

Introduction

When Professor Andrzej Tretiak established the English Seminar at the University of Warsaw, Poland had been an independent state for only five years. Recovering from the 123 years of political non-existence, the country was struggling to re-establish its institutions, improve standards of living, and provide education to its citizens. It also had to contend with severe economic hardships, including mass unemployment and hyperinflation; and was awaiting reforms intended to underpin basic common prosperity. Although the University of Warsaw had already had a history of over a hundred years, it was in 1918 that it started to enjoy freedom and independence from political interference. In 1923, this seat of learning was therefore a rapidly developing but still very young academic institution. These may be well-known historical facts, but we need to bring them to the forefront of our minds in order to fully appreciate the courage and visionary spirit which Professor Tretiak embodied. The inter-war years offered great promise, but such promise would only be dashed by the outrage of Nazi occupation, tragically followed by decades of political oppression. The year 1989, which is within the lifespan of many of us faculty members, ushered in halcyon days of unconstrained research opportunities, and also the exponential development of English Studies as an educational discipline. English, perceived as a “window to the Western world”, was the language of both the academia and international organizations. Needless to say, the great demand for English teachers and competent English speakers was conducive to the growth of our Institute. Not only did we expand in size, but we also modernized curricula so that students could be offered tailored options for the construction of their individual paths of educational development.

In recent times, English as a foreign language has become ubiquitous, and so today it is rather a language of instruction as opposed to being an object of study, albeit we still offer classes intended to improve the mastery of language skills. Furthermore, we participate in international projects and explore research topics relevant to contemporary literature studies, culture studies, and linguistics. We foreground 21st-century methodologies and share our research interests and academic pursuits with our students, with whom we engage as active participants and the co-creators of our achievements.

At the same time, we are facing the same questions and uncertainties as other scholars within the field of humanities. Namely, how can we contribute to solving global crises by facilitating critical thinking? And how can we exploit literatures

and cultures to enhance our understanding of the human condition? The study of language and communication is key in approaching these questions, too.

Spearheading change in what is an ever-transforming world, we have become the first department in Poland to offer separate degrees in English Studies – Literature and Culture, and English Studies – Linguistics. This gives our students an opportunity to focus on the discipline of their choice and to have their specialism recognized on their diploma. It should be also mentioned that with 61 faculty members and a number of Emeritus Professors actively involved in research and teaching, we are the largest institute at the University of Warsaw. As the future may pose new challenges to the humanities, we shall continue to remain relevant and inspire generations of students.

This book documents the achievements of my illustrious mentors, their predecessors, and my colleagues currently working in the Institute. I would like to thank all contributors, whose involvement and efforts have made this publication so impressive. My special thanks go to Prof. Dorota Babilas, who authored the first part of the book (aided by Prof. Emma Harris and Prof. Jerzy Welna), and who also edited the entire volume. I would like to acknowledge the precious help of Prof. Aniela Korzeniowska and Prof. Barry Keane, who ensured the coherence and language quality of the text.

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Dr hab. Agnieszka Piskorska, Head of the Institute of English Studies

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