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Structural Analysis of the Fairy Tale in the Works of Roman Volkov: Toward a Revision of the Historiographical Canon

Abstract

The article offers a comprehensive analysis of the folklore scholarship of Roman Mykhailovych Volkov (1885–1959) in the context of the emergence of structuralist approaches to folktale studies in the first half of the twentieth century. It focuses on his work *The Fairy Tale: A Study of the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale* (Vol. 1: *The Great Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian Fairy Tale*. Part 1: *Tales of the Innocently Persecuted*. Kharkiv, 1924), which presents a conceptually coherent model of formalized analysis of the fairy tale and which remained largely outside international scholarly circulation for a long time.

The article reconstructs the methodological foundations of Volkov's approach, including the concepts of plot construction, motif, plot formula, and variability. Moreover, it situates them within broader European structuralist trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A separate section examines the tension between the approaches of Roman Volkov and Vladimir Propp, interpreting it not in terms of historical priority but as a problem of asymmetrical reception and the transformative appropriation of ideas in the process of canon formation.

Special attention is paid to the gender dimension of Volkov's work, particularly his systematic analysis of tales about the innocently persecuted that feature an active female heroine. This perspective allows his studies to be interpreted as an early stage in the development of a gender-sensitive approach to folktale research. It is argued that Volkov's combination of structural analysis with attention to variability, cultural context, and character agency renders his approach theoretically robust and calls for a reassessment of its place in the history of structuralist folklore studies.

Keywords: Roman Volkov, structuralism, FAIRY TALE, plot construction, motif, gender, Vladimir Propp.

Introduction. Relevance of the Research Topic

Throughout the twentieth century, the history of structuralist folktale studies developed into a relatively stable scholarly canon, within which certain concepts and names acquired the status of foundational, while others – despite their methodological innovativeness – remained on the periphery of folkloristic research. Particularly illustrative in this regard is the situation surrounding early attempts at the structural analysis of the FAIRY TALE undertaken in the Slavic scholarly milieu during the first third of the twentieth century.

The scholarly legacy of the Ukrainian folklorist Roman Mykhailovych Volkov, primarily concentrated in his work "The Fairy Tale: A Study of the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale" (1924), represents a systematic and conceptually complete project of formalized analysis of the folktale narrative. Nevertheless, it remained outside active international scholarly circulation for a long time, which led to an asymmetry in its reception and to its displacement from established historiographic reconstructions of structuralism in folklore studies. As a result, Volkov's methodological innovations were often regarded as auxiliary or "proto-structural" in relation to later concepts, without due consideration of their internal logic and theoretical self-sufficiency.

The relevance of this study is also determined by the need to reconsider the collision of scholarly priorities in the relationship between the approaches of Roman Volkov and Vladimir Propp. This concerns not only the issue of historical precedence but also the complex mechanisms of canon formation, asymmetries of reception, and transformational appropriation of ideas, within which the authorial contribution of individual scholars may be partially neutralized. Of particular importance in this context is the gender dimension of Volkov's folkloristic legacy, especially his systematic analysis of tales with an active female heroine, which makes it possible to regard his works as an early stage in the formation of methodological sensitivity to the gender specificity of the folktale narrative.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the folkloristic concept of Roman Mykhailovych Volkov, examining its structuralist and gender dimensions, as well as to clarify the place of his scholarly legacy in the history of Slavic folktale studies during the first half of the twentieth century.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set: 1) to analyze the historiographic context of the reception of Roman Volkov's scholarly activity in Ukrainian and international folklore studies; 2) to reconstruct the methodological foundations of Volkov's approach to the analysis of the FAIRY TALE, in particular the concepts of plot construction, motif, and plot formula; 3) to outline the structuralist features of Volkov's concept in relation to broader European methodological trends

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; 4) to examine the gender dimension of the analysis of tales about the innocently persecuted in Volkov's works; 5) to analyze the collision between the scholarly approaches of Roman Volkov and Vladimir Propp as a problem of methodological continuity and asymmetry of scholarly reception; 6) to clarify the significance of Roman Volkov's legacy for the formation of structuralist and gender-oriented studies in contemporary folktale scholarship.

Research Methods

The methodological basis of the article combines historical-scientific, structural-analytical, and comparative approaches. The study employs the historical-typological method to reconstruct the place of Roman Volkov's works in the development of folkloristic thought; structural analysis to identify the principles of organization of the folktale narrative, the system of motifs, and plot formulas; and the comparative-typological method to juxtapose Volkov's concept with later structuralist models, particularly in the context of the collision with Vladimir Propp's approach.

In addition, elements of discourse analysis are employed to interpret the mechanisms of reception and scholarly interpretations of Volkov's legacy across different historical periods, as well as an interpretive approach aimed at identifying the gender specificity of character roles in the FAIRY TALE. This methodological combination enables the consideration of Roman Volkov's folkloristic concept as an integral phenomenon, rooted in its historical and cultural context, while also being relevant to contemporary humanities research.

Literature Review

For a long time, Roman Volkov's scholarly activity remained on the periphery of historical and folkloristic studies, despite its significant contribution to the development of structuralist analysis of the FAIRY TALE. Only in recent decades has the scholarly literature produced works that deliberately address his legacy, problematizing issues of authorship, priority, and methodological originality of his approaches.

A significant contribution to the reassessment of Roman Volkov's role was made by Oleksandr Kyryliuk, whose works consider the scholar's activity within the broader context of the development of structuralist and formal methods in the humanities.[1] The researcher emphasizes that key ideas of functional analysis of the folktale plot were formulated by Volkov earlier than they acquired canonical form in later studies.

[1] O. Kyryliuk, "R. M. Volkov ta V. Ya. Propp: pytannia priorytetu ta vplyvu nimetskoi folklorystychno-naratolohichnoi tradytsii na doslidzhennia nymy struktury kazky." *Δόξα / DOKSA*, issue 12, 2008, pp. 308–317, http://doxa.onu.edu.ua/Doxa12/308-317.pdf [in Ukrainian].

Kyryliuk pays particular attention to the problem of scholarly attribution, pointing to the existence of substantial parallels between Volkov's conceptual positions and the later works of V. Propp without proper reference to the primary source.

This problem is consistently developed in the doctoral dissertation of Olesia Naumovska, where Roman Volkov's "pioneering" structuralist studies are analyzed as an independent and integral scholarly concept.[2] The author convincingly demonstrates that Volkov cannot be regarded as a precursor or "intuitive forerunner" of Propp; rather, his works constitute a complete analytical project, certain provisions of which were later reproduced without proper scholarly reference. In this context, the question of the relationship between Volkov's and Propp's scholarly approaches arises not as a problem of influence but as a problem of incorrect borrowing and the erasure of authorial priority.

Further development of this topic can be found in the dissertations of Alina Oprelianska[3] and Yana Savoshchenko,[4] which examine Roman Volkov's legacy through the prism of the history of folkloristic methodology and the ethics of scholarly knowledge. Although neither dissertation is directly focused on the study of Volkov's legacy (A. Oprelianska explores the mythologeme of "androgyny" in the Ukrainian FAIRY TALE, while Y. Savoshchenko examines the folklorism of Maria Matios's authorial prose using Volkov's method), both scholars concentrate on the analysis of specific analytical coincidences in the interpretation of the structure of the FAIRY TALE, character functions, and the compositional logic of the plot, emphasizing the systematic and non-random nature of these parallels. In this way, they expand the argument in favor of revising established notions of the "canonicity" of Propp's structuralist model.

Another element of contemporary historiography devoted to reassessing Roman Volkov's legacy is Anna Kachan's article, which considers his works in the context of the formation of structuralist and formal approaches to analyzing the FAIRY TALE.[5] The author focuses on the analysis of *Investigations into the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale* as a study representing an early stage in the formalization of the folktale plot in European folklore studies of the early twentieth century. The article

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[2] O. V. Naumovska, "Mifolohichna triada 'zhyttia → smert → bezsmertia' u narodnii prozi." Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philological Sciences (10 January 2006 – Folklore Studies). Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, 2021, p. 577, https://uacademic.info/ua/document/0521U102023 [in Ukrainian].

[3] A. O. Oprelianska, "Mifolohema 'androhinnist' v ukrainskii charivnii kaztsi." PhD dissertation (035 Philology). Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, 2022, p. 176 https://scc.knu.ua/zdobuvach-phd?id=335976 [in Ukrainian].

[4] Ya. A. Savoshchenko, "Folkloryzm avtorskoi prozy Marii Matios." PhD dissertation (10 January 2007 – Folklore Studies). Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, 2018, p. 216 https://scc.knu.ua/upload/iblock/0fc/dis_Savoshchenko%20Y.%20A._new.pdf [in Ukrainian].

[5] A. Kachan, "Mekhanistychno immanentnyi pidkhid vyvchennia struktury kazky ta yii motyviv Romanom Volkovym". *Scientific Collection "InterConf*+," no. 36(167), August 2023, pp. 215–230, https://doi.org/10.51582/interconf.19-20.08.2023.016.

emphasizes Volkov's use of motif numbering, plot construction formulas, and the principle of repetition of structural elements, which makes it possible to include his work among those associated with the development of structural analysis of the folkloric text. In this way, Kachan's research contributes to the integration of Volkov's concept into the broader scholarly framework of folktale analysis methodology.

Overall, contemporary scholarship demonstrates a gradual shift in approaches to evaluating Roman Volkov's activity: from marginal mentions to attempts at a full rehabilitation of his scholarly authorship. The works of O. Kyryliuk, as well as the dissertations of O. Naumovska, A. Oprelianska, and Y. Savoshchenko, form a body of arguments that suggest the necessity of revising the history of structuralist folktale studies, taking into account issues of scholarly ethics, priority, and authorial responsibility.

Thus, the analysis of existing research shows that Roman Volkov's legacy requires further systematic interpretation not only as a historical-scientific fact, but also as a key case for understanding the mechanisms of canon formation and the marginalization of alternative intellectual traditions.

Biographical Factors in the Formation of Roman Volkov's Scholarly Views

Roman Mykhailovych Volkov (pseudonym Vovk; 1/13 October 1885, Novhorod-Siverskyi, now Chernihiv Oblast – 6 May 1959, Chernivtsi) was a Ukrainian folklorist and literary scholar, educator, and academic organizer, one of the leading researchers of oral tradition in the first half of the twentieth century, the first rector of the Odesa Institute of People's Education, and both a representative and one of the founders of a structurally oriented approach in Slavic folktale studies. He held the title of *Privatdozent* from 1916 and professor from 1923.

Roman Volkov was born in Novhorod-Siverskyi, one of the ancient cultural and historical centers of northern Left-Bank Ukraine, a region distinguished by the continuity of its educational and spiritual traditions. He came from a family that belonged to the intelligentsia for several generations: his grandfather was an icon painter, his parents worked as teachers, and his brother chose the profession of an artist. Thus, various forms of cultural practice – sacral-visual, pedagogical, and artistic – coexisted in Volkov's family environment, contributing to the early formation of respect for text, image, and tradition as means of preserving and transmitting cultural memory.

Within the family milieu, a legend existed about a change in the family surname: it is likely that the original form, *Vovk*, was administratively recorded as *Volkov* in the nineteenth century, under the conditions of Ukrainian lands being part of the Russian Empire, in accordance with the established practices of Russification of anthroponyms. In this context, the scholar's own use of the pseudonym *Vovk* is indicative and

may be interpreted as a symbolic gesture of returning to his ancestral identity, and at the same time, as a form of cultural self-identification organically connected with his folkloristic interests.

Roman Volkov received his primary and secondary education at the Novhorod-Siverskyi Classical Gymnasium of the Kyiv Educational District, which played a notable role in shaping the region's humanistic intelligentsia. After graduating in 1904, he entered Saint Volodymyr University in Kyiv, but later, due to inability to pay tuition fees, continued his studies in the Department of Philology at the Nizhyn Historical-Philological Institute of Prince Bezborodko, from which he graduated in 1912 with the degree of Candidate of Sciences. As P. Mykhed aptly notes, "Free education at the Historical-Philological Institute of Prince Bezborodko attracted talented youth from all the outskirts of the empire."[6] It was precisely the Nizhyn period that proved decisive for his professional formation: here, his scholarly interests in folklore were definitively shaped, combining field observations with historical-typological and comparative analysis – an approach atypical of university practice at the time.

Already during his student years, Volkov recorded the folk drama *The Comedy about Tsar Maximilian and His Disobedient Son Adolf* (1910, Novhorod-Siverskyi). A comparative study of this text in relation to the Ukrainian veret and folk song became the basis of his first substantial scholarly work*, "The Folk Drama 'Tsar Maximilian'" (An Attempt at Investigating Its Composition and Sources)* (1912),[7] published as a separate volume in Warsaw. Even in this early work, one can clearly discern the researcher's aspiration to identify the structural components of the folkloric text, trace its genetic connections, and establish typological parallels – an orientation that later defined the methodological direction of his entire scholarly legacy.

The high scholarly level of this work led to the next academic step: the academic council of the Nizhyn Institute delegated the young scholar to the professorial milieu of Saint Petersburg University. His doctoral dissertation was supervised by Professor I. O. Shliapkin and Academician O. O. Shakhmatov, one of the leading researchers of the chronicle tradition of Kyivan Rus. Studying in the same intellectual circle as Volkov were M. K. Piksanov and M. K. Azadovsky, which attests to his involvement in the central philological debates of the early twentieth century.

After completing his studies, Roman Volkov worked in Odesa as a teacher of Russian language and literature, Latin, logic, and psychology at M. S. Panchenko's gymnasium, combining pedagogical practice with active scholarly work. In 1916, he successfully passed his master's examinations and obtained the title of *Privatdozent*,

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[6] P. R. Mykhed, *M. Volkov i V. I. Rezanov. Literatura i kultura Polissia*, issue 2, 1991, pp. 107–111. http://www.ndu.edu.ua/images/stories/polissya/p_2.pdf [in Russian], p. 106.

[7] R. M. Volkov, *Narodnaia drama "Tsar Maksimilian." Opyt razyskanii o sostave i istochnikakh,* Warsaw, 1912, [in Russian].

and from 1918, he lectured on special courses and conducted seminars on oral tradition at Novorossiysk University. In 1919, he completed preparation for a professorial title at the Petrograd University.

An important stage in his biography was his participation in the creation of new educational institutions during the period of the Ukrainian Revolution. In 1919, Volkov took part in the founding of the Ukrainian Teachers' Institute in Odesa and became its head; at the initiative of the Teachers' Union, the institution was named after Ivan Franko. After the establishment of the Odesa Institute of People's Education in 1920, he became its first rector. In 1923, he received the academic title of professor. In this position, Volkov combined administrative, pedagogical, and scholarly-organizational activities, viewing the university as a space for the formation of a new humanistic intelligentsia.

In 1924–1925, the scholar headed the ethnographic-linguistic section of the Odesa Commission for Local Studies at the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Under his leadership, large-scale collections of dialectological, folkloric, and ethnographic materials were carried out, as well as work on an ethnographic-dialectological map of Steppe Ukraine (Kherson, Katerynoslav, Bessarabia, Crimea, Kuban). During this period, he actively participated in organizing the "Steppe Ukraine" Museum in Odesa (opened in 1927) and published collections of Ukrainian folk tales under the title *Vovk's Tales*, combining scholarly editing with a desire to preserve living folk poetics.

In 1937–1945, Volkov worked at Odesa State University, where he was one of the initiators of the creation of the Faculty of Philology, served as its dean, and headed the Department of Russian Literature. At the same time, he carried out active cultural and educational work, organizing Shevchenko evenings, founding a "Shevchenko Circle," and delivering public lectures to a broad audience. Of particular importance was his contribution to the creation of the textbook and anthology *Ukrainian Literature* for the eighth grade, in which he authored the folklore section (five editions published between 1938 and 1945).

During the Second World War, while the university was evacuated to Bayram-Ali (Turkmenistan), Volkov took part in organizing an evening university and lectured for the local population. Between 1945 and 1950, he served as Vice-Rector for Research and Head of the Department of Russian Literature at Lviv State University. From 1950, he held analogous positions at Chernivtsi State University, where he later headed the Department of World Literature. The final period of his scholarly and pedagogical activity is associated with Chernivtsi.

The scholarly output of Roman Volkov comprises 152 publications, including over 20 monographs. His research encompasses folk drama, the fairy tale, song, ballad, *bylyna*, *duma*, as well as problems of folklore-literature interaction and inter-Slavic relations. A significant place in his legacy is occupied by studies devoted to the works of Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka, Adam Mickiewicz, Vasily Zhukovsky, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Leo Tolstoy. All these works are united

by the aspiration to reveal deep structural and typological connections between oral tradition and written literature.

The life and scholarly path of Roman Volkov convincingly demonstrate that he occupies an important place in the history of Ukrainian folklore studies and twentieth-century literary scholarship, representing a model of a scholar for whom the study of oral tradition was not merely an academic practice, but also a form of cultural responsibility.

The Structuralist and Gender Dimensions of Roman Volkov's Folkloristic Concept

In contemporary studies on the history of structuralism in folklore studies, increasing emphasis is placed on the need to reconsider the early stages in the formation of formal and structural analysis of the folktale, particularly beyond established canonical narratives that reduce the genealogy of this approach to a limited circle of "classical" names and works. In this context, the scholarly legacy of the Ukrainian folklorist Roman Mykhailovych Volkov deserves special attention, above all, his fundamental study *The Fairy Tale: Investigations into the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale* (1924), which, despite its undeniable innovativeness, long remained on the periphery of both national and international fairy-tale scholarship.

The figure of Roman Volkov occupies a distinctive place in the history of Ukrainian and pan-Slavic folklore studies of the early twentieth century. His scholarly activity combined intensive organizational, editorial, and collecting work with consistent theoretical reflection on folk verbal art. As head of the ethnographic-linguistic section of the Odesa Commission for Local Studies at the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1924–1925, Volkov contributed to the systematic collection of dialectological, folkloric, and ethnographic materials and to the creation of an ethnographic-dialectological map of Steppe Ukraine, encompassing the Kherson, Katerynoslav, Bessarabian, Crimean, and Kuban regions. In the same context, he initiated the establishment of the "Steppe Ukraine" Museum in Odesa, opened in 1927, and compiled collections of Ukrainian folk tales known under the title *Vovk's Tales*.

Of particular importance for understanding Volkov as a folklorist is his contribution to the study of folklore in secondary education, specifically to the formation of a scientifically grounded system for the school-level interpretation of folk verbal art as a component of national cultural tradition. Literary scholar Anatolii Volkov, the researcher's son, aptly notes: "Of great significance for Ukrainian folklore studies was the section 'Folklore' written by R. M. Volkov for the eighth-grade Ukrainian literature textbook. The textbook went through five editions (1938–1945). In terms of scope, it constituted a genuine course in Ukrainian folklore – nearly 100 pages. The course covered general issues of folklore studies and a fairly detailed overview of folk songs from the earliest times to the nineteenth century. Separate sections

addressed to *dumy*, fairy tales, sayings and proverbs, as well as riddles. Consistent attention was paid to folkloric poetics."[8]

At the same time, Roman Volkov was actively engaged as a compiler and editor of scholarly and literary publications. Among these were the jubilee collection *Lesia Ukrainka: On the 75th Anniversary of Her Birth* (1946), *A Collection of Old and New Materials of the Folk Narrator A. M. Sukhovertova*, *Bukovyna in Songs* (1957), which included the first publications of folk songs recorded by Yurii Fedkovych, as well as two volumes of studies prepared for the Fourth International Congress of Slavists (1958). His participation in editing the scholarly volume *The Problem of Translation and Inter-Slavic Literary Interrelations* (1958) further testifies to the breadth of his academic interests and his ability to work at the intersection of folklore studies, literary studies, and translation studies.

The most significant contribution of Roman Volkov to folklore studies was his monograph *The Fairy Tale: Investigations into the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale. Vol. 1. Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian Fairy Tales. Part 1. Tales of the Innocently Persecuted* (1924). It is precisely in this work, as Alina Oprelianska rightly observes, that "what we might consider distant germs, or a basis for the emergence of gender studies of fairy tales," for the first time acquired systematic scholarly articulation.

As Oprelianska notes, it is in this very study – where Volkov "raised the problem of the female fairy tale" – that one can discern distant yet conceptually significant beginnings of those approaches that would later be articulated as structural and gender-oriented.[9] This assessment allows Volkov's research to be viewed not only as a stage in the development of formal analysis, but also as an early form of methodological sensitivity to narrative roles, functions, and positions of characters – particularly female ones – within the structure of the fairy-tale text.

Volkov's methodological explorations should be considered within the context of broader European trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the end of the nineteenth century, the French scholar Charles-Marie-Joseph Bédier applied the so-called "algebraic" segmentation to the analysis of the fairy-tale plot, dividing it into constant elements (marked by the symbol Ω) and variable components that change across different plots. This approach enabled him to outline a schematic structure of the fairy tale and to inaugurate a new way of analyzing the folkloric text as a system of interrelated parts.

One of the earliest attempts to adapt such methodological tendencies in Ukrainian folklore studies was precisely Roman Volkov's work. In *Investigations into the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale (1924),* he conducted a structural analysis of Great Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian fairy tales, laying the groundwork for this

[8] A. R.Volkov, *Diialnist R. M. Volkova na tsaryni ukrainskoi folklorystyky. Literatura ta kultura Polissia*, 1990, pp. 88–89, http://www.ndu.edu.ua/images/stories/polissya/p_1.pdf [in Ukrainian], p. 89.

[9] Oprelianska, p. 27.

methodology in Slavic fairy-tale studies. Volkov concluded that the fairy tale, as a folkloric genre, differs from other narrative forms in that it is distinguished by a clear compositional organization, allowing it to be described with almost mathematical precision.[10]

Accordingly, he defined his main tasks as follows: (1) to determine what in the fairy tale pertains to form and style; (2) to identify plot schemes; (3) to single out the simplest narrative units – motifs – from which plot schemes are composed. At the same time, Volkov emphasized that "one must not lose sight of the fact that between the form (in the broad sense of the word) of a literary work and the everyday life that gave rise to it, there exists a close connection."

Volkov worked within an intellectual field shaped by the intensive collecting activities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when folklore was understood primarily as national heritage and as a factor of cultural and identity continuity. Despite the obvious limitations of the romantic-populist paradigm for contemporary humanities, it was precisely this paradigm that provided the corpus of texts without which subsequent theoretical analysis would have been impossible. At the same time, Volkov clearly recognized the distance between the moment of recording a folkloric text and the time of formation of its plot structure.

A fundamentally important element of Volkov's methodology is the thematic index of magical (fantastic) fairy tales that he developed, in which he attempted to systematize plots according to dominant thematic features. Although such a division often captures rather complex motifs than integral plot types, it nevertheless testifies to the researcher's aspiration to organize folkloric material on the basis of recurring structural elements.

Basing his research on a broad corpus of material from the collections of A. Afanasiev, V. Hnatiuk, B. Hrinchenko, M. Drahomanov, I. Manzhura, O. Rozdolskyi, I. Rudchenko, and others, Volkov proposed an extensive classification of magical fairy tales, distinguishing fifteen thematic groups, among which tales "*of the innocently persecuted*" occupy a special place:

1. Tales of the innocently persecuted.
2. Tales of the foolish hero (defined by Volkov as novella-tales).
3. Tales of three brothers.
4. Dragon-slayer tales.
5. Tales of the wise maiden (Volkov notes that the tale of the Seven-Year-Old Girl does not belong to this type).
6. Tales of the cursed and enchanted.
7. Tales of winning a bride.
8. Tales of the possessor of a talisman.
9. Tales of the possessor of magical objects.
10. Tales of the unfaithful bride.

[10] Naumovska, pp. 170–172.

11. Tales of the treacherous mother (sister).
12. Tales of the prophetic hero.
13. Tales of those destined by fate.
14. Tales of miraculously exposed crime.
15. Tales of cannibalism.[11]

Volkov analyzed tales of the innocently persecuted as a distinct subtype of the magical fairy tale. This group includes narratives about the Mare's Head, the Old Man's Daughter, the Bull-Calf (*Telychka*), as well as numerous variants of Cinderella-type tales. What was fundamentally innovative for his time was Volkov's conscious focus on narratives with an active heroine, effectively singling out the female fairy tale as an independent object of scholarly analysis. The very act of defining the female fairy tale as an analytical category allows Volkov to be regarded as one of the first scholars sensitive to the gender specificity of narrative. As Oprelianska emphasizes: "What we might consider distant germs, or a basis for the emergence of gender studies of fairy tales, appears in 1924, namely in the work of the Ukrainian scholar Roman Volkov."[12]

Within this group, Volkov developed a logical plot formula as a stable complex of motifs, designating each of them with conventional symbols and comparing schemes of different variants. This enabled him to derive a universal formula-scheme for tales of this type – "$A – A_2 – C_2$," where A denotes the persecution of the "innocently persecuted," and C denotes her triumph, marking the completion of the initiation cycle.

Methodologically, Volkov relied on a structural approach articulated through the concept of plot construction. He was interested in the possibility of studying the form of the fairy tale as an autonomous scholarly object, while at the same time insisting on the inseparable connection between narrative form and the socio-cultural context of its emergence. The fairy tale, according to Volkov, already possesses established compositional models, whereas reconstruction of the original everyday context is possible only through careful analysis of motifs. Motifs are thus treated as key elements that ensure the connection between the formal structure of the text and its cultural foundation.

An important component of Volkov's method is his consistent reliance on variability. He analyzed Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian variants of fairy tales, identifying shared and divergent motifs as well as cultural layers. Particularly illustrative in this respect is his analysis of the motif of the "grateful mouse" in variants of the tale of the Mare's Head, where Volkov demonstrates sensitivity to the internal logic of the narrative and the semantic coherence of images. Such observations allow

[11] R. M. Volkov, *Skazka. Rozyskaniia po siuzhetoslozheniiu narodnoi skazki. Vol. 1: Skazka velikorusskaia, ukrainskaia i belorusskaia. Pt. 1: Skazki o nevinnogonymykh.* Kharkiv, 1924, p. 238 [in Russian], pp. VIII–IX.

[12] Oprelianska, pp. 23–24.

him to draw conclusions about borrowings, transformations, and local adaptations of motifs within a common plot framework.

The numbering of motifs and the creation of plot-construction formulas constitute another significant step toward the formalization of fairy-tale analysis. Although certain formulas may appear selective or not always logically consistent, the approach itself was unprecedentedly innovative for its time. Volkov effectively proposed a toolkit that made it possible to view the fairy tale as a system of interrelated elements, without reducing it to merely illustrative or ethnographic material. At the same time, as Oprelianska rightly observes, Volkov took ethnocultural specificities of fairy-tale traditions into account: "The author considers different variants of plots, which brings him closer to the Finnish school of fairy-tale studies, and identifies motifs that occur in these variants. On this basis, the researcher draws conclusions about the affiliation of a particular motif or formula with a particular culture."[13]

In this context, the reception of Volkov's legacy in contemporary scholarship is particularly revealing. As Oleksandr Kyryliuk emphasizes, Volkov's studies go beyond the descriptive or purely comparative folkloristic analysis typical of the early twentieth century and demonstrate a systematic aspiration to uncover the internal organization of the fairy-tale text, its compositional levels, and functional elements. According to Kyryliuk, in Volkov's works, the fairy tale appears not as a sum of motifs or variants, but as a holistic artistic-semantic organism subject to analysis according to its own internal laws.

Kyryliuk underscores that in his 1924 work, Volkov consistently moved away from historical-genetic explanatory schemes of fairy-tale origins and focused instead on analyzing principles of plot construction. He was interested not only in the origins of individual motifs but also in the regularities of their combination, alternation, and transformation within the narrative, which makes it possible to identify recurring, typologically stable plot models.[14]

Kyryliuk pays particular attention to Volkov's influence on Vladimir Propp, emphasizing that this influence was "if not decisive, then quite significant." A considerable number of fairy-tale episodes, terms, and even references to specific authors in Propp's works on the fairy tale can be regarded as continuations of ideas laid down in Volkov's research. Propp's "Absence" effectively corresponds to Volkov's inserted exposition "The Husband Is Away," while Propp's category "Fie-fie" correlates with Baba Yaga's formula "Fie-fie, it smells of the Russian spirit."

Kyryliuk also draws attention to recognition motifs, noting that the motif of recognition by a kerchief and the motif of "the wife at her husband's wedding" appear in Propp without any modification compared to Volkov's system. For this reason, the scholar argues, "the origin of many structural units in Propp becomes clear only after acquaintance with Volkov's work," since "it was Volkov who first singled out

[13] Oprelianska, p. 26.

[14] Kyryliuk, p. 314.

those elements of fairy-tale structure and introduced into scholarship the relevant terms that Propp later directly used for his own description and explanation of the fairy tale's construction."[15]

Thus, incorporating Oleksandr Kyryliuk's arguments makes it possible to substantially revise the established understanding of the history of structuralism in fairy-tale studies. Roman Volkov emerges not as a marginal or merely "pre-Proppian" figure, but as a researcher who first identified those elements of fairy-tale structure and introduced the corresponding terminology that later became the foundation of the morphological analysis of the fairy tale. As Kyryliuk concludes, "the work of the Ukrainian researcher R. M. Volkov is undoubtedly a pioneering study that significantly determined the specific features of V. Ya. Propp's approach to the study of fairy-tale structure. In a certain sense, it set the general direction of subsequent structural-semiotic research, including the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics and the entire post-Proppian paradigm, and also, to some extent, indirectly influenced French structuralism, which was antithetical to the latter (see the discussion between C. Lévi-Strauss and V. Ya. Propp)."[16]

The combination of structuralist analysis with consistent attention to the female character as an active bearer of action allows Roman Volkov to be regarded as one of the first scholars whose works outline a synthesis of structuralist and gender approaches in folklore studies. Despite the fact that his work was insufficiently appreciated during the Soviet period and, for a long time (essentially to this day), remained outside international scholarly circulation, the very term *innocent persecuted heroine* and the logic of analyzing the corresponding plots convincingly testify to Volkov's fundamental contribution to the development of fairy-tale studies.

At first glance, it may seem paradoxical that Roman Volkov, having conceived his *Investigations into the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale* as a multi-volume study, did not continue this project after the publication of the first volume in 1924. However, a closer analysis of the scholarly and socio-political context reveals several factors that significantly influenced this decision. In the author's view, at least two interrelated factors were decisive.

The first was the sharply negative reaction of a significant part of Ukrainian folklorists, who failed to accept the absolutely innovative methodology of the "pioneer of structural analysis,"[17] R. Volkov. His structurally oriented approach to analyzing the fairy-tale plot, which differed radically from the established historical-genetic and descriptive models, was characterized by critics as "erroneous" and as not corresponding to the "true" tasks of folklore studies.[18] As a result, Volkov's work found

[15] Kyryliuk, p. 309.

[16] Kyryliuk, p. 315.

[17] Savoshchenko, p. 121.

[18] S. Savchenko, "Rets. na kn.: Volkov – 'Skazka. Rozyskaniia po siuzhetoslozheniiu narodnoi skazki'. Etnohrafichnyi visnyk," No. 1, Kyiv, 1925, pp. 78–84. https://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/ulib/item/ukr0011828 [in Ukrainian].

itself isolated from the dominant scholarly discourse of the time and did not receive the necessary institutional support.

The second, no less significant factor was the appearance in 1928 of *Morphology of the Folktale* by the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp.[19] Analysis of this text demonstrates not only a general methodological affinity with Volkov's research, but also the direct use of the logic of his analysis, a significant number of elements of fairy-tale structure, factual material, terminology, and even references to specific authors already employed in the Ukrainian scholar's monograph. Under the conditions of Soviet cultural policy, which was based on repressive mechanisms and systematic hierarchization of national scholarly traditions in favor of the Russian center, such a situation effectively deprived Volkov of the possibility to openly defend his scholarly priority. Despite Vladimir Propp's Jewish ethnic origin (he was born under the name Hermann Waldemar), in scholarly and public discourse, he was consistently represented as a Russian scholar, which fully corresponded to the ideological demands of the time.

Under these circumstances, Roman Volkov was forced into silence, which became a severe personal and professional blow. Indicative in this respect is a testimony recorded by the author of this article during conversations with the scholar's grandson: "Of course, everyone in our family knew about the situation with Propp. However, speaking openly about it was taboo. Grandfather would categorically fall silent." This silence appears not only as an individual reaction to the loss of scholarly priority but also as a symptom of the broader situation in which Ukrainian humanities of the Soviet period found themselves under pressure from political and ideological constraints.

The Collision of Scholarly Priorities in Structuralist Folktale Studies: Roman Volkov and Vladimir Propp

The collision between the scholarly approaches of Roman Volkov and Vladimir Propp – often described as a "pioneer theoretician" in the fields of narratology and structural studies[20] – emerges not as a direct polemical confrontation but rather as an asymmetry of methodological inheritance, scholarly reception, and conceptualization of the object of study. What is at stake are different trajectories in the development of structuralist thinking in folkloristics, trajectories that were formed within a shared intellectual field but were recorded in historiography in markedly different ways.

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[19] V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale.* 2nd ed., University of Texas Press, 1968, https://doi.org/10.7560/783911.

[20] S. Royanian, N. Afsari, 2016, *Folk Narratology: Propp's Improved Actants and Functions*. *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 13(1), December 2015–February 2016, pp. 87–92, p. 87.

Volkov's research, presented in *The Tale. Investigations into the Plot Construction of the Folk Tale* (1924) is grounded in a structural approach that the author himself designates by the concept of *plot construction*. The scholar raises the question of whether the form, composition, and style of the folktale can be studied as independent analytical categories, while simultaneously emphasizing the inseparable connection between the formal organization of the narrative and the cultural and everyday environment in which it arose. This position allows Volkov to combine formal analysis with sustained attention to the social and ritual foundations of the tale, without reducing it to an abstract scheme.

In his analysis of FAIRY TALEs, Volkov consistently operates with the concept of the *motif*, relying on Aleksandr Veselovsky's definition, according to which a motif is the simplest narrative unit, while a plot is the result of their combination and alternation. Building on this idea, the researcher identifies motifs, traces their combinations, and constructs formulas for plot construction for individual types of tales. Although not all of the proposed formulas are marked by complete logical closure, the approach itself was unprecedentedly innovative for its time and, in fact, anticipates the principles of formal analysis that would later receive systematic elaboration within structuralist folkloristics.

The methodological proximity of Volkov's approach to the later studies of Vladimir Propp cannot be explained by mere coincidence. It is known that Propp was familiar with Volkov's work, as evidenced by a brief but fundamentally telling critical reference to him in the preface to *Morphology of the Folktale*. This fact confirms that Volkov's monograph belonged to the circle of sources with which Propp consciously correlated his own research and precludes interpreting the shared features of the two concepts as the result of independently generated analogous ideas.

A thorough analysis of the intellectual convergences in the works of the Ukrainian and Russian scholars was conducted by Oleksandr Kyryliuk. In summary, these convergences can be grouped into three main blocks.

1. Convergences in Initial Narrative Situations, Prohibitions, and Violations

A clear convergence in the conceptualization of the initial elements of the folktale narrative is found, in particular, in Propp's function of "Absentation," which in Volkov appears as the inserted initial situation "The husband is absent" (C-6-1). It is precisely this moment that creates a situation of vulnerability for the characters, as a result of which they become subject to persecution by a stepmother or jealous sisters. Following the absence, children fall into misfortune – this plot element is also recorded by Volkov, albeit in a narrower formulation connected with children's disobedience to their mother (f-1).

Although Volkov lacks a prohibition explicitly linked to absentation, as formulated by Propp, the consequences of violating other prohibitions – such as the prohibition against entering a secret room – serve an analogous function, precipitating misfortune. Importantly, in Propp's morphology, this element is likewise present in the form of a ban on entering a secret chamber. In general, Volkov singles out the extremely widespread motif of violating a testament, which Propp systematizes as the violation of a prohibition or injunction.

Also indicative is the parallel between Volkov's motif of the wise man who falls into trouble after violating the king's prohibition against revealing the meaning of his words (f-13) and Propp's reflections on the prohibition against the hero sharing knowledge of otherworldly origin. To this same complex belongs the prohibition against touching the Firebird, which Volkov records as a separate motif and which Propp analyzes by interpreting the Firebird as a being connected with the world of the dead. In a similar vein, Propp interprets goldenness as a marker of otherworldliness – a feature that is systematically present in Volkov's analysis in images such as the bird with a golden crest (v-1-2), the duck with golden feathers (v-1-3), the deer with golden horns (v-1-5), the piglet with golden bristles (v-1-6), as well as in motifs of golden and silver apples (v-2-1), a garden with golden leaves on a grave (v-2-2), a golden egg (v-2-3), and golden spinning tools, tubs, and jugs (v-2-4), among others.

2. The Helper Function, Marvelous Characters, and Motifs of Trials

In analyzing the helper function, Propp pays special attention to the magical horse, particularly the horse with a golden mane. The significance of this character had been previously documented in detail by Volkov, who distinguished it into separate classes: (w-1-1), (w-1-2), and (v-1-4). The same applies to the image of the eagle. Among the magical helpers (marvelous companions) of the hero, Volkov includes the Ukrainian figures Vernyhora, Vernydub, and Prudyius, their Russian counterparts Gorynia, Dubynia, and Usynia (x-1), as well as Ob'yidala, Obpyvala, Moroz-Triskun (x-2), Chuinyy, Shvydkyy, and Zirkhyy (x-3), and the brothers-craftsmen (x-4). In Propp, we encounter an almost identical set of characters: Moroz-Studenets, brothers, Gorynia, Dubynia, Usynia, the archer, the swift runner, the sharp-sighted one, the keen-eared one, the swimmer, and the helmsman.

It is also worth noting that the not entirely transparent role of Prudyius (Prudyvus, Krutyvus, Vusian, Vusach) as a character with extraordinary abilities receives clarification in the Ukrainian tale "Kyryk, the Mare's Son, Vernydub, Vernyhora, and Prutyvus," where this hero "threw his mustache across the sea, and people crossed over it."

While Volkov classifies motifs of solving impossible tasks as ready-made typical motifs, Propp develops this direction into an extensive system of tasks assigned by Baba Yaga, the hero, the bride, the princess, the water spirit, the sorcerer-teacher, the old king, and others, granting them the status of trials and tests, while retaining

the term "difficult task." Among the direct convergences in defining this element is the task of building a palace, a garden, or a bridge within an unrealistically short time. Volkov identifies this as a motif of recognition, which also plays a prominent role in Propp's analysis.

Distinguishing between recognition of objects and recognition of persons, Volkov discusses plots in which a husband recognizes his wife or a wife recognizes her husband, placing particular emphasis on the motif of "the wife at her husband's wedding." Propp isolates this motif as a separate class without any transformation. Both scholars also mention recognition by a kerchief, which Propp includes in the rubric of the hero's branding.

3. The Image of Baba Yaga, the Dead, Punishment, and Final Motifs

It would not be an exaggeration to state that Propp's interest in the figure of Baba Yaga and her dual, ambivalent nature was largely set by Volkov, who considered Yaga one of the most striking folktale characters. In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp even singles out a special rubric "Fu-fu," borrowing the formulaic expression recorded by Volkov: "Fu-fu, it smells of the Russian spirit." Volkov also emphasizes the trait of Yaga as child abduction (s-1), which in Propp becomes a basis for including this character in corresponding morphological rubrics. The motif of feeding and watering the guest, noted by Volkov, is formalized by Propp as a separate function, "She fed and watered."

In both studies, an important role is played by the dead and the magical objects associated with them: the "grateful dead man" in Propp and the dead "from the graves" in Volkov, in particular, the deceased biological mother of the stepdaughter, as well as objects that appear or grow on the grave of a murdered character. At the same time, when introducing the motif of the "Grateful Dead," Propp refers not to Volkov but to a German source.

In tales of the "Cunning Science," both authors analyze the motif of otherworldly teachers to whom parents entrust their children for training in exchange for a symbolic payment (C-10). Both Volkov and Propp also record the motif of an unsuccessful bargain, when the hero is forced to sell something from the household without knowing exactly what it is (f-11). Volkov describes in detail the methods of punishing the negative character – being torn apart by a horse (d-2-3), dragged over a harrow (d-2-4), shot at the gate (d-2-5) – while Propp generalizes these variants, speaking of execution, exile, or being tied to a horse's tail.

A separate element in Propp is the king's "summons," in which he promises his daughter to whoever completes the task or sleeps with her; an analogous motif exists in Volkov, where the king, having issued a summons, conducts a bridegroom's inspection (r-3-1). The motif of flight with obstacles, when the heroes throw magical objects behind them (t-3-1), enters Propp's analysis without any change. The same

applies to motifs of blindness and restoration of sight (r-4-2), as well as the motif of exhausting searches, where in Volkov the hero wears out three pairs of boots, breaks three iron staffs, and gnaws through three iron prosphorae (r-2), which corresponds to Propp's descriptions of the hero's preparation for the journey.[21]

At the same time, the nature of this intellectual dependence does not provide grounds for speaking of verbatim textual borrowing. Propp does not reproduce Volkov's exposition, nor does he use his formulations literally. However, at the level of analytical procedure and terminological logic, a consistent assimilation of Volkov's key ideas can be traced. In particular, Propp operates with the same structural units of the folktale narrative that Volkov designated as "variants," redefining them as "functions," and repeatedly turns to the same corpus of folktale examples and plot situations that had already been employed in Volkov's analysis.

Thus, the issue is not plagiarism in the formal sense but a transformational borrowing of a conceptual model. Whereas Volkov constructs his analysis on the principle of variability and the combination of motifs within multiple plot realizations, Propp radicalizes this logic by reducing it to an invariant sequence of functions and proclaiming the universality of such a scheme. As a result, shared elements acquire different theoretical statuses: what in Volkov appears as a variable structural link becomes in Propp an obligatory component of a single morphological order.

The receptive aspect of this collision is also crucial. The translation of *Morphology of the Folktale* into the major European languages generated significant resonance and secured Propp's status as the founder of structural folkloristics in global scholarly discourse. By contrast, Volkov's unprecedentedly innovative work for its time was never translated and remained of limited circulation both internationally and domestically, which led to an asymmetry in the evaluation of scholarly priorities. It is telling that even certain terms introduced by Volkov (in particular the designation "innocently persecuted" with regard to folktale characters) entered international scholarly usage without a clear association with his name.

Fundamental differences between Volkov and Propp also concern the conceptualization of the object of study. Volkov insists on the principled variability of the folktale text, viewing each tale as a multiplicity of realizations within which motifs can transform, be substituted, or be borrowed from other traditions. From this perspective, he analyzes, for example, the motif of the "grateful mouse" in the tale of the Mare's Head, demonstrating how semantic shifts in images testify to intercultural layering and secondary influences.

Special attention should also be paid to the corpus of texts on which Volkov's analysis is based. The researcher deliberately focuses on tales of the innocently persecuted, which he interprets as "female tales," that is, narratives in which the heroine acts as the active subject of action. In this way, Volkov effectively introduces the problem of female agency in the folktale narrative into scholarly circulation,

[21] Kyryliuk, p. 310–312.

combining structural analysis with sensitivity to the gender specificity of the plot. Propp's model, oriented primarily toward the male dragon-slayer hero, proves suitable above all for analyzing "male" types of tales and is less universal with regard to female, neutral, or children's narratives.

Thus, the collision between Roman Volkov and Vladimir Propp lies not so much in a divergence of methods as in the unevenness of their historical reception and the different degrees of theoretical radicalization of shared initial ideas. Volkov's work represents an early, conceptually coherent stage in the development of structural analysis of the folktale, combining a formalized approach with attention to variability, cultural context, and gender issues. Awareness of this allows us to correct the established understanding of the genealogy of structuralism in folktale studies and to return Roman Volkov to the circle of key figures without whom the formation of this field would have been impossible.

Conclusions

Roman Volkov's folkloristic concept represents a coherent and methodologically self-sufficient model of early structural analysis of the magic folktale, formed even before the canonization of Proppian morphology. The concepts of plot construction, motif, plot formula, and the principle of variability proposed by Volkov laid the foundations for a formalized analysis of the folktale narrative in the Slavic scholarly milieu. The collision between the approaches of Volkov and Propp lies primarily in the asymmetry of scholarly reception and in the different degrees of theoretical radicalization of shared foundational ideas, while the very fact of Volkov's influence on Propp is undeniable and raises no methodological doubt. The systematic analysis of tales featuring an innocently persecuted female heroine with an active role allows Volkov's legacy to be regarded as an early stage in the development of a gender-sensitive approach in folktale studies. Consequently, Roman Volkov's scholarly heritage constitutes a landmark yet undervalued contribution of Ukrainian humanities to the formation of the structuralist approach. His research not only initiated a new methodological tradition but also brought Ukrainian folktale studies to the level of global intellectual discourse. Today, the urgent task is to reinterpret and reintegrate his ideas into contemporary academic discourse, which will enable the correction of established historiographic narratives and a proper assessment of the Ukrainian scholar's place in the development of world folkloristics.

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