

## EDITORIAL PREFACE

In the wake of the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the English Department of the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, I feel it is the right time to recall some moments of its almost century long history. A while ago, Professor Vida Janković, who is one of the Department's most distinguished scholars and a retired professor of American studies, reminded us of the growth of Anglo American studies in Serbia.

Professor Janković was born in Rome in 1919. After primary and secondary education in Chicago, New York and Belgrade, she studied French and English language and literature in Paris before the Second World War. She also graduated from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade in 1949. Professor Janković obtained Ph.D. thesis at the University of Zagreb in 1965 and she specialized in American studies at the University in California in 1966 and 1967 as a Fulbright scholar.

These are some extracts from the plenary address that Professor Vida Janković delivered on the occasion of the celebration of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the English Department:

*I am very glad today to have been invited to extend a very cordial and hearty welcome to all of you at this impressive gathering. I say this mainly for two reasons: firstly for having this special opportunity to participate in paying homage to our English Department's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and secondly because I am still around to be able do so.*

*In looking back at this span of 80 years, we can justifiably state that it has been marked by three distinct phases, all characterized by slow, painstaking beginnings and sudden harsh endings, due to the vicissitudes of historical events (the two Balkan wars, the First and Second World Wars and more recently the civil conflagration), four wars in one century, all of which*

engulfed Serbia and impeded the smooth and even growth of all the segments of its educational institutions.

There is no time at this point of our Conference for a full account of our English Department's history, but for those participants who may be interested, it can be found in an extensive book published a few years ago, with all the names, facts and figures available here. Allow me therefore only to highlight several memorable events from the past. In our first phase of English language instruction, one hundred years ago, two English lecturers, David Low – back in 1907 and subsequently – John Wiles (in 1913) organized English language and literature courses then attached to the Department for German Studies. Thus quite unknowingly they initiated the tradition for their countrymen to be active and highly competent participants in the growing process of English language acquisition, a tradition that has continued undiminished to this very day.

A second beginning ensued when two Cambridge University graduates, Professor Vladeta Popović, and his wife Mrs. Mary Stansfield Popović undertook, in 1929, the arduous task of creating a separate Department for English studies, building it up on contemporary principles and training nearly 300 students able to become the future teachers of English in our schools. Then again came a violent wartime break and all academic activities were once more suspended.

The third phase began in 1945, when Professor Popović and Mrs. Stansfield Popović, having returned after their four years confinement in German concentration camps, with renewed energy and enthusiasm, began rebuilding what had been destroyed during the occupation. They taught steadily increasing numbers of students along modernized teaching methods and greatly expanded the curriculum. But these efforts were not entirely untroubled because during the first few years after the liberation of the country, the then authorities looked somewhat askance at the Department, describing it as being elitist or even as a possible hotbed for training future foreign agents. Fortunately, this misdirected attitude lapsed in due time, when it was realized that the Department's activities were entirely wholesome and an irreplaceable entity in the overall educational system, whose many graduates supply personnel for academic, educational, political, economic and all varieties of administrative spheres.

Since then and throughout the last 25 years, the English Department has gone through a continual process of expansion, modernization and change, predominantly in the methodology of tuition and in the composition of its

curricula, from which some formerly required subsidiary subjects, such as the rather exotic one entitled “Pre-conscription military training”, gave place to the topics of national defence and later to civil defence and recently to the more amenable and contemporary subject of social ecology.

Although with an extensively transformed plan and program of studies, what has not changed since its inception, has been the Department’s steadfast dedication to promoting cultural contacts with its counterparts throughout the world by inviting prominent professors of English as well as numerous well known writers in the Anglophone sphere to appear before our students and to import life to what they were being taught or were only reading about. In return, the English Department of Belgrade University has been the grateful recipient of scores of scholarships, fellowships and countless gifts of books and periodicals that have replenished its library after the considerable wartime losses and helped it to become one of the largest in our Faculty.

To sum up: the past experiences of our Department have sometimes been bleak but have not arrested its growth. It is to the credit of the younger generation of the Department’s teaching staff with their enterprising vision that modernization will continue.

There is always more room for improvement. Perhaps the adaptation of the new Bologna principles will contribute to newer, more radical perceptions of what a University should really be.

In this sense, one would like perhaps to see the introduction in our University of inter-disciplinary studies, so that a student might choose to read history, for example, and languages, and combine them with geography, or philosophy, or art, or even music.

Why not?

I certainly hope that the future generations of scholars will share the enthusiasm of our dear Professor Janković and cherish the awareness of her immense contribution to the development of Anglo American studies in Serbia.

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