



Joseph H. Silverman: 1924–1989

Professor of Literature, UC Santa Cruz and UC Los Angeles; Provost of Adlai E. Stevenson College,

“Joseph H. Silverman, Literature: Santa Cruz”

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Our dear friend and colleague, Joseph H. Silverman, died on March 23, 1989, at Santa Cruz, California, after a long and heroic battle with cancer. He was 64 years old. Joe was born in the Bronx, New York, on October 15, 1924. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from City College of New York, earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Southern California, and did advanced studies at the Universities of Mexico, Madrid, and UC Berkeley. He taught at the University of Southern California and at the Los Angeles and Santa Cruz campuses of the University of California. From 1974 to 1981, he was provost of Adlai E. Stevenson College at Santa Cruz and, from 1983 to 1985, he directed the University of California's Education Abroad Program in Madrid.

Joe was an eminently learned man. His major concerns were with Spanish Golden Age literature (particularly the *comedia* and the picaresque novel), with the role of converts from Judaism in Spanish life, culture and letters, and--in over 30 years of collaboration with Samuel G. Armistead and Israel J. Katz--with the traditional literature of the modern Sephardic Jews. But Joe's interests were by no means limited to these fields; they were far-ranging and variegated. His knowledge of Spanish and Spanish American literature--and of other literatures too--was prodigious. He was also passionately concerned with truth and justice, and his bibliography includes several contributions to newspapers in the United States and in Spain pertaining to political and other human issues. The list of his publications totals over 300 items, including books, articles and reviews.

As a public lecturer, Joe Silverman was spellbinding. As a teacher, he was unique. To attend one of his classes was to experience teaching at its very best: a presentation, scrupulously prepared in every detail, but, at the same time, spontaneous, dynamic, and humanized at the least expected moment by some inimitable, irrepressible, mischievous--even outrageous--comment, or a humorous comparison, that would bring some feature of the distant past into a modern, everyday perspective, actualize it and make it more real and immediate to his listeners. As a colleague, Joe was always the painstakingly careful reader of his peers' work, providing abundant editorial comments and letters of reference readily. Whether as a member of a committee or of a task force, or at weekly meetings, he was both the consummate professional and the pun maker. His marvelous sense of humor was legendary. But, for many of us who knew and worked with Joe in professional terms, in addition to his great learning, his sensitivity to literary problems, and his superb teaching, one of his extraordinary characteristics was what can only be called his wisdom; his unerring capacity to know what was right in professional and in human terms. We can point not only to his long and successful service as provost of Stevenson College, but also to innumerable personal kindnesses, invaluable advice, and unfailing help to colleagues and friends throughout this country and in Europe and Israel as well. And this brings us to an essential aspect of his character: his compassion, his caring, his humanity. After his initial recovery, three years ago, Joe took time to visit others who had been struck by cancer, to talk with them, to comfort them, to share his feelings and his experiences with them, to try to make it better.

There is a venerable and marvelous Jewish tradition, to the effect that there are just 36 *tsaddikim*, 36 truly righteous men, whose presence, whose intervention, sustains the world. They are called *lamedvavniks*, after the Hebrew letters that represent the number 36. Unrecognized by each other, it is they, with their goodness and their compassion, who sustain civilization and who hold society together. We are quite sure that Joe Silverman must be counted among them.

Samuel G. Armistead, Murray Baumgarten, Israel J. Katz, Marta Morello Frosch, Joseph V. Ricipito