



UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
The scientific journal **FACTA UNIVERSITATIS**
Series: **Linguistics and Literature** Vol.2, No 7, 2000 pp. 65 - 67
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TOWARDS THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY

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Somewhere in the middle of my career, on my first and only sabbatical, free to do whatever I wanted, I found myself at the crossroad: day and night I threw a glance at what went before, what life had offered, and how I responded to its offer. Much to my surprise I realized then that my true vocation was teaching. At first, I most determinately decided to follow Professor Dragiša Perović's advice that I should turn to writing. Yet writing, deceptively easy before I tried to put all my life into one volume, which, after just about less than ten pages, proved impossible, was obviously still beyond my reach. Besides I felt I was not yet ready to withdraw from public life, a step which writing would require, and give up or rather deprive myself of the vocation that had given me so much pleasure and absorbed my creative energy rewarding it with a sense of fulfillment. And then like a godsend, came an invitation to take part in the committee formed for the foundation of the Faculty of Philosophy at Nis, the second largest centre in Serbia. Years later, I realized I had taken the right turning by following the voice of the vocation which had already proved so successful and which was yet to yield enormous satisfaction. The results continuing at present in Niš, even under very unfavourable conditions, are the best proof.

I continued teaching in the English Department of Belgrade with two courses in literature and supervision of several MA and PH D students until 1978. When according to new legislation I had reached full pensionable age - women at sixty, men at sixty five, change of heads of departments each other year - there was no longer anything I could do to keep the standards of the English department in Belgrade at the high level we had reached, the level which had earned it the reputation of the best English Department outside UK and USA, as professor Angus McIntosh, head of the Department of English of the University of Edinburgh, put it.

From then on all my creative efforts were dedicated to the development of the English Department in Nis.

"No city, however ancient, such as Niš, can offer a seminal ground for culture and wisdom unless it is in possession of a faculty of philosophy." The young highstanding communist leader of the district of Nis, Veselin Ilić, had made this pronouncement with utter seriousness, his eyes gleaming with a deep internal conviction. This expressed his determination to give his birthplace Niš a firm basis in human knowledge, humanities.

The circle of prominent university staff from Belgrade University and one or two local professors, presided over by the rektor, Branislav Grbeša, approvingly listened to the young man's words addressed to all present, waiting for what might follow. Most

faces hitherto unknown to me I was going to get to know on numerous trips backwards and forwards Beograd/Niš. One and all with high running reputation, one of them being the famous professor Dragoljub Mitrinović. I recall the long disputes that ran between him and myself. I did not share his rigorous attitude to pedagogy: he showed little, if any, interest in his students, but was true to his subject in which his exceptional talent in mathematics and electronics was embodied. Incomparably more pleasant and life-giving were the chats with professor Bertolino, whose high scholarly level in mathematics never affected his love and devotion to his students. There were also discussions verging on political disputes with Miloš Ilic, professor of Sociology in our Philological Faculty in Belgrade. These are but a few of those I think I shall always remember, because they contributed to the widening of my horizon beyond the faculties of Philosophy and Philology and offered an insight into the best there was in the spirit that ruled Belgrade University at the time.

The three hours' drive once a week in the course of several months came as a kind of refreshing experience leading to the foundation of the Faculty of Philosophy of Niš. With only a few departments to be opened at first, my interest was naturally turned to the Department of English. I felt well equipped to tackle the problems pertaining to such an undertaking, thanks to the experience gained in reforming and bringing it up-to-date the English Department in Belgrade. Under the impression that the English Department in Niš will be given free hand, I approached the rektor of the Niš University, formally the highest authority in the committee, with the question: "Suppose I took up the foundation, organization and running of the new English Department at Niš, would I be free to do what I thought best with my experience in Beograd?" Professor Grbeša, whose friendliness set the tone to our meetings, smiled at me and answered with a very loud and unequivocal YES.

I decided then and there to take up the responsibility for the foundation of the new English Department at Nis. Once Ljiljana Mihailović readily accepted to join me, move to Nis and live there, the greatest problem which might have stood in my way was solved. The undoubtedly best linguist in modern English, and a dedicated teacher, she was the best colleague I could have to work with and bring to life a new untainted English Department in a fresh Faculty. There were no obstacles to fight against like the insistence to comply with the old-fashioned pattern of related departments in the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, the English Department being the only language and literature department in the Faculty of Niš.

Years of cooperation brought Ljiljana Mihailović and myself close together. We easily decided on all the points concerning the plan and programme of a four year course, and agreed to let the knowledge of English of the students admitted decide whether we could teach in English from the very start. We soon realized that the schools they came from were far better than we had expected and so was their knowledge of English.

My intention to have all the major areas in linguistics and literature represented in the Niš English Department did not immediately and fully come through - between the idea and the realization falls a shadow. It was through the various subjects of dissertations presented by the young staff at Niš that I came as close as I could to the realization of my initial goal. By the time Ljiljana Mihailović retired, having reached a full pensionable age in the autumn of 1968, we were in a position to honour her by a Festschrift, which besides the contributions from English and American colleagues, contained also some highly interesting and original papers by the young scholars from the Nis English

Department. As soon as any of these young members of the Department had obtained a PH.D, I rushed their promotion through all the bureaucratic channels, so that by the autumn of 1982, with five fully qualified assistant-professors in the Department of English in Niš, I could finally retire. I too was presented a Festschrift in which again the contributions of my American and British colleagues were published alongside the papers of my colleagues from Niš and some, not many, from Belgrade.

My retirement did not, of course, mean that my interest in the English Department in Nis came to an end. I am happy to see that the majority of my colleagues there continued along the lines I set. Both my personal contacts with them and their publications confirm my longstanding belief that the conception of literature and of the teacher's vocation I fought to affirm has not merely survived under various pressures but is most powerfully reaffirmed in the Nis Department. The nature and the substance of the papers contributed to this issue of the FACTA are yet another powerful example of the view of art and literature as one of the very few remaining realms within which a critical re-examination of and a resistance to the cynically materialistic values, upheld by prevailing ideologies, can take place. It is exactly this concept of art that can show the way out of the severe crisis the Humanities are at present undergoing all over the world.

U SUSRET TRIDESETOGODIŠNJICI

Vida E. Marković

Moj odlazak u penziju svakako nije značio kraj mog interesovanja za anglistiku u Nišu. Srećna sam što vidim da je većina mlađih kolega nastavila mojim putem. I moji lični kontakti sa njima i njihove publikacije potvrđuju moje trajno uverenje da je shvatanje književnosti i nastavničkog poziva koje sam se borila da afirmišem ne samo odolelo različitim pritiscima već se veoma snažno reaffirmiše na niškoj Anglistici. Priroda i sadržaj radova u ovom broju FAKTA su izvanredan primer pogleda na umetnost i literaturu kao jedne od malobrojnih preostalih oblasti u kojoj se može odvijati kritičko preispitivanje i iskazati otpor ciničnomaterijalističkim vrednostima koje vladajuće ideologije podupiru. Upravo ovakvo poimanje umetnosti može pokazati izlaz iz ozbiljne krize kroz koju prolaze humanističke studije širom sveta.