

Remembering Dr. Laurence Prescott

Renowned scholar Dr. Laurence Prescott passed away on November 27, 2016 at the age of 73. He was one of the founding members of ALARA and served as President for many years. Within his vast scholarship, he is particularly known for his work on Afro-Colombian writers Candelario Obeso, Jorge Artel, and Manuel Zapata Olivella. For those interested in the African Diaspora in the Americas, his work that brings to light the correspondence and friendship between Manuel Zapata Olivella and Langston Hughes is particularly ground breaking. As he noted in “We Too Sing America’: The Friendship and Literary Correspondence of Langston Hughes and Manuel Zapata Olivella,” “While Hughes helped Zapata Olivella to sharpen his literary skills and to understand better US black life and culture, Zapata Olivella enhanced and broadened Hughes’ appreciation of the black experience in Spanish America” (3).¹

Beyond all of the scholarship and accolades, Laurence was a kind and giving person, always willing to mentor young scholars. I remember that as I was completing my Ph.D., I e-mailed him with questions about Manuel Zapata Olivella. Although we had never met, and I was not a known scholar, he graciously replied, and let me know that I could reach out whenever I needed help or guidance. I was honored to finally meet him in person at ALARA’s 2004 conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Not only did he make me feel welcome, but he also made a point of talking to other young scholars and new ALARA members to make sure they felt welcomed.

Laurence was a great mentor to me throughout my career, lending me his support and guidance as I navigated the tenure track. He also became a friend, and we corresponded often about our families and

everyday life. When my mom fell ill, he checked in periodically to find out how she was doing. When she passed away, he sent me a lovely handwritten letter, which I still have, expressing his condolences.

Laurence was also a devoted husband and father. He often spoke fondly of his wife and children. When he retired, he expressed his excitement to me about finally being able to regularly attend his children’s many extra-curricular activities, and he would update me now and then about their activities and accomplishments with great pride.

Many of us will miss Dr. Laurence Prescott, the Professor and scholar, but as I choke up trying to write this, I will conclude by saying, I will also miss Laurence, my mentor and friend.

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¹ Laurence Prescott. “We, Too, Sing America’: The Friendship and Literary Correspondence of Langston Hughes and Manuel Zapata Olivella.” XIV Biennial Conference of the Association of Colombianists. Denison University, Granville, Ohio. August 3-6, 2005.