

“WITH KINGS AND COUNSELORS”
In Memoriam Professor Dragana R. Mašović (1955-2023)

Many people will probably remember Professor Dragana R. Mašović for her uncompromising attitude, her often seemingly-strict outlook, and her infallible work ethic. Yet, few of us who had the privilege to really know her will first think of her smile and her big heart, as well as her honest and natural impulse to impart wisdom on younger generations. She always encouraged her students to see beyond the horizon, as Whitman suggested, or to explore deeper and follow in Melville's intellectual footsteps. A testament to her dedication to this cause can be found among hundreds of her publications during her long and successful professorship: textbooks, monographs, edited volumes, translated volumes, scientific papers, articles... These books and articles, along with the memories and anecdotes of generations of former students will remain her legacy. Her legacy is also her personal collection of hundreds of books she had diligently and painstakingly obtained and then endowed to the Library of the Faculty of Philosophy. This gift of giving is something that she cherished: always ready to advise her younger colleagues, for ever reading and writing for those who, as she put it, “think with their own heads, guided by their own ideas,” always siding with those who chose the road less taken, the path of learning, always trying to set her own example.

Her numerous publications can be categorized into several major directions in line with the development of her career, her intellectual output, and her academic interests. In many of those endeavors, she was a pioneer, a trailblazer, the first one to venture into the unknown. This is never an easy task and often comes with the risk of being misunderstood, the risk she gladly and willingly took. But this intellectual daring often paid off as she was in many ways a visionary when it came to teaching cultural studies and Anglo-American literature at the University of Niš. The beginnings of Professor Mašović's academic career were focused on popularizing American literature in Yugoslavia, and in Niš, especially. She published essays, articles, and literary translations of the American classics like Poe, Whitman, Faulkner, and of the representatives of counter-culture like Ginsberg and Burroughs in the reputable national and local journals such as *Književna reč*, *Gradina*, *Bagdala*. For many of her readers, those articles opened new doors into different worlds and opened up paths towards different ways of thinking and speaking. After she became a university professor, Professor Dragana Mašović continued her efforts to broaden the horizons of her students. For many of them, especially those generations devastated by wars in former Yugoslavia, poverty, economic crises, American Literature and American Studies classes were the only link with the outside world, like Gatsby's green light, a shining beacon of hope that a better future is waiting out there if only you work hard and hold on for long enough.

The highlight of her academic career was probably introducing a mandatory course in American Studies, for the first time in former Yugoslavia, into the tertiary curriculum of the Department of English at the Faculty of Philosophy. Professor Mašović insisted that it was absolutely necessary to hold critical views of both foreign and domestic cultures, even when this attitude was not mainstream in our country in the late 1990s. Her pioneer

contribution to this informed study of America was her seminal textbook anthology *The Fateful Dreams: The Introduction to American Studies*, published in 2002 and 2009 (second edition). The course in American Studies inspired numerous other courses in cultural studies at the Department of English and many younger professors and teaching assistants chose to adopt this combined, multidisciplinary approach to literature and culture along with the Formalist tradition of close reading. If you ask her students about Professor Mašović's classes, they will probably tell you that it was from her that they first learnt about close reading, about making notes while watching movies, and about the love for American short stories, dramas, and movies they found during those lessons.

Her probably favorite course that she introduced into the curriculum were *Irish Studies* which sublimated years of reading, love, working with students, searching for authors and texts... The final results of this endeavor include *The Irish Short Story Anthology* published in 2003, *Essays on Irish Culture and Literature* (1996) and two seminal volumes on the *History of Irish Literature from the Beginnings to Contemporary Period* published in 2013 and 2014 and many more articles, texts, and translations. For many years, Professor Mašović also worked as a lector and translator for some of the most reputable University journals such as *Facta Universitatis: Mechanical Engineering* and taught at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Niš.

Even after her retirement, Professor Mašović kept her daily schedule of carefully planned reading and writing and, with a smile, brushed off any indication that she should *not* work. The papers and articles published in the final years of her life reveal her commitment to the issues of the contemporary society, literature and culture in general, such as, the phenomenon of terrorism, new readings of Steinbeck and Melville, the relationship between Serbian and Irish culture and literature. She published with some of the most reputable publishers in the Balkans, e.g., The Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, The Croatian Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, The Faculty of Philology in Skopje, North Macedonia, thus proving her deepest attachment to the former Yugoslav spaces and her professional and academic reputation.

Another very important dimension of Professor Dragana Mašović's academic and non-academic life was her firm belief that an intellectual has to have a public role, besides teaching and publishing; one has to dedicate their life to active doing for the good of their community, just like Benjamin Franklin proposed in his *Autobiography* that she often quoted. And indeed, the Professor always spoke and acted on behalf of progressive, liberal, cosmopolitan, and democratic ideas and was decidedly against narrow-mindedness. She bravely protected the individual's right to free speech, engaged in public debates and fiercely defended professor's independence in opinion and decision-making, the cornerstones of contemporary university, as she always maintained.

The Professor would end her emails with Stefan Zweig's quote: "Only the person who has learnt to open their soul wide on time will later be able to contain the cosmos." And indeed, Professor Dragana R. Mašović was at the same time a microcosm of her own and a person who was able to have cosmic effects on the people around her.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam¹.

Ana Kocić Stanković

¹ May she rest in peace (Irish Gaelic).