

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on October 19, 2004,
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Enrique Anderson-
Imbert was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

ENRIQUE ANDERSON-IMBERT

BORN: February 12, 1910

DIED: December 6, 2000

On December 6, 2000, the Harvard Faculty lost one of its most distinguished members, Professor Enrique Anderson-Imbert. He was born in Córdoba (Argentina) in 1910, studied at the Colegio Nacional of La Plata and entered the University of Buenos Aires when he was eighteen years old. There, at one of its best moments and under a definitely European spell, he studied philology and philosophy under the famous Pedro Henríquez Ureña and Alejandro Korn. He began his career as a lecturer at the University of Cuyo in 1940 and one year later at the University of Tucumán, but since his student years he had been drawn to journalism and started writing for the Buenos Aires daily *La Vanguardia*, and soon became the sole editor of its literary section. He served in this position for a long time, and here he established his reputation as a man of letters and literary critic. His call to writing was overwhelming, prevailing at first over scholarship, and never left him in his lifetime. Strongly attracted to fiction and the essay, he admired English authors like Bernard Shaw and Chesterton, as well as the Spaniards Unamuno, Gómez de la Serna, and Ortega y Gasset. In his own work, Anderson fought for a renewal of the Argentinian literary landscape, moving away from XIXth century realism to favor fantasy, intellectual depth, and a richer, more flexible language. In 1934 he published *Vigilia (A Vigil)*, his first novel, and three years later *La flecha en el aire (The Arrow in the Air)*, a collection of essays. Fascinated by the theory and techniques of the short story, his early literary output was enough to establish him as one of the founding fathers of the so-called “magic realism” which was later followed by Miguel Angel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, and Gabriel García Márquez, the famous stars of the Spanish American *boom*. His two-page short story *El leve Pedro (The Weightless Pedro)*, written in 1937, is seldom absent from anthologies. Anderson was one of the first to be impressed by the work of Jorge Luis Borges. He was instrumental in making his work known in the United States, and had the opportunity to welcome him at Harvard as the 1967 Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry. Anderson-Imbert was proud to call himself a Socialist to the last day of his life, even if less indebted to Marx than to the British Fabian movement and to Bernard Shaw, with whom he maintained correspondence.

Anderson-Imbert’s life was painfully inflected by the Perón regime, which made him leave his

position at the University of Tucumán. A Guggenheim fellowship brought him briefly to Columbia University in 1947, the year in which he also initiated his tenure at the University of Michigan, where he remained until 1965. It was there that he developed his full academic potential, working in the fields of Spanish American and Peninsular stylistics and literary esthetics. He was acclaimed for a scintillating, personal style capable of taking his students to arduous Socratic questions in lectures spiked by wit and even a bit of measured histrionics (he once taught *Martín Fierro* outfitted as a *gaucho*). Above all, in 1954 in Mexico he published his *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana*, the first and still unsurpassed overview of an immense field, which won recognition overnight for what had been considered a remote corner of world literature, and made Anderson-Imbert's name famous. In 1956 *The Other Side of the Mirror* appeared, his first book of short stories translated into English.

Very aware of the growing maturity of Iberoamerican literature, the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University started clamoring for the addition of a new chair in the early sixties. Spanish literature was then generally understood as virtually limited to peninsular Spain, and in fact very few scholars were working in this country on literatures from south of the border. It took time and a degree of persuasion to advance what looked at that moment like a bold idea, but at last in 1965 persistence made possible the appointment of Enrique Anderson-Imbert as the first Victor S. Thomas Professor of Hispanic Literature. He had been the obvious candidate, and Harvard's move was immediately followed everywhere, bringing forth the present flourishing of the study of Iberoamerican literature in U. S. universities.

Don Enrique fulfilled each and every expectation as an academic powerhouse at Harvard. It is impossible even to summarize the achievements with which he enriched the collegial life of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. He brought along his wife Margarita Di Clérico, who served brilliantly as Book Selector for Spanish and Portuguese Collections at Widener Library. Anderson-Imbert continued publishing many books of both criticism and fiction, and surrounded himself with a constellation of disciples who are to be found today at the helm of Hispanism in the United States. One of them recalls with affection "Professor Imbert's captivating teaching style, the panache with which he delivered every talk. The constant twinkle in his eye, the perfectly tailored suits, the aromatic pipe and dark-rimmed glasses, and especially his ram-rod straight bearing that made him six, even seven full feet tall (instead of five and a bit) to those of us seated around the seminar table."

A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters from 1967 and the Academia Argentina de Letras from 1979, Anderson-Imbert remained quite busy after his retirement in 1980. Then he returned almost full-time to his first love for fiction and the essay. In his mature years he experimented with philosophy, humor, and lyricism, repeatedly approaching the thriller and the police novel as a sophisticated art form. Nevertheless, Anderson did not forget his interest in literary aesthetics and narratology, bringing out in 1992 his study *Mentiras y mentirosos en el mundo de las letras*, a not so little masterpiece on lies and liars in literature,

not yet translated into English.

Nostalgic for his beloved Buenos Aires, Anderson-Imbert used to return there during summer vacations to enjoy his friends and the city's rich literary life, even at the expense of living in a perennial winter. He died there, and his loss was lamented as that of the last Argentinian humanist. On his deathbed he outlined a short story that he had just conceived: a violinist, about to begin a recital that will decide his career, realizes that he has forgotten to bring the needed sheet music. Enrique Anderson-Imbert is survived by his daughter Anabel, of Oakland, California, and his son Carlos, of Meredith, New Hampshire.

Respectfully submitted,

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