



## IN MEMORIAM

### **Donald L. Shaw (February 11, 1930-January 30, 2017): Scholar, Mentor, Friend**

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In April 2006 at the annual Kentucky Foreign Language Conference (KFLC), *Decimonónica* sponsored a session honoring Donald Leslie Shaw's broad scholarly contributions to Hispanism. It was one of five different panels organized for this renowned scholar in addition to a grand luncheon that celebrated his remarkable career and presented him *Modernisms and Modernities: Studies in Honor of Donald L. Shaw*, a *Festschrift* edited by Susan Carvalho that included her 12-page introduction, a wonderful biographical sketch of Shaw. Those of us present for these various tributes in Kentucky will never forget how visibly overwhelmed Shaw was by the multiple public gestures, to include his induction into the prestigious *Orden de Don Quijote*, one of the highest international honors of Sigma Delta Pi, the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society. And although these various recognitions reconfirmed the huge impact Shaw had made on both Latin American and Spanish literary studies, the fact that the venue was his beloved

Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, an annual “pilgrimage” he refused to miss because of its reunion with dear students, colleagues and friends, made the collective homage even more meaningful.

Of course, this wonderful event did not conclude Shaw’s career as he remained very active until his retirement from the University of Virginia in 2011, at which time he moved to Bologna, Italy, to be with his family, until his death this past January. “Retirement,” however, was a very difficult phase for Shaw as his discipline and dedication to the profession were greatly hampered by inadequate access to research resources. Clearly, being forced to change a well-established and tireless research agenda that during his career resulted in over 130 articles, 10 books, 6 editions, and over 40 book contributions, was no easy task. However, such close friends as Jorge Avilés-Diz diligently and faithfully responded to Shaw’s retirement-challenge by regularly sending him hard copies of the latest books and articles related to his fields. Yet such efforts were hard-pressed to address Shaw’s insatiable intellectual appetite: within just 24-48 hours of receipt of the material, Shaw would contact Jorge to report on and discuss at length.

During his last years in Italy, communication with Shaw still confirmed an incredibly lucid and competent scholar, despite his declining health, which is why it was still a blow to many of us, including myself, to learn of this great Hispanist’s passing in January 2017. Appropriately, and complementing Carvalho’s aforementioned homage in 2006, the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* also commemorated Shaw’s life and work in spring 2017 with a fine tribute by David T. Gies of the University of Virginia and Ann L. Mackenzie of the University of Glasgow. So, when *Decimonónica* kindly asked me to contribute yet another acknowledgement of Shaw’s contributions to our field, I first responded enthusiastically, but then doubted whether I could possibly add anything worthwhile to the beautiful and complete portraits of Shaw already in print. Ultimately, I decided that a small glimpse into the relationships I and others shared with Shaw over the past three decades might further deepen an appreciation for a complex man whose internationally regarded scholarship was complemented by his steadfast love, loyalty, and dedication toward his colleagues and students.

I first met “Professor Shaw” a few months after Miguel A. Fernández, *Decimonónica*’s co-founder, and I completed our Masters in Spanish together at Middlebury College in 1989. That August I moved to Charlottesville to begin the Ph.D. program at the University of Virginia, where shortly thereafter I and the other newly-arrived graduate students were greeted by Shaw, department chair at the time. As eager and aspiring scholars, we were all star-struck by this renowned Hispanist, but we were equally impressed by his frankness and genuine desire to help all of us succeed not only in the graduate program, but also as future academics. However, we all soon learned that his feedback was never sugar-coated, as many conference presenters discovered over the years when Shaw attended their sessions: if he thought you were misguided, he would tell you bluntly, but if he liked what you did or said, you would enjoy unforgettable encouragement. As Carvalho herself noted: “Praise from him is hard-won...” (11). Those of us who had such interactions with Shaw were all the better for his persistent and uninhibited candor.

Following graduate school, I lost touch with “Professor Shaw” as I became consumed with the demands of a new job, but was reconnected through my request in 1997 to reprint selections from his renowned *The Generation of 1898 in Spain* for an anthology I was co-editing at the time with Linda Boone Bartlett, another former student of Shaw. That reconnection followed with a reunion in April 1998 at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference (KFLC), a venue that, as mentioned previously, Shaw considered a necessary annual “pilgrimage.” Here “Professor Shaw” became “Don” for me and many other former students, and consequently many of us adopted Don’s pilgrimage as our own. It was also in Kentucky where for years Shaw cultivated and nourished his enduring friendships through socials he hosted in his own hotel room at the beloved Springs Inn, and where many of us, including all three of the founding co-directors (J.P. Spicer-Escalante, Miguel Fernández and I) of *Decimonónica* back in 2005, had the privilege of enjoying his company and his highly entertaining anecdotes. And because the KFLC was so important and special to Don, he expected to see you there each year, and he became concerned and disappointed by your absence, which is why to this day and years after Don himself stopped attending due to his retirement and relocation to Italy, so many of us continue the KFLC tradition.

Don’s conference loyalty, however, was not limited to the KFLC. He almost just as regularly attended the regional Mountain Interstate Foreign Language Conference (MIFLC), where he did not hesitate to welcome new friends into his circle of beloved colleagues, which for some who were awestruck by Shaw’s accomplishments, felt as though they had been given a backstage pass to The Beatles. Michael Gómez, past editor for Spanish Literature and Culture for *Decimonónica* and a Generation of 1898 specialist, coincided with me back in 2003 when we both attended the MIFLC at the College of Charleston. During a break in the conference sessions, I introduced Michael to Donald, who proceeded to invite both of us for a drink in his hotel room on Calhoun Street. This was the regular type of kind gesture Shaw was inclined to extend to anyone who showed a mutual interest. To this day, that hour in Shaw’s room while discussing casually our research interests over an adult libation is a moment Michael and I still reminisce: the intimacy afforded by a heavyweight scholar seen as unapproachable by many.

There are hundreds of related anecdotes that highlight the humanity of the “unique force” that was Donald Leslie Shaw (Gies & Mackenzie 149). Those of us such as Germán D. Carrillo, Jorge Avilés-Diz, Javier Herrero, Susan Carvalho, Christine Blackshaw, Iana Konstantinova, Alyce Cook, Linda B. Bartlett, and I, among others I am surely and shamefully overlooking, had the privilege of annual reunions with a loyal friend and mentor who never failed to provide his support both personally and professionally, and who was and continues to be, despite his absence, responsible for having influenced positively and profoundly the lives of thousands of Hispanists worldwide. Don will be sorely missed, but never forgotten, and we are grateful for his incredible legacy to Hispanism.

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**Works Cited**

- Carvalho, Susan. "Prologue and Dedication." *Modernisms and Modernities: Studies in Honor of Donald L. Shaw*. Ed. Susan Carvalho. Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs, 2006, pp. 5-17.
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