

EDITORS' FOREWORD

*The man who does not read good books
has no advantage over the man who can't read them.*

Mark Twain

Readers of ELOPE will have welcomed the appearance of this special issue, a Festschrift honouring the seventieth anniversary of Professor Meta Grosman, a stalwart in the field of English and American studies. Her immense contribution to scholarship is demonstrated in the ensuing comprehensive bibliography, comprising nearly three hundred monographs, studies, articles, reviews, forewords, introductions, interviews and other forms of her academic and public engagement.

Although the forty-six years of Meta Grosman's affiliation with the English department at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana speak for themselves, as does her indefatigable effort to maintain the high academic and administrative efficiency of this department, it befits the occasion to outline her professional and institutional career before moving on to Meta as a teacher, colleague and friend.

Meta Grosman graduated in English and German from the Faculty of Arts in 1960 and was forthwith appointed the position of teaching assistant at the Department of Germanic Languages. She soon pursued her studies abroad, first at Cambridge University and in London (1963–1964), and finally, having obtained an American research scholarship, at the University of Miami, Ohio, where she took her MA degree in 1965. Six years later she earned a doctorate from the University of Ljubljana with her dissertation on the relation between the reader and the literary work of art in British criticism from 1921 to 1961. Foregrounding the reader a vital maker of meaning rather than being merely under the author's dominant control, the research immediately proved to have broken new ground in the Slovene literary community; the critics, willingly or not, were gradually becoming aware that there was more to the word on the page than met the eye. Not only did Meta Grosman's observations plant the seed for a more reader-oriented Slovene approach to studying literature – an approach largely influenced by Hans Robert Jauss's and Roman Ingarden's receptionist aesthetics, which had been previously ignored in Slovenia – they also paved a solitary and, more often than not, unappreciated way for what was to evolve a few decades later into literary pragmatics, now a major critical discipline.

In addition to her scholarly achievements, Meta has always stood out as a unique personality. Indeed, a statement and an example to all of us of the younger generation

who prefer the what-America-can-do-for-you commodity. In other words, as former students of Meta's we are only beginning to grasp her philosophy of duty, loyalty and concern – the very philosophy which underlay the years 1988–1992 and 1996–1998, when Meta Grosman acted as head of the Department of Germanic languages, as well as the years 1998–2000, when she became head of the newly established Department of English at the Faculty of Arts. It was a period which would be remembered for the growth and expansion of English and American studies in Slovenia, at least at the academic level if not nation-wide. This was largely due to Meta Grosman's policy of bringing together as many promising young scholars as possible, particularly in the domain of English linguistics, even though her commitment to literary studies might have encouraged a different priority. But she had a vision and a sense of duty. Thus she managed to make the department both compact and astonishingly diverse, with subjects ranging from in-depth surveys of literatures in English and modern English grammar to translation, discourse analysis, lexicography, generative grammar, or historical grammar.

This was also the period (1994–1997) of Meta Grosman's coordination of the TEMPUS project, which aimed to institutionalize translation studies in Slovenia and succeeded in founding a new translation department at the Faculty of Arts. It was a common feeling that, owing to Meta's international renown as well as the invariably persuasive power of her character, doors would open – and they did. No matter what project, position, promulgation, or representation she undertook, it always worked for the benefit of the department.

Among Meta Grosman's numerous achievements, let us just point out a few: she was the president of the Council of Humanities of Slovenia; she founded The Slovene Association for the Study of English (a member of the European Society for the Study of English) and acted as its first president; she has been a member of the FILLM (Fédération internationale des langues et littératures modernes) board since 1996; President of the Reading Association of Slovenia since 1995. In the years 1987 and 1988 she was a Fulbright professor at UC Berkeley, followed by her research scholarship at the University of Munich in 1992, granted by DAAD. In addition, Meta Grosman has for several years chaired the committee of the secondary education curriculum in Slovenia, with a view to making the school programmes more student-friendly and especially more functional in terms of developing the cognitive potentials of young learners. In 1997, her merits in the field of tertiary education were recognized with a national award by President Milan Kučan, followed by the SOVA (Slovene Association for Tertiary Didactics) award in 2000, and the 2006 Great Award in recognition of her pedagogic and scholarly contribution to Anglistics and the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts.

All medals, awards and nominations aside, Meta Grosman's central interest has been and continues to be the inter/cross-cultural reception of Angloamerican literature, with special

emphasis on the impact of translations on Slovene literary production, criticism and theory. However, as Meta's life-long students we cannot but sense that her main concern stays with ways of improving literature teaching, and that all her crusades over the newly-sprung critical thoughts have but one common purpose: to bring literature closer to its implied reader by making it sound alive, pertinent, potent. And no matter how many new theories tomorrow may bring, we firmly believe that she will do her best to put them into practice, to implement them in the classroom. As on the day when she walked in, and we were freshmen and had not the faintest idea what to do with this literature stuff, and she said: "You don't need to be a shoemaker to know that your shoe pinches. It's the same with literature." Curious enough, at the time, but then it dawned on us that Meta was actually using a metaphor for critical reading. And we gradually began to like it, we assumed the role of readers and started to value the stones which we ourselves brought to the vast mosaic of literature. And this is something that outweighs hundreds of bibliographical entries.

In the last few years, Meta Grosman's interest in the category of the reader in literary criticism has centred around the issue of reading and ways of improving reading literacy, particularly among the younger generations. Thus she has, more eagerly than ever, stood up against those proponents of literary texts (the majority of them being teachers at various levels of education) who impose their own arbitrary interpretations rather than encourage readers to develop their own literary sensitivity, appreciate their own experience and learn how to articulate it. Her empirical work is based on studying the development of cognitive functions parallel to the language development, which has proved instrumental in young learners' successful formation of their self-image, and therefore in their more active and coherent socialization. Meta's findings, encapsulated in three seminal publications, *In Defense of Reading* (2004), *Literature in Intercultural Contexts* (2004), and *Dimensions of Reading* (2006), have all the necessary power and persuasiveness to strengthen the public awareness of the significance of reading competence. This issue, which has for decades gone practically unnoticed, is now, thanks to Meta, properly articulated, and we can only hope that it will eventually bear fruit.

The range of topics covered in this volume reflects to a great extent the breadth of Meta's own scholarship, with an expected emphasis on inter/cross-cultural themes, whether in the form of literary, translational, or linguistic discourse. The list of contributors provides a fairly representative panorama of scholars who may differ in their primary research interests from Meta, but nevertheless share a close affinity with her: either as colleagues and friends, or simply as admirers of the same object.

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