism made possible a rough institutional framework. This context and the simultaneous development of (literary) avant-gardes helped to shape literary theory as an autonomous epistemological discourse which sought to rationalise literary practices. The emergence of literary theory is directly linked by Tihanov to the historical changes in its uses, which are conceptualised as changes in the régimes of its relevance. Tihanov's term *régime of relevance* denotes the prevalent manner of appropriating (i.e. using and interpreting) literature in a given historical moment. The régimes, competing with each other, are prompted to emerge by many social factors. What is unique about the formation of literary theory in the Great War era is that literature, for the first time in history, is observed in its intrinsic literariness rather than in light of its (utilitarian) worth for society and the individual. This means that literature acquires a meaning because of what it is—an original discourse different from all others, its central definition being the self-sufficiency of the language function.[27]

Thus, Murko's epistemology embodies the Other of the régime of relevance, which became dominant with the birth of literary theory. Murko's thought stems from other social, or historical, circumstances. His first determination is his relocation from the province into the centre of a multinational and multiethnic premodern political entity, which impacted his academic education. The strikingly unequal relationship between the two places was structurally inscribed into the production of knowledge at the academic institution and thus had a material existence. Therefore, he may be said to belong to an earlier régime of relevance, which examines literature (as part of philology, more precisely Slavic philology) in terms of its use in broader culture and its usefulness for society. For him, Slavic philology is a technique with (ideological) effects in the field of cultural education, which

25. See Galin Tihanov, *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

26. According to Tihanov, literary theory existed approximately from the Great War almost to the end of the 20th century. Politically, it may be said to have been framed by the October Revolution at its birth and by the fall of the Berlin Wall, that is, counter-revolution, at its death. Its slow decline, or rather, its transformation into a theory of culture (whose subject was produced more broadly) is traced by Tihanov as early as the 1970s. This coincides with the so-called neoliberal turn, in which demands for the political recognition of oppressed groups, along with the political offensive of the ruling classes, broke their links to the larger demands for the democratisation of economic life. Especially after the emergence of area studies, they were transformed in the Anglo-Saxon academic space into objects of knowledge (their identity knowledges), which meant that they were culturalised and dehistoricised. Rather than theoretical they are spontaneously perceived ideological objects of knowledge. Cf. Jernej Habjan, "Research as Reading: From the Close Reading of Difference to the Distant Reading of Distance," *Primerjalna književnost* 34, no. 2, (2011): 177.

27. See Tihanov, *The Birth and Death*, 20–21. While literary theory is characterised by snatching the literary text away from attempts at its socialisation, it is, as emphasised above, perfectly clear that each régime of relevance is rooted in history. Particularly conspicuous are the recent formation of a new state and the establishment of the Prague linguistic circle. The latter decided in 1930 to honour the eightieth anniversary of President Masaryk by publishing a slim volume about Masaryk and language, which included essays by Mukařovský and Jakobson. Ibid., 34–5.

means that it has a socially cohesive role.[28]

Contradictions of Central European modernity in an individual's epistemology?

Murko obtained the best conditions for practising his knowledge relatively late, in a new, modern political context built on the ruins of the Great War. By then, however, this knowledge had become anachronistic, for the old-world social circumstances in which he might have developed his epistemological horizon had disappeared. Interestingly, Murko spent most of his life researching (Southern Slavic) national epic poetry. In his era, the same admittedly applies to e.g. Mikhail Bakhtin and György Lukács. But while Murko engaged in field work and listened to folk singers reciting epic poems[29], the other two sought to establish the relation of the epic to the novel as the modern discursive formation *par excellence*. In their case this relation is perpetually unstable, oscillating between placing the novel in the continuity of the epic tradition and strictly distinguishing between the two forms. For Murko, by contrast, research into ancient epic tradition never segued into reflections on its relation to the novel. Is it possible that research into oral literature, that is, the history of epic poetry, was Murko's specific articulation of the contradictions brought on by modernity? Firstly, his choice was certainly encouraged by the political circumstances, for the Viennese government of the late Empire showed a 'patronising interest' in the folk poetry of its non-Austrian lands—'nations without history', as they were pejoratively dubbed. Still, Murko's unflagging interest in the epic (he still attended research expeditions as late as the 1930s) and his lack of interest in reflecting on the novel, a trend which started during the Great War, might hint at an individual's epistemological expression of the larger historical tensions. Moreover, by representing an institutional support of the Prague Slavic studies[30]—paradoxical only at first glance, but in fact caused by his broad conception of Slavic philology—he condensed the possibility of breakthroughs in linguistic and literary theoretical thought.

In mapping the intellectual history organised around the figure of Murko, another idea of Central European origins may come in handy.[31] We may have recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis. In his analysis of dreams, Freud introduced *displacement* and *condensation* as two seminal concepts explaining the mechanisms of the unconscious.[32] Perhaps the emergence of Slovenian literary studies on the one hand and of literary theory on the other are most clearly explained precisely by importing these two concepts into our semantic field. What is important is that these two mechanisms be understood as markedly relational and social, that is, historical. Every single scholar mentioned in this paper was relocated to various academic environments because of social pressures. As a result of these movements, the Prague Slavic studies in the interbellum period represented an important condensation of intellectual powers. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that this environment saw an organised production of meanings which significantly contributed to literary theory. The effects of these processes may be observed as highly diverse epistemologies (such as Murko's versus Jakobson's) thriving at the same time in the same environment. The same academic institution was capable of assimilating both Murko's supposedly anachronistic epistemology and Jakobson's theoretical production.

Conclusion

We have attempted to outline the space which represents a certain historical milieu of knowledge production. Its structure was reconstructed against the background of such societal specifics as the existence of a multinational (and multiethnic) premodern political entity, and later its disintegration and restructuration, which assumed the form of (multi)national states. In this political and social space, we were able to observe its specific unequal structure with its centres and (semi)peripheries and institutions, where knowledge is (re)produced through an

28. Not unlike the course pursued by Prijatelj in Ljubljana. The emergence of Slovenian literary studies was practically a historical necessity, given that its main effect after the constitution of the State was the education of a young modern nation. Thus, it became a national institution rather than an institutional refuge of theory. The distinctive dynamism lay in the Prague linguistic circle, regardless of the fact that the new national state was an important prerequisite for its emergence. While Jakobson did observe the style of Masaryk's speeches in his spare time, he nevertheless strove to write theory.

29. For a detailed account on Murko's role in the development of oral theory and its impact on Homeric scholarship, see Blaž Zabel, "'A True Pioneer': Matija Murko's Influence on Milman Parry and Albert Lord," *Oral Tradition* 37 (2025): 197–220.

30. In 1920 he came to lecture on Southern Slavic languages and literatures at the Charles University, where he remained as a professor until his retirement in 1931. During this time, he brought about a renovation of Slavic studies, soon began to publish a professional journal, co-founded the Institute of Slavonic Studies, and co-organised the first international Congress of Slavists in 1929. In 1932 he became president of the Institute of Slavonic Studies and retained this role to 1941, when he was removed from his position by the Nazis.

31. For a different vantage point that is not necessarily incompatible with ours, one in which Murko is considered a semiperipheral scholar, see: Blaž Zabel, "What is Semiperipheral Scholarship? A Case Study of Matija Murko (1861–1952) and His Reception in Oral Theory and Literary Studies," *History of Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2025): 189–208. https://doi.org/10.1086/734368.

32. Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams (first part)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IV (1900)*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1971), 277–309.

unequal exchange—and, last but not least, by concentrating this knowledge in the centres. A social and historical formation with these characteristics might well be called *Central Europe*.[33] All the dynamics and relationships in the structure have a pronounced modern character. Indeed, all of Murko's transfers, the knowledge he fostered, and all his academic relationships are a product of modernity. As demonstrated above, insofar as systems of knowledge are not monolithic but rather complement each other or diverge, oppose each other or converge, possibly even clustering at the same institution—to that extent they are symptomatic of Central European modernity as a historical product of emigration, exile, travels and other relocations, multilingualism, and meetings. In this respect, Prague was certainly a centre of all such movements.[34] And Murko was a historical figure impacted by many of them.

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33. That is to say: not due to such bare empirical facts as its geographic position, but because it has been reconstructed together with its inner tensions and contradictions, which combine into a (potentially) heterogeneous whole.

34. See Tihanov, *The Birth and Death*, 157.