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IN MEMORIAM: DAVID WILLIAM FOSTER

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## In memoriam: David William Foster

Emily Hind<sup>1</sup>

The loss of our beloved colleague, David William Foster, leaves us with the enduring contribution of his mentoring legacy and an almost incredible amount of groundbreaking publications. The staggering quantity and quality of books, articles, translations, and reviews that Professor Foster wrote over some fifty years helps us to think about LGBTQ and Jewish themes in a sweeping range of Latin American texts, from print literature to film to photographs, and shows especially profound expertise in cultural production issuing from Brazil and Argentina. Of course, pages upon pages of information about this bibliography can be found in other sources. Here, I would like to celebrate David William Foster's tireless editing energy and his warm collegiality.

In 2018, I asked a beaming Professor Foster where he found so much energy. We were standing in a hotel lobby before a conference event in Irvine, California, and he glowed with kindness and grins in a way that made me wonder if there might be a secret source of this radiant good will. He told me that as a child, his mother would carve out a respite for herself and escape

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his unstoppable life force even if for just a little while, by locking him in the closet. For less joyful narrators, this anecdote might have led to ruminations on childhood trauma, but for Professor Foster this story was delightful. He recounted the anecdote with contagious laughter. His rich humor regarded the marvels of his own hyperintelligence and kinetic enthusiasm with the same sense of admiration that I felt: David knew how to be a gracious celebrity intellectual.

I never studied under Professor Foster or worked by his side at the same university, and yet I came to know him as an empathetic world citizen and superior human being over email, as I coordinated the book reviews for the journal he edited, *Chasqui*. Wherever Professor Foster traveled, he answered email, and even at home in Arizona, he always seemed to be about to leave for or return from Brazil or Argentina. His answers to email came almost as fast as I could send them, and to share this bubbling creativity and warmth, I select the following excerpts drawn from his correspondence to me. Should one wonder what David thought about parenting, politics, or deadlines, the following will serve as illumination.

Here is a comment from David about having a child: “Having a son was the best thing I ever did in my life. (I’d say the same thing if it were a daughter, but David Raúl just happens to be of the dude persuasion)” (from January 13, 2019).

Here is David’s parenting advice from an email sent the next day, in the main about literature, but also recommending a certain style of authority: “Just relax and have fun. My son is 43 now and a deputy prosecuting criminal attorney, but I still view him as just a great little tyke!” (January 14, 2019).

As the fraught social politics and environmental conditions of Arizona took their toll on him, Professor Foster kept his sense of humor, even for a fast email reply: “Meanwhile, it’s hot here, with forest fires and noxious politics—the usual Arizona clime” (June 8, 2019).

On August 22, 2019, David further explained his thoughts on the troubles in Arizona that inevitably vexed a specialist in social justice:

One of the many diversions in my life, especially here on the border in Arizona, is preparing expert witness testimonies for refugees requesting humanitarian exile for sexual reasons. It is

my way of fulfilling the Jewish commandment (the zero one on the tablets) of doing good in the world. I'm happy to say that, all of the shitty rhetoric of the administration aside, we usually win because the judges are sane (remember that word) administrators of humane justice. I have a Belgian lesbian coming up for a hearing. (That's an easy one: Guatemalan lesbian rights could not be a starker oxymoron) but it does take time to write it up. SO it may be a few days before you hear from me about any queries.

Lest I give the impression that David would conclude an email with such a frightening note of caution, please read his actual last sentence—a commandment of sorts, perhaps not “commandment zero” that I cited in a previous quotation, but not so trivial as to be worth omitting:

*Keep the sass up!*

The above exhortation seems to me worthy of printing for my office wall, but it is hard to choose just one message as the best. David wrote email as kindly, quickly, and thoughtfully as he completed all the other genres. On the same day as the above message, on August 22, 2019, he completed the business for *Chasqui* and returned to the social justice work in Arizona, adding:

It does help me sleep better at night—especially when we win. You should see the look on the gubernint lawyer's faces when the judges rule in our favor. They all look like they were cloned in a secret lab in the basement of the Hoover building.

Quoting these emails does not give a sense of the depth of David's work of course, because in the first place they circumvent the less humorous but no less feisty writing that Professor Foster had done for the attachments that he sent, often with unusually lengthy and important book reviews. For example, on October 29, 2019 Professor Foster contacted me about a review he wrote on *eighteen* books in the same essay, all treated with depth and brio. Simply receiving a book review essay on *eighteen* books in a single shot surely set the most memorable length for any review that I will handle for *Chasqui*. Professor Foster never seemed to flag under such onerous, self-assigned workloads.

Less than a month later, David wrote to announce travel plans, including a stop in Argentina, where he promised to drink orange juice in my honor at the St. Moritz, in Buenos Aires (“Tomaremeos un jugo de naranja en tu honor en el St. Moritz”) (November 24, 2019).

In another email exchanged during the pandemic shutdown, David winks cheerfully, “I seem to be, so far, leading my life of a Carmelite nun” (May 6, 2020). One day later, in seeming transcendence of the immense number of books he was slated to review for *Chasqui* and other venues, reading lists that obeyed systematic topic clusters, he rejoiced: “I’m simply enjoying the luxury of reading randomly.” In the next breath, Professor Foster elegantly reassured me that falling behind with a deadline wouldn’t matter in the long run: “We are running late for the May issue anyway. In the *longue durée* of intellectual work, no one will even notice” (May 7, 2020).

David William Foster was an immensely positive, loving, good-humored colleague and a dazzling intellectual. I never saw him show exhaustion. I never saw him lose his cool—or his warmth. I miss his wit in and affection in my inbox. We have lost one of the greats.