

Vjekoslava Jurdana: “ ‘My dear Lute’ (*Leute moj mili*): A Review of V. Bubrin & V. Grubišić, *Croatian Renaissance Reader / Hrvatska renesansna čitanka*”

Vjekoslava Jurdana

Faculty of Education
Juraj Dobrila University
Pula, Croatia

vjurdana@unipu.hr

Vladimir Bubrin and Vinko Grubišić, *The Glory and Fame/Dike ter hvaljen'ja: Croatian Renaissance Reader / Hrvatska renesansna čitanka*. New York: Croatian Academy of America, 2015; pp.589; foreword, preface, introduction, author biographies, vocabulary, selected bibliography, ISBN: 9780692347331.

Vladimir Bubrin's and Vinko Grubišić's book, *The Glory and Fame/Dike ter hvaljen'ja*, is the result of their long engagement in the study of Croatian Renaissance literature, which has included the publication of their translations of certain works in the *Journal of Croatian Studies*, published by the Croatian Academy of America in New York and which is also the publisher of this work. As noted in the Forward to the work:

“Founded in New York in 1953, the Academy has as one of its goals the promotion of Croatian literature, culture and history among English speakers. The Academy has primarily carried out this mission through its publication of the *Journal of Croatian Studies*, an annual scholarly review published since 1960.” (p.13)

In this context, one should note, as was done by John Kraljic, the President of the Academy in his Forward to the book, that Bubrin and Grubišić received the 2012 Davidias award from the Croatian Writers' Association for their translations, an honor usually bestowed on the best study or for the best translation during the past year.

The Glory and Fame/Dike ter hvaljen'ja has been planned and conceived as a reader of Croatian Renaissance literature. Indeed, that specific term – *Reader* – is clearly denoted in the second portion of the title of the work. The word ‘Reader’ implies that something will be read, that is, that

someone will read a specific text. The emphasis is thus on the person reading. In this framework the main goal of this work is clearly set forth in its title, i.e., it offers texts from Croatian Renaissance literature to the modern reader. In a word, an older period of literature – such as the Renaissance – is presented to its newest reader, the (post)modernist recipient.

Did the authors succeed in their goal? To answer this question, one needs to clarify for whom this Reader is intended by considering the two concepts mentioned above – (post)modern and the recipient. Using the language of cultural theory, we currently live in the era of metamodernism, which has succeeded the post-modernist age.

One can already see the reaction against the postmodernist tendency to network with the universal desire for authenticity. Contemporary recipients seek to be protected from the effects of (postmodern) metastastical consumerism, from the lies of the marketplace and daily competition, overflowing with insecurities upon which the above-referenced social networking/confrontations had been established. In this digital ontology one can observe the importance of form as a constituent element of information.¹ That is the reason we can see all around us increasing desires for truthfulness. We are witnessing a new celebration of originality. As a whole, three ideas predominate: specificity, value and authenticity. They frame the new era of authenticity.² But, this is not a simple return to the past, or a one-sided rejection of post modernistic premises. It involves, instead, processes of repositioning between post-modernistic conceptions and positions of modernism (which delimited what can and cannot be done) and post-modernism (where all is permitted).³ Here one comes across the discussion between, on the one hand, the desire for universal truth and, on the other hand, (political) relativism, between hope and doubt, sincerity and irony, wisdom and naïveté, building and destroying. It concerns cultural metamorphoses and the development of cultural sensitivity during a period known as metamodernism, in which man, in a driven manner, oscillates and swings between the future, the present and the past, with and between ideals, returning to metaphysics.⁴

The contemporary human also sees literary works in the same manner.

¹ Drucker (2001).

² Docx (2011).

³ This concerns a critique of the post-modernist creed, ‘anything goes’ which commenced in 1995 in the field of architecture with the arguments of the urban planner Tom Turner (1995): 9 and his suggestion that “*the built environment professions are witnessing the gradual dawn of a post-Postmodernism that seeks to temper reason with faith.*”

⁴ As a view of post-post-modernism, specifically as a response to post-modernism, the concept of metamodernism has been introduced by the cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010).

This brings us to the theory of reception, in which a literary text is viewed as a MESSAGE. This message has been styled by an author, and has been distributed to the world, hence we refer to him as the SENDER of the message. The message will be received, listened to, read and accepted by the RECIPIENT. As a result, that entire communication process, in which the sender, the message and the recipient participate, occurs within the context of the process of reception which brings us to an understanding of the importance of how someone receives a specific literary-artistic message, indeed, not simply how the recipient receives it but how it affects the recipient and how will it motivate and inform him/her. Thus, as we have shown, the theory of reception places in focus the problem of communication between the reader (recipient) and the literary work.⁵ H. R. Jauss and W. Iser emphasize that the relationship between the recipient and a work is an active and dynamic one, which generates its own unique dialogue. Specifically, there are two means of understanding: reproductive and productive. In modern epistemological theory and in hermeneutics and the aesthetics of reception, they are known by the terms monological and dialogical. The monological means of achieving knowledge takes on a one-way, conveyer-belt, adoptive, unchangeable, reproducible, authoritative, dogmatic characteristic. Dialogical knowledge is described as a two-way, mutual participation, converginal, hermeneutical-analytical, critical, dialectical, productional or creative process. In the latter, the creation of an idea occurs through two-way communication or interaction between the literary text and the communicator. Thus, communication from a literary-artistic text is transformed into an interaction or dialogue between the text and the recipient, and in this relationship the recipient receives new meaning, his role having been changed. The recipient does not simply adopt information as a given, but himself creates/constitutes information. Thus, the recipient does not have a passive role but a creative one.

Because the theory of reception especially emphasises the role of the recipient in his encounter with a literary-artistic work, it comes as no surprise that it has been heavily transposed into literary education, and that, indeed, the theory has been methodologically reflected in various educational curricula. Thus, it influences the modification of the organizational model of the education process, as well as the selection of a strategy in the interpretive-analytical phase of its communication with the literary text. As a result, we are speaking about literary communication as a pedagogical phenomenon which terminologically has been entitled literary-pedagogical communication. The latter term has two concepts, with the first – literary – denoting that the communication is literary by its content (the communicator),

⁵ Jauss (1982).

and the second – pedagogical – denoting the method and goal of such communication. Because in that context the recipient does not have sufficient (pre)knowledge for independent literary communication and literary-aesthetic reception, he requires a mediator. Communication with a literary-artistic text becomes intermediate, that is, it occurs within a didactic-methodological mediation process. This is critical as only with a satisfactory means of mediation in communicating with the literary artistic text will the recipient increase his emotional and potential comprehension of the text, allowing him the means to verbally and nonverbally express his experience. It is in this context that we review this Reader, which is expressly directed to the recipient. It is specifically intended for a recipient who is neither accustomed to the Croatian language, nor who has much knowledge about earlier Croatian literature, specifically of the Renaissance. Thus, Bratislav Lučin, of the center for the study of Marko Marulić and his humanist circle, the Marulianvm in Split, emphasizes in his Preface that: “*The Glory and Fame is intended for students of Croatian and Slavic studies in the English-speaking world, as well as for readers who have little or no knowledge of Croatian.*” Moreover, in keeping with this goal:

“*A great effort has been made to bring the texts closer to the reader, overcoming the linguistic barrier, yet at the same time the reader is exposed to the original old Croatian texts: the English translations are positioned opposite the original old Croatian selections, with the same text rendered into standard contemporary Croatian along the bottom of the facing pages. This anthology will definitely serve as a textbook or valuable reference for students, and as one of the most comprehensive sources of text and information about Croatian literary Renaissance for readers who speak little or no Croatian.*” (p. 16)

As the editors of the Reader themselves note in their Introduction:

“*To ensure thorough comprehension and appreciation, and for ease of reading, the original texts have been printed on the left-hand pages, with the corresponding English translation on the right-hand pages, and a contemporary Croatian translation along the bottom of each page.*” (p. 43)

The translations were presumably approached with the foregoing in mind, from the original to the contemporary Croatian version, and then into English. Bratislav Lučin explains how this had been accomplished in his Preface:

“*The original Croatian texts are taken from standard editions, mainly from the series Pet stoljeća hrvatske*

književnosti (Five Centuries of Croatian Literature), and Bogišić's Leut i trublja. Marulić's texts are taken from the selection found in Duhom do zvijezda (With the Spirit to the Stars), edited by Bratislav Lučin. For the selections from Marin Držić's works, the authors relied on the authoritative Djela (Works) edited by Frano Čale." (p. 16)

Here one sees the main intention in the concept of the Reader, and that is in the mediation between the contemporary recipient and the message given by older Croatian literature. Bratislav Lučin speaks further on this:

"The translations into standard modern Croatian are the authors' own and are informative in nature – that is, they do not strive for any particular esthetic or poetic effect but rather serve to elucidate the original texts and help the untrained reader to better follow and navigate through the original." (p.16)

Nevertheless, as Lučin emphasizes: "*the English translations, largely by the authors themselves and by Katia Grubisic, aim to be readable and faithful to the originals, but with a good dose of poetic appeal.*" (p.16)

This all goes to the task of achieving the best possible communication with the selected works. The texts in the Reader are most important. Fifty-five writings have been selected, from the pens of 28 authors who worked in the last quarter of the 15th century and in 16th century. The Reader includes texts of a number of unknown poets as well as two folk ballads. The unique feature of the Reader is that it includes all three literary genres: poetry, prose and drama. Poetic texts take the largest share, in keeping with the literary production of the Croatian Renaissance, as the editors themselves state: "*Most Croatian Renaissance literature was written in verse.*" (p. 18) Further, one should note that, in connection with geographic origins, the authors presented in the Reader for the most part came from Dalmatia, specifically its coastal regions, the area where the Croatian literary Renaissance flowered. This is evidenced by the title of the book itself, selected from the initial verses of the first literary epic of Croatian literature, *Judita*, which had been composed in Croatian by Marko Marulić, the 'father' of Croatian literature. Here we reproduce the English translation of that epic as found in the Reader: *Judita – Libar Marka Marka Marula Spličanina u kom se uzdarži historija svete udovice Judit u versih harvacki složena / Judith – The books of Marko Marulić of Split containing the history of the holy widow Judith in Croatian verse composed.* And its first verse: "*The glory and the fame of Judith the blessed*" ("Dike ter hvaljen 'ja presvetoj Juditi") (p. 74). Graham McMaster translated this particular work, described by Lučin as "*a masterful translation of excerpts ... adhering to formal metrics and to patterns of rhyme.*" (p. 16)

As we have previously discussed, the editors of the Reader have as their most important task establishing a mediating role between the older Croatian text and the modern recipient so as to ease his (initial) encounter with these creative works, a task which is not simple even for a recipient expert in Croatian. In connection with this goal, the editors note that the book includes “*... a substantial bibliography and a lexicon of selected common words, also included in contemporary Croatian as well as English.*” (p. 43). These ancillary texts, the Introduction, Author Biographies, Vocabulary and Selected Bibliography, assist the recipient-reader not only to contextualize the literary texts which he has received, but also to learn some additional details about their authors and the time and space in which they created their works.

Within the universe of the texts themselves, within the heart of the Reader, the editors guide us through their theoretical review entitled ‘The Glory and Fame: An Introduction to Croatian Renaissance Literature’ (p. 18-43). Their review contains the following subheadings: Regional and Cultural Influence, A Map of Croatian Renaissance Literature: Split, The Republic of Dubrovnik, Dubrovnik, Cradle of Croatian Drama, The Coast and the Islands, Northern Croatia, and Literature Beyond Croatia’s Borders, The Late Renaissance, The Glory and Fame. The editors rely on recent literature which they cite in their footnotes. Further, a selected bibliography is included towards the end of the book. A special role is played by the tri-lingual Vocabulary section which perhaps most thoroughly reflects the multilayered nature of the Reader itself and allows one to peek at the language and spirit of the Croatian Renaissance.

In the end, this is an extremely functional work, not a pretentious one, but an extremely attentive introduction to a part of Croatian literature, which succeeds in protecting the originality of the texts while making them accessible. Thus we find here the three metamodernist ideas (specificity, value and authenticity) in their totality. Such ideas mark the age of authenticism; today it is not easy to mediate between the contemporary recipient and (older) literary messages. Further, the Reader, in a highly effective manner, allows the recipient to engage in dialogical learning. Certainly, one should add, that the Reader is also a useful source for those who are fluent in Croatian and for students of Croatica in the Homeland, especially in today’s contemporary globalized culture which is based on the dominance of English. Moreover, *The Glory and Fame / Dike ter hvaljen’ja* is a source for all who desire, in an easy but not superficial, in a practical but not frivolous, way to remind themselves of a glorious and golden era of Croatian culture and literature. Indeed, not only to remind themselves, but actually to enter into that spectacular world of the Croatian literary word and creatively reinvent it from the viewpoint of the contemporary recipient. The

recipient, living in an era of a culture of death, as has been described by Pope John Paul II, may already have a distressed heart, just like the Renaissance lady who turns to the unknown poet in the poem *My Dear Lute* (*Leute moj mili*). The title is chosen as the subtitle of this review, seeing its possible reinterpretation as a metaphor for the poet's call and address to, as well mediation with, the recipient, never a simple task, especially in this metamodern era. As a result, in concluding this review we reproduce the entire original poem and its translation as presented in the Reader:

“*Leute moj mili, hoću te moliti /* “My dear lute, I beg you,
mojojzi gospoji malo pozvoniti, / play a little for my lady.
jeda ti od mene bolje srjeće budeš / Perhaps you will be luckier than me
čemerno tere nje srdačce dobudeš.” / to win her stone-like heart.”
(p. 64-65).

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