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*‘Who? Me. A Memoir’*  
Donald Leslie Shaw (1930–2017)

DAVID T. GIES  
*University of Virginia*

&

ANN L. MACKENZIE  
*University of Glasgow*

Donald Leslie Shaw was a unique force in Hispanic Studies. No one who came in contact with him was likely to forget his ability to enlighten, provoke, entertain, shock and challenge one to think more deeply and more broadly about literature. He took great delight in his ability to ‘épater la bourgeoisie’ (and anyone else within hearing range) and was notoriously frugal (he cut his own hair to save money). He loudly proclaimed his ‘hate’ for certain individuals (the list changed periodically, but often included his mother, E. A. Peers, W. C. Atkinson, P. E. Russell, and the American co-author of this remembrance), but was fiercely devoted to his wife Mariella, his children Andrew and Sylvia, and his students. He was certainly one of the most enthusiastically non-politically correct figures ever to populate British and American higher education.

Don was born on 11 February 1930, in Manchester, where he studied at Stand Grammar School and the University of Manchester (which locals still called ‘Owens’), where he earned his first-class honours BA in French and Spanish. At Manchester, having secured a postgraduate scholarship, he began to study the work of Pío Baroja, the subject of his Master’s thesis, and from that stage developed a deep interest in the theme of ‘angustia’ in modern Spanish letters. His researches for his thesis took him to Spain, and to Madrid, where, to his delight, he interviewed Baroja several times, discussions which, as a young researcher, he found invaluable. His research MA, ‘A Critical Assessment of Pío Baroja as a Novelist’, supervised by Margaret Raventós, of whom he had affectionate and positive memories, was awarded in 1954. Another significant influence at Manchester University was Luis Meana, to whom he was enduringly grateful for introducing him to Argentine literature, and, in particular, to Borges. He spent two years in the RAF (1953–1955), to comply with National Service requirements. He then took up his first academic post at Trinity College Dublin as a Junior (Assistant) Lecturer in the department headed by Edward Riley. By the time he completed his doctoral thesis on ‘*Angustia* in Some Modern Spanish Writers’ (awarded by TCD in 1961), he had moved

from TCD to his first tenured position, as lecturer in Spanish-American literature at the University of Glasgow (1957–1964).

Throughout his life, Donald had many stories to tell of his years as a lecturer at Glasgow University. Some of them are recounted in his unpublished memoirs. A toned-down summary is to be found in the pages he contributed, in 2007, to the article by Gustavo San Román on ‘The Rise of Modern Latin American Literary Studies in the UK: A Questionnaire to Early Practitioners’.<sup>1</sup> It is no secret that, while he soon became firm friends with Ivy McClelland whose scholarship he greatly admired, he did not get on with the Head of Department and Stevenson Professor of Hispanic Studies, William C. Atkinson. By the time Donald joined his staff, Atkinson, apart from a few years spent in Oxford, seconded to the Foreign Office during the Second World War, had been in charge of Hispanic Studies at Glasgow for twenty-five years. The two men, one aged twenty-seven, the other double that, could not have been more different in temperament and in their research interests and perspectives. Nevertheless, it was thanks to Atkinson that Donald found himself obliged to turn himself from a Hispanist exclusively concerned with Spain, its modern literature and culture into an internationally influential specialist in Spanish America. Atkinson had expanded the curriculum of his department to include the UK’s first full Honours Degree in Latin American Studies, and he had appointed Donald to devise, prepare and teach no fewer than three Honours courses on Spanish American Literature, History and Thought, from the origins to the present day! As Donald said himself: ‘It took most of six years to get on top of what Atkinson had commanded me to mug up’.<sup>2</sup> By the time he had done so, while he was still eager to publish on modern Spanish literature, he was also becoming committed to research on the literature of Spanish America, a notable expansion of his scholarly interests not unconnected with the changes which took place in his personal circumstances while he was at Glasgow. As Don liked to tell his undergraduates at the time, once he had met, fallen in love with and married Mariella, and their son, then their daughter, had been born (life-changing events which happened before he left Glasgow for Edinburgh), he found that he could no longer believe with his previous fervour in the *angustia* of human existence which had been the main focus of his doctoral thesis, and of early articles he derived from it. Don published quite a few articles during the Glasgow years, still mostly on

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1 See Donald L. Shaw, *Who? Me. A Memoir* (Charlottesville, 2001 [unpublished]; original text kindly made available by Don’s daughter, Sylvia). For San Román’s article, see *Latin American Studies in the UK*, ed., with an intro., by William Rowe, Luis Rebaza-Soraluz & Claudio Canaparo, *BSS*, LXXXIV:4–5 (2007), 447–94 (see pp. 465–67).

2 Shaw, *Who? Me. A Memoir*, 50–51 & 54.

Spanish literature (especially Baroja);<sup>3</sup> but by 1961, he was writing his first pieces on Spanish American literature, and an article on the theatre of Villaurrutia appeared in 1962.<sup>4</sup>

In 1964, Don was attracted to a lectureship, mainly in Spanish-American Studies, with a higher salary, newly established at the University of Edinburgh, where he rose in rank (1964–1986) from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer, to Reader, and, finally, from 1979, to Professor. It was at Edinburgh where he met two scholars who had a profound influence on his life and career: the man who was at that time the dominant presence in Hispanism in the UK, Professor A. A. (Alec) Parker and Don's colleague and lifelong friend, Javier S. Herrero. Don found Alec Parker a complete contrast to William Atkinson, both personally and professionally. Parker specialized, of course, in Golden-Age literature, theatre and culture, so his research interests and Don's were very different. It was perhaps no coincidence, however, that it was while he was at Edinburgh that Don published his few pieces of research into Early Modern Spain, and especially his fine scholarly edition of Malvezzi's *Historia de Felipe IV*.<sup>5</sup>

Gies first discovered the acuity of Don's mind in the early-to-late 1960s when he began to read Don's studies on Spanish Romanticism and the then so-called Generation of 1898.<sup>6</sup> These articles are still models of scholarly clarity, documentation, and originality, and they attracted several generations of scholars to the field. Don's ability to synthesize complex issues and recast them in clear, non-jargon-ridden prose, marked his interests and writing style. Several years later, his masterful *A Literary History of Spain: The Nineteenth Century* (1972) appeared to wide acclaim, and has been translated, reprinted and updated repeatedly over the years (it is currently in its 14th edition in Spanish). Three years later, his *The Generation of 1898 in Spain* appeared, and has likewise been translated and published in multiple editions.<sup>7</sup>

Donald Shaw began to take an interest in Latin American literature at a time when it was still a relatively new discipline in the UK. By the mid

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3 See, for instance, his first article 'The Concept of Ataraxia in the Later Novels of Baroja', *BHS*, XXXIV:1 (1957), 29–36; 'A Reply to *deshumanización*: Baroja on the Art of the Novel', *Hispanic Review*, 25:2 (1957), 105–11; and 'Humorismo and *angustia* in Modern Spanish Literature', *BHS*, XXV:3 (1958), 165–76.

4 See Shaw, 'Pasión y verdad en el teatro de Villaurrutia', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 28:54 (1962), 337–46.

5 Virgilio Malvezzi, *Historia de los primeros años del reinado de Felipe IV*, edición y estudio preliminar, por D. L. Shaw (London: Tamesis, 1968).

6 See, for instance, Donald L. Shaw, 'Towards the Understanding of Spanish Romanticism', *MLR*, 58:2 (1963), 190–95; 'The Anti-Romantic Reaction in Spain', *MLR*, 63:3 (1968), 606–11; 'Ganivet's *España filosófica contemporánea* and the Interpretation of the Generation of 1898', *Hispanic Review*, 28:3 (1960), 220–32.

7 See Donald L. Shaw, *A Literary History of Spain: The Nineteenth Century* (London: Ernest Benn/New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972); *The Generation of 1898 in Spain* (London: Ernest Benn/New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975).

1960s, he was writing masterful overviews of ‘Spanish American Literature’ for the *Year’s Work in Modern Language Studies*.<sup>8</sup> This interest intensified over the years, and produced many books and editions; but it would be Borges who would remain the chief focus of much of his intellectual energy for the rest of his life. Don met Borges in 1967, while he (Don, not Borges) was visiting professor at Brown University, a meeting that stimulated the publication of his Critical Guide to *Borges’ Ficciones* (1976), *Borges’ Narrative Strategy* (1992), and numerous articles and book chapters on the great Argentine story-teller.<sup>9</sup> Don’s restless mind continued searching for meaning in Spanish and Latin American literature. He moved from the Boom to the Post-Boom, from Mallea and Borges to Gallegos and Skármeta, from Sabato to Isabel Allende. He wrote incessantly, obsessively, joyfully. Other titles in Latin American literature include *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana: boom, posboom, posmodernismo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1981; rewritten and expanded in 1999; currently in its 9<sup>th</sup> edition), *Alejo Carpentier* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985), *Antonio Skármeta and the Post-Boom* (Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1994), *The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998), *A Companion to Modern Spanish American Fiction* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2001), and *Beyond the Vanguard: Spanish American Poetry after 1950* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008).

He read voraciously. No student or colleague remained untouched by Don’s generosity and speed-reading skills. We gave him drafts of articles, book typescripts, incipient editions of texts and (literally) ‘de la noche a la mañana’ he returned them with dozens of perceptive comments, corrections, encouraging observations and, yes, some rude remarks.

The invitations to serve as Visiting Professor at Brown University (1967), the University of Stirling (1976–78) and the University of Virginia (1983) encouraged him to make a major move to the latter institution in 1986. He had become less contented than previously in Edinburgh. He got on well with Edward Riley, who had succeeded Alec Parker in the Chair of Spanish, the latter having moved to the University of Pittsburgh in 1968

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8 See, for instance, Donald L. Shaw, ‘Spanish American Literature: The Colonial Period’, *YWMLS*, 26 (1964), 281–82; ‘Spanish American Literature: The Twentieth Century’, *YWMLS*, 27 (1965), 263–70; ‘Spanish American Literature: The Twentieth Century’, *YWMLS*, 28 (1966), 281–95. There were many others to follow on this same topic, published every year in the same series in the *YWMLS* between 1967 and 2000.

9 See Donald L. Shaw, *Borges: Ficciones*. A Critical Guide (London: Tamesis/Grant & Cutler, 1976; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised & updated, 1992); *Borges’ Narrative Strategy*, Liverpool Monographs in Hispanic Studies (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1992). See also, for instance, ‘Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*’, in *Landmarks in Modern Latin American Fiction*, ed. Philip Swanson (London: Routledge, 1990), 27–49; ‘*Manomètre* (1922–28) and Borges’s First Publications in France’, *Romance Notes*, 36:1 (1995), 27–34; ‘Two Borges Essay Manuscripts in the University of Virginia Collection: “La Cábala” and “Flaubert”’, *Review*, 37:1 (2004), 27–35

(where by then Javier Herrero was already teaching, and Gies took his Ph.D.), before ending up in Austin, Texas, in 1970. But he missed the company of both Alec and Javier Herrero. Moreover, Don's wife and children were no longer in the UK, but had already settled in Italy. His main reason for the move to the States, however, was that he knew if he remained in the UK he would be obliged to retire within ten perhaps even within five years; for, in the 1980s, many academics in Britain were being encouraged to retire early to make room for younger colleagues, who could be employed at a much lower salary. As Donald puts it bluntly in his memoir, the 'decisive issue was that there is no retirement age in the USA'.<sup>10</sup> Donald loved teaching, particularly postgraduate teaching and supervision. In the USA he could go on teaching and supervising well beyond the normal and, at the time, compulsory UK retirement age of sixty-five. Moreover, the States had the added attraction of having many more postgraduates to teach. From 1986 until his retirement in 2011, Don was the Brown-Forman Professor of Spanish American Literature (an endowed chair), teaching a wide range of courses to undergraduate and graduate students. There could be as many as fifty postgraduates at Virginia at any one time. He directed numerous doctoral dissertations and always encouraged his students to do better, research more, and then publish, publish, publish (putting 'another shovelful on the dung heap of academia', as he called published work, including his own, in typical Shavian fashion).

While in Virginia, Don reconnected with his identical twin (we repeat: identical twin) Ken, professor of Educational Sociology at the University of Exeter, who, until his death in 2007, visited Don regularly in Virginia. They had the particular sibling closeness that, it seems, only identical twins experience. It is an extraordinary but exact truth that in their late twenties, though living and working miles apart and meeting only infrequently, they had each contracted TB at the same time, and even in the same spot on the same lung—a serious illness from which, happily, they both recovered. Double-takes abounded when the two of them showed up for a party or a poetry reading, Don with his beloved bowler hat perched jauntily on his head.

Perhaps Don's greatest legacy was his love for, and need of, his students. He told stories (oh, the stories—always creative, sometimes defamatory, frequently hilarious, amusingly salacious, at times even true) that enthralled students. He craved an audience, and the students willingly gathered around him in his office and at conferences to hear him spin yarns of the past. No one does not have a 'Donald Shaw' story of his or her own, and often more than one (more likely, more than a dozen). His typescript autobiography, *Who? Me. A Memoir* (2001) deserves to be published, but a good guess is that legal vetting would reduce it by half.

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10 Shaw, *Who? Me. A Memoir*, 88.

Blessed with good health into old age, Donald Shaw had an enviably extended and productive career, which lasted until in 2011, aged eighty-one, he retired from the University of Virginia and moved permanently to Italy, to spend his last years with his family in Bologna, where, without access to libraries relevant for his researches, he could no longer easily accept, as he had done previously the quite numerous invitations which still came, asking him to contribute to this or that special issue of a journal or this or that *Festschrift*. In turning down one such invitation from the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* he replied: 'I am not writing or researching here. I have no facilities, and no will, at 83. Even if I wanted to, I could not contribute anything scholarly'. He ended: 'Please do not take this amiss. *BSS* has meant a lot to me over the years'.<sup>11</sup>

But if his academic career ended there, his legacy to Hispanism lives on. Through his inspirational teaching during well over fifty years he turned numerous students both in the British Isles and in the United States into career Hispanists and Latin Americanists. The students, who included, in the UK, Robin Fiddian, James Higgins, Ann Mackenzie, John McIntyre, Gerald Martin, Giovanni Pontiero, Philip Swanson, John Walker and Edwin Williamson, and, in the USA, Kathryn Bowers, Susan Carvalho, Raquel Chiquillo, Joan Clifford, J. Alyce Cook, Vanessa Guibert Heitner, Alex Constanza Holland, Iana Konstantinova, Linda Maier, Hugo Méndez Ramírez, Eugenia Muñoz, Patricia Reagan, Miguel Rivera, Bruce Dean Willis, Jason Wilson, and many others. It was his former students and colleagues, most notably at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh in the UK, and at Brown University and especially at the University of Virginia in the USA, together with his admirers and collaborators worldwide, who ensured that Donald enjoyed the public recognition he deserved by their contributions to two admirable *Festschriften*. The first, *Studies in Modern Hispanic Literatures in Honour of Donald L. Shaw*, primarily a British initiative, co-edited by Robin W. Fiddian and C. Alex Longhurst, was published in 2005 as a Special Double Issue of the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*,<sup>12</sup> to which Donald had contributed articles and reviews for nearly half a century, besides acting as peer-assessor of numerous submitted articles, in his long-serving capacity as a member of its Editorial Advisory Committee.<sup>13</sup> The other *Festschrift*, edited from the University of Kentucky by his former student at the University of Virginia, Susan Carvalho, was mainly an American tribute, and appeared in 2006 under the

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11 Email exchanges between Donald Shaw and Ann L. Mackenzie, dated between 9 May and 20 May 2013 (see, for the quoted extract, Shaw to Mackenzie, 10 May 2013).

12 *Studies in Modern Hispanic Literatures in Honour of Donald L. Shaw*, ed. with an intro., by Robin W. Fiddian & C. Alex Longhurst, *BSS*, LXXXII:3–4 (2005).

13 Donald was invited to join the *Bulletin's* Editorial Committee in 1976.

title *Modernisms and Modernities: Studies in Honor of Donald L. Shaw*.<sup>14</sup> Both these Homage Volumes are evidence of the affection and esteem which Donald's students and colleagues felt for him. Justly acknowledged to be one of the greatest British Hispanists of our era, and passionate about the people and things that mattered to him, as 'scholar, teacher and mentor, Donald Shaw has earned the gratitude of many',<sup>15</sup> all of whom surely have rejoiced to learn that late into the night before he died he was still lucidly discussing literature with his daughter, Sylvia.

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14 See *Modernisms and Modernities: Studies in Honor of Donald L. Shaw*, ed. & intro. by Susan Carvalho (Newark, Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta, 2006).

15 See Robin W. Fiddian & C. Alex Longhurst, 'Introduction' to *Studies in Modern Hispanic Literatures in Honour of Donald L. Shaw*, ed. Fiddian & Longhurst, 289–93 (p. 293).