

John W. Kronik (Vienna 1931- Los Angeles 2006)

In April of 2002, many of John Kronik's students, colleagues and friends gathered at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference to honor him, to celebrate our friendship, his significant contribution to the field of Hispanic literature, his immense commitment to teaching and mentoring, and the impact he had in many of our lives. We were there to celebrate his many academic achievements, and to reminisce in the wonderful experiences that we shared with him. Four years later it is with deep sorrow that we mourn John's death, and again honor his life as a prominent scholar and faithful friend.

As I spoke about John in the Kentucky gathering, I underscored how unnecessary it was to offer a list of his academic successes as an eminent scholar of nineteenth-century Spanish literature, renowned Galdosista, as a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and many other awards, as director of three NEH Summer Seminar for Teachers, as author of more than a 100 articles, as editor for seven years of the internationally known journal *PMLA*, and as a bonafide scholar of Spanish American theatre. Listing all his achievements then and now is unnecessary. We all knew John quite well, and knowing John both academically and personally was a privilege.

For many of us, our relationship with John began in the classroom. He arrived at Cornell from the University of Illinois in 1966 and taught there until 2001. As a gifted teacher his courses were surely the best, his standards the highest, his corrections and comments both honest and helpful, his sense of humor and keen irony entertaining. I will never forget the last day of every course I took with John: they always ended with a warm and sincere applause that students began spontaneously, and I can still see John gently returning the applause to us for what he believed were our accomplishments. Actually, there was still an additional ending to the course: the curtain truly came down in John and Eva's house as they kindly opened their home and hearts to a bunch of hungry and loud students.

Closely connected to John's distinguished career as a teacher was his true devotion to mentoring and to supporting the academic growth of so many people in our field – a commitment that implied establishing a long lasting relationship with students and colleagues. We know of his seriousness

when it came to supporting many of us as colleagues – reading manuscripts, attending our presentations at conferences, writing letters of recommendation, alerting us about opportunities in our field, even “rebuking” us if he thought we were not following the “right” academic path. More importantly, John always taught us by example: his lectures were models of organization, clarity, insight, erudition, and as many of us witnessed, they were lively and entertaining.

It is clear how John’s teaching and mentoring skills touched our lives, how deeply he influenced our careers as teachers and scholars. Even after I left Cornell, every time I sat down to write a scholarly paper, I knew John was somewhere in the back of my mind. Would he read one of my paragraphs and write on the margins “feo,” or maybe “bien pensado?” He was equally kind to young scholars, something I witnessed in the incredible relationship that he established with his NEH students. These famous seminars left a trail of delightful memories and intellectual growth in the lives of so many, and were additional proof that all those who came in contact with John were touched by his intelligence, humor and devotion to teaching.

Can we talk about John without celebrating his keen sense of humor and wit? As John was attempting to figure out how to participate in all his students’ and friends’ lectures at the 2002 KFLC, he expressed to Akiko Tsuchiya and myself his anxiety in the following terms:

There are conflicts involving former students, former NEH Seminar participants, colleagues who are close friends.... So, tell me how I emerge from this predicament without offending two-thirds of the conference attendees and losing half of my friends. Do I go to 5 minutes of each paper, zooming from one building to another? Do I go to no papers at all? Do I assign surrogates, like Eva? Do I purchase and set up tape recorders in each room?

He was truly concerned that he could not attend all of his friends’ presentations, nevertheless, he ended his letter on a brighter note: “All these, of course, are delightful dilemmas, and I thank you for having created them and for giving Eva and me so much – and so many – to look forward to.” Although I have been writing in the past tense about John, I can still hear his voice, he is now with me and with many of us – in our memories, in his and our writings, and in our classroom performances. It is truly a joy to have him so close, so present in our lives. I am honored to speak for all those who experienced John’s friendship, professionalism, and love.

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