

Svetozar Koljević

Svetozar Koljević was born on September 9, 1930 in Banja Luka. He first attended the University of Zagreb and then transferred to the University of Belgrade, from which he graduated in 1954 with a major in English and a minor in Yugoslav Literatures. In 1957, he received his M. Litt. Degree from the University of Cambridge, where he studied with the well known literary historian David Daiches. Koljević earned his Ph.D. from the University of Zagreb in 1959.

Koljević began his academic career as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, where he was promoted to the rank of full professor in 1971. Many generations of students still remember him as a teacher whose lectures were extremely popular and an educator whose pedagogical and personal qualities fully reflected his professional merits. In addition to the students from the University of Sarajevo, where Professor Koljević spent most of his academic career (from 1958 to 1992), he also taught English literature to the students of the University Novi Sad, where he demonstrated his unique lecturing skills from 1992 till his retirement in 1995. Yet, Koljević did not stop teaching even then, because he continued to work as a Visiting Professor, regularly offering several literature courses per academic year at the universities of Nikšić, Banja Luka, Serbian Sarajevo, and Belgrade.

As visiting professor and researcher, Svetozar Koljević acquired a high professional reputation at academic institutions all over the world. As early as 1963/64, he taught graduate courses in English and Comparative Literature at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. In 1975/76 he was a Visiting Fellow at All Souls College, University of Oxford; he also taught a graduate course in Yugoslav literatures during the winter and spring semesters of 1981 at the University of California at Berkeley. He delivered numerous lectures at the universities of Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Novi Sad, Oxford, London, Nottingham, Birmingham, Sheffield, Glasgow, Lancaster, Harvard, Princeton, South Carolina, Illinois, and Hope College (Michigan). He participated at a variety of international conferences. He also published a number of articles dealing mostly with Serbian oral poetry and, specifically, with the relationship between oral and written literature in academic journals in Oxford, Tübingen, Dublin, Uppsala, Stockholm, Nottingham, Minneapolis (Minnesota), Helsinki, New York and Columbus (Ohio). As a guest of the British Academy, he was in London from May to July of 1987, where he chaired the international conference on the South Slavic oral tradition (The Study of Oral Tradition and the South Slavs), organized by London University in June of 1987 in order to mark the bicentennial anniversary of the birth of Vuk Karadžić.

In the early 1990s, Koljević was at the University of Oxford three times as a Visiting Fellow (at St. Catherine's College, from January 4 to February 28, 1993; at Merton College, from June 1 to September 30, 1993; and at All Souls College, from October 1, 1993 to February 6, 1994). In September 1993, he was the guest of the Serbian Studies Foundation at Macquarie University in Sydney, where he participated at an international conference on Ivo Andrić and Miloš Crnjanski and submitted a paper entitled "The International Theme in the Works of Ivo Andrić and Miloš Crnjanski." In 1993 and 1994 he received invitations by the universities of Belgrade, London, Warrick, Berkeley, and Indiana (Bloomington) to deliver lectures dealing with the meeting points of different cultures in European literatures. During the fall semester of 1995/96, he was a Visiting Professor in the Department of Yugoslav Studies of Hankuk University in Seoul (South Korea).

Svetozar Koljević's literary research—that includes twenty-two books of literary criticism and several hundred articles published in various journals—has been focused for decades on two main points of interest: topics related to the British literary tradition and issues that deal with South Slavic, mostly Serbian, literatures, in particular with Serbian oral epic poetry, which is apparently Koljević's favorite subject. With regards to British Literature, Koljević's approach has been unusually comprehensive in terms of historical width and the broad selection of genres and authors which he always discussed within the firm framework of contemporary literary theory and placed in the broad context of world literature. Paying close attention to various aspects of the text, Koljević used his exceptionally fine literary sense to select and interpret the elements that help explicate the whole. In addition to exceptionally high scholarly standards and intellectual originality, Koljević's books are characterized by a refined, attractive, and witty writing style; this is why they became not only invaluable references for students of English, but very popular and widely read texts that are perused and highly appreciated by the general reading public as well. These qualities are especially noticeable in his *Whims of the Novel (Hirovi romana, 1988)*, which offers a 350-page survey of various ideas, trends, and authors spanning almost three hundred years of novelistic tradition in Great Britain and North America, as well as in his two monographs *20th Century English Poets (1914-1960) (Engleski pesnici dvadesetog veka, 2002)* and *20th Century English Novelists (1914-1980) (Engleski romansijeri dvadesetog veka, 2003)*, which represent a unique synthesis of the author's decades-long interest in, research into, and teaching of English literature.

Regarding Serbian literature, Svetozar Koljević's ultimate scholarly achievement is his study *The Epic in the Making*, which was published in Great Britain by the prestigious Oxford University Press (Clarendon Press) in 1980; its Serbian translation, entitled *Postanje epa*, appeared in 1998. Critically acclaimed right after its publication by various British, American, and French professional journals, this study was praised as the best overall account of the Serbian epic tradition available in a foreign language. The book received similar stellar reviews from most competent Serbian reviewers. Thus, Svetozar Petrović described *Postanje epa* as "the climactic moment of Koljević's scholarly adventure," adding that "there is almost not a single relevant issue pertaining to the existing research of our oral tradition that has not been touched on in the book," and pointing out that all those

issues are “considered in the light of Koljević’s own inventive approach, many of them in a unique, entirely original way.” Finally, as an additional proof of Koljević’s incessant and successful efforts to keep abreast with the latest trends in literary theory and criticism, one of his more recent books, *The Babylonian Challenges* (*Vavilonski izazovi*, 2007) should be mentioned. Koljević’s critical interpretation of literary texts has taken an interdisciplinary turn here, as he places the discussed works in a broad cultural context, using many tools provided by the study of various disciplines of the humanities. His creative interpretation of the works of four great Serbian authors (Andrić, Crnjanski, Tišma, and Selimović) helps define their position, as well as the position of Serbian literature as a whole, in the context of European literature and culture.

Svetozar Koljević’s books have been awarded numerous literary prizes. His *Comic Elements and Myth* (*Humor i mit*) received the City of Sarajevo April 6th Award in 1969, while his *The Way of the Words* (*Putevi reči*) was recognized by the publishing house Svjetlost in 1979. In Novi Sad, Koljević was given the Laza Kostić Literary Award for the best scholarly literary study for his *The Eternal Torch* (*Vječna zublja*, 2006); he also received the Đorđe Jovanović Award for the best book of critical essays for his study *The Babylonian Challenges* in Belgrade in 2008. Koljević’s outstanding work as a literary translator was recognized through the BIGZ Award, which he got for his rendition of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* into Serbian (Belgrade, 1987). Koljević received the Vojvodina Association of Writers Award for Life’s Work in Novi Sad in 2002, the Writer’s Wreath of Kozara Award for “overall advancement of literature and culture” in Prijedor in 2005, and the Vuk Award for “outstanding contributions to the development of culture in the Republic of Serbia and in the areas of Serbian cultural influence” in Belgrade in 2006. In 1967, Koljević was decorated with the Medal with Silver Stars Recognizing Special Contributions to the People and in 1985 he was awarded the Medal with Gold Wreath for his work.

Svetozar Koljević is also an active member of many domestic and international professional organizations, including Serbian PEN and the International Association of University Professors of English (IAUPE). He is the member of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and of the Republic of Srpska Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Zoran Paunović