

Aron David Kossoff (1918–1995)

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Aron David Kossoff, a well-known and fondly remembered emeritus professor of Hispanic Studies at Brown University, died peacefully at his home in Wareham, Massachusetts, on May 3, 1995. He is survived by his wife Ruth.

David Kossoff, as he preferred to be known, was born in 1918 in Hartford, Connecticut to Samuel and Ellin Kossoff, Yiddish-speaking immigrants from White Russia. His father, though first trained as a rabbi, was a pharmacist, and a popular figure in a working-class neighborhood. David attended Amherst College, majoring in French. Treatment for tuberculosis interrupted his studies, and he did not complete his B.A. until age 26, when he graduated *magna cum laude*. David was attracted to Brown by the reputation of William Fichter, a pioneer American Hispanist, student of Federico de Onís and the founder of Hispanic studies at Brown. Beginning in 1945 David began graduate studies in Spanish at Brown, a program and school of which he was an enthusiastic supporter for the rest of his life. He received the M.A. in 1947, with a thesis on “Characterization in Avellaneda’s *Don Quijote*,” and the Ph.D. in 1954. A revised version of his dissertation appeared as *Vocabulario poético de Herrera* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1966).

Dave, trained by the Lope editor Fichter, was in many ways a textual scholar, and created at Brown a course on the editing of Hispanic texts, which I had the good fortune to take. His work on the lexicon of Herrera—himself a textual scholar—was a tool by means of which to study the variants of that editorially complex author. Uncompleted projects, for which his work on Herrera’s poetic texts was preparation, were editions of Herrera’s *Algunas obras* and *Anotaciones a Garcilaso*, the latter the central work of literary scholarship of

the Spanish Renaissance. To this day it remains without a proper edition. He put his editorial skills in practice in his 1970 edition of two plays of Lope, *El castigo sin venganza* and *El perro del hortelano*.

A central component of David's thought during his last years was the prevalence of *conversos* among Golden Age writers. His controversial 1979 Fordham lecture, "Murmuración y linaje en Cervantes," is still unpublished. That Cervantes was a *converso* had been proposed by Américo Castro, but David went on to make this suggestion for Lope as well (in a deceptively titled article, "Fuentes de *El perro del hortelano* y una teoría de la España del Siglo de Oro," in *Estudios sobre literatura y arte dedicados al profesor Emilio Orozco Díaz* [Granada: Universidad de Granada, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1979], II, 209–13). It was therefore ironic, he remarked, that shortly after his retirement the Spanish government honored him with the Order of Isabel la Católica.

In 1947 David Kossoff met Ruth Nutt Horne by auditing a class of hers. She had also transferred from French (M.A., Brown, 1935) to Spanish, and had preceded David as a student of Fichter, writing a dissertation (1946) on "Lope de Vega's *Peregrino en su patria* and the Novel of Adventure in Spain," then continuing as an instructor at Brown. They married in 1948. David's appointment as an instructor at Brown occasioned the termination of her position under an anti-nepotism policy in force at the time. After years of part-time employment she eventually joined the faculty of the University of Rhode Island and was chairman of the foreign language department until shortly before her retirement in 1978.

The Kossoffs, happily married for forty-seven years, were not great travelers, other than attending AIH meetings and sabbatical trips to Spain. But they were enthusiastic hosts, and for some fifteen years held a weekly *tertulia* in their home in Providence, open to all Spanish students in the Providence area. After David's retirement in 1983 they moved permanently to what had been their weekend escape, Ruth's family home in Wareham, Massachusetts. There came a constant stream of professional and family visitors, on whom both David and Ruth thrived. They enlarged the small house repeatedly, one room at a time, until a chaotic but strangely pleasing and peaceful dwelling resulted. It was full

of books and art, especially paintings and sculptures of David's friend Pablo Serrano.

David and Ruth were modest and generous. This is seen first in their gifts to Brown, many unpublicized. He and Ruth set up and endowed two funds, one for library purchases and the other to provide financial assistance to graduate students in Spanish. He was constantly concerned with the Brown Spanish program, the welfare of its students, whom he said he truly enjoyed, and the supporting library collections. Also we find this selflessness in his editorial projects, to which he sacrificed his own research time, leaving a number of unpublished articles, the publication of which I am presently exploring. It was he who brought to Brown in 1983 the first U.S. meeting of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, a mammoth endeavor, the publication of whose proceedings occupied several of his and Ruth's years thereafter. While requesting that he not have one, and that donations to the Brown University Library be made instead, he was central to the publication of the homage volumes to his professors William L. Fichter and Juan López-Morillas. His last publishing venture, a facsimile edition of a beloved *Vocabulario* of Cristóbal de Las Casas (Madrid: Istmo, 1988), was intended to raise money for library purchases.

David Kossoff is remembered by those who knew him for an inner glow, a calm, cheery disposition and optimism that sustained him through problems and his final illnesses. He was no complainer, and believed that life had been good to him. Antonio Vilanova called him, in 1989, "un santo convertido en persona," a saint in the flesh, "en aquel humildísimo despacho de Marston Hall."