

A Few Words about George

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George Woodyard, otherwise known as the “Jefecito” to many of us who worked with him and the *LATR*, was an extraordinary human being. All of us here who knew him were blessed by his friendship, mentoring, and always good cheer; indeed, I can’t remember a written communication from him that didn’t end with “Cheers, George.” I miss his cheerful smile and laugh, among so many other things. I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words about George in the presence of fellow admirers, who are gathered here to honor him, and of George’s beloved wife and daughter—Eleanor and Shana—and of his dear friend of many, many years, Bob Hartmann.

It seems all wrong to me to be at a Latin American theatre event and to not see George here. I keep waiting for him to come in the door and join us. So many of his friends, students, and colleagues have commented in the months since George’s death that it is just isn’t the same without him. We had come to count on George for so many things—his feedback about and support of our work, the Latin American Theatre Today “pachangas” at KU, his emails and letters, the parties at his house. I had grown so used to running into George (and Eleanor) in so many places all around the world that for now traveling has lost some of its luster for me. I don’t think George would like for me to get too maudlin, but the truth is that at this stage of my life and my career, losing George has been a real blow and has been the cause of many a shed tear on my part. To put it in a nutshell, I miss him and his always gracious “Hello, Kirstencita, how are you?” We all miss him!

I am part of the generation of Latin American theatre “people” who follow closely behind George, so I guess you can call me one of the “younger oldies.” I had the privilege of being part of the first Latin American Theatre Today symposium and theatre festival in 1982, and had the honor of welcoming the then-leading scholars in what was then a very new academic field:

Juan José Arrom, Arrom's student Frank Dauster, and of course, George (missing was George's and my mentor, Merlin Forster, who had introduced both of us to Latin American theatre at the University of Illinois; my memory is that what I knew of the field as a graduate student was contained in two volumes of Carlos Solórzano's anthology of *Teatro latinoamericano*). What a thrill to have been there for such a generational reunion! And the invited playwrights: what a stellar collection of talent from Latin America at that time: Enrique Buenaventura, Emilio Carballido, Egon Wolff, David Benavente, and so many others. Such were the times that Latin American women playwrights were not very present, but by 1992, when George sponsored the second Latin American Theatre Today symposium/festival at KU, women were everywhere and of course, graciously welcomed and embraced by the host who had invited them to the wheat fields of Kansas.

Thanks to George's unending energy and hard work, his dedication to a journal that was to gain national and international recognition, and to his traveling ways, which took him all over Latin America meeting and championing the Latin American theatre world, George helped to put us all on the map and to give credence to a research and teaching field that in its early days many fellow Latin Americanists did not quite see as equal to the then-booming Latin American novel. I abandoned that novel very soon after doing my dissertation on José Donoso, having fallen deeply in love with the theatre. This was a risky switch to make early in my career, and I know that without George and his ever-more-prestigious *Latin American Theatre Review*, I would have struggled mightily in academe back then. George not only helped me as a beginning scholar to find my way in my chosen field, he also gave legitimacy to that field and, in this way, helped to pave the way for what has been, for me, a successful and satisfying career. And so he did for so many scholars throughout the U.S., Latin America and Europe. And also for all his former students, some of whom are here at this conference; they are the truest testimony to the legacy that George Woodyard has left us.

I thank my colleagues on this panel for including me, and I thank Beatriz Rizk for organizing this symposium in George's honor. These are the kinds of generous acts that defined the life of our good friend and I take this opportunity to once again say, "gracias, Jefecito," for everything.

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