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CALLING THE BLUFF: A CRITIQUE OF ENGLISH- LANGUAGE LITERARY CURRICULUM IN THE SLOVENE SECONDARY EDUCATION

1. Introduction

Over the past decade and a half or so, the reformed English literary curriculum in Slovene secondary schools has been characterised by a uniquely forward-looking mindset and pioneering approaches in literature teaching methodology that for the first time in decades succeeded to achieve the aim of developing literary competence in Slovene students that would allow them to read foreign literature unassisted after they complete their secondary education. At least that's one side of the story; the implemented curriculum could equally well be described as an unnecessarily radical programme of which too much was expected even though it was realistically never in a position to achieve its stated aims, and that has consequently so far failed to justify the required resources both in staff and classroom time, not to mention student effort.

My article is thus about something slightly out of the ordinary - it's about the Emperor's new clothes, about the elephant in the room. I talk about the shortcomings, contradictions and failures of the English literary curriculum that are self-evident yet somehow continue to go unreported, unaddressed, and unchecked, thus crucially contributing to the deadlock that the reform has long found itself in. I also turn to the programme's architects, who keep turning a blind eye even to those issues that require their most urgent attention. Finally, I question the multitude of reviews, analyses, and reports in which one is hard pressed

to find an honest admission that something may call for improvement or may not be working altogether, but which are at the same time full of self-congratulatory praise of past successes, and confident predictions of even better results for the future.

My working hypothesis speculated that the reform of secondary-school English literary curriculum that took place in the early 1990s was essentially a set of arbitrary decisions by a circle of experts in the field of literature that took it upon themselves both to cause the reform to happen in the first place, as well as to subsequently implement it. Due to their inexperience with and/or disregard of both the English teaching methodology theory and the actual state of English in Slovene secondary schools regarding student proficiency and teacher training, the architects of the reform failed to build upon the then-current circumstances, and underestimated the demands that were to be imposed by the adoption of the reform. It further seemed as if the said reform was overly focused on abandoning virtually all past teaching practices and turning everything upside down, rather than retaining whatever proved functional or indeed successful, and making upgrades where needed. Finally, the reform appeared to simply not have been followed up by permanent critical evaluation and the necessary improvements that could eventually result a curriculum that, although flawed, could be made sustainable without significantly compromising its spirit.

The hypothesis was never geared towards making new discoveries; from the start, my intention was to systematically dismantle the officially recognised but in fact questionable arguments and to set against one another the numerous contradictions that permeate the English literary curriculum. Indeed, my best arguments were unwittingly provided by the very people this article is most critical of, and in the name of countless secondary school students and teachers that have been put in a difficult position and left little choice but to get on with the job over the years. In my own name, I hope that at least some of them will come across and prompt those who can make the difference to take action. Heaven knows it's long overdue.¹

¹ I decided not to include poetry in my review of the literary curriculum; the study thereof appears to be set up better than that of the two longer literary works and its basic

2. Evaluation

Whenever there is a historical background of a contemporary phenomenon to research and evaluate, it is difficult to decide where the various influences begin and possibly end. The temporary discontinuity in the Slovene secondary education caused by World War 2 thus seems a convenient place to start tracing the disciplinary, as well as the ideological development of the English literary curriculum in what was to become the grammar school of today.

2.1. *Historical overview*

The teaching of literature was part of the Slovene secondary school curriculum practically from the start: it gets its first mention in the syllabus for the 1947/8 academic year (Ministrstvo za prosveto 1947: 5). The 3rd and 4th year students were to be introduced to the classic English literary canon as well as with modern authors (*ibid.*). It was, however, up to the teacher to decide upon the number of works and the extent of their treatment in class - a circumstance which was to remain characteristic of the English curriculum until the mid-1970s. The list of authors to be studied in the final two years was expanded the following year (Učni načrt *etc.* 1948: 55) with an overview of English literary history beginning with Chaucer added for the fourth year (*ibid.*).

After the initial wave of practically annual secondary school curriculum reforms in the late 1940s, there were no more than three in the next two decades. With each revision, various minor changes were incorporated into the syllabus and contributed towards the development of the English literary curriculum without ever turning overly radical. The 1955 syllabus for English as the primary foreign language

postulates have remained relatively constant over the years. Furthermore, the teaching aids provided are much more comprehensive and useful, the student workload required is almost trivial in comparison, and lastly - but not least - the actual knowledge of the poems selected for study is not even tested during the oral Matura exam. (Fortunately for the Matura Committee for English, the students seem to have so far remained oblivious to this curious fact.)

introduced literary home reading assignments from the first year on (Učni načrt *etc.* 1955: 55-6), starting with abridged texts from readers for the first two years. In the third year, the students began with classroom study and analysis of unabridged literary texts belonging to Romanticism, Realism, and contemporary styles (*ibid.*). The fourth year covered Shakespeare, 18th century literature, Naturalism and further contemporary works, as well as an overview of other key literary works (*ibid.*: 57) that complemented the introduction to historical, political and economic background from the third year (*ibid.*: 56).

The 1962 syllabus for English as the primary foreign language stresses the need for choosing texts that are suitable for the students' ages in order for them to better realise the significance of learning a foreign language (Republiški komite *etc.*: 88) and advocates the progression from simpler texts featuring an engaging plot for first-year students towards more demanding works, characteristic of the nation to which their author belongs in the latter years (*ibid.*). The same guidelines are to be observed regarding home reading assignments - the students should start with reading shorter and simpler texts which are to grow gradually longer and more demanding (*ibid.*: 90).

Another significant postulate of the syllabus is the teacher's autonomy in choosing the texts to be studied in class; he or she is instructed to compile a reading list in the beginning of the academic year, which should be flexible enough to accommodate various students' interests (*ibid.*: 88). The syllabus is rich with suggestions for the texts to be potentially studied in class; the choice of works was made so as to complement the Slovene world literature syllabus (*ibid.*: 89). The list starts with modernised poetry from the Anglo-Saxon period and the Middle Ages, and ends with novels and plays by contemporary authors (*ibid.*). Literary history is to be presented only in relation to the works studied with an explicit provision that the students should not be overburdened with biographical data (*ibid.*). The 1964 syllabus re-introduces abridged readers as suggestions for home reading assignments in all four years (Cvetko 1964: 48-9) and refreshes the list of suggested literary texts with several updates (*ibid.*).

The first syllabus to abandon the approach of the students' acquiring an overview of literary history and to explicitly state the main

aim to be that of unassisted critical reading of foreign literary text was issued in 1975. It is strongly characterised by the clear appeal for creating the environment encouraging of critical and analytical reading and subsequent in-class interpretation, which should serve to develop the students' aesthetic criteria (*Gimnazija etc.* 1975: 89). The new paradigm represents a marked difference compared to all preceding syllabi, which is further reinforced by the adoption of the non-chronological study of texts (*ibid.*). The progression from simpler works, regarding both their language and their content, towards more difficult ones is retained (*ibid.*), as is the excerpt-based approach.

The 1980 literary syllabus for English as the primary foreign language was predominantly rooted in Mirko Jurak's reader-cum-textbook for secondary schools, *Berila iz angleške in ameriške književnosti*, published in 1978. The differentiation between the language-oriented and humanities-oriented secondary school programmes gave literature a more prominent role within the former (*Družboslovno-jezikovni etc.*: 1). The short-lived 1992 syllabus is uncharacteristically brief in its treatment of literary curriculum: the teacher is merely presented with a list of 42 literary works found, either in full or in form of excerpts, in the 1990's two-volume reader *Literatures in English* by Mirko Jurak, and instructed to choose sixteen of them (*Gimnazija etc.* 1992: 42) for classroom study.

2.2. *Current state of affairs*

The current syllabus, approved by Strokovni svet RS za splošno izobraževanje (National Board of Education) in 1998, represents a markedly different approach, at least as far as the literary curriculum is concerned. It emphasises the reading of integral texts as the basis for the awareness of the social-cultural parameters that defined them at the time of their creation, as well as their position in literary history from a contemporary perspective (*Predmetni etc.*). Beside contrasting the works studied with their translations, making comparisons with relevant Slovene literature is also encouraged (*ibid.*).

Another key aim is the competence for unassisted reading of authentic literary texts, which is to serve a double function, namely of broadening the students' cultural horizons and of maintaining their language proficiency after they leave school (*ibid.*). In order to achieve

such competence, the syllabus emphasises a positive classroom attitude that favours multiple interpretations of the works and encourages the students to express and discuss their literary experience (*ibid.*). The students are expected to gradually become sensitised to the processes of intercultural awareness and be able to critically evaluate their process of reading (*ibid.*).

The syllabus retains the provisions for student co-operation in choosing the non-mandatory literary works according to their interests and cross-subject integration with Slovene (*ibid.*). The overview of literary history is given a low priority with non-functional learning by heart specifically warned against, and is not to be subject to marking (*ibid.*).

The January 2008 Predlog posodobljenega učnega načrta (Modernised Syllabus Draft) builds directly upon the current syllabus and does not include any new or revised elements.

3. Criticism

At a glance, it is easy to assume that the reformed English literary curriculum was a welcome turning point that ushered in a new era of literary appreciation for Slovene secondary school students, and not a moment too soon. The numerous publications by the main architects of the said reform are indeed full of praise for the achievements apparently singularly due to the new approaches introduced on their part, and hardly - if at all - mention any shortcomings of the programme or problems encountered at any point during its implementation. However, a closer, contrastive look at these same documents reveals that there are numerous inconsistencies, fallacious arguments and misconceptions, which are considerably more indicative of the true state and actual effects of the reformed curriculum both today and in the past.

3.1. Choice of literary works

Since the inception of the advanced level English Matura in 1995 [Rot Gabrovec 2005: 333], six books have been chosen as eligible for the exam, namely (in the order of their introduction) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by

Oscar Wilde (1995), *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger (1996), *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (2001), *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne (2005), and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon (2007).

The selection of these literary works, spanning slightly more than a century regarding the year of their publication, is very diverse, which is generally a good idea. This way, more ground can be covered between the two books in terms of literary style, cultural and regional characteristics, and time periods - an important factor with only two works to be read. Four of the works are novels, two are theatre plays, they are of very different length (roughly 30.000 words for *Look Back in Anger*, three times as much for *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, with *The Curious Incident...* not far behind), and their authors belong to three different nationalities. Through the years, the works have appeared in various combinations of two, with one out of every pair being singled out as the topic of the examination question.

There are also numerous others, less quantifiable but nonetheless important differences between the works, such as their positions within the respective national literary canons (which may or may not be indicative of their literary value), their accessibility for upper-intermediate to advanced EFL students, and their perceived relevance for secondary-school students, i.e. young people in their late teens, which Grosman sees as a crucial consideration (2005: 139). I find that there are considerable differences between the works not only regarding the first, but the latter two criteria, as well, which is less desirable yet understandable to an extent, as it quite clear that the Matura Committee was - and possibly remains - totally oblivious to actual circumstances within Slovene secondary student population. Grosman thus expects the students to meet their peers across the world and share their literary experience concerning The Great Gatsby with each other (2000b: 6), and claims that the novel is written in accessible English understandable to Slovene students (*ibid.*).

It is difficult to rationalise all the considerable and seemingly random imbalances without drawing the conclusion that insufficient effort has been made to minimise the differences from year to year, i.e. from one generation of students to another, and prevent some

generations of students from working much harder than others. The overall performance-based adjustment mechanisms that are being used in calculating the applicants' scores (Državni izpitni center 2006: 24) may contribute towards curbing the unequal position the students find themselves in, yet ensuring equal opportunities can't have been very high on the Committee's list of concerns.

Out of curiosity more than anything else, I took notes regarding the vocabulary difficulty level in each book, noting down the number of instances I had to consult the dictionary. While my experience is obviously very subjective and not directly applicable to any other reader, the ratio between the most and least accessible book (*The Curious Incident...* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) is more than 1:25, specifically 9 vs. 222 words or phrases consulted. Even if the respective page counts of the books (roughly 80.000 words vs. roughly 90.000) is taken into consideration, the difference still exceeds the factor of twenty. Notwithstanding the obvious subjective bias, such difference in the amount strain that is put on the reader is definitely an issue that needs to be resolved.

I find it surprising that the vocabulary and various other criteria of subjective difficulty (sentence length, level of grammar, subject matter, cultural specificity) - provided that the works proposed are actually tested against them - are given so little weight in the selection process, at least if that is to be inferred from the imbalances. It certainly stands to reason that books should not only be balanced in relative terms, i.e. to be as equally demanding as possible for the students, but also tested for absolute "difficulty". Great literature does not have to be impenetrable, and since literary reading is not - or is at least not supposed to be - an exercise in dictionary juggling in order to merely make it to the final page with a basic idea of plot and character development, special care should be taken to clear the students' path to proper literary experience of any unnecessary hurdles.

With these and many other factors to consider, making a truly balanced selection is understandably difficult. Fortunately, it seems that matters are improving, with the last addition to the roster being a definite step in the right direction. It is, however, difficult to say whether this is a result of research and analysis, or merely an instance of blind

luck as I was unable to find any references to any past or present selection process in the documents consulted. In fact, the only measurable criterion for a work to be considered for the Matura appears to be a translation into Slovene; Grosman and Benulič (1994: 16) even put forward the suggestion that the students should first read the translation, either as an introduction to the original work in case they find it too difficult or in order to compare the two in terms of language and vocabulary (*ibid.*: 26), even though one of the long-term aims of the reformed literary curriculum is the ability to read foreign-language literature unassisted (Grosman 1994: 7). One of my teacher sources claimed that the availability of secondary literature, primarily reader's notes and similar study aids, some of which are directly referred to in the teacher's guides, is also considered.

Film adaptations are allegedly also a contributing factor, and four out of the six books were indeed made into movies, namely *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Pygmalion* (also as *My Fair Lady*), and *Look Back in Anger*, and I was told by several teachers that they take advantage of this by showing the films in the classroom and using them as references. I was unable to find an official position on such practices but considering that Grosman and Benulič disapprove of any use of television and speculate about it negatively affecting one's ability to read (1994: 11) and even hindering psychological development in infants and youngsters (Grosman 1998c: 14), I expected the Matura Committee to be more active in limiting the possibility of them occurring at all. In her own guide to *The Great Gatsby*, Rot Gabrovec also warns of the possibility of the students' getting confused due to the differences between the novel and its film version (2000: 101) - a concern applicable also to other screen adaptations and one that could be simply and effectively resolved by not referencing them in the first place, as well as encouraging the teachers not to show them in class.

Whether the availability of these, albeit perfectly legitimate supplementary materials, is really beneficial to the aims of the Matura as quoted from *Predmetni izpitni katalog za maturo* by Grosman (1994: 7) and further argued for by Grosman and Benulič (1994: 15) or whether this is actually tacit admittance that the students may not be able to cope with the task assigned to them on the part of the Matura Committee, is

debatable. There is, however, no denying that while reading a translation or watching a film adaptation may enhance a reader's experience with a book, it also makes it more appealing and safer for the students not to read the prescribed work, or at least not to read it as carefully. With Matura questions largely addressing the books' plots and/or plot elements, watching the film instead of reading the book may prove a irresistible shortcut to many students.

Finally, it's important to keep in mind that for most students, the two chosen literary works represent their first encounter with reading a full-length unabridged literary text in a foreign language, at least as far the syllabus is concerned. This is no mean feat by itself since reading a book written in a foreign language is recognised as a significantly different and more demanding experience than doing so in one's mother tongue. When the pressure of the Matura oral examination and the advance-level written composition is added into the equation, it becomes all the more obvious that the students are likely to find themselves under a lot of strain. It is therefore regrettable that the long-standing tradition of Slovene secondary education, namely studying excerpts of canonised but diverse literary works, was discontinued in the early 1990s. This approach reached its final stage of evolution in 1989 when the two volumes of *Literatures in English* reader (for the 3rd and 4th year respectively), together comprising 92 amply annotated excerpts, were approved and adopted for use in secondary schools by Strokovni svet Slovenije za vzgojo in izobraževanje (National Board of Education).

Literally overnight, a gradual and informed approach to future reading of full-length literary works was omitted in favour of retaining a mere two works which, however carefully chosen, can never encompass the breadth and diversity of the many different literary styles, attitudes, and ideas that can be found in a suitable collection of excerpts. Any legitimacy of teaching literature with the help of excerpts was, however, essentially denied by Grosman and Benulič, who accuse it of producing "non-readers" (1994: 17) and deem it particularly unsuitable for subsequent external testing (*ibid.*: 14). Though the various shortcomings of this approach are generally accepted and duly pointed out by Grosman and Benulič in "Pouk književnosti za maturo", certain advantages are still recognised by other authors such as Cook, who,

albeit critical, never questions the legitimacy of the use of excerpts (1986: 150), nor does he treat the method as a practice of the past (*ibid.*: 151). However, in supporting the - self-evident and indeed uncontested - argument that an annotated excerpt cannot serve as a replacement for the literary work in its entirety, Grosman and Benulič insist that teaching literature using excerpts induces disinterest in students (1994: 18), causes reader manipulation (*ibid.*: 18), and negatively affects the reader-text relationship (*ibid.*: 21, 23).

The decision for the English literary curriculum to focus exclusively on novels and plays thus seems rash, as well as insufficiently supported: to consider it the only alternative to excerpts, failing even to acknowledge the long-standing and respected tradition of the short story in American literature, as well as other contemporary literatures in English, casts doubts over the impartiality of the decision makers. There is little reason to believe that both approaches could not function side by side and complement each other, for instance by letting various shorter texts serve as an introduction to various forms of English literature and prepare the students for the task of in-depth study of longer works - including the ones selected for the Matura - which Grosman and Benulič themselves characterise as complex and demanding (1994: 22). By first reading and then responding to a lot of shorter and thus more manageable pieces of literature over the course of several years, the students would also be able to develop and hone their skills in literary interpretation, and expression thereof.

3.2. Teacher training

Literature has become an increasingly important part of the Matura and, as such, a large part of the secondary school English syllabus, especially with the standard level oral examination having been modified in 2005 to feature questions relating to the two major works covered in class, which is something Grosman essentially argued for as early as in 1998 (1998c: 16). Yet even before this change, the number of grammar school students who elected the advance level typically exceeded 30% of all English Matura applicants for that particular academic year, according to the Matura reports issued yearly by Državni izpitni center (National Examination Centre). Such figures reiterate the fact that the teaching of

literature needs to be taken just as seriously as language teaching and that it has to enjoy a comparable amount of support in terms of teacher training and course materials.

Even though they try to keep a brave face most of the time and act as if nothing out of the ordinary is asked of the teachers, Grosman and Benulič implicitly admit to their being unsuitably qualified for the approach that is supposedly required for teaching English literature for the Matura (1994: 12). At the same time, Grosman insists that a teacher cannot teach anything he himself or she herself is not familiar with (Grosman 1994: 5), and for several years 1994's *Književnost in jezik za maturo iz angleščine* was the only resource for "understanding the changes in literary curriculum, their causes and effects on didactic approaches" (*ibid.*), at least the way these were perceived by the Matura Committee. This fact was recognised by Grosman in *Jezikovne zmožnosti za maturo iz angleščine*, a follow-up to *Književnost in jezik za maturo iz angleščine* published four years later that draws upon the previous book and represents an evolution of the approaches set therein (1998a: 4).

Helping the students acquire long-lasting (if not permanent) literary competence and functional knowledge is a process that involves many steps, none of which may be omitted or done half-way. They include providing the students with the necessary background information so as to sensitise them for the stylistic, cultural, period-related, and other specificities of a given literary work, assisting them during the process of reading itself, which includes checking on their progress (as falling too far behind can be very difficult to make up for), drawing their attention to important elements of the work, providing analyses, acting as a catalyst for criticism, engaging them in debates and discussions, and answering any questions that may arise - all to be performed and co-ordinated by the teacher.

According to Grosman, the global aim of the secondary school English curriculum is for the students to develop literary competence that will allow them to read unabridged English literary works after their completed secondary education (1998a: 5), and even though the students are very unlikely to be ever explicitly tested on this, it is likely that many English teachers took this aim to heart and are working hard not to let the students down. In fact, they may be working too hard: to

achieve this aim, they are required to employ numerous skills - skills that shouldn't be and often can't be invented or picked up on the go by the teacher, but instead skills that need to be systematically taught, acquired, and tested during their teachers' education.

Unfortunately, the training in teaching literature that the Department of English graduates receive is, at least in my experience as a recently graduated student, meagre, perfunctory, and not at all tailored to the requirements of the secondary school English syllabus. Compared to two solid years of skill-oriented "Didaktika angleščine" ("English Teaching Methodology") in the 3rd and 4th years, the 2nd year "Angleški roman v 19. in 20. stoletju" ("English novel in the 19th and 20th century") is a decidedly abstract and unfocused back-door introduction to the mindset that should be adopted by a teacher of literature. There are two further lectures that deal with the theory of literature teaching, "Angleški roman" ("English novel"), which is designed to complement the aforementioned "Angleški roman v 19. in 20. stoletju", and "Literarna teorija za angliste" ("Literary theory for students of English"), which is even more focused on literature teaching (Šuštaršič and Grosman 1998: 61-2). Neither of the lectures are mandatory, however, not even for students on the pedagogic track of study.

Interestingly, a separate, fully-fledged subject "Književna didaktika" ("Literature Teaching Methodology") is part of the 3rd year syllabus at the Department of Slovene. At 30 periods each, it seems to be considered equally important as "Jezikovna didaktika" ("Language Teaching Methodology"), which is indicative of a markedly different approach to teaching literature. To give both the same priority at the Department of English might sound like overkill, especially with only two major literary works taught throughout the secondary school, yet if the aim is indeed to provide quality education for the students, the actual amount of teaching done should not in any way be a deciding factor.

3.3. *Teaching aids*

When it comes to teaching literature, the difficult situation the teachers of English in secondary schools are faced with due to being insufficiently qualified could be - at least to a certain extent - alleviated with well-written teaching aids and other secondary literature accompanying each book selected for the Matura. As far as the poems are concerned, the teachers have been traditionally well served, while for most prose works and dramas, supplementary materials of varying length, scope, and usefulness were published in some form or another.

Šolska ura z Velikim Gatsbyjem by Meta Grosman and Veronika Rot Gabrovec, published in 2000 for the 2001 advanced level Matura, is the only official, National Education Institute-sanctioned guide that was published as a separate volume. It is generally regarded by teachers as a deep and methodical work, and one obviously created with the classroom situation in mind, particularly the second part by Rot Gabrovec. It covers most, if not all relevant aspects of the novel, and is reportedly of great help in bringing them closer to the students. In 2002, *Šolska ura z Velikim Gatsbyjem* was complemented with *Tasting and Grasping The Great Gatsby*, a classroom-oriented, exercise-based preparatory guide written by three grammar school teachers, namely Alenka Battelino, Jana Selan and Irena Šubic Jeločnik. Interestingly, they suggest spending as much as three periods studying each of the novel's nine chapters in class (Battelino *et al.* 2002: 3); with two works to cover, such arrangement makes up more than half of one year's worth of English lessons, which strikes one as a big commitment to make in all but the most proficient classes.

The Picture of Dorian Gray was accompanied by two separate guides intended for teachers. The first one was published in 1994 as part of *Književnost in jezik za maturo iz angleščine* by Grosman and Benulič and can be best described as an introduction to the non-existent full guide due to its limited length of twelve pages, as well as the absence of practical guidance for teachers. Beside a few interesting but extremely sketchy notes on thematisation and intertextuality (1994: 50-55), the 13-page section in question features a brief digest of various modern theories on which the newly-introduced curriculum was based, interspersed with descriptions of several suggested classroom practices

and some practical advice for improving the students' Matura performance. While it certainly provides the teachers with some guidelines how to approach the teaching of the book, they are left to their own devices when it comes to planning out the actual lessons and realising them. It is also not clear whether the various methods described had been previously tested in a classroom environment typical for Slovene secondary schools; Grosman and Benulič claim that these "proven" methods have been in use abroad "for a long time" (1994: 45), however no further information, including any concrete data regarding their appropriateness and effectiveness, is given in the book.

An additional guide to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, intended for students, was written by Meta Grosman, Soča Fidler, and Majda Grabar and published two years later in *Angleščina pri maturi*. It spans twice the length of first one, yet it features little more than a detailed plot summary by Fidler and an action line, i.e. a plot summary in graphical form by Grabar. Quite what the authors' intention was with this guide is not clear; Grosman stresses that the students should make their own action lines/matrices so as to better keep track of various plot developments (1996a: 107), yet a detailed one is already provided for them. And even though Fidler is quick to stress that the plot summary can never be a substitute for actually reading the novel and that students should only refer to it should they need to recall any plot details (1996: 121), expecting all to comply would be rather naive.

Književnost in jezik za maturo iz angleščine also features a guide on *The Catcher in the Rye*, which wasn't included in the 1995 advanced level Matura but was introduced the following year. The novel had been a popular reading assignment even before the curriculum reform (Grosman and Benulič 1994: 14) and was deemed suitable for future Matura selection already at that time (*ibid.*: 62). At seventeen pages, the guide to *The Catcher in the Rye* is longer than the one on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in the same volume and contains slightly more information both on the book itself and on its suggested classroom presentation.

The only other selected work with domestically written teaching materials was *Pygmalion* with two contributions in 1998's *Jezikovne zmožnosti za maturo iz angleščine* written by Meta Grosman and Veronika

Rot Gabrovec. The team that would go on to produce the aforementioned guide to *The Great Gatsby* already shows a lot of promise with the 40-odd page treatment of Shaw's play. Their two-part guide is rich in referenced historical, literary, critical, and contrastive information and very analytically oriented, altogether omitting straightforward plot summary and character portrayal found in previous guides to the works selected for Matura. It has been assessed as useful by the teachers I talked to, though additional materials are reportedly still required for the actual classroom presentation, as also suggested by Rot Gabrovec herself (1998: 50-1), though the teachers are still left to their own devices when it comes to sourcing them.

No guides or similar materials were provided for either of the two newcomers, *Look Back in Anger* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, which is an unfortunate decision, particularly in the light of former being described as "notably opaque" by Carter (1986: 218). I was unable to find any official statement that would explain why this commendable practice was discontinued, especially as the teething problems were apparently successfully overcome. What is most worrying, however, is the fact that the teachers are left to their own devices having to seek and collect the materials themselves. Not that there has been any kind of shortage - after all, commercial notes in English are widely available for the two works (as well as for the other four), and I was told that there is also a lot of co-operation among the teachers all over Slovenia with their home-grown teaching aids being circulated amongst themselves. Yet for the teachers to have been put in such a position in the first place is hardly a sign of responsibility towards them, or indeed of appreciation of their work on the part of those in charge - a sentiment universally expressed by the teachers I was in contact with.

There is, however, another aspect to this problem that represents an important - and unfortunate - paradigm shift within the Matura Committee. It goes without saying that with no Education Board-sanctioned materials available, there is no unified standard of minimum and recommended level of knowledge for the students to display in the advanced Matura exam. This puts the teachers in a difficult position of having to guess what aspects of the books to put more emphasis on and

singling out those warranting less thorough treatment at their own risk. In the past, this was a serious enough concern for the Committee to at least avoid the issue if not rectify it - according to Grosman, literary history was altogether omitted from the syllabus precisely for this reason (1996a: 112). Provided that her justification wasn't just a handy excuse, such an update to the Committee's policy is a clear signal that the members' grasp on the requirements for successful teaching is not nearly as tight as the seriousness of the occasion would warrant.

3.4. Student proficiency

By the time they finish their 4th year, Slovene secondary school students will have been exposed to close to ten years of English teaching in school. During this time, they are expected to make the transition from absolute beginners to upper-intermediate level - at least according to the titles of the popular New Headway and Matrix textbooks used in the 4th year of grammar school. Ten years certainly sounds like a lot and one might be forgiven to think that students would be able to take the reading of authentic and unabridged literary texts in their stride. There are, however, several indicators suggesting that the English language proficiency of secondary-school students in Slovenia may be misrepresented and overestimated - for example, Grosman and Benulič suggest that the students' sentiment of a literary work being too demanding is often not legitimate (1994: 45) - and that too much is asked of them when it comes to reading, understanding, and interpreting literature.

Firstly, the syllabus is designed in such a way that by the time they begin reading either of the two books, most students will not have covered all English grammar they are expected to know by the end of the academic year - that is grammar by all means required to read authentic literary works. As late as in the 4th year, students will, as per syllabus, encounter certain grammar topics for the first time, and with linguistic ground still to cover, requiring the students to read unabridged literary texts sounds like a tall and unreasonable order. However, the only time Grosman and Benulič admit to the possibility of the students not being up to the task, they suggest it is due to the shortcomings of the Slovene syllabus and its supposed failure to provide

adequate mother tongue literacy (1994: 29). They also claim this to be a widespread phenomenon documented throughout the world yet at the same time refuse to acknowledge it by justifying literature-related English language aptitude requirements in Slovene secondary schools (*ibid.*: 29-30). This way, Grosman and Benulič not only fail to take into account Hans-Robert Jauss's literary reception theory, one of the main contemporary principles of curricular literary selection (Krakar Vogel 2004: 61), but also the basic notion that the literature presented to students in the context of literary curriculum should be chosen so as to be understandable to them (*ibid.*: 62).

However, even if one accepts that their own mother tongue may be holding back their English proficiency to an extent, it is difficult to imagine the students making the most of a work of literature without the language in which it is written being second nature to them. Having not yet, or having just acquired various important grammatical items makes it more difficult for one to recognise and/or focus on a text's literary value - an aspect discussed and corroborated by Littlewood (1986: 181). Requiring the students to subsequently write about their understandably flawed experience is therefore unreasonable, with Long explicitly stating that "non-native speakers should not, at any but the most advanced levels, be asked to write 'critical essays', for which they do not have the necessary and lengthy training, or the background (which generally means wider reading)" (1986: 43). For the aspect of wider reading alone, the students thus cannot be expected produce their own critical response rather than reiterate officially accepted opinions - which, according to Grosman, is instrumental for the students meeting the requirements set in the English section of *Predmetni izpitni katalog za maturo* (Grosman 1994: 8), and is also the aim of contemporary literary curriculum as outlined by Grosman and Benulič (1994: 16). Additionally, the authors seem to be aware of the 4th year students' difficulties with writing, having been observing their writing competence through Department of English entry tests (1994: 41). Instead of accepting their level of proficiency as a platform to build upon, they instead consider it deficient and substandard.

A browse through the textbooks that effectively dictate it reveals that in Slovene secondary schools, including grammar schools, the

English syllabus is predominantly grammar- and language-oriented, with cultural and historical themes featured scarcely and unsystematically. In order to better understand and appreciate literature originating in any cultural environment that is not the reader's own, a certain amount of knowledge of its history and culture is required (Grosman and Benulič 1994: 24-5). A crash course just before the reading is begun or even as the reading is in progress is a short-sighted and flawed solution, and while Grosman and Benulič stress the importance for the intercultural component of the curriculum to be subject to systematic planning (*ibid.*: 26), the necessary steps to ensure this have not been taken. Students are rarely provided with continual insight into the characteristics and particularities of various English-speaking nations throughout secondary school so as to create a foundation for a much deeper awareness and understanding of the historical and cultural framework of a given time period, which is essential for ensuring informed reading (*ibid.*: 27-8). Grosman and Benulič acknowledge this shortcoming and recommend that literary works that require extensive social and cultural background knowledge should not be studied in class (*ibid.*: 26).

A problem related to the one above is one of vocabulary. Whatever the number of words to be acquired - unfortunately, not even an approximate figure is given in the syllabus for grammar schools - and/or actually acquired by the end of the 4th year, it is simply impossible to read any of the literary works prescribed so far without constantly resorting to the dictionary (although the vocabulary load does not appear to be distributed equally among the books selected, as shown in 3.1.). In the best-case scenario, the reading process is in this way seriously and continually disrupted and the time required for finishing the book drastically extended, a situation identified by Smith, who calls it "tunnel vision", (1987: 30-2, as cited in Kukovec 2000: 81). However, especially with less proficient students, the amount of new vocabulary may prove so overbearing that they are unable to progress at all, a phenomenon known to any learner when presented with material that is too difficult for their proficiency level, and one confirmed by Grosman and Benulič (1994: 25).

Rather than recognising the inadequacy of the students' vocabulary as a given circumstance and working within the boundaries it imposes, various dubious techniques intended to temporarily suppress the problems likely to be encountered are presented instead. Kukovec, for example, suggests that the students should guess the meaning of unknown words from the context itself, use the dictionary only to look up words that they consider crucial to the text, and ignore those words that they see as irrelevant (2000: 92) and encourages the teachers to work towards the students' developing these apparently crucial reading strategies (*ibid.*). This unusual form of critical literary reading is partially echoed by Grosman and Benulič (1994: 25), as well as Battelino *et al.* (2000: 9); none of articles, however, express any concern whether the quality of the literary experience could be in any way compromised by guessing, rather than learning unknown vocabulary. Grosman and Benulič even go as far as to claim that infrequently used words do not enrich a learner's vocabulary (1994: 25), as if learners were able to somehow guess how frequent - or how crucial to the text - a given item of unknown vocabulary happens to be, and that the practice of doing the so-called vocabulary preparations for the first one hundred words encountered in a text is a "utterly non-functional waste of time" (1994: 44).

3.5. *Paradigm incompatibility*

The last major reform of the secondary school English literary curriculum took place in the early 1990s and represented a radical break in the way literature was taught for almost half a century. By doing away with the tradition of mainly excerpt-based teaching in favour of studying two full-length literary texts practically overnight, this change marked a new paradigm not only within the subject, but within the entire system, as well. Slovene literary curriculum still relies on excerpts as it has done for decades, thereby ensuring a multi-cultural and systematic representation of literature according to Krakar Vogel (2005: 127), who also sees the foreign language literary curricula achieving neither (*ibid.*). Grosman, however, argues that the only way of ensuring a thorough and engaging classroom treatment is by teaching a strictly limited number of texts (1998b: 8).

Year after year, Slovene secondary school students have thus found themselves in an unusual situation: despite having had virtually no prior in-school contact with English literature and literary conventions and a very short sensitisation period, they are asked to read two full-length unabridged literary texts and express themselves about their experience. Not having been given the opportunity to internalise either the literary reading or the literary response processes in an even remotely gradual way - something that has otherwise come to be expected of a literary curriculum (Krakar Vogel 2005: 122) - and with the demanding external examination looming ahead of them, the students are left little choice than to draw upon their literary knowledge acquired in their Slovene literature course. This does not pose a problem in itself - in fact, in "Pouk književnosti za maturo", Grosman and Benulič acknowledge the transfer of linguistic capabilities in that a skill learned in one language becomes available for use with any other language one speaks (1994: 25-6). Whenever any two languages rely on opposing paradigms, however, such transfer becomes undesirable, which Grosman and Benulič also point out when claiming that excerpt-based curricula produce sloppy readers with a disinterested attitude towards the text (*ibid.*: 26). Learning something one period and then having to effectively unlearn it for the next one is not only a sign of poor cross-subject co-ordination in the Slovene secondary school curriculum but is, more importantly, also confusing and distracting for students. Grosman allows for the possibility of such undesirable cross-pollination of knowledge occurring yet takes no blame for it and considers the teacher to be solely responsible for resolving the situation (1994: 6).

The perception of quality of the said literary experience presents another divergence between the Slovene and English subject paradigm. Krakar Vogel acknowledges that many 4th year grammar school students still mainly read for content and appeals for the literary work selection and Slovene Matura exam questions to reflect this fact so as to suit as many students as possible according to their reading level (2005: 126). On the other hand, Grosman and Benulič take a much more negative stance towards reading for content, calling it "naive" (Grosman and Benulič 1994: 60) and "reductive" (*ibid.*: 70), and compare such experience to that of abridged literary works (*ibid.*). They thus refuse to

accommodate the students in such a way even though the students' capacity for critical reading in English is bound to be lower than in Slovene, both due to inferior literary experience and the fact that the reading is done in a foreign language - and even though Grosman states that the student's experience of a literary text is the only acceptable basis for the study of literature in schools (2000b: 5), and that various aspects and layers of a work to be studied should be adapted to each group of students according to their individual readings, interests and feedback to the teacher (*ibid.*: 5, 10-1).

Additionally, it seems that the actual linguistic aptitude of Slovene students was again not taken into account during the decision-making process. Maintaining a positive attitude and refusing to underestimate the students' knowledge is always welcome, yet it appears that it has not been based on any sort of tests or other measurements, not even on Matura results - surely these could serve as adequate basic benchmark for the students' general proficiency. Merely taking a look at what sort of language skills are explicitly tested in the two Matura test papers that precede the literary essay should be a strong enough signal that the scope is just too broad. As it stands, the students are effectively required to perform the same task, i.e. read full-length unabridged literary works, in a foreign language as they are in their Slovene class, only on a smaller scale, i.e. by having to read fewer books - but also without nearly as much background knowledge and preparation.

4. Suggestions

There is a cline of changes that could be implemented in the secondary-school literary curriculum, from various modifications and improvements of the existing paradigm to radical changes that would focus on completely different foreign language competences of Slovene students. By listing the suggestions below, I do not imply that any solution is inherently more suitable, time-efficient, proficiency-conscious or indeed in other way better than the current requirements yet I do believe that some of them warrant a serious consideration in regard to the criticism outlined in the previous chapter.

4.1. Inclusion of student-nominated full-length literary works

It doesn't take a radical change to make a difference, and even letting the students have a say on what they and their peers should read would automatically result in a greater involvement in the process on their part, as well as make for a considerable motivation boost. This way, the Matura Committee could prove that student feedback (Grosman and Benulič 1994: 15) and learner-centredness (Grosman 2000b: 10) actually matters, while entrusting them with such a major decision would represent a formidable act of faith that the students would certainly respond most favourably to.

It is a fact that an increasing number of secondary-school students do read English literature on the side, particularly works belonging to the fantasy genre. When I talked to the students about their favourite books in English, various novels from the *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Artemis Fowl*, and *His Dark Materials* series - along with the now-classic *The Da Vinci Code* - were among the most popular works and many readers were very enthusiastic about them and eager to discuss them with me. It would be a real shame to fail to recognise the potential of the students' enthusiasm about these works, regardless of the fact that some of them have been labelled and subsequently treated as paraliterature; as argued by Brumfit and Carter, "[t]he capacity to read so that one is 'inside' the story is as necessary for Fielding or Dostoyevsky as it is for Arthur Haley, Barbara Cartland, or Agatha Christie" (1986: 33).

4.2. Supplementary use of abridged versions of full-length literary works

Abridged versions of literary works come in various shapes and sizes, and a well-written one does not necessarily take too much away from the essence of the work it is based upon. At the same time, its use, either in class or as a home reading assignment, can bring several important benefits. Firstly, and most importantly, it would increase the likelihood of the students actually doing some productive reading in English, which may not always be taking place within the current framework. With both teachers and students agreeing that most of the works selected for the Matura are simply too difficult, taking shortcuts is

commonplace and it is no secret that it is quite possible to pass the advanced level Matura exam without actually reading the book one is tested on - without raising any suspicion with the examiners.

It is therefore important to ensure that the students are given less incentive to resort to translations, readers' notes and film adaptations by properly priming them with abridged versions instead. If they are allowed to familiarise themselves with the essential elements of a work, their literary experience would be greatly enhanced once they begin reading the real thing. This way, they would not have to "ramble about in darkness" - an expression I heard on more than one occasion - but instead be allowed to build upon the information less painfully acquired beforehand. And while it is likely that some would content themselves with reading only the abridged version without proceeding on to the original work, being exposed to English semi-literature is still better than nothing (Rot Gabrovec 2000: 94).

4.3. Introduction of several shorter authentic literary works

According to one of my teacher sources, I am not the first person to formally suggest that unabridged literary works of comparatively reduced length, such as short stories, should be introduced instead of novels and plays. Evidently, however, such appeals have so far fallen on deaf ears with the Matura Committee, and quite inexplicably so. The short story is universally considered to be every bit as serious of a literary genre as the novel and the play. It put American literature on the world map in early and mid-19th century and has enjoyed great popularity in most literatures in English ever since. According to Vincent, "[s]tories are less daunting than novels simply by being shorter, and they are usually easier than either plays or poetry by being in prose" (1986: 214-5). Similarly, the format of novella has so far also been ignored, despite the availability of such world classics as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the "comparative linguistic simplicity of [which] enables the learner to respond to them as works of literature, not as reading puzzles" (*ibid.*).

In spite of all this, however, the Committee have so far behaved as if either of the genres didn't even exist, let alone acknowledge the benefits their compactness has in comparison to longer works. They

have thus failed to take advantage of a self-contained literary form up to ten times shorter than the ones selected in the past, yet with few, if any drawbacks regarding the complexity of the narrative, literariness, or the wealth of human experience conveyed. Even by assigning twice, even three times as many works than the current norm, the student workload would still be reduced while at the same time, the scope and diversity of the literary curriculum would be enhanced.

4.4. Use of excerpts taken from full-length literary works

As unpopular with and even outright reviled by those in charge of the English curriculum this approach has been ever since the reform that took place in the early 1990 (Grosman and Benulič 1994: 14ff), it is not without its supporters. In his introduction to the first volume of *Literatures in English*, a textbook approved by the National Board of Education and reviewed by Grosman, Jurak emphasises "the widening of cultural horizons in the secondary school curriculum" (1994: 9) that is made possible by studying many texts with a "rich variety of [...] themes, human problems, social situations and stylistic approaches" (*ibid.*). The wider scope provided by studying sufficiently diverse excerpts is an important characteristic of this method, and one that can certainly influence the students' future literary behaviour in a positive way by simply giving them the opportunity to sample what is on offer within the body of work that are literatures in English - something that studying a mere two texts simply cannot provide. But whatever the stand, even moderate critics, such as Cook, acknowledge the convenient nature of this method (1986: 150) and concede the fact that they "are frequently used in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language at intermediate and advanced levels" (*ibid.*).

There is another consideration that supports this suggestion, however, namely the Slovene literary curriculum paradigm, which, in addition to full-length text, relies heavily on excerpts. In the previous section, I have already stressed the need on paradigm compatibility, and considering that the Slovene one is, if nothing else, quantitatively dominant, it seems unwise to reject it altogether and in fact work against it. In their rejection of the approach, Grosman and Benulič speak at length about the transfer of all linguistic competences between

languages (1994: 25-6), yet if the said transfer is so strong as they claim it is, working adamantly against it seems all the more futile and short-sighted. There is also no reason why a given number of extracts could not be complemented with an additional full-length literary work in order for the curriculum to retain the benefits of this method, as well.

4.5. Discontinuation of secondary school english literary curriculum

For well over a decade, the English literary curriculum has operated under the proposition that English literary competence is greatly beneficial to the students' overall language proficiency - including their mother tongue (Grosman and Benulič 1994: 12) - as well as crucial for future cultural co-existence on a global scale (*ibid.*: 15). Even though these are major and potentially controversial postulates, Matura Committee members have been noticeably vague and/or evasive in supporting such claims (Grosman 1996a: 105), preferring to soul-search and answer questions with questions (Grosman 2000a: 26-7). At the same time, their arguments are weakened partly by their own writing, such as Grosman's and Benulič's claim of transferability of linguistic competences between languages (1994: 26), as well as by other authors, such as Short and Candlin, who suggest that there are "no particular linguistic feature or set of linguistic features [...] found in literature but not in other kinds of texts" (1986: 107) and "reject the traditional notion that there is a separate literary language" (*ibid.*: 108), and Littlewood, who reflects on the "[c]hanges in educational and social conditions[, which] have shaken the once unquestioned status of literary study amongst our educational goals" (1986: 177).

When it comes to teachers, who are given the task of carrying out the syllabus based on these principles, the ones I discussed the matter with agreed that the ability to read literature in a foreign language does not have an inherent value - which they are nevertheless required to convince their students of (Grosman 2000a: 26). They also proved open to sensible alternatives with some of them even putting forward their own suggestions, particularly an introduction to English for specific purposes - which, incidentally, was part of the English curriculum for the third and fourth year of grammar school as early as in 1947 (Ministrstvo za prosveto 1947: 5). All of them considered preparing the

students for the ability to use university-level English textbooks, a real-world requirement for an increasing number of them, to be a more productive use of classroom time than pursuing a noble goal that is foreign-language literary competence, and would embrace the option if given the opportunity.

Many students I talked to were also excited about eschewing literary curriculum in favour of different types of activities. Their ideas were very diverse but most included some form of peer interaction by means of oral and to a lesser extent written communication, or required project-oriented research using traditional and on-line sources. Without their being aware of it, their suggestions tie in extremely well with the recommendations contained in foreign language segment of Council of Europe's *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in Europe*, which alone gives a lot of legitimacy to their ideas. With the teachers agreeing that spontaneous spoken interaction and various other unguided activities have long been among the weaker points of the English curriculum in Slovene secondary schools, it is obvious the classroom time that would become available by discontinuing the literary curriculum could be put to good use.

5. Conclusion

The curricular reform that ushered in the current English literary paradigm in Slovene secondary schools was without a doubt conceived, initiated and implemented with good intentions. The enthusiasm and dedication of the reform protagonists and the members of the Committee is palpable and the time and effort invested on their part appreciable. From the early days of the programme in the early-to-mid 1990s, Dr Meta Grosman and her team have worked hard and extensively to bring a new breed of literary studies into Slovene secondary school classrooms.

Though deserving of respect and admiration, their work is not without its share of controversy. Certain aspects of the reform were poorly thought out, various real-life parameters were assumed rather than surveyed and verified, changes were made according to erroneous

propositions while at the same time, relevant and legitimate suggestions have fallen on deaf ears, including those coming from the very people who have been carrying out the programme. The teachers I talked to expressed their disappointment in the unresponsiveness of the Matura Committee, claiming that the changes implemented during the years have never seemed to be based upon their input and occasionally even went directly against their findings and suggestions.

While regrettable, the Committee's behaviour is by no means incomprehensible and can be seen as one of the consequences of the way the reform was first conceived. A decision was made to do away with the previous, excerpt-based literary curriculum and have the students read two full-length English literary texts, whereupon the aim was actively pursued - almost aggressively so. If a fact needed to be distorted or bent out of shape, if the logic of a particular mechanism had to be perverted or turned upside down, or a proven solution had to be sacrificed along the way, it has apparently become acceptable to do so in the name of literary enlightenment. This kind of work ethic has gradually spiralled into a situation in which the various current and former members of the Committee tap their own shoulders and congratulate themselves on how well their ship is doing on its chartered course, all the while convinced that the matters are constantly improving still and that each successive generation of students not only does better, but that they are the ones who make it happen.

With so much at fault with the programme, there has always been a lot of room for improvement yet the efforts to rectify the situation have proven inadequate in the face of the number of accumulated problems. Moreover, few published documents suggest that the measures taken were implemented systematically and/or as a result of careful deliberation - quite the contrary: they appear random and often fail to properly integrate into the general framework of the reform. These, therefore, are not the sort of changes one realistically expect to ensure long-term improvement to the students' experience of the curriculum, or to better justify the effort invested in it on their part. In order to begin to fulfil the students' rightful expectations, the facts will have to be reviewed, the absurdities and contradictions will have to be rid of, and the curriculum will have to be re-established on a thoroughly realistic

foundation. My article, along with the dissertation that preceded it and served as the basis for it, is intended as a contribution towards attaining this goal.

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POVZETEK

Razkrinkanje: Kritika kurikuluma za pouk književnosti pri angleščini v slovenskem srednjem šolstvu

Književnost ima pri pouku angleščine v slovenskem srednješolskem izobraževanju dolgo in razgibano tradicijo. Po skoraj pol stoletja na odlomkih osnovanega književnega pouka je l. 1994 uvedena reforma uveljavila celovito obravnavo literarnih del z angleškega govornega področja s preverjanjem znanja na višji ravni splošne mature kot sestavnim delom nove paradigme. Prenova je bila zastavljena neustrezno, saj je precenjevala raven znanja dijakov, ni poskrbela za ustrezno didaktično usposobljenost učiteljev in ni bila usklajena s književnim poukom pri slovenščini. Pomanjkljivosti z leti niso bile odpravljene, temveč so se mestoma celo povečevale, zato je po več kot desetletju na mestu pregled možnih sprememb pri programu, vključno z odpravo pouka književnosti pri angleščini v slovenskih srednjih šolah.

ABSTRACT

Calling the Bluff: A Critique of English-language Literary Curriculum in the Slovene Secondary Education

Literature has enjoyed a long and colourful tradition as a part of the English curriculum in Slovene secondary education. After almost half a century of excerpt-based literary curriculum, the reform of 1994 established a holistic study of English-language literary works with advanced-level Matura testing as an integral part of the new paradigm. The reform proved ill-conceived: the students' proficiency level was overestimated, the teachers did not receive additional training, and there proved to be incompatibilities with the Slovene literary curriculum. Over the years, these shortcomings have not been addressed; moreover, there was a turn for the worse in certain areas. As a response to the current state of affairs, certain potential modifications and changes to the programme are reviewed, including the discontinuation of English literary curriculum in Slovene secondary schools.