From: *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 27.1 (Spring 2007 [2008]): 7-10.
Copyright © 2008, The Cervantes Society of America.
http://www.h-net.org/~cervantes/csa/artics07/cruzs07.pdf

Remembering Carroll Johnson

Anne Cruz

The news that Carroll Johnson had suffered a stroke and was hospitalized and in a coma reached me from friends in California. It was followed by another, more anguished call that Carroll had died at Resurrection Hospital in Chicago. The brief irony, one that Carroll would have relished, of knowing he was interned in Resurrection Hospital, named the same as that of Cervantes's novela "El casamiento engañoso," was immediately eclipsed by the unimaginable shock of his passing. The news spread swiftly among the community of Golden Age scholars: Carroll, the epitome of Cervantine wisdom and humor, had had no time to write us with one foot in the stirrup; he had had no time to communicate his thoughts to his family and friends knowing he would soon leave us. Instead, we were left clutching at memories, straining to think of the first time we met, and then, as the unrelenting truth sank in, slowly recreating the conferences and reunions when we last heard him speak, and pacing our pain as we again read from the vast array of his articles and books.

It was through his publications that I first met Carroll—in a brilliant article on the *Buscón*, he revealed the converso background of the Coronel family, forever changing our interpretation of Quevedo's picaresque novel. In a ground-breaking analysis of the *Guzmán de Alfarache*, he entered "inside" the fragmented mind of a literary *pícaro*. And in his infamous *Madness and Lust*, he proposed the scandalous notion that Don Quixote's adventures were due to his wish to distance himself from his incestuous desire for his niece. Carroll's portrayal of Cervantes's

protagonist as a middle-aged man suffering from a conflicted attraction to his nubile relative was roundly rejected by some scholars, who flatly denied that fictional characters might reflect real anxieties. Their negativity proved both unfortunate and unwise, because the flap their criticism created overshadowed, at least for a while, Carroll's impressive analysis of the proto-psychologist Juan Huarte de San Juan's theories and how they might applied to the knight as well as to real people. Refusing to accept his critics' attacks on what they considered his misreading of fiction, Carroll drove with California plates that defiantly read "SOBRINA."

I next met Carroll through his signature: a letter of evaluation for my tenure case at UC-Irvine, which I was permitted to read redacted, still showed the four loops of the "C," the two "l"s and the "J" of his name, or so I thought. The letter, which came at a crucial time in my academic career, gave me the opportunity, when I finally met him in person at his beloved UCLA, to approach and thank him for his charitable view of my past and future projects. I was struck at how right my friends were who found him to resemble Don Quixote—he not only wrote on the knight, he actually looked like him. And at times, he also behaved like him: at that first meeting, he seemed serious, aloof, and uncomfortable as I explained how my clever detective work assuredly revealed his hand in the deliberations. A consummate professional, Carroll never admitted to having had any part in my case. Instead, he taught me an important lesson in discretion.

It would take many conversations on our mutual interests for me to discover that Carroll was not aloof, but shy—and that he was not at all serious, but gifted with a sly sense of humor. In his writings, Carroll's droll wit often shared the pages with his keen observations. In the archly-titled article "Of Witches and Bitches," he warned us not to be taken in by an idealistic belief in the "Coloquio de los perros"' feminism, calling on the historical record to set us straight: "But before we get too carried away with the idea of witches as women of power who offer an alternative to patriarchy, we should recall the facts as reported in the Inquisition documents" (20). On my complaint in our co-edition *Cervantes and his Postmodern Constituencies* that official Cervantes studies remained a bastion of male privilege, he punctiliously reported in his Introduction that of the thirteen contributors to our volume, "five (or 38%) were women" (xiv).

While at times bemused by us, Carroll strongly supported feminist scholars, whether as his colleagues or as his students. He understood the social and political reasoning behind feminist criticism, even as he accepted the fallibilities of his own gender. In the article "La sexualidad en el *Quijote*," he was quick to recognize Marcela's independence and autonomy in *Don Quixote*, as her flight into the woods not only freed her from Grisóstomo, it restored her control over her own life. Switching interpretive gears, he then compared Marcela's life to Don Quixote, in that she likely fled unconsciously from her uncle, and ended the article by introspectively analyzing himself: "mi lectura psicoanalítica de la infrahistoria sexual de Marcela puede ser, al menos en parte, una función de mi propia identidad sexual, que incluye una predisposición, que comparto con los autores del Génesis, de culpar a las mujeres por los trastornos del orden" (132).

Although Carroll aimed his deprecation solely at himself, a well-placed sentence in his book reviews could just as easily slice through an author's self-importance. Yet, as a scholar who gladly accepted criticism and enjoyed debate with a view towards advancing discussions rather than assuaging egos, he was genuinely surprised and disheartened when his remarks, which he directed always at the work, were instead taken personally by an offended colleague. Fortunately for us, the few negative responses occasioned by his candor did not keep him from challenging the divide of Cervantes studies into "correct" and "deviant" methodologies or from lamenting the growing chasm between Spanish and American Cervantistas, a trend he found extremely worrisome (xi).

In *Cervantes and the Material World*, Carroll's innovative study on the materialist versus the humanist import of Cervantes's fiction, which I was elated to publish as the inaugural volume of my series "Hispanisms" with the University of Illinois Press, Carroll eloquently communicated his increasingly firm belief in the need to historicize literature. The afterword contains his most thoughtful and sincere expression of the role of history in teaching literature, and of his own role as a scholar and teacher:

> Like all literature, the stories, plays, and poems written by Cervantes and his contemporaries are the products of, and engage in a living

> dialogue with, all the institutions and forces of the society in which they were produced and read. As an educator I have a responsibility to my students to make them aware of that dialectic of text and context, so they can have some idea of what the authors were doing and what the texts meant when they were produced. And this obligation is the more compelling the more similarities I come to perceive between that historical moment and ours, in terms of the problems confronted, the remedies proposed, the choices made, and the results obtained. We also need to explore the precise relations of text and context: how all of that influences literary production, how it shows up in literary texts, and how it is influenced by those same texts. There is also an obligation to share one's discoveries and ideas with one's professional peers, and to enter into a dialogue with them concerning the goals of our collective enterprise. (197–98)

Carroll met his obligations scrupulously: he was generous with his praise when he believed that praise was due. He patiently read through reams of papers and chapters by students and younger faculty, carefully noting our abundant mistakes and inconsistencies, and succinctly encouraging us on what he thought worthwhile. In his own work and courses, Carroll never failed to cite and recommend the work of his past masters who guided him through graduate school. I gratefully honor his example by recognizing his outstanding legacy to our field and his singular counsel to us as educators, and I extend my deepest sympathies to Leslie Johnson and the family for their irretrievable loss. They, more than anyone, know that *nessuno canterà con miglior plettro*.

Modern Languages and Literatures
University of Miami
Coral Gables, FL 33146
ajcruz@mail.as.miami.edu