

In Memoriam: Frank Dauster (1925-2015)

Many adjectives come to mind when I think of Frank Dauster, whose recent death was reported by his wife, Helen Dauster, on October 3, 2015: teacher, researcher, critic, mentor, world traveler, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and pioneer—yes, pioneer! It would never have occurred to Frank Dauster's grandparents, who emigrated from Germany to the coal fields of Pennsylvania, that their grandson would become an internationally acknowledged trailblazer in the field of Latin American theatre studies. Continuing the tradition of his thesis advisor, José Juan Arrom, Frank is known as the father of Latin American theatre studies, a field that is flourishing today thanks to all his many contributions and to the researchers and teachers he inspired. As his good friend and co-collaborator George Woodyard commented during an homage to Frank, "To write about Frank Dauster is a singular honor because his career as a scholar and teacher in the field of Spanish American literature marks a level of achievement of extraordinary quality" (17). World Cat, which keeps track of such statistics, lists 215 separate publication items, including several books: *Breve historia de la poesía mexicana*; *Xavier Villaurrutia*; *Ensayos sobre teatro hispanoamericano*; *Breve historia del teatro hispanoamericano siglos XIX-XX*; *Ensayos sobre poesía mexicana*, and *The Double Strand: Five Contemporary Mexican Poets*. Although he retired from Rutgers in 1992, Frank continued to express his consuming interest in generational periodization in publications such as "Perfil generacional del teatro hispanoamericano (1894-1924)." He also co-edited two anthologies of plays widely used by *aficionados* of Latin American theatre: *9 dramaturgos hispanoamericanos* and *En un acto*. In addition are his many book chapters and individual articles in the major journals of the day, as well as over 100 book reviews, encyclopedia entries, and other shorter pieces. He served as associate editor of *Hispania* for many years, as a member of the editorial board of several journals, and in what is undoubtedly more than a labor of love, for 24 years he served as a contributing editor on Spanish Drama for

the *Handbook of Latin American Studies*. When I was invited to be co-editor, I accepted because I wanted to follow in the footsteps of both Frank and George Woodyard, not realizing how demanding a task it is to annotate so many plays in ways that are meaningful and useful to colleagues. Not one to waste words, Frank did an impressive job as an annotator.

What World Cat does not catalog is the impact of Frank's work nor the critical responses to his many contributions, nor does it mention all the papers he gave at conferences. I met the eminent Prof. Dauster for the first time at the 1968 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference and at the first session ever dedicated to Latin American Theatre, which was organized by George Woodyard. At over six feet tall, Frank was as impressive in appearance as he was in intellect. His encouragement at that time assured me that he would be an accessible colleague, and that warm and encouraging relationship lasted until now.

There were many other important lessons I learned from Frank, and some were harder to follow. For example, Frank had high standards with regard to work in the profession and expected his colleagues to play by the rules. If colleagues went over their allotted time at conferences, he would walk out if it appeared they would not stop, believing that we each have the right to speak in our turn but not to abuse the patience and good will of others. Perhaps it is his legacy that at LATT conferences we are each assigned a specific amount of time on the program!

Another lesson that is still much appreciated: his great respect for writers no matter their gender or genre. While the title of the article "Success and The Latin American Writer" does not reflect this respect, it appeared in an anthology called *Contemporary Women Authors of Latin America*, co-edited by Doris Meyer and Margarite Fernández Olmos. For those who never heard him speak, the tenor of Frank's introductory remarks—brisk, almost no-nonsense brusque—gives you an idea of his style and passion for excellence: "I would like to speak briefly about several women whom I consider important writers on the Latin American scene. The fact that they are women is peripheral, for me at least, because I deal with writers, not male or female writers. My principal concern is always whether they write well enough to be worth reading, studying, and talking about" (16). His interest in Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos, and Luisa Josefina Hernández was not that they were women, but that they were excellent writers who, in his concluding words, "have borne the extra and indefensible burden of trying to succeed in an honorable manner in a society which is in many ways dishonorable" (21).

These words are an inspiration to those of us who continue to highlight the work of artists whose gender causes them to be ignored or, as he comments in another essay, “barred from any significant participation [...] because of obstacles imposed by a traditionalist male-dominated society” (“Raising the Curtain” 23).

Rereading his words again at this time of commemoration, I hope to make clear to the younger generation of scholars that we all owe so much to the foresight, strength of conviction, and passion that marked the work of Frank Dauster. Though he retired in 1992, his publications are still consulted and his influence still remains. Kirsten Nigro paid tribute at his retirement, echoing Castellanos: “Frank Dauster —el que me dejara ver que *sí* está bien hacer las cosas *de otra manera*.” I ended my own poem in his honor, “Yo también hablo de Frank Dauster,” by paraphrasing Villaurrutia (the subject of the doctoral dissertation he wrote at Yale):

I believe, still, that his work will live on — for when we think of him,
Francamente,
 No es el Dauster de “*un acto*” sino el que ocupa lugar
 En *todas las generaciones*.

Sandra Messinger Cypess
University of Maryland

Works Cited

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