8

Detail as the Basic Semantic Unit in Folk Art

The conception of folkloric creation has undergone a basic change in recent decades. There has been a fundamental change in the view of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in folk creation, of the relative participation of the individual and the collective in it, of the relationship between folkloric creation and "high" art, of the incorporation of folklore into the life of society. Questions of artistic form in folklore have also taken on a new appearance. Moreover, new problems, in fact new sets of problems, are looming on the horizon. There are in particular the questions of functions as well as those of the sign and semioticity. It would be too extensive an undertaking and would lead to a repetition of things already known from elsewhere were we to attempt to elucidate the new conception of folklore in its entire breadth and magnitude. The following study will deal with the questions of the sign and semioticity in folkloric art, not in their entire scope but only with the problem of the semiotic nature of detail in the folkloric work of art.

We must nevertheless say at least a few words about semioticity in folkloric art in general.[1] A folkloric creation of whatever kind has the very pronounced character of a sign. It even happens that semioticity connects a folkloric work, for example, a song, so firmly to certain kinds of situations in life that the semiotic function suffices to veil the content of the text of the song. Martha Bringemeier quotes the song "Wir sitzen hier so fröhlich beisammen," the first line of which speaks about the pleasure of sitting

This essay was translated from "Detail jako základní sémantická jednotka v lidovém umění" (1942), *Studie z estetiky* (Prague, 1966).

1. If we say "folkloric art," we have in mind those folk creations which correspond to the individual categories of "high" art, for example, folk songs, folk paintings, folk theater, and so on. We must be aware, however, that folkloric creation as a whole by no means occupies only the sphere of art and that the relation of the "artistic" folkloric work to the life of the collective is completely different from that of "high" art. It is more concrete and more immediate. For this reason there is also no boundary in folkloric creation between works with a prevailing aesthetic function and works in which the aesthetic function, though present, does not prevail over the others.

with a friend but the text of which is a patriotic song from the period of the Napoleonic wars. The meaning of this text is, however, absorbed by the meaning of the first line to such a degree that "sometimes when sung, the entire first stanza disappears and, nevertheless, the song retains the meaning which the first line gives it."[2]

The folkloric work of art as a whole, therefore, generally relates to specific kinds of real situations which it signifies. The individual and the collective can strive to affect reality (magic rituals and objects) through the mediation of the folkloric work as a sign. A significant property of folklore is that each folkloric work is a set of rather loosely connected signs, and thus they are capable of migrating freely from one whole to another. It has been known for a long time that folk tale motifs, for example, are capable of migrating from tale to tale separately and in sets and of regrouping freely even within individual tales. This also applies, however, to other kinds of folkloric art. Karel Šourek mentions how a certain detail in folk painting and sculpture is sometimes exaggerated for emphasis regardless of its actual proportion to other elements: "Let us look, for example, at the proportions of the individual characters in the scene 'The Flight into Egypt' on the underlayer of the glass: the landscape, the ass, St. Joseph—all of these diminish next to the dominant silhouette of Mary hiding the Holy Son while fleeing. The exaggerated head of the statue of St. John of Nepomuk (the proportion of head to body is 1 : 3) pressing his silent lips together with poignant zeal is evidence of the same principle of sculpture. Here again the semantically important details of the saint's face are exaggerated . . . because for the folk artist they are the vehicle of the expression and hence the total meaning of the statue."[3] This is, of course, a completely different conception of the unity of the work of art from that to which we are accustomed from works of contemporary "high" art. As proof of this let us juxtapose a passage from Šalda with the preceding citation from Šourek: "A poetic work is not the individual speeches or deliberations of certain characters but an *inseparable, integral whole* of characters, actions, fates, *the entire poetically*

2. *Gemeinschaft und Volkslied* (Münster, 1931), p. 107.

3. *Lidové umění v Čechách a na Moravě* [Folk art in Bohemia and Moravia] (Prague, 1942), p. 118.

vital tissue, as it unfolds before the reader from the first letter to the last sentence."[4]

Does the folkloric work of art therefore never achieve the closed form which we require of the works of high art? An observation made by Jungbauer[5] provides an instructive answer to this question. The author succeeded in recording both the original form of a broadside ballad about a murder, composed in 1845, and the rendition of this song as it existed in folk tradition in 1905, sixty years after its origin. The original song had twenty-one stanzas, the version of 1905 only seven. In comparison with the verbose original, the text which had passed through tradition is a closed balladic form. This form did not, however, result from a creator's intention but came about through creative forgetting, in brief through a collective collaboration on its transformation, a collaboration which cannot be denied intentionality and at the end of which a folk (in fact, in the case of the broadside ballad, semi-folk) work corresponds to the creative principle of artificial poetry. The independence of individual details, the "additive" character of the entire composition of the song, however, remain in effect even in the collective collaboration on the transformation of the existing work. As soon as an artificial song becomes folklorized, it not only loses some of its motifs but also acquires others.

The appending of details in folk art does not always correspond to the laws of logic and experience. We shall speak about this later. A detail maintains its semantic independence, and a work comes about through the appending of details which are usually part of tradition and have therefore originated a long time before the author of a particular work used them. Thus the theory of the spontaneous origin of a work from the author's experience is shown to be invalid for folkloric art. Karel Jaromír Erben, who held to this theory, explains in the introduction to his anthology the origin of the song "Červená růžičko, proč se nerozvíjíš?" in a way that was for a long time considered a generally valid explanation of the genesis of folk songs: "A girl hears a tune, for example No. 93 of this collection, being played in a pub. These heartrending sounds—which in my opinion can best be produced on a violin,

4. "Doslov autorův," *Loutky i dělníci boží,* 4th ed. (Prague, 1935), p. 418.

5. G. Jungbauer, "Zur Volksliedfrage," *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 5 (1913): 68 f.

and even their form indicates a more perfect instrument—stick in the girl's memory; her entire soul is filled with them and takes on their color; day and night this tune is on her mind; wherever she goes, she hums it, seeking only the words which would allow her to pour out through her mouth what abounds in her heart and soul. Suddenly her gaze accidentally falls on an open red bud of a rose bush in the garden in front of her window. This is the spark for her soul; in this bud she sees a real image of that emotion which the music has caused in her soul. Immediately seizing this opportunity, she makes the half-opened rose the beginning of her song; the tune establishes the word order, the form of the lines and also governs the rhyme, when the girl begins:

> "Červená růžičko, proč se nerozvíjíš?
> Proč k nám, můj holečku, proč k nám už nechodíš?"
> "Kdybych k vám chodíval, ty by si plakala,
> červeným šátečkem oči utírala."[6]

> "Little red rose, why don't you open?
> Why don't you come to visit us any more, my darling,
> to visit us?"
> "If I came to visit you, you would cry,
> you would wipe your eyes with a little red
> handkerchief."

According to Erben, the actual impulse for the origin of the *text* of the song (the melody is provided in advance) is an accidental sensory perception and the emotional experience attending it. But this is contradicted by the fact that the first line of the song has a traditional character and even stands at the point of intersection of several traditional formulae for a beginning. (1) Its beginning has the form of a question, like, for example, the first line of the song "Čí je to koníček?" [Whose little horse is this?]. (2) It has the character of an apostrophe, like, for example, the beginning of the song "Ach cesto, cestičko ušlapaná" [Oh path, little path trampled down]. (3) It is introduced by the adverb "why," and fifteen songs in Erben's collection begin with this word, in addition to others which have "why"—just as our song—within the first line. (4) It begins with an adjective signifying a color, as do, for

6. *Prostonárodní české písně a říkadla* [Czech folk songs and sayings], 4th ed. (Prague, 1937), pp. 8-9.

example, the songs "Černé oči, jděte spat" [Black eyes, go to sleep] and "Červený, bílý, to se mně líbí" [Red, white, that's what I like]. (5) Its first line contains the name of a plant, as do, for example, the songs "Červená, modrá fiala" [Red, blue violet], "Trávo, trávo, trávo zelená" [Grass, grass, green grass] and indeed even "Růžička červená, krví pokropená" [Little red rose, sprinkled with blood].

The genesis of a folkloric work of art thus begins with an accumulation of traditional motifs and formulae even though we must presuppose an individual creator at its origin. And the origin of a work of folk art is only the beginning of a process of constant changes occurring through the regrouping, the addition, and the loss of details. These details are the basic semantic units of the contexture of the folkloric work of art. They can be of different scope. Thus the very coupling of words can be a basic traditional semantic unit in folk poetry, but so can a line or even an entire stanza ("wandering" stanzas).

In the linking of details into a contexture, of course, there often occur semantic "junctures" which in folk art are neither an accidental phenomenon nor the "defect" about which scholars of the older generation, such as Gebauer and Bartoš, used to speak. Although the "junctures" are perceived, the semantic connection between them is only apparent. It is the listener's task to establish it. This semantic process of connecting the unconnected manifests itself most distinctly in folk poetry (although it also occurs, for example, in folk visual art). Thus the introductory lines of folk songs often have to be connected with what follows afterwards. It sometimes happens, of course, that the connection is direct even though the beginning of a song has a formulaic character:

Pod tú černú horú	Under that black mountain
husičky se perú.	geese are fighting.
Pod'me, moja milá,	Let's go, my darling,
zabijem některú.[7]	we'll kill one of them.

More often, however, the connection must be sought afterwards—in our relating the beginning of the song metaphorically to what follows:

7. F. Sušil, *Moravské národní písně* [*Moravian folk songs*], 3rd ed. (Prague, 1941), p. 271.

Co je po studýnce,	Why should one care about a well,
dyž v ní vody není?	when there's no water in it?
jako po panence,	as about a maiden,
dyž v ní lásky není.	when there's no love in her?
	[Sušil, p. 287]

There are also cases in which the connection between the beginning and the very context of the song is simultaneously direct and figurative:

Rostó, rostó konopě	The hemp is growing, growing
za cestó,	beyond the road,
už só pěkný zelený.	it's already nicely green.

A za nima roste	And beyond it grows
černovoký děvče,	a dark-eyed girl,
až vyroste, bude mý.	when she grows up, she'll be mine.
	[Sušil, p. 287]

But we also find examples in which there is a lack of any apparent or hidden semantic connection between the beginning of a song and what follows it:

Na nasilskym poli	On Nasily field
stromeček stoji	a little tree stands
a na něm žulty květ;	and on it there's a yellow flower;
o! dočkaj ty, dočkaj,	oh! wait you, wait,
moja najmilejša	my most beloved,
hodzinu sedym let.	seven years for the moment.
	[Sušil, p. 299]

Here the semantic juncture between the beginning of the song and the continuation of the text is almost displayed. The semantic "leap" which subsequently occurs is striking precisely for its absolute incomprehensibility.

A comparison of the variants of the same song, each of which has a different beginning, can be interesting. In Sušil's collection we find on p. 271 the song:

Sokolove oči,	Falcon's eyes,
jastřabove peři;	hawk's feathers;
každa panna blazen,	every maiden is crazy,
co pacholkům věři.	who trusts young men.

The variant closest to this version has the beginning:

| Šuhajova hlava, | A swain's head, |
| za klobóčkem péří, | feathers in his hat, |

každá panna blázen,	every maiden is crazy,
kerá chlapcům věří.	who trusts boys.

The entire meaning of this stanza (and of the rest of the text) is: swains are handsome but deceitful. The first variant feigns a semantic break between the first and second distychs. It actually only feigns it, because it does not name the proper subject of the statement, the swain, but only suggests it by the predicates: eyes, hawk's feathers (in the hat). In the second variant the subject concerned is explicitly named. The semantic leap is still present to a certain extent, because the adversative "but" (handsome but deceitful) remains unexpressed. The third variant completely suppresses the semantic leap:

Kolik je klásečků	As many ears as there are
v ječmenném snopečku,	in a barley sheaf,
tolik falešnosti	so much deceitfulness
při každém synečku.	is there in every young man.

Here an entire pattern book of the possible semantic connections (and disconnections) between the beginning and the text of a song is gathered within the negligible span of a single little song.

Scholars noticed the peculiarities of the semantic relationship between the beginning and the text proper of folk songs long ago, but their evaluation was different from ours. Let us cite as an example Gebauer's study "On the Beginnings Favored by Folk Songs, Especially Slavic Ones" (1875). There we read: "Besides beginnings with fully realized images we frequently encounter in folk songs *disfigured, stunted and corrupted* beginnings and images. In order for an image to be *fully* realized, the object should be placed next to it and the *tertium* pointed out. And whenever one of these things is missing, the image lacks something for its completeness. Sometimes, of course, the meaning of the image is not greatly obscured and understanding is not hindered, although something has been omitted. . . . But more frequent are cases in which the image is obscured by disfiguration and its meaning and purpose become unclear. The detriment to the art of poetry and the debasement of poetic technique are palpable when dark and often nonsensical disfigurations occur instead of clear images and when there is a preference for *stereotypical* image beginnings which are sometimes suitable but more often not."[8]

8. J. Gebauer, "O začátcích v jakých si libují národní písně, zvláště slovanské," *Stati literárnědějepisné,* ed. A. Novák (Prague, 1941), 1: 80–81.

Today it is already clear that—in contrast to Gebauer's view—not even the semantic leaps between the beginning and the text are a manifestation of a "corruption" but only an exaggeration of the general tendency of folkloric art toward composing a work from details which are semantically more or less independent. Today we already know very well that the starting point from which a folkloric work of art is constructed by addition is not an image (even one only gradually realizing itself in the work) of a semantic whole but that it is details created and fixed by tradition which are subsequently put together to form a whole in a mosaic-like fashion. This is valid for the work as a whole, not only for one of its parts, for example, the relationship between the beginning and the text of a folk song. Let us cite some examples of this artistic method, typical of artistic folklore, again verbal folklore.

First let us call to mind the rather frequent cases in which the coupling of a fixed epithet (*epitheton constans*) clashes with the occasional context precisely because of its traditional nature; for example, "louka zelená sněhem se bělá" ("the green meadow is whitening with snow"),[9] where the semantic leap between the lexicalized coupling of an adjective with a substantive and the remaining contexture of the sentence is readily apparent. The way in which subjects are handled in folk songs provides another illustration of the mosaiclike composition of a contexture in them. The folk song, unlike artificial poetry, exhibits an excessive preference for emphasizing the subject from whom the utterance proceeds or to whom it is addressed. Linguistically this tendency manifests itself in the frequent use of the personal and possessive pronouns of the first and second person (I – you; my – your) as well as the first and second persons of verbs. At the same time the speaking and addressed subjects alternate with one another frequently and vividly in the course of the same song. This also results in a certain kind of semantic leap. In a folk song the repertoire of possible speaking subjects is often increased because not only people but animals (for example, a horse to his rider) and inanimate objects, even immaterial states of mind, speak here:

Plyň, lásko falešná,	Flow, false love
až do Prahy,	right to Prague,
jednoho mládence,	[false love] of one youth,
jedné panny!–	[false love] of one maiden!–

9. Erben, *Prostonárodní české písně*, p. 385.

Já láska falešná	I, false love,
pluju v řece;	flow in the river;
byla jsem puštěna	I was launched
po potoce.	on a brook.

[Erben, p. 176]

The deceased, too, are often addressed and speak in the folk song, even when evoking an impression of something miraculous is not intended. In epic songs, for instance, the depiction of death is presented through the mouth of the dead person himself:

Na kohos, Mariško,	Whom, Mariško,
na kohos vouaua,	whom were you calling,
dyž ti ta vodička	when that water
ústa zalévaua?	was flooding your mouth?
Byua bych vouaua	I would have called
na svoju mamičku,	my dear mother,
ale sem nemohua	but I couldn't
pro prudkú vodičku.	for the rushing water.
Byua bych vouaua	I would have called
na svého tatíčka,	my dear father,
ale sa mi vliua	but the water
voda do srdečka.	was pouring into my heart.
Byua bych vouaua	I would have called
na svého miuého,	my beloved,
ale sem nemohua	but I couldn't
pro boha živého.	for God's sake.

[Sušil, p. 120]

The folk song can also use an indefinite subject ("someone") for the purpose of making the listener feel the semantic leap, in this instance provided by the semantic span between the extremely concrete first person of the verb and the diffuseness of the semantic contour of the subject "someone":

Když jsem já k vám	When I used to walk
chodívával	to your place
přes ten hájíček,	through that little grove,
na cestu mně svítívával	my way was usually lit
jasnej měsíček;	by the bright little moon;
měsíček mně svítívával	the moon used to light my way,
já jsem sobě zpívávával,	I used to sing to myself,
popošel jsem kousek	I'd gone a bit
cesty,	of my way,
někdo zavolal.[10]	*someone* called me.

10. Italics mine, J. M.

Zavolal jest smutným	He called in a sad
hlasem:	voice:
"Stůj a zastav se,	"Halt and stop,
jde za tebou potěšení,	your darling is following you,
něco ti nese:	is bringing you something:
nese ti smutné psaní	is bringing you a sad letter
černě zapečetěny;	sealed in black;
málo inkoustem je	with little ink it is
psáno,	written,
více slzami."	more with tears."

[Erben, p. 163]

From artificial poetry we are accustomed to perceiving the fact that someone addresses or is addressed as a part of the theme. In folk poetry, however, the fact that someone addresses or is addressed is often motivated very freely. Precisely for this reason folk poetry can exploit the changes in speaker for the mere achievement of semantic leaps. A comparison of two variants of the same song appearing in Erben's collection (p. 162) provides us with a good illustration. The song contains a girl's complaint about her lover's infidelity. In one variant the girl is the sole speaking subject right to the end; in the last stanza of the second variant the lover suddenly starts speaking and ironically answers the girl. The two versions are as follows:

First Variant

Zafoukej, větříčku,	Blow, little wind,
v pravou stranu;	to the right;
že mého Jeníčka	that I greet
pozdravuju;	my Johnny;
že ho pozdravuju,	that I greet him,
za lásku děkuju,	thank [him] for [his] love,
za jeho falešné	for his false
milování!	loving!

Second Variant

Zafoukej z Dunaje,	Blow from the Danube,
můj větříčku,	my little wind,
pozdravuj ode mne	greet from me
mou Aničku:	my Annie:
že ji pozdravuju atd.	that I greet her, etc.

Since the alternation of subjects in the folk song is therefore largely freed from thematic motivation, folk poetry can transfer the spectator to the perspective of one subject, then of a second, and sometimes even of a third. Within the contexture of a song

there occurs, therefore, a sequence of semantic shifts which results from the semantic independence of the detail, an independence that is a property of folk poetry:

Teče voda, velká voda kolem dokola jabora.	Water, a flood is flowing all around the maple tree.
Všecky lavičky pobrala,	It has carried away all the footbridges,
jenom jednu tam nechala.	it has left only one there.
Po kerej Honzíček chodí, Marjánku za ruku vodí.	Over which Johnny walks, leads Mary by the hand.
Byl jest tam jeden stromeček, na něm bylo moc jabliček.	There was one little tree there, on it were a lot of apples.
Utrh Honzíček, utrh dvě, jedno je pustil po vodě.	Johnny picked, picked two, one he launched on the water.
Kam, jablíčko, kampak kráčíš, že se ani nevotáčíš?	Where, little apple, where are you going, that you don't even turn around?
Kráčím já, kráčím po dolu, až k mej Marynce do domu.	I'm going, I'm going down, right to my Mary's house.
Když připlynulo k okýnku, zaklepalo na Marynku.	When it had reached the little window, it knocked for Mary.
Vyjdi, Marynko, vyjdi ven, Honzíček stojí před domem.	Come out, Mary, come outside, Johnny is standing in front of the house.
Pročpak bych já ven chodila? Dyt' já nejsem jeho milá.	Why would I go outside? You know, I'm not his beloved.
Pročpak bys milá nebyla, dyt's mi dávno slibovala!	Why wouldn't you be [my] beloved, since you promised me long ago!
Slibovalas mně o duši, že se ta láska nezruší.	You promised me on [your] soul, that this love wouldn't be broken.
	[Sušil, p. 312]

There are six changes of the speaking subject in this twelve stanza song (if we disregard the neutral stanzas): the lover, the singer, the apple, the apple, the girl, the lover. However, not only the speaker can change in a song, but so can the one to whom the utterance is addressed. If the change occurs without preparation and transition, there is a semantic leap here as well. In the following song a girl speaks all the time but at first to her lover, then suddenly to her mother:

Jen jednou za tejden, potěšení moje, můžeš přijít; až se pomilujem, můj zlatej holečku, můžeš si jít:	Only once a week, my delight, can you come; when we've made love, my golden lad, you can leave:
v sobotu podvečer, to sejdem se, když hodinka přídc, rozejdem se.	on Saturday evening, we'll meet, when the time comes, we'll part.
Krájejte, má milá, mamičko rozmilá, drobnej salát; já nejsem uvyklá, má mamičko milá, dlouho spávat:	Cut, my dear, beloved mother, the salad fine; I'm not used, my dear mother, to sleeping long:
já vstávám raníčko za svítání, když češe můj milý, holeček rozmilý, koně vrany.	I get up early at dawn, when my dear, beloved lad, grooms [his] black horses.
	[Erben, p. 170]

Here the change in listener occurs only once. The change is, however, very striking not only because it happens unexpectedly but also because the two utterances are semantically independent of one another to a great extent. The semantic leap at their boundary is therefore striking.

Under the conditions which we have just depicted, it is not surprising that the folk song is mainly oriented toward dialogue. The composers of the echoes,[11] especially Čelakovský and Sládek,

11. *Editors' note.* The "echo" (Czech: *ohlas*) is a particular type of Czech poetry which imitated the folk verbal art of the Slavs both in theme and in form. Cf., e.g., F. L.

were clearly aware of this property of the folk song. This is true not only of Czech folk songs. Gesemann cites three common compositional schemes of Serbian folk poetry: the fairy's calling, the raven's message, the dream and the interpretation of the dream.[12] All three imply the dialogization of epic material. By calling, the fairy warns the hero of danger, and the hero replies; the ravens come forward, they are asked questions, and they answer; the dream is narrated by the person who had it, and it is then interpreted by another person in reply. The reason for which dialogue is so prevalent in folk poetry does not stem from its themes alone, nor is it merely a matter of an external technique; rather it follows from the very principle of the semantic structure of the folkloric work of art, from the tendency to build its semantic contexture from partial units which are relatively independent of one another.

In addition, let us mention so-called balladic terseness as another property characteristic of this genre. Heussler even declares it the main feature distinguishing the epic song from the epic.[13] From the example cited by Jungbauer and quoted above it is obvious that abbreviation is the result of the economy of memory. But terseness is likewise *facilitated* by the very structure of the contexture composed of units relatively independent of one another. If we view the ballad from the standpoint of artificial poetry and hence from the perspective of a unified semantic intention, its terseness may appear to us as a dramatic quality in the sense of the definition favored by Jaroslav Vlček (a ballad is a drama narrated in the form of a song), but for the poetics of folk poetry it is only one of the consequences of the basic semantic law of this manner of creation.

Another consequence of the validity of this law is a phenomenon common in the folk lyric whereby all of a sudden and without transition a laudatory song can become deprecatory, a sympathetic one antipathetic, a seriously intended one ironic, by the mere addition of a stanza which is in sharp opposition to the preceding stanzas. In the foreword to his *Anthology of Czecho-*

Čelakovský's *Ohlas písní ruských* [The echo of Russian songs] (1829) or *Ohlas písní českých* [The echo of Czech songs] (1839).

12. G. Gesemann, "Kompositionsschema und heroisch-epische Stilisierung," *Studien zur südslawischen Volksepik* (Reichenberg, 1926), pp. 65 f.

13. A. Heussler, *Lied und Epos* (Dortmund, 1905), p. 22.

slovakian Folk Songs (1874) František Bartoš mentions a number of examples of this, of course, only to show how he himself "has purged the text of all kinds of inappropriate additions." It was not his fault but rather the spirit of the age that caused him to overlook the fact that such striking semantic turns in the text are only extreme manifestations of a property omnipresent in the folk song, namely, the constant oscillation of semantic contexture. The contexture of a folk song is always ready to surprise the listener, to take another path than that which its previous course has indicated. But if we imagine the conditions under which a folk song used to be sung—for example, at a folk dance before a circle of listeners who evaluated every initiative on the part of the singer— we understand that the deviations from an already known text, which brought a traditional text closer to the immediate situation, were not considered by the audience to be a "detriment" to the effect but rather an enhancement of it. Thus Erben cites (p. 114, No. 117) a song in which a lover complains how he came to visit his beloved at her parents' house, how the dog Kuráž started barking at him and summoned his master, whose arrival chased the boy from the yard. The text ends with an apostrophe to the dog Kuráž:

Kuráž, Kuráž!	Kuráž, Kuráž!
ty lásky neznáš;	you don't know what love is;
sic bys byl neštěkal,	otherwise you wouldn't have barked,
když jsem byl u vás.	when I was at your place.

The song is thematically closed, but Erben has recorded one more stanza. Of course, he introduces it with the note: "The following stanza is probably a later addition and is only detrimental to the preceding ones." The stanza reads:

Vždyť' já jsem neštěkal,	Well, I didn't bark,
já jsem jen vrčel,	I only growled,
kdybych to byl věděl,	if I had known this,
byl bych radš mlčel.	I would rather have kept quiet.
Špetni jen, Kuráž!	Just whisper, Kuráž!
kůrčičku tu máš;	here's a crust for you;
já ani nemuknu,	I won't even open my mouth,
když budeš u nás.	when you're at our place.

If Erben says that the stanza is "detrimental," he is speaking from the standpoint of the compositional unity to which he himself strictly adhered in his own epic poems and fairy tales. The

requirement of compositional closure was not, however, valid for the folk singer and his listeners. Instead, the song was more charming for them if Kuráž, who had hitherto only been addressed, unexpectedly joined in the end of the song with a good-natured afterword in order to proclaim his previous behavior a mistake. This corresponds exactly to the principle of additive composition in which the listener could expect a surprise from an unforeseen semantic break after every line, not to say every stanza.

By remaining alive and being transformed from reproduction to reproduction, the folk song and other forms of folk poetry do not, therefore, have the unity of semantic intention which makes a work of artificial poetry an integral creation characterized by a particular set and sequence of parts. In the perception of a work of artificial poetry, the tendency toward semantic unification operates from the very beginning, when the total meaning of the creation is still unknown. Every part, every detail which enters the perceiver's consciousness during perception is immediately evaluated and understood in its relation to this total meaning, and only its incorporation into this meaning determines the specific semantic quality and import of every detail of the work. If some detail slips out of the sequence of the others, if it resists incorporation into the total meaning, the perceiver expects that another detail will appear by means of which the seemingly errant detail will be connected with the total meaning. Even when all the parts (details, motifs) of a work are not incorporated into the total meaning or when this total meaning remains hidden from the perceiver, the orientation toward the semantic unity of the work is not invalidated. There will merely be a feeling of artistically intentional semantic "deformation." It is, however, otherwise in folk poetry. The semantic sequence created by successive individual motifs remains open. The total meaning which is, of course, gradually created in the perceiver's consciousness from a sequence of units can change in the course of the work. Even in folk poetry, though, there are cases in which the meaning of the work is unified, indeed very tightly unified, but in such cases semantic unity is not a precondition, a norm; it is simply one of the possible results. The inconsistency of successive motifs in folk poetry is neither a "mistake," as the old school believed, nor an intentional deformation (as more recent theoreticians have said), but a simple fact.

Let us demonstrate what we mean by an example. It is a song recorded in Sušil's collection (p. 98) which narrates how a daughter, married far away from her mother, arrives for a visit a year later but does not find anyone in the house except a little boy sitting at the table. She starts to talk to him:

Ptam se ja tě, pachole, hdě moja maměnka je?	I ask you, little boy, where my mother is?
Mamička nam umřela, to včera od večera.	Our dear mother has been dead since yesterday evening.
Leža tamto v komůrce v malovanej truhelce.	*She's lying there in that little room in a painted coffin.*
Dcerka, jak to učula, hned k mamičce běžela.	The daughter, as soon as she heard this, immediately ran to her dear mother.
Ach mamičko, stavajtě, požehnani mně dajtě.	Ach dear mother, get up, give me your blessing.
Dy stě nám ho nědaly, když stě nam umiraly.	After all, you didn't give it to us, when you were dying on us.
Ach mamičko, stavajtě, slovečko ke mně mluvtě.	Ach dear mother, get up, speak a word to me.
Ma dceruško, něvolaj, těžkosti mně nedělaj.	My little daughter, don't call, don't give me a hard time.
Ja bych rada mluvila, dyby ja živa byla.	I'd like to speak, if I were alive.
Ležim blizko kostela a neslyšim zvoněňa.	*I'm lying close to the church and I don't hear [the bells] ringing.*
Ani ptačka zpivati, tej zezulky kukati.	Or the birdie singing, the cuckoo calling.
Těš tě už tu Pan Bůh sam, matka Boži, svaty Jan.	May the Lord himself comfort you here, the mother of God, Saint John.

The inconsistency which violates the unified meaning of the song is apparent here. It is said that the deceased lies in a little room, but several lines later the deceased claims that she is close to the church. This contradiction can very easily be explained genetically. In both cases it is a matter of fixed folkloric motifs which we find in other songs in very similar, even identical wording:

I. Tvůj Heřmánek v komoře je,   Your Herman is in a little room,
   leží v malovanej truhle.   he is lying in a painted coffin.
                                                              [Sušil, p. 83]

II. Nežadaj to, ženo ma,   Don't ask, my wife,
    by ses ku mně dostala.   to join me.
    Ležím blízko kostela   I'm lying close to the church
    a něslyšim zvoněňa,   and I don't hear [the bells] ringing
    ani ptáčka zpivaňa.   or the birdie's singing.
                                                              [Sušil, p. 152]

What is important is the fact that the first of the motifs is
presented both in our song and in the other one as a *report* about
a dead person, the second likewise in both occurrences as a part
of an *utterance of the deceased himself.* Therefore there is an
"incongruity" in our song where these two motifs are presented
simultaneously in such a way that the deceased is both narrated
about and then allowed to speak herself. Each of these two modes
of presentation is accompanied by an appropriate motif. The fact
that the two motifs contradict one another does not matter in folk
poetry where the emphasis rests much more on a gradual *creation*
of the total meaning than on the unity of meaning intended from
the beginning and revealed at the end of the work.

Those who claim that such contradictions are "mistakes" might,
of course, object that here we have a mere oversight, a distortion
of the original "correct" reading from repeated reproductions. Let
us therefore present another example which will show us that an
"accidental" successive arrangement of motifs is also creative
energy. We are referring to a song recorded in Sušil's collection on
p. 122. It is a ballad about a "young man" who comes to visit a
girl at night, against her father's will. The father gets up and chops
his head off. The girl then laments her lover's death and runs to
the Danube, into which her father has thrown the severed head.
After this passage comes a very strange but tragically effective
depiction:

Synečkova hlava   The young man's head
po Dunaju plyve   is drifting on the Danube
a za tú hlavičkú   and behind that dear head
štyry krápě krve.   four drops of blood.

Za tymi krapjami   Behind those drops
klobúček s pentlami   a hat with ribbons
a za tým klobúčkem   and behind that hat
botky s ostrohami.   some boots with spurs.

Za tymi botkami   Behind these boots
truhelka s pokrovem   a coffin with a lid
a při tej truhličce   and with that coffin
štyřé mládencové.   four young men.

A nad hrobem stála,   And she stood above the grave,
žalostně plakala,   plaintively weeping,
chudobným žebráčkom   to poor beggars
almužnu dávala atd.   she was giving alms, etc.

The head drifts along the surface of the river and several dif-
ferent objects drift along behind it: blood, a hat with ribbons,
boots with spurs. All of this can be put into the frame of a single
picture, into a single, empirically possible scene. But does "a
coffin with a lid and with that coffin four young men" also drift
along the Danube? Here we obviously confront another scene: we
see a funeral before our eyes. Here the folk song has achieved a
semantic effect by means of a "dissolve," known today from the
film which has attained it through a complex technical develop-
ment. But how did the song achieve it? Through the simple juxta-
position of motifs without regard for a close connection between
them. In the semantic composition of the folk song, motifs appear
as units precisely delimited from one another, not continuously
connected so that there can be gaps, semantic leaps, contradic-
tions, and so on in their succession. And thus the device of the
"dissolve" of two different scenes which is used in the song fol-
lows quite regularly from the very principle of the semantic
structure of folk verbal art. We also find proof of this in the pre-
ceding verses in which we see drifting one after the other the head,
four drops of blood, a hat, boots. The detail of the "four drops of
blood" on the surface of the river which do not dissolve in the
water, if conveived optically, has a ghastly and phantasmal effect.
Lyrically expressed, it is blood which cries for revenge. But again
this powerful impression is achieved by a mere successive arrange-
ment of motifs sharply delimited from one another. What is
presented here is not a verbal equivalent of a visual impression but
an enumeration of motifs which the perceiver projects into a visual
image only afterwards.

From this example we can conclude that a certain incongruity
or even a contradiction among successive motifs, which always
potentially accompanies the progression of the semantic structure
in folk verbal art, follows from the very essence of this kind of

creation. It is a principle that cannot be evaluated either positively or negatively but must be considered as existing and operating. At the same time, however, it is apparent how mistaken anyone is who approaches folk verbal art with the presupposition of "deformation." Folk poetry attains a considerable span between empirical reality and its representation simply on the basis of the fact that its aim is a combination of signs, not a reproduction of the empirical relations among things. Awareness of the correspondence between the sign and reality persists in this; the folk artist (not only the poet) is always convinced that what he writes or paints is reality. We find a very nice observation about the direct relationship between the work and reality in the folk artist's consciousness in Papoušková: "[A folk glass-painter] answers the question 'According to what did you paint Janošík and the brigands?' surely and without hesitation: According to reality (p. 40).—[The same painter] called himself a naturalist because he painted according to nature, but the legend about Geneviève was just as real for him as his neighbor's cat which he painted in his spare time" (p. 61).[14] Here, of course, the explanation is the same as in poetry. A folk visual artist puts his work together from signs, and for him the impression of the "reality" of his creation is based on the fact that each of the partial signs of which he composes his work has its own relation to reality.

Therefore the mode of creation in folk art is different from that of high art to the extent that it is absolutely unjustified to approach a work of folk art with the habits which we bring with us from high art, even if they seem to us completely self-evident and necessary. In this respect, the semantic structure of folk poetry is a very good means for explaining the semantic structure of folk art in general. Let us thus take a closer look at the notion of *motivation*. This notion is, of course, very special; it is limited not just to literature but specifically to narrative and dramatic literature. As we shall see, nevertheless, taking this concept into account can also result in a general explanation.

Motivation is a basic requirement of plot construction in artificial narrative and dramatic literature. Every motif entering the work should be related to another or several others, and it should

14. N. Melnikovå-Papoušková, *Československé lidové malířství na skle* [Czechoslovakian folk glass-painting] (Prague, 1938).

be related in such a way that the motifs bound together by it determine one another semantically and are thereby incorporated into the total meaning of the contexture. On account of reciprocity, motivation has at the same time a progressive and a regressive character. When the initial member of a motivational bond appears, it evokes an expectation in the perceiver; the next then directs the perceiver's attention backwards to what has already been perceived. At one time the necessity of motivation was formulated epigrammatically as follows: if at the beginning of the narration it is said that a nail has been driven into the wall, it is necessary that the hero hang himself on this nail at the end of the work. Even in artificial literature the "requirement" of motivation is not, of course, an inviolable norm, the observance of which determines the value of the work. It is not an imperative, but rather it is the semantic background against which the course of the action in artificial literature is perceived. The effectiveness of motivation increases with the distance between the motifs which are bound by it into the contextural sequence. The longer the connection of a certain motif with the others remains hidden from the reader, the more the reader's expectation contributes to the "tension," and the more strongly the action is bound into semantic unity by means of motivation. The linking of motifs over a distance could perhaps be represented schematically as follows:
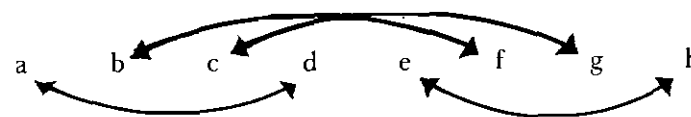
Here the letters represent motifs, their alphabetic order indicates their succession, the curves symbolize the semantic relations between individual motifs, and the arrows at the two ends of the curves are to indicate the reciprocity of the motivational relations. It is clear that the more densely the contexture is permeated with motival interrelations, the more the cohesiveness of its semantic structure is enhanced.

Frequently the "explanatory" motifs, that is, those which semantically determine and incorporate other preceding motifs, are accumulated at the end of the narration; in some cases the "key" motif, which has either a direct or indirect motivational connection with many of the preceding ones, is placed here. This results in the perceiver's being kept as long as possible in the dark about

the semantic range of the entire contexture—an impression well known from detective novels. If we take into account the fact that in the case of an extremely unified motivation the solution is usually provided at the very end of the sequence, we could alter the motivational scheme as follows:
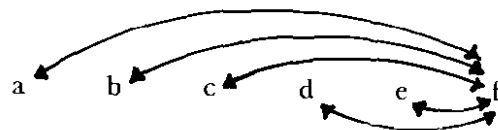
By concentrating the curves on the letter *f*, we wish to indicate the "key" motif, elucidating at once the meaning of everything preceding. We should add, of course, that neither of these schemes nor the two together grasp the real variety of the alterations of which motivation is capable in different situations. Their purpose is only illustrative.

Let us now deal with the question of motivation in the folk epic. We must, of course, be aware of the great variety of phenomena which are included under this term. Here we have the entire range between the heroic epic and the fairy tale. Indeed, even if we limit ourselves only to the fairy tale, we shall find a considerable variety of genres, and this variety certainly has an influence on the formation of semantic structure. Polívka says: "In a formal analysis, tales should certainly be more precisely differentiated from fairy tales and other novelistic and humorous short stories. But so far the question of whether various folk stories differ in this respect has not even been raised."[15] Nevertheless, the question of whether we can detect—despite this great variety—at least indications of a general attitude toward motivation that characterizes folk creation as a whole is not unjustified. From what we have already said above about semantic structure in folk art in general and folk poetry in particular, it seems to follow that such an attitude exists. The composition of semantic structure from partial semantic units relatively independent of one another necessarily has consequences in this respect as well. As we have seen, motivation *unifies* a literary work semantically, but folk poetry—according to its constructive principle—tends, on the other hand, to disturb the static semantic unity of the work. We should not, of

15. J. Polívka, "Doslov" [Afterword] in J. Kubín, *Lidové povídky z českého Podkrkonoší: Úkrají východní* [Folk tales from the Bohemian Krkonoše region: the eastern part] (Prague, 1926), p. 445.

course, think that there is no motivation in the folk epic. In the fairy tale we encounter at each step motifs whose ultimate incorporation into the plot occurs only in its further course. Let us take, for example, the fairy tale about Zlatovláska as we find it narrated in Erben.[16] Here the hero starts to understand the speech of animals because he has eaten snake flesh in violation of an interdiction. This violation causes him to be sent out to win Princess Zlatovláska for his master. Knowledge of animal speech turns out to be useful when he communicates with the animals that he helps, and this aid rendered to animals is again to the hero's advantage in accomplishing the tasks assigned to him when he strives to win Zlatovláska. This is a continuous and even complex motivational chain (the complexity lies in the fact that one and the same deed in relation to what follows is incorporated into two motivational series: the eating of snake flesh both brings the hero the task of winning Zlatovláska and helps him in fulfilling it). Each motif has its precise place in the sequence of the others; any displacement of the individual motifs would upset this motivation. There is nothing here that differentiates the motivation of a fairy tale narrated in this way from motivation in artificial literature.

But let us look at the variants of this fairy tale recorded in Tille's *Index of Czech Fairy Tales.*[17] Among them we find a variant which proves that the attitude of the folk epic toward motivation is indeed different from that of artificial literature. It is the version recorded by Kubín[18] to which Tille adds the note "Confused." The "confusion" is not, however, such that it has upset the continuity of the fairy tale; rather we might speak about a rearrangement of the plot. In Kubín's version, Zlatovláska is the daughter of the king whom the hero serves, and thus the competition for the bride between the king and the hero which was one of the mainsprings of the plot dynamics in Erben's version is lost. The king assigns the hero the job only as a punishment for eating snake flesh against his interdiction (in Kubín only he who has eaten the flesh first understands animals—the king was therefore cheated out of the effect of the snake flesh). In the organization of motifs,

16. *České pohádky* [Czech fairy tales] in *Dílo K. J. Erbena* (Prague, 1939), 3:45.

17. V. Tille, *Soupis českých pohádek* (Prague, 1934), 2, pt. 1, pp. 374–79.

18. *Lidové povídky z českého Podkrkonoší: Pohoří západní* [Folk tales from the Bohemian Krkonoše region: the western range], pt. 1 (Prague, 1922), pp. 269–74.

however, the hero's journey in quest of Zlatovláska is also lost, and thus the encounter with the animals, which was presented in Erben as an adventure experienced by the hero during his journey, has lost its motivation. The necessity of placing the encounter with the animals somewhere else arose because of this rearrangement, and Kubín's narrator does not hesitate to place this encounter at the very beginning of the narration. During the encounter the hero speaks with the animals that he helps, and thus a particular inconsistency occurs in Kubín. The hero speaks to the animals first, and the narration about snake flesh comes only afterwards. In Kubín's version, therefore, the hero actually speaks with the animals before he has the ability to understand them. From the standpoint of artificial literature Tille was correct to call this version "confused," for in artificial literature such a transposition of motifs disturbing the motivation is possible only as an intentional breach of it (for example, for comic effect). It simply does not matter to the folk narrator and his listener (who are otherwise accustomed to hearing about speaking animals without any previous motivation in songs and fairy tales). For them motivation is not the basic principle of the successive arrangement of motifs to the extent that its breach is felt as a deformation. They do not avoid motivation; they use it, but they can also do without it.

And thus the fairy tale, just as other forms of folk verbal art and folk art in general, experiences and evaluates each motif as an independent semantic unit. The folk narrator does not, therefore, care too mnch whether he has prepared the listener for a newly introduced motif or not. In Kubín, for example, the miraculous horse says to his master Honza: "But now, dear boy, you've got a hard nut to crack. You must destroy that Brandiburk so that your entire fate as well as mine is fulfilled."[19] But the listener is hearing about this "Brandiburk" for the first time and learns only from the further narration that Brandiburk is the commander of a great army, but even here he is mentioned only in passing: "Well, Brandiburk has suddenly moved, and he has declared war on that king."[20] In the folk fairy tale the only matter occupying the narrator's and the listener's attention is a direct sequence of motifs.

19. "Kokeš," *Lidové povídky . . . Úkrají východní,* p. 154.
20. Ibid., p. 155.

Whenever there is a transition from one motif to another, it is always felt more strongly tban in higb literature, where attention is focused more on the reciprocal bonds of non-contiguous motifs. The basic principle of semantic structure in the folk narrative could therefore be represented by the scheme:

$$a \curvearrowright b \smile c \curvearrowright d \smile e \curvearrowright f \smile g \curvearrowright h$$
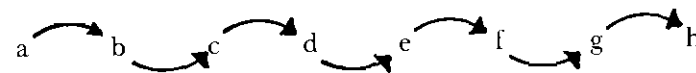
And in the folk story this principle is the only scheme on the basis of which the motivation can be realized. For this reason motivation in the folk narrative tolerates a breach much more easily than that in high literature.

Another manifestation of the tendency toward successive arrangement is so-called staircase construction (a model being the fairy tale about the rooster and the hen) represented by the scheme:

$$a \curvearrowright b \curvearrowright c \curvearrowright d \curvearrowright e \curvearrowright d^1 \curvearrowright c^1 \curvearrowright b^1 \curvearrowright a^1$$
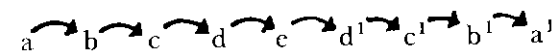
Even where there is a genuine motivation in a folk narrative, it is influenced by the tendency toward successive arrangement: the tasks (one and the same hero gradually does various tasks, or several heroes do one and the same task and only the last succeeds). But the principle of successive arrangement is realized not only in the folk epic but also in other genres of folk poetry, especially in the lyric. In lyric poetry the transition from motif to motif is realized especially sharply as a surprise factor, as a place where semantic reversals occur.

In folk art, therefore, detail is much more than a subordinate structural element. It is not static but is the basic vehicle of initiative in the semantic structure of the folkloric work of art. Folk art does not proceed from an image of the whole but from an ordering of details provided by tradition, and unexpected wholes arise from the always new ordering of these details. It is, of course, clear that an image of closure, perfection—an image not very often realized and not basically important for folk art—hovers as the final goal at the end of the development of the folkloric work of art as well. It could be said aphoristically: Was Hanka aesthetically

correct when he ordered the motifs in his "Kytice" [The bouquet][21] in such a way that a girl who "fell, ah, fell into the cold water" still has the time and the opportunity afterward to consider who "planted the bouquet in the loose soil," or was it Goethe who by merely rearranging the motifs had "Das Sträusschen"[22] end on a balladic note: "Da fällt, ach! da fällt sie/Ins kühlige Wasser" ("She fell, ah, she fell into the cold water")? From the standpoint of high poetry Goethe was indisputably right, and his intervention reveals an artist of genius precisely because of its seeming insignificance accompanied by a powerful poetic effect. From the standpoint of folkloric poetics, however, Hanka was right because he perceived the folkloric law of ordering motifs.

The thesis which we have attempted to formulate in this study has been documented (rather than explicitly stated) many times in the great number of folklore studies of recent years. But this in no way means that the study of folklore has already drawn all the necessary conclusions from it. Modern folklore studies have not exhausted all their possibilities but rather have just begun to realize them. The continuation of the semantic analysis of folkloric art can push not only folklore studies but also the theory of art miles ahead.

21. *Rukopis Královédvorský* [The Královédvorský manuscript], 1835 edition, pp. 44–45.

22. "Das Sträusschen: Altbömisch," *Goethes Werke*, part 1, vol. 3 (Weimar, 1890), p. 210.

9

Between Literature and Visual Arts

I

Comparative literature owes its origins to the Romantic interest in the historical and geographical heterogeneity of cultural activities. In the course of its development it has created a number of methods, each of which has entailed not only a different modus operandi but also a different approach to material, a different conception of it. Sometimes the path of a certain theme or thematic element (motif) is traced through different literatures; sometimes the literary activity in a broad cultural sphere differentiated into a number of national literatures is examined with a unifying vision. The questions arise as to what is the center of this activity, what the impulses originating from it, and how do literatures bound into a unity of a higher order influence each other. Furthermore, the question of the general regularity of literary activity and its historical variations arises. In the last few decades the foundations for a comparative study of literary forms have been laid.[1] In connection with the comparative study of the literary form we should mention Jakobson's fruitful idea of investigating those literary forms which are closely tied to language, for example, meters in literatures related by language (such as Slavic). The influence of language for the differentiation of literary development is thus revealed. It appears that even slight differences between kindred languages determine the completely different natures and developments of the same meter in two linguistically related literatures. Even in more complicated literary phenomena, for example, in international literary movements (such as Symbolism), we can often deduce to a considerable degree the heteromorphism of such a movement in different nations from differences in their linguistic systems.

This essay was translated from "Mezi poesií a výtvarnictvím," *Slovo a slovesnost* 7 (1941).

1. See, for example, F. Wollman's *K methodologii srovnávací slovesnosti slovanské* [On the methodology of Slavic comparative literature] (Brno, 1936), p. 86.