
OBITUARIO / OBITUARY

Edna Aizenberg: An Obituary for a Colleague and a Friend

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My most recent conversations with Edna revolved around Zionism, the fascination of early Zionist leaders with the possibility of resettling Jews in Argentina and, more specifically, Eshkol Nevo's novel *Neuland*. The book's protagonist is forced to leave his wife and daughter in order to fly to South America in search of his father who has been reported missing. There, he meets with a woman who has impulsively fled Israel due to a loveless relationship and the grief at the loss of her brother. The novel highlights Israelis searching for new meaning and exploring the meaning of homeland. Parts of our conversations are reflected in Edna's most recent article, "Jewish Gauchos on the Mediterranean: How Alberto Gerchunoff Met Eshkol Nevo," published posthumously in *Chasqui: Revista de literatura latinoamericana* 47.1 (2018).

Like all previous conversations with Edna, we did not agree on many issues. But I was always impressed by her intellectual curiosity, her ability to listen, and her academic and moral compass which allowed her to embrace new approaches to the study of Jewish experience in Latin America. Unlike many scholars of her generation, she was bold in challenging common assumptions. This was probably what brought us together in the first place, back in the 1990s. Coming from different backgrounds and different disciplines, we quickly found a common language. Based on mutual respect, and despite our different standpoints, what began as collegial conversations soon became a profound friendship and a productive academic collaboration.

It was Edna's idea to try and revitalize LAJSA with a joint presidency. I was somewhat hesitant about it, but Edna knew well how to convince skeptics and we went ahead and presented our joint candidacy for LAJSA's presidency. Together, I would like to believe, we were able to inject renewed impetus into

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LAJSA, attract younger members in North and South America, as well as in Israel, and incorporate LAJSA and Jewish themes in other scholarly associations, such as AJS or LASA.

For many years, Edna served as a member of the international editorial board of Tel Aviv University's journal of Latin American studies, *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*. The two of us co-edited a special issue, entitled: "Going Beyond, Going Against: New Studies of Jewish Latin Americans" (2012), in which we tried to map out new areas in Jewish Latin American historiography and cultural studies, and illustrate the vitality and innovative quality of contemporary scholarship in this field.

Edna joined me in the editorial board of Brill's book series, Jewish Latin America: Issues and Methods, which is about to publish its 10th volume in a few weeks. This volume, *Splendor, Decline, and Rediscovery of Yiddish in Latin America*, co-edited by Alan Astro and Malena Chinsky, will complete our first "minyan" in this book series.

Edna also contributed to the volume I co-edited with Adriana Brodsky, *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone* (2013), with a pioneering article entitled, "The 'Other' Gerchunoff and the Visual Representation of the Shoa".

Edna Aizenberg's publications are of seminal importance to scholars of Jewish Latin America, ethnic studies, and diaspora studies. A preeminent scholar of the work of Jorge Luis Borges, her publications on other topics have also had significant impact. Among these are: *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing* (2002), *On the Edge of the Holocaust: The Shoah in Latin American Literature and Culture* (2015), and *Parricide on the Pampa?: A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's Los gauchos judíos* (2000; 2015).

I will miss Edna, her intellectual provocations that always challenged me, her constructive criticism, and her wise suggestions and comments.

I owe Edna a lot, many scholars of Jewish Latin America owe her a lot, LAJSA owes her a lot.