



IN MEMORIAM

Alfred Arteaga
Professor of Chicano Studies
UC Berkeley
1950 – 2008

Alfred Arteaga (May 2, 1950- July 4, 2008), professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, was a respected and well-loved colleague and teacher. He was recognized by his peers as both a gifted intellectual and a gifted poet. He was born and raised in Los Angeles. He received an M.F.A. in creative writing from the School of the Arts at Columbia University in 1974. In 1975, he received a First Chicano Literary Prize for his poetry, and from then until his death, published his poetry and translations of poetry in a wide range of literary reviews, both in the United States and abroad. He is regarded as a foundational Chicano, that is, Mexican- American, literary figure, as both intellectual and poet.

In 1984, he received his M.A. in literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and his Ph.D. in 1987. His doctoral dissertation was titled “Language, Discourse, Sign: Reading Dialogisms in the Texts of Shakespeare and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.” He served as assistant professor of English at the University of Houston from 1987 through 1990. In the spring of 1989, he served as director of the Texan Universities London Program. In 1990, he was appointed assistant professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley. He was denied recommendation for tenure in that department in 1998, but the faculty of the Department of Ethnic Studies recommended promotion to associate professorship in recognition of his innovative scholarship in Chicana/ o literary studies. The University of California, Berkeley, approved promotion to associate professor with tenure in 1998. In 2008, shortly before his death, he was pleased to have received promotion to full professor.

His first book was a collection of poetry, *Cantos* (Chusma House Publications, 1991). His second, published in 1994, was an internationally acclaimed anthology of essays, *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in Linguistic Borderlands* (Duke University Press) that featured internationally recognized intellectuals Gayatri Spivak, Tzvetan Todorov, Jean Luc Nancy, Edmundo Desnoes, and his then- University of California, Berkeley, colleagues, Norma Alarcón, and David Lloyd.

In 1997, he published an important work of his own literary theory, *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities* (Cambridge University Press) and a collection of essays, *House with the Blue Bed* (Mercury House). From 1998 through 2006, he published three collections of poetry: *Love in the Time of Aftershocks* (Chusma House and Moving Parts Press, 1998), *Red* (Bilingual Press, 2000), and *Frozen Accident* (Tia Chucha Press, 2006). At the time of his death, his last collection of poetry, *Zero Act* (Cusp Books, 2008) was in press.

In addition to poems, interviews made of him, and his books, Professor Arteaga published anthology chapters, journal essays, working papers, and translations of the poetry of others. His scholarly and creative works were published in English, Spanish, and Italian, and translated into these languages as well as into Japanese and

German. He was recognized as a poet and an intellectual in France, Spain, Germany, Britain, and Japan, as well as in the United States. He was honored locally when his poetry was selected for inscription into the sidewalks of Addison Street in the City of Berkeley, in a project that was also edited into book form by Robert Haas and Jessica Fisher, *The Addison Street Anthology: Berkeley's Poetry Walk* (Heyday Books, 2004).

Trained at the doctoral level as a Renaissance- era scholar and yet himself a historic figure in the world of Chicana/ o letters, in his doctoral dissertation Professor Arteaga sought the continuities and resonances between two great minds of Renaissance Europe and colonial Mexico, William Shakespeare and the genial polymath nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Arteaga was interested in the complex coexistence of cultural differences that give rise to new “interlingual” forms and “intercultural” perspectives and discourses. It was thus a logical extension of his abiding intellectual concern with what is produced through cultural contact, in spite of cultural differences, to study the cultural, literary, and musical innovations of post-1965 Chicana/ o artists and intellectuals, of which he was one, as an exemplar of the rich linguistic and aesthetic hybridities of our own time.

His fascination with the linguistic, literary, and social theories of the great 20th century Russian theorist of the carnivalesque, the grotesque, heteroglossia, and the dialogical imagination, Mikhail Bakhtin, suggests the nature of Arteaga's own intellect, and the kind of depth and range that he admired and consistently worked at within his own literary theories, his scholarship, his pedagogy, and his poetry.

There is no question that Arteaga achieved something extraordinary and important in his last major work, *Frozen Accident*, written after his first and major heart attack and the six- week coma that followed it. He emerged from that fateful passage intellectually and spiritually renewed and focused, and staged this ambitious and accomplished cycle of poems in dialogue between pre- Columbian and modern (Wittgenstein) and post- structuralist European philosophies, echoing the works of the philosopher, poet, and prince of pre- Columbian Mexico, Nezahualcoyotl, that perhaps there is no better way to speak truth on this earthly plain than through “flower, song,” that is, poetry, for we, like life itself, are the Divine's own beautiful, if perishable, flower- like canto.

Among Arteaga's awards and honors were the First Chicano Literary Prize in 1974 for his poetry; the Irvine Chicano Literary Prize: Cenzontle in 1988; a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship from 1993 to 1994; a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Creative Writing and Poetry in 1995; and a PEN Oakland / Josephine Miles Writing Award in 1998.

He lectured broadly in the United States, and also in Spain, England, Mexico, Japan, Germany, New Zealand, England, Canada, and France. In the United States, he was invited to present his scholarly work at Yale University, University of Houston, New York University, Brown University, Cornell University, Emory University, University of California, San Diego, University of Illinois, Champaign- Urbana, and of course, University of California, Berkeley.

He was an avid world traveler, a polyglot, a musician, and had recently created a short video, *Habana Vieja*, with Yaumaris Leyva Roble (2002).

Professor Arteaga's scholarly and poetic work was reviewed in distinguished journals and he, in turn, served as a reviewer of scholarly journals and of poetry book manuscripts for the University of Iowa's distinguished Contemporary North American Poetry Series.

As a teacher, Professor Arteaga enriched the ethnic studies graduate and undergraduate curricula with humanities offerings in the arts and theory. He taught graduate courses in contemporary literary theory, on the textual expression of nation and ethnicity, on cultural studies and art, and was avidly sought for his undergraduate and graduate courses in creative writing. He also taught innovative cultural studies courses focused on Chicano or Mexican- American music, in addition to Chicana/ o literature courses.

Alfred Arteaga was fortunate to have been able to achieve recognition as an intellectual and a poet from some of the foremost luminaries of our day and to have been loved by many for his warmth, his collegiality, his caring mentorship, his commitment to social justice, his selfless departmental and University service, and his lack of pretension, while nonetheless being a truly erudite and a subtle, serious, highly intelligent and creative man.

Professor Arteaga suffered a major heart attack in 1999, which seriously debilitated him and from which he never fully recovered. His great zest for life remained untouched, however, as he continued to travel throughout the world, as his health allowed, and he commenced and completed what may be his most enduring work, the compendium of his philosophical and aesthetic coda, *Frozen Accident*. He suffered a second heart attack in 2005, and after numerous fundraisers organized by his daughters and many friends, he traveled to Thailand for an extremely costly experimental stem cell procedure that was highly successful, if only temporarily so. He felt himself fortunate, and was profoundly moved, to have witnessed the large number of people who cared for him, including University of California, Berkeley, faculty, students, and administrators, who participated in the many fundraisers that enabled him to travel abroad for medical treatment. Professor Arteaga died peacefully, while hospitalized, in July of 2008. He was buried, according to his wishes, in the charming seaside village of Pescadero, California, in a hillside cemetery, overlooking a beautiful green valley.

Alfred Arteaga was a devoted and proud father and is survived by his three daughters, Marisol, Xochitl, and Mireya Arteaga; two grandchildren; his sisters, Tisa Reeves and Rebecca Olsen; his mother, Lillian Wilding; and his ex- wife, Paula Contreras.

Laura E.

Pérez
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