

**THE CONTRIBUTION
OF PROFESSOR JÁN MICHÁLEK
TO SCHOLARSHIP AND TEACHING
IN THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH
ON FOLK PROSE IN SLOVAKIA¹**

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Introduction

On October 15th 2020, the family and – given the pandemic at the time – only a few former colleagues and students paid their last respects in Bratislava's crematorium to the university professor Ján Michálek, (*12. 3. 1932 – †10. 10. 2020). J. Michálek's entire professional life was linked to his *alma mater*: the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava. During the course of over fifty years, he devoted his energy, creative ideas and detailed sense of organisation to the faculty in his teaching and in his various teaching, academic and administrative functions. However, first and foremost he trained and taught dozens of graduates of the faculty, which was the only faculty in Slovakia until the early 1990s to train adepts of ethnographic and folklore studies and practice. J. Michálek was also head of this department from 1970 to 1990, when it went under the name of Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University.

He also played an essential part in the history of the *Studia Academica Slovaca* (SAS) summer school of Slovak language and culture at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, where he gave regular lectures

¹ This paper is the output of the VEGA 2/0107/19 project "Folklore, folk studies and ideology". It also contains a version of the paper which was published in Slovak (Hlôšková, 2014, pp. 196-216).

for many years, as is evidenced by his thirty-three published articles in the anthologies of the SAS, and which formed the basis, among other things, for L. Mlynka's statement that "...after the studies on linguistics and literary theory, those concerned with folk culture are the second largest group." The author particularly highlights J. Michálek's role: " 'the most productive' " writer, not only from the point of view of the quantity of articles, but also as the key writer, is J. Michálek, who is one of the anthology's main authors" (Mlynka, 2000, p. 359).



Ján Michálek

The professional biography of J. Michálek²

J. Michálek was born on March 12th 1932 in Brezová pod Bradlom. In 1956 he graduated in history and ethnography from the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, and from then on until his retirement in 2004 he taught in the department known today as the Department of Ethnology and Museology of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University.

His academic work focused primarily on the history of folklore studies, the theory of folklore studies and individual genres of folk prose. As J. Michá-

² References to the publication activity of prof. Michálek see in his selected bibliography, which is a part of this text.

lek himself said: “As far as my professional orientation is concerned, my choice (oral tradition, historical themes in folklore, its current situation, the history of Slovak ethnology) was based on current needs in this area, as well as on my knowledge and view of exceptionally momentous events and changes (the year 1948³, industrialisation, collectivisation etc.) in society” (Michálek, 2011, p. 128).

He defended his doctoral thesis *Historická tematika v ústnom podaní na Podjavorinsko-Podbradlansku* [Historical Themes in Oral Stories in the Podjavorinsko-Podbradlansko Region] in 1965. Together with J. Olexa, J. Michálek prepared a translation of the 1928 international catalogue of folk tales by A. Aarne and S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale. A Classification and Bibliography*, published in Slovak in 1961. In 1971, he published a monograph on the memorate as a specific narrative genre, *Spomienkové rozprávanie s historickou tematikou* [Reminiscent narrative with a historical theme], which acted as his habilitation thesis.

J. Michálek prepared several university textbooks and teaching manuals. *Dejiny etnografie a folkloristiky. Postavy, diela, inštitúcie* [The History of Ethnography and Folklore Studies. Personalities, Works, Institutions] was published in three editions, and the book *Tradicia a inovácia (štúdie o ľudovej kultúre)* [Tradition and Innovation (studies on folk culture)] was published in 2001. He was a co-editor and wrote the afterword to the work by P. J. Šafárik *Slovanský národopis* [Slav Ethnography] which was published as volume IV of *Spisy P. J. Šafárika* [Works of P. J. Šafárik] in 1995.

J. Michálek also worked as an editor for the publishing houses VEDA, Tatran, Mladé letá and others on numerous collections and selections of the folk oral tradition, many of which were re-edited, for example *Čarovné zrkadlo. Výber zo slovenskej ľudovej slovesnosti* [The Magic Mirror. A selection of the Slovak folk oral tradition] (1973, 1983, 1988). He was present at the inception of the *Folk Art in Slovakia* series by the Tatran publishing house, in which he published monographs of memorates *Keď je dobrá klobása* [When there's a good sausage] (1987), local and historical legends *Zvonové studničky* [Wells of bells] (1990) and demonological legends *Na križných cestách* [At the crossroads] (1991). He studied the narrative of the Slovak National Uprising in his publication *Protifašistický odboj na Slovensku v rozprávaniach ľudu* [The anti-fascist resistance in Slovakia in folk narrative] (1985).

He edited several local and regional monographs, for example *Stará Turá* (1983), *Brezová pod Bradlom* (1970, 1998), *Ľud hornádskej doliny* (1989) and

³ This concerns the change in Czechoslovakia's political and economic system, when in February 1948 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia became the decisive political power.

Gemer – Malohont (2011),⁴ as well as several anthologies of academic conferences, for example *Slovenská ľudová kultúra (stredoeurópske vzťahy)* [Slovak Folk Culture (Central European relations)] (1996).

He is the author of twenty entries in the *Encyklopédia ľudovej kultúry Slovenska I., II* [Encyclopaedia of the Folk Culture of Slovakia I, II] (1995).

He supervised dozens of master thesis⁵ and doctoral thesis. J. Michálek was a member of several editorial boards for academic journals and a long-standing member of academic councils and committees for awarding academic honours at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University and the Slovak Academy of Sciences. He was a founding member of the Slovak Ethnography Society⁶ (Godálová, 2006, p. 47) established in 1958.⁷

J. Michálek's teaching, academic and organisational work was rewarded by several institutions with commemorative tablets and medals; for example, he was awarded the Gold Medal of Comenius University.

After this factual information, the next section of this article will focus on the characteristics of J. Michálek's principal articles in the context of the study of folk prose in folklore studies in Slovakia.

Research on folk prose in the academic work of J. Michálek

Historical traditions

The period following the Second World War can be characterised in our area of interest in the oral historical tradition in Slovakia as “mono-thematic” in the sense that researchers concentrated on one thematic cycle.

J. Komorovský's work (1957) is a complex folklore, or more exactly culture-historical take on the king Matej tradition. Another branch of folk research on oral historical traditions is the interpretation of the brigand tradition. The exploitation and cultivation of the brigand tradition has a specific place in the history of Slovak culture (Hlôšková, 2005) and this tradition can also be said

⁴ In the publications *Stará Turá*, and *Záhorská Bratislava*, he is the author of the chapters on folk prose.

⁵ J. Michálek was also the supervisor for the master thesis *Ľudoví rozprávači – nositelia jednej z foriem súčasného folklóru* (1978) of the author of this paper.

⁶ At present, the Society operates under the name of Ethnographic Society of Slovakia.

⁷ At the first General Assembly of the Slovak Ethnographic Society, J. Michálek was elected academic secretary. During the 1969-1972 period, he was elected as vice-president of the society.

to have the same place in terms of its interpretation in folk studies. In brief, this approach can be described as deliberate. I perceive the orientation of post-war Slovak folk studies in the area of verbal traditions mainly towards the brigand tradition as part of the deliberate monitoring of those parts of narrative interpretations of the past which were given a degree of progressive ideological expression. In this understanding, folk brigand traditions were classified as part of the movement of popular displays against social and national oppressors such as peasant revolts, anti-feudal uprisings, workers' strikes, the partisans' fight against fascism. This deliberate focus in researchers' work, however, often led to a distorted image of the ideological form, poetic value and true function of these traditions in the repertoire of folk narrative. O. Sirovátka pointed at the problem of the bipolarity of brigand traditions at the beginning of the 1970s (Sirovátka, 1972).

From the perspective of the historical starting-point, the folk image of the revolutionary years of 1848/1849 is one of the "young" and regionally defined historical traditions, in particular the image of one of the leaders of the revolutionary events of that period, J. M. Hurban.⁸ J. Michálek (1966, 1978) described the characteristics of this cycle of narratives with a historical theme. He places the tradition in a specific and historical context, while characterising the events of the time, the attitude of J. M. Hurban and of the popular classes within it. J. Michálek came to the conclusion that the verbal tradition in which the awareness of the population of the Podbradlansko-Podjavorinsko region processed the theme of the events of 1848/1849 was grafted on to traditional ideas and images. At the field research stage, the author described the contemporary state of the material which researchers had omitted, approaching the material with aesthetic criteria for assessing narrative expression. It is this very typology of certain life situations that gives the legend tradition its permanent revitalisation, where the itinerant motifs are updated with local, chronological and personal specifics. J. Michálek considers the association and merging of individual historical stages as an expression of the continuity of the narrative tradition, correctly in my opinion, which is not, of course, just a peculiarity of the traditions about the events of 1848/1849. I consider his treatment of the issue as stimulative, mainly because he paid attention to the historical tradition of regional content, and recorded the contemporary state of tradition, while describing both its semantic dominant, as well as the set of motifs of the given cycle. J. Michálek (1999) devoted an article published in the Anthology of the SAS to his native region and the oral tradition concerning an important figure born

⁸ Jozef Miloslav Hurban (1817 – 1888), Lutheran priest, writer, journalist, politician and organiser of cultural life in the Slovak national movement, a leading figure in the Slovak uprising of 1848/1849, the first president of the Slovak national council.

there, M. R. Štefánik⁹. He included in it the results of the long-term and extensive research to which his former student Z. Vanovičová devoted herself (Vanovičová, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1996).

There are few specialised folk studies works on the topic of the Tatar or Turkish incursions and rule on the Slovak territory of medieval Hungary. In works of a synthetic nature, the Turkish cycle is characterised as one of the dominant cycles of legends of the Slovak prose folklore tradition (Melicherčík, 1968, p. 618). I consider it necessary to pick out the works of J. Michálek and M. Kosová from among the specialised folk studies on this topic. In his study *Povesti o Turkoch v podjavorinsko-podbradlanskom kraji* [Legends on the Turks in the Podjavorinsko and Podbradlansko regions] (1969), he concentrates on materials obtained in field research at the beginning of the 1960s on an area with a sparsely populated, remote hill settlement on the Slovak-Moravian border. By setting them in specific historical and social circumstances relating to the Turkish dominance, the author characterises the thematic dominants of the oral tradition and gives relevant conclusions of a generalising nature. He tries to define the causes for the persistence of the oral tradition about the Turks in the narrative repertoire of this area and considers the nature of the settlement as a stabilising element which was a condition for preserving archaic elements of folk culture. This study also includes brief characteristics of stories from the perspective of folk poetics. The author also raises the issue of what was originally folk material used as a model for literary interpretation by the poet S. Chalupka (1812-1883) and thus re-entering the folk narrative repertoire.

The article by M. Kosová is outstanding for its clear-cut methodological focus, pregnant formulations and its way of dealing with the issue of historical legends with a Turkish theme (Kosová, 1972). The foundations of semiotics form the theoretical basis of the author's analysis of the relation between *fabula* and *sujet* in folk legends with a Turkish theme. The author limited the corpus of the material studied chronologically to reports from the last fifty years and the territory of Slovakia and the Moravian-Slovak border region, and partly the Ukrainian areas adjacent to the territory of eastern Slovakia. The texts represented both the territory incorporated in the 16th and 17th centuries into the Ottoman empire, the territories under direct threat of Turkish incursions as well as territories where historical evidence shows that they were not under Turkish dominance nor were they under threat. In the understanding of a folk work as a model of reality, with this work fulfilling the role of a means of information, M. Kosová considers "being under threat" as the *sujet* basis of legends with a Turkish theme, because it has a dominant status in the hierarchy of semantic elements. Based on an explanation of the origin of the *sujets* of folk legends

⁹ Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880 – 1919), astronomer, photographer, military pilot, brigadier general in the French armed forces, diplomat and politician. He had the most merit in building up the Czecho-Slovak foreign resistance during the First World War.

with a Turkish theme from the paradigm of military themes, the author tried to define them. She thus labels the *sujets* of folk legends with a Turkish theme as “a development starting from being under threat to its liquidation or surrender to the process of the least binary semantic opposite” (Kosová, 1972, p. 386).

We may also consider the work of J. Michálek as “monothematic” from the point of view of the wider circle of genres of reminiscent narrative and life-based narrative with the theme of the First and Second World Wars and resistance in the Slovak National Uprising, to which I shall return later.

Literary folklorism

The personal biography of J. Michálek includes information on popularising volumes of oral tradition which he edited as collections of individual genres.¹⁰ In addition to samples of the folk oral tradition, the publications also contain accompanying specialist texts, but written with consideration for the potential recipient, the ordinary reader. In the case of several of these volumes, the readers were children. In the high-quality series by the publisher Tatran, *Ludové umenie na Slovensku* [Folk Art in Slovakia], J. Michálek published three books devoted to memorates, demonological, and local and historical legends (Michálek, 1987, 1990, 1991).

He also formulated his experience and theoretical knowledge gained during his work editing texts of folk oral tradition in academic articles concerning the issue of so-called literary folklorism. This is the category in which all edited folklore texts fall when they leave their original communication system bound to oral telling and the specific hierarchy of functions of this narrative genre or another. Folklore texts which are part of a technical type of communication go through various levels of editing. In the 1970s and 1980s, great attention was paid in Slovakia to the theory of folklorism, mainly thanks to another important Slovak folklorist, Milan Leščák.¹¹ He developed the concepts in several seminars and conferences addressing this issue. A special set of papers in the “Folklore in mass communication media and publishing practice” section, devoted specifically to the issue of literary folklorism, was presented at the international seminar held in Martin as one of the events of the jubilee XXV. Východná Folklore Festival (Švehlák, 1980). In his paper, J. Michálek (1980, pp. 44-51) focused on the complementarity of the relationship between so-called

¹⁰ The publications are: *Zo živých prameňov* (1960), *Studnička* (1962), *O Jankovi Polienkovi* (1963), *Havran a liška* (1964), *A róka és a hollo* (1966), *Čarovné zrkadlo* (1973).

¹¹ Professor Milan Leščák – from 1963 to 1995 an academic member of staff of the Institute of Ethnography SAS (the present-day Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS), from 1995 to 2004, a university lecturer at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University (present-day Department of Ethnology and Museology).

authentic folkore and so-called stylised folklore in the system of contemporary culture. He emphasised the fact that “Folklore in its original, authentic forms and in various forms of its second existence has specific opportunities for its use and action thanks to its ideological, aesthetic and ethical content” (Michálek, 1980, p. 45). The author states that “Authentic folklore and folk culture, as well as stylised folklore, both represent two real and living elements of society’s cultural life.” (Michálek, 1980, p. 45). He characterises literary folklorism as “...a long-lasting process of the existence of folk values in a fixed form in the most varied specialised collections, as well as in the varied situations of readers’ publications and editions.” (Michálek, 1980, p. 46). He differentiates the extent of interventions in the “original” folklore text: “If in the professional transcription of a text, there is an attempt to achieve maximum precision in representing the narrated variant, a literary “retelling”, a readers’ edition aims for further processes and interventions more in such a version. It can lead, for example, to a contamination of the variants of the same type, to the construction of a so-called optimal variant of several specific versions, for the use of linguistic and stylistic elements in other texts etc.” (Michálek, 1980, p. 49).

The complementarity of the mutual relationship between folklore and expressions of folklorism in living culture can also be seen in the way these communication systems influence each other, which in the case of literary folklorism means that what were originally folklore values return through it into the folklore environment.

History of folk studies

The history of this subject, namely folk studies, has a special place in J. Michálek’s research and teaching. In 1990, the first edition of his university manual on the history of folklore studies in Slovakia was published (Michálek, 1990). In his own way, J. Michálek was following on from the work of M. Dzubáková (1976) devoted to the beginnings of folk studies in Slovakia via the figures of J. Kollár (1793 – 1852) and P. J. Šafárik (1795 – 1861). He also devoted several papers to them and cooperated in editing Volume IV of the “Spisy Pavla Jozefa Šafárika – Slovanský národopis” [Collected Works of Pavol Jozef Šafárik – Slav Ethnography]. Under the modest title of *Doslov* [Afterword], the publication includes a study by J. Michálek in which he evaluates the multi-faceted academic work of P. J. Šafárik, while concentrating on the area of ethnography in the historical context of the level of the contemporary development of academic research and knowledge influenced by the movement for national revival. Through the characteristics of his work and activities, the author also succeeded in depicting the personality traits of P. J. Šafárik: as an organiser, motivator, leading figure and colleague in the field of collecting, processing and providing a scientific interpretation of sources and

facts. He also pointed out Šafárik's prognostication of Štúr's stage of interest in folk culture, but in the oral tradition in particular, when pointing out the contemporary understanding of the folk oral tradition as one of the possible historiographic sources.

J. Michálek drew attention to the works of researchers from outside the folk studies environment and valued their contribution to the history of folk studies, namely mainly literary historians of the 20th century, such as A. Mráz, R. Mrlan, F. Votruba, R. Brtáň, J. Horák, K. Rosenbaum, V. Kochol, P. Liba and others who understood the function of folklore's influence within literary folklorism in the history of Slovak literature (Michálek, 1996, pp. 13-19). J. Michálek wrote several specialist papers and analytical studies devoted to figures in folk studies or ethnography such as J. Kollár, P. J. Šafárik, A. Horislav-Škultéty, P. Dobšinský, J. L. Holuby, K. A. Medvecký, S. Cambel, P. G. Bogatyriov, R. Bednárik, J. Mjartan and K. Plicka.

He realised that Slovak folk studies of the time did not have a work on their own history which might be an adequate pendant to the syntheses on the history of ethnography written by V. Urbancová (Urbancová, 1970, 1987). He also pointed to the fact that "...ethnography as a science has also contributed – albeit to different extents – to the democratisation of our national culture. Its contribution has been all the greater for the active manner in which it tried to include the discovered values of folk culture in contemporary national movements and cultural efforts" (Michálek, 1996, p. 13). He pointed to the importance of analysing so-called "ego documents": "In this context, I draw particular attention to the importance of studying the relationship between researchers and other interested participants in folk studies, beginning with their collection activity and continuing to their most significant publications" (Michálek, 1971, p. 17). In the past, the author of this article applied such a focused approach to studies concerning A. Kmeť, Š. Mišík, J. L. Holuby, B. G. Bogatyriov (Hlôšková, 2009).

Genre theory

As I have already mentioned above, for J. Michálek the material starting-points for a theoretical consideration of the issue of genology were narratives with the theme of the First and Second World Wars. These are narratives making up part of historical memory, either of contemporaries of military events who might have been, but did not have to be, direct participants, or passed down synchronously or diachronously as part of the oral tradition.

The power of the depicted theme also fed into the professional growth of folk studies. Put simply, we could state that folk studies "discovered" narratives with the theme of personal history at the point when they shifted their interest in the bearer from the group to the individual, when in addition to tra-

ditional genres living narratives appeared within the group model of the narrator's repertoire, associated with the narrator himself and the circumstances, and thus apparently unstable. Today it is already clear that in the period when attempts at national emancipation were being made in the 19th century in Europe's so-called small nations, traditional folklore served as an argument in the domain of politics and culture; it was the multi-semantic symbol of a group. The philosophical basis of that time was that of anti-feudal ideas, and the popular and plebeian classes of the population were seen as an active subject in history, the essence of the national societies which were being built. Their culture (= folklore) as an expression of the group's soul was supposed to become the source of a nationwide culture, and its symbol. It is probably also for this reason that *life narrative* (memorate) remained on the margins of the attention of researchers. At the same time, it is a paradox because among Slavs in the first half of the 19th century, the editor of Serb folk epic, V. S. Karadžić, pointed to the significance of exceptional bearers, since he based his collection (1814 – 1846) on their individual repertoires. He also pointed to their exceptional personality traits and interesting biographies. In 1871, A. F. Hilferding chose a similar approach, when he classified the texts in his publication *Onežskije byliny* by their narrators. M. Azadovský's work from 1926, *Eine sibirische Märchenerzählerin* in which he used the psychological and anthropological-functional method was a breakthrough in this direction (Krawczyk-Wasiłewska, 1980). The number of works with this approach to the bearer (R. M. Dorson, S. Witkiewicz et al.) gradually grew, until in the 1960s and 1970s several papers were published which applied various methods, often combined with photographic documentation, artistic expressions and the collector's documentation notes, to the study of the figure of the narrator. The monograph by the Finnish folklorist and regionalist J. Pentikäinen from 1978 (Pentikäinen, 1978) can be considered a breakthrough in this respect, dealing with the exceptional figure and bearer of traditional folk culture Marina Takalo, where the author combines a folkloristic and anthropological approach in his ten-year-long research. From the world of Czech folk studies, we can mention the work by the collector from southern Moravia A. Šebestová, who gave currency to the term *lidské dokumenty* [folk documents] (in addition to traditional folklore genres, she also recorded and published narratives from everyday life and life stories) (Šebestová, 1947).

In Slovak folkloristics, it was not until the middle of the 20th century that M. Kosová was the first theoretically devoted to this genre, and in 1971 (Kosová, 1958), with the aforementioned monograph by J. Michálek (1971) and summarily G. Kiliánová (1992).

In Slovak folk studies, it was only in the mid-20th century that M. Kosová (1958) became the first person to deal with the theory of this genre, followed by J. Michálek in 1971 with his above-mentioned monograph, and then by G. Kiliánová (1992). M. Kosová put to good use her knowledge acquired from

field research in the Slav seminar of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University from 1928-1942 under the supervision of F. Wollman (Gašparíková, 1993, 2001, 2004; Hlôšková, 2006). The idea of several years of systematic research on the territory of the whole of Slovakia was based on the principle of a creative figure in relation to his/her living environment. G. Kiliánová devoted herself in detail to developing criteria for memory-based narration as an autonomous genre.

The professionalization of social science subjects, and thus intensified ethnographic, linguistic, as well as folkloristic, research at the beginning of the 20th century brought to light a living narrative repertoire, in which narrative about life was a living part, both from the point of view of quantity, and mainly from the semantic point of view.

The classification viewpoint, driven by an attempt to systematise knowledge, is, as we know, a theoretical construct. Although it is clear to us those humans are effectively also *homo narrans* and naturally try to share their experience, feelings and knowledge with others, regardless of being (un)aware of their narrative's genre characteristic, it is still possible to find certain stable and invariant elements which differentiate these narratives from others.

Memory-based narrative as a dynamic phenomenon of culture came into being probably owing to its association with a more intimate social framework; traditional genres (fairy tale, legend, myth) talked about group ambitions, actions or losses. Memory-based narrative individualises these topics. If the hero in the traditional group is the collective (an individual hero also symbolises the group), then in memory-based narrative, it is the individual who struggles with fate and circumstances. Dealing with fate and circumstances is the core of the action/story or its birth in a narrative form.

Even in the Slovak folk studies of the 20th century, tendencies linked in many ways to the research tradition of the 19th century continued to exist, with non-scientific goals at the forefront when formulating collection plans. At its beginnings, the study of oral prose was centrist in terms of textology, as well as selective: traditional "crystallised" genres – the fairy tale and legend – were at the centre of interest (Michálek, 1996). We can state that it was only the linguist S. Czambel, a researcher focusing on positivism, who gave an image of the whole breadth of the contemporary narrative repertoire at the beginning of the 20th century with his recording of texts (Žeňuchová, 2009). During the next stage of development of folk studies in Slovakia, it was only researchers in the second half of the 20th century – M. Kosová-Kolečányi, J. Michálek, M. Leščák (Leščák, 2010)¹², V. Gašparíková, G. Kiliánová – who worked fully on

¹² The publication was cited until its publication as a manuscript. M. Leščák in fact defended a thesis with the same name in 1971.

the theory of such hitherto neglected genres as humoristic narrative, life-based or memory-based narrative.

As I have already mentioned, from the point of view of the theory of the memorate, the publication by J. Michálek (1971) is a fundamental work in the history of Slovak folk studies; it also involved J. Michálek in the contemporary discussion of the definition of the subject of folk studies research. His research field was mainly the Podbradlansko and Podjavorinsko region, but he also attempted to find natural narrative situations, drawing on the need to have “plentiful and reliable material” as a starting-point” (Michálek, 1971, pp. 9-10). He was interested in the contemporary situation of traditional culture in relation to the social and educational composition of the rural environment studied, which was reflected in the thematic and genre composition of the narrative repertoire. From the perspective of the material examined, the principal chapter is “Memory-based narrative on the world wars” (Michálek, 1971, pp. 56-100). The narrators also included people born in the second half of the 19th century, and the research carried out at the beginning of the 1970s showed that “the number of these stories is still today [the year of its publication – note by HH] relatively high, and very varied in terms of motifs” (Michálek, 1971, p. 67). The author – innovatively for that period – states that memory-based narrative on the topic of the First World War can also be used as reliable sociological source to understand the attitude of the popular masses to the First World War, and in general to war overall (Michálek, 1971, p. 59). for which present-day folk studies used the term of philosophy of history. J. Michálek also analysed memories and narratives about the Second World War, pointing out from the perspective of the ecology of folklore the importance of “bringing back to life” narrations which are so-called commemorative occasions (for example during celebrations of the Slovak National Uprising etc.), where the content and formal expression of the narratives often help put the finishing touches to how the topic of war is dealt with in literature, film and drama.

The contribution of J. Michálek’s work from the perspective of genre theory and poetics lies in the terminological specification and definition of category properties for the subgroups of memorates, namely *rozprávanie zo života* [life-based narration] and *spomienkové rozprávanie* [memory-based narration]. J. Michálek followed on from previous researchers (J. Polívka, A. Melicherčík, M. Kosová) and applied the point of view of the narrator, with an emphasis on the content and formal structure of the narrative. He points to the processuality of the narrative creative process when “...the primary meaning of life-based narrative, of monitoring autobiographical versions lies in the opportunity to examine the creative process...”, where “this material makes the issue of the individual and the collective in the creative folk/art process very topical” (Michálek, 1971, p. 105). From this point of view, memory-based narration is, then, a version which is not the narrator’s immediate experience; the relation to the fact recounted is via an intermediary, at the very least at one remove, or at sev-

eral removes. It thus represents a stage of folklorisation – in time and in space – which has consequences for the content and the form of the narratives, when, for example a “historical figure in the folk’s imagination becomes the person created by the oral story” (Michálek, 1971, p. 110). And in the end, J. Michálek’s statement on field research as a condition *sine qua non* of folk studies is still relevant today, for example in discussions on the disappearance or development of folklore and on its functions in contemporary people’s system of values” (Michálek, 1971, p. 130).

A few personal words in conclusion

I was a student of Professor J. Michálek’s from 1974 to 1978, and he was also my supervisor when writing my master thesis about so-called scenic folk narrators. I wrote my master thesis as the young mother of my son Adam; for this reason, we did not have many sessions together, and they needed to be brief and constructive. I appreciated the trust which he placed in me when I was embarking on my work and understanding the issues in question. He took a calm and kind interest in my feelings as a mother, and about how my son was faring. He was pleased with the result of my studies, as he also told my husband Braňo with his own special smile. A few years later, he suggested using the informal “you” form with that very same smile, causing me much embarrassment, since I still considered myself his “student”. The embarrassment passed, and all our subsequent meetings were pleasant and enriching. I am convinced that professor Janko Michálek remains in this way in the memories of many generations of his students.

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