

In Memoriam

Peter Grzybek (November 22, 1957 – May 29, 2019)

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International paremiology has lost one of its stellar scholars who had a tremendous influence on the multifaceted study of proverbs. In fact, were it not for Peter Grzybek, proverb scholarship would not have made the impressive theoretical progress that has taken place during the merely thirty-five years that he has tilled this rich field. Unfortunately and sadly he did not reach the old age that some of the other famous paremiologists like Archer Taylor (1890-1973), Bartlett Jere Whiting (1904-1995), Démétrios Loukatos (1908-2003), Matti Kuusi (1914-1998), Lutz Röhrich (1922-2006), Arvo Krikmann (1939-2017), and others obtained. Instead his life ended prematurely at the age of not even sixty-two years after having suffered with various illnesses that necessitated prolonged stays in hospitals. This parallels to a certain degree the life of his mentor and friend Grigorii L'vovich Permiakov (1819-1983) who died after a long illness at Moscow at only sixty-four years of age. Like Permiakov, Peter Grzybek was taken from us way too early, and the scholarly world of such disciplines as cultural studies, folklore, linguistics, literature, paremiology, phraseology, semantics, and semiotics mourn this incredibly productive colleague and friend whose intellectual prowess is evident in his complex publications and which could be observed during discussions at various international conferences. The written and spoken word of Peter Grzybek made people think outside the box resulting in new insights and unexpected discoveries.

Peter was born in the small city of Herne close to Bochum in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. From 1978-1984, he studied Slavic Philology, English, and Language Pedagogy at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum with various stays in the former Yugoslavia, Ukraine, the United States, and the Soviet Union. All of this made him a true polyglot person that can be seen in all of his publications. He finished his M.A. Thesis in 1984 with distinction and was able to publish it as *Lechts und Rinks kann man nicht velwechsern?!? Zur Neurosemiotik sprachlicher Kommunikation* (Trier: Linguistic Agency, University of Trier, 1984). Staying at Bochum, he worked at the Institute of Slavic Studies, continued his studies in 1986/87 at Moscow and Leningrad, and finished his dissertation in 1988 that appeared as a book one year later with which he made Russian scholarship accessible to semioticians everywhere: *Studien zum Zeichenbegriff der sowjetischen Semiotik (Moskauer und Tartuer Schule)* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1989). In 1992 he secured a position at the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz in Austria. Continuing his interest in semiotics and broadening his work to include folklore, he presented his cumulative "Habilitationsschrift" with the title *Slawistische Studien zur Semiotik der Folklore* at Graz that was based on some of his important work during the decade from 1984 to 1994. It was his good fortune to remain permanently employed as a professor at the Universität Graz to the end of his life, with guest professorships at the Universität Wien (1993/94) and the Humboldt-Universität Berlin (1999) as well as teaching assignments at the Universität Salzburg (2000/01) and the

Kyrrill-und-Method-Universität in Trnava, Slovakia (2001/04). He also was the head of the Institute of Slavic Studies at Graz between 2004 and 2011. Throughout his career, he proved himself to be a demanding, engaging, and inspiring instructor who cared deeply for his students and helped them as a mentor to succeed with their studies.

Peter Grzybek's scholarly work can be divided into three main parts. There is first of all his expertise in semiotics. In fact, from 1989 to 1997 he was one of the editors of *Znakolog. An International Yearbook of Slavic Semiotics*, and from 1985 to 1999 he was on the editorial board of *Bochumer Beiträge zur Semiotik*. In addition to his own semiotic articles he also edited several books, among them *Cultural Semiotics: Facts and Facets / Fakten und Facetten der Kultursemiotik* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1991), *Psychosemiotik – Neurosemiotik. Psychosemiotics – Neurosemiotics* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1993), and *Synergetic Linguistics. Text and Language as Dynamic Systems* (Wien: Praesens, 2012, with Sven Naumann, Relja Vulcanović, and Gabriel Altmann). There is no doubt that Peter had a lasting influence on semiotics with a special comparative emphasis on culture, folklore, and language.

The second area of Peter's expertise is quantitative linguistics and literature. He was an active member of the International Quantitative Linguistics Association for many years and served as its vice president from 2009 to 2012. He was one of the editors of the book series *Quantitative Linguistics* and he also was an active member of the editorial boards of the journals *Glottometrics* (2004-) and *Glottology* (2008-). Many of his own articles are informed by detailed mathematical analyses of word and sentence lengths, and he also edited several volumes in this fascinating approach to language and literature, among them *Contributions to the Science of Text and Language. Word Length Studies and Related Issues* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), *Exact Methods in the Study of Language and Text* (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007, with Reinhard Köhler), and *Text and Language. Structures, Functions, Interrelations. Quantitative Perspectives* (Wien: Praesens, 2010, with Kelih Emmerich and Ján Mačutek).

It is, of course, the third area of Peter Grzybek's scholarly work that is of immense significance to paremiologists and phraseologists throughout the world. Since this obituary is addressing primarily scholars and students occupied with proverbial matters, the following comments will go into considerable more detail. He was one of the founders of the Westfälische Arbeitskreis "Phraseologie/Parömiologie" (1991-2002), a founding member of the European Society of Phraseology (1999-) and board member between 1999-2006, and a board member of the *International Association of Paremiology* at Tavira, Portugal (2007-). At the international meetings of these organizations Peter's voice could be heard as he argued for equitable rules and regulations, presented innovative ideas, and at times was more than willing to engage in rhetorical polemics. To be sure, his enthusiastic, engaged, and at times a bit aggressive comments and arguments were always meant in a constructive way with a bit of good humor mixed in as well. His heart was definitely in the right place, and at the bottom of his involvement was always the idea of fostering a meaningful scholarly exchange. This (com)passionate approach to scholarship was always also evident in his work as one of the editors (with Wolfgang Eismann and Wolfgang Mieder) of the two book series *Studien zur Phraseologie und Parömiologie* (1994-1998) and *Phraseologie und Parömiologie* (1998-). The books that have appeared in these series are clearly the better due to Peter's careful editorial work. His editorial commitment can also be seen from his work on such volumes as *Sprachbilder zwischen Theorie und Praxis. Akten des Westfälischen Arbeitskreises "Phraseologie / Parömiologie" (1991 / 1992)* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1994, with Christoph Chlost and Elisabeth Piirainen), *Kritik und Phrase. Festschrift für Wolfgang Eismann zum 65. Geburtstag* (Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2007, with Peter Deutschmann, L. Karnicar, and Heinrich Pfandl), and *Phraseologie im Wörterbuch und Korpus / Phraseology in Dictionaries and Corpora* (Maribor:

Zora, 2014, with Vida Jesenšek). This is also true of his role as a member of the editorial board of *Proverbium. Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* (2004-). I still remember how glad I was that he joined me in my efforts as the editor of this publication that I started in 1984. Of course, I regret that I did not ask my dear friend Peter to join the editorial board much earlier.

This reminds me that he was a most welcome contributor to the first volume of this publication with his short article on “Grigorij L’vovich Permiakov [Permiakov] (1919-1983)”. *Proverbium*, 1 (1984), 175-182. This was the beginning of our friendship that lasted for thirty-five years with a rich correspondence and the delight of meeting at international paremiological and phraseological conferences from time to time. But this paper on the greatest Russian paremiologist of the previous generation also marks the start of Peter Grzybek’s sincere commitment to paremiological matters. Knowing that we all stand on the shoulders of those scholarly giants who influence us, Peter took it upon himself as a Slavist with an expertise in the Russian language to make Permiakov’s theoretical work accessible worldwide. (for an annotated bibliography of Permiakov’s pioneering paremiological publications see Wolfgang Mieder, *International Proverb Scholarship. An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1982, pp. 339-343; II [1990], pp. 235-236; III [1993], pp. 551-559). Permiakov’s groundbreaking scholarship that combined semantic, semiotic, and structural approaches with folkloric aspects in turn had a lasting influence on Peter Grzybek, as can be seen from his very first book that he edited together with our mutual friend Wolfgang Eismann from the Universität Graz: *Semiotische Studien zum Sprichwort. Simple Forms Reconsidered I* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984). The book includes articles by Peter on the semiotic approach to proverbs and the paremiological minimum that continued to occupy him in numerous publications during the years to come. Following Permiakov’s insistence that proverbs are part of the so-called folkloric simple forms (fables, fairy tales, legends, riddles, jokes, etc.), he immersed himself into folk narrative scholarship and again together with Wolfgang Eismann edited a related second volume with the title *Semiotische Studien zum Rätsel. Simple Forms Reconsidered II* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1987) that includes several contributions by himself as well.

Several decades earlier the German scholar André Jolles had published his influential book *Einfache Formen* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1930; rpt. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1958 and 1965) that has finally been translated into English by Peter J. Schwartz as *Simple Forms* (New York: Verso, 2017). The renowned German folklorist Hermann Bausinger took the matter up again with his book on *Formen der “Volksprosa”* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1968, 2nd ed. 1980), but what unfortunately is little known is that Walter A. Koch, one of Grzybek’s professors at the Universität Bochum, edited a seminal volume about twenty-five years later with the title *Simple Forms. An Encyclopaedia of Simple Text-Types in Lore and Literature* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1994). It will surprise no one that he solicited the help of his former star-student who contributed superb articles on the “Märchen” (pp. 144-157) and the “Riddle” (pp. 242-254). I don’t know why this book has remained so unknown, but I recall the excitement of my famous folkloric and paremiological friend Alan Dundes (1934-2005) when I drew his attention to it. But be that as it may, Peter Grzybek also contributed absolutely enlightening entries on “Adage” (p. 1), “Apothegm” (pp. 13-14), “Blason Populaire” (pp. 19-25), “[Proverbial] Comparison” (pp. 68-74), “Proverb” pp. 227-241), “Wellerism” (pp. 286-292), and “Winged Word” (pp. 293-298). Anybody who has written encyclopedia articles knows how challenging such entries are to compose, but Peter accomplished his task in typical magisterial fashion with his treatment of the proverb being of special value.

At this point it would be tempting to review each and every one of the paremiological articles listed in the hopefully complete bibliography below (all items are in my International Proverb Archives here at the University of Vermont). That is, of course, not possible and also not necessary, since many of them will be known as seminal contributions to paremiologists. I do, however, want

to single out yet another edited book by Peter Grzybek, namely *Die Grammatik der sprichwörtlichen Weisheit von G.L. Permiakov. Mit einer Analyse allgemein bekannter deutscher Sprichwörter* (Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 2000). The book represents another attempt to get the work of Permiakov better known among those not able to read his Russian publications. It contains five of Permiakov's articles translated by Peter as well as a detailed analysis of their significance. But at the end there is also a major contribution by Peter and his long-time friend Christoph Chlosta about the logico-semiotic classification of well-known German proverbs along Permiakov's model. It should be pointed out here, as is indicated in the attached bibliography, that Peter Grzybek obviously enjoyed working together with good colleagues and friends, notably Rupprecht S. Baur, Christoph Chlosta, Wolfgang Eismann, Rüdiger Grotjahn, Anna Tóthné Litovkina, and Undine Roos. We had started to discuss the possibility of working on a joint project, but this is now no longer feasible. I am certain that we would have enjoyed working together.

Peter Grzybek's articles written in German have definitely had and will continue to have great influence on German paremiology. If I had to single out a few of Peter Grzybek's most influential paremiological articles worldwide (written in English), I would pick the following: "Foundations of Semiotic Proverb Study", *Proverbium*, 4 (1987), 39-85; also in *Wise Words: Essays on the Proverb*, ed. Wolfgang Mieder (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 31-71; and also slightly revised in *De Proverbio. An Electronic Journal of International Paremiology*, 1, no. 1 (1995), 206-229; "Empirical and Folkloristic Paremiology: Two to Quarrel or to Tango?" *Proverbium*, 12 (1995), 67-85 (with Christoph Chlosta); and "Semiotic and Semantic Aspects of the Proverb", *Introduction to Paremiology. A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*, eds. Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Melita Aleksa Varga (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 68-111. But be that as it may, here is a list of key terms that indicate Peter Grzybek's multifaceted comparative and polyglot approach to proverb studies: comparison, computation, culture, empiricism, experiment, familiarity, folklore, frequency, genre, knowledge, length, lexicography, linguistics, literature, mass media, mathematics, meteorology, obsolescence, paremiological minimum, popularity, semantics, semiotics, simple forms, statistics, stereotype, structure, variant, and variation. With such scholarly breadth and depth, how could Peter Grzybek's scholarly accomplishments not continue to influence future paremiology!

But how does one say good-bye to such an internationally renowned scholar and dear friend? As I have gotten older, I have so very much become aware what losing such compatriots as the above-mentioned deceased friend means. And now Peter is gone as well, leaving a void, sadness, and a feeling of loneliness. Should we despair? That would not be in Peter's spirit. I am certain that he would want us to carry the torch of paremiology forward by honoring his work and by keeping his memory in our minds and hearts. Farewell, Peter Grzybek, you did your work well – "Finis coronat opus".



Peter Grzybek's Paremiological Publications

1984

(ed.). *Semiotische Studien zum Sprichwort. Simple Forms Reconsidered I*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984. 259 pp. (=Kodikas Code – Ars Semeiotica: An International Journal of Semiotics, 7, nos. 3-4 [1984], 197-456). With Wolfgang Eismann.

“Bibliographie der Arbeiten G.L. Permjakovs”. *Semiotische Studien zum Sprichwort. Simple Forms Reconsidered I*. Eds. P. Grzybek and Wolfgang Eismann. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984. 203-214.

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“Grigorij L’vovich Permjakov (1919-1983)”. *Proverbium*, 1 (1984), 175-182.

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“Überlegungen zur semiotischen Sprichwortforschung”. *Semiotische Studien zum Sprichwort. Simple Forms Reconsidered I*. Eds. P. Grzybek and Wolfgang Eismann. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984, 215-249.

“Zur lexikographischen Erfassung von Sprichwörtern”. *Semiotische Studien zum Sprichwort. Simple Forms Reconsidered I*. Eds. P. Grzybek and Wolfgang Eismann. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984. 345-350.

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1985

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1986

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Review of G.L. Permyakov. *300 allgemeingebrauchliche russische Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten. Ein illustriertes Nachschlagewerk für Deutschsprechende.* Moskva: Russkij jazyk, 1985. Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1985. In *Zielsprache Russisch*, 7, no. 2 (1986), 61-63.

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1987

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1988

“Sprichwort und Fabel: Überlegungen zur Beschreibung von Sinnstrukturen in Texten”. *Proverbium*, 5 (1988), 39-67.

1989

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1990

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1992

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1993

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1994

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