

In Memoriam: Deb Cohen (1955-2020)

Deb Cohen, Professor Emerita of Spanish at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania, passed away suddenly on March 13, 2020. After working in the travel industry, Deb earned her PhD in Spanish from the University of Kansas, where she wrote a dissertation about the plays of Mexican dramatist Rodolfo Usigli under the direction of George Woodyard and served as *Latin American Theatre Review's* Editorial Assistant. Those who knew Deb well remember her as an insightful scholar of Mexican and Central American theatre, an effective teacher, an accomplished play translator, and a talented lighting designer and set painter for theatrical productions.

Deb's earliest contributions to Latin American theatre studies include articles in *Latin American Theatre Review* on the plays of Usigli and Luisa Josefina Hernández. Travel to Honduras sparked her interest in that country's popular theatre during the 1980s, leading her to co-author two articles with Kenton V. Stone, one on Teatro de la Basura and the second on Jack Warner and Teatro La Fragua. When accompanying students studying abroad in Costa Rica, she researched that country's theatre and became known for her pioneering work on its New Wave dramatists, who began writing plays in the 1980s. Her articles offer feminist interpretations of plays by Claudia Barrionuevo, Ana Istarú, and Melvin Méndez, analyze the critique of political corruption in plays by Barrionuevo, Walter Fernández, and Ailyn Morera, and examine the historical theatre of Jorge Arroyo, Leda Cavallini, Lupe Pérez Rey, and Miguel Rojas. Deb's final scholarly project was *Diálogos dramáticos Costa Rica-México*, an anthology of six plays co-edited with Elaine Miller and published by Editorial Memoria en Movimiento.

Deb's collaborative nature was evident not only in her publications but also during conferences, for which she regularly organized panels. She would not hesitate to state her honest opinion when advising colleagues in the early stages of their careers or evaluating manuscripts for the *Latin American Theatre Review*. Students benefited as well from her excellent mentoring skills,

with many of them posting on social media after her passing about how “Dr. Deb” had helped them to learn the basics of the Spanish language. She also enriched their extracurricular life by hosting an international music hour on the campus radio station and serving as faculty advisor for the LGBTQ club.

Deb also made a significant impact on the performing arts at Slippery Rock University, whose University Theatre staged in 2009 her English translation of Melvin Méndez’s *Un viejo con alas* (*The Old Man’s Wings*). Her passion for theatre extended to the production side when she staged with students her English translations of the plays *Tu voz* (*Only You*) by Felipe Galván and *Sobre chapulines y otras langostas* (*Chapulines and Other Critters*) by Walter Fernández. After retiring from teaching in 2016, she stayed busy studying technical theatre and designing sets and lighting for many University Theatre productions. Not long ago, she produced at Slippery Rock her own translation of Felipe Galván’s play *Tu voz*. Present for the staging, Galván comments, “La búsqueda era su camino, la perfección su meta, el hallazgo estético su obsesión. Debora Cohen, a quien todos sus amigos llamábamos Deb, fue vida que enseñó a hacer vida en la vida, en el estudio y en la escena.”

Although we will miss Deb tremendously, we will always remember her creativity, clever sense of humor, and zest for life. Since Deb’s family has a tradition of commemorating the date of a departed loved one’s birth or passing with a toast of one’s favorite beverage, I believe that Deb would appreciate our raising a glass in her honor: ¡Un brindis por nuestra querida amiga y colega que nos sonríe desde las estrellas!

Elaine M. Miller

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