Hispania Guest Editorial

Janet Pérez: Mentor and Friend

Jeffrey Oxford  
*Midwestern State University*

Although I knew the name Janet (Winecoff Díaz) Pérez as an undergraduate student, I originally met Janet in person when I began my graduate studies at Texas Tech University; she was the graduate advisor at the time and one of my first professors. During that initial semester, I quickly discovered three things: first, the Diet Coke® that “Dra. Pérez” invariably brought to class only temporarily mitigated her need to clear her throat. Second, she had an astonishing knowledge of practically anything and everything related to Hispanic literature and was a very humble person about such. Over the years, former graduate-school colleagues and I have often reminisced about (a) mischievous classmate(s) asking an esoteric question only tangentially related to the topic under discussion; Janet would pause, take a breath, and almost always respond, “Well, I don’t know much about that” before beginning an exposition on that very topic which often lasted the remainder of the three-hour class. And, third, I learned that she was the consummate editor, seemingly writing more on my papers than I did myself; even as my dissertation director, while the ideas may have been mine, the final product certainly owed much to her editing capabilities and mentoring.

More than once I spent considerable time (this was in the days prior to Google Scholar, electronic library catalogs, or even a digital version of the MLA International Bibliography) tracking down content she knew and insisted that I read and/or include in my analysis, “a work published about 25 years or so ago” she would say, intentionally (or so I would come to believe later on) failing to tell me if I were to look for a book or an article, or if it was written in Spanish, English, or some other language. Once or twice, I was unable to find the source and, upon going back to her to tell her such, she would then name the author and a portion of the article or book title and send me back to the stacks once again. Obviously, in her prime her memory was prodigious, and her mastery of so many Hispanic-related topics was unparalleled by anyone else I have ever met (consider, for example, the number and variety of editorial boards she served on, the nearly one hundred theses/dissertations directed, the nearly three hundred articles and books published, the more than two dozen volumes of the *Monographic Review*, each with a different focus, etc.). Justifiably, she was named a Corresponding Member of the RAE and received a number of other prestigious awards. I have become over the years extremely grateful for her “teaching me how to fish” instead of just “giving me a fish.”

Over the years Janet and I remained in close contact. Frequently, in fact, when I was in Lubbock visiting in-laws, my wife and I would drop by her house to visit or go out to lunch or dinner; Orlando’s Italian Restaurant was often her location of choice. Shortly after she became the Editor of *Hispania*, and knowing about my previous work with the “*Hispania* on CD-ROM” project, Janet asked if I might be interested in taking on the position of Production Editor of the journal. After discussing the duties, I agreed to allow my name to go forward, and thus began
an even closer collaboration with her . . . and instructions that “Jeffrey, by now, after all these years, I think you can call me Janet [instead of Dra. Pérez].”

The production of an issue of *Hispania* was fairly laborious at that time with numerous back and forth hard copies between us and the authors before the publisher’s galley copy, invariably with revisions that Janet requested at each step. Additional difficulties arose, but she handled all with aplomb. In 2009 a FedEx plane crash in Lubbock resulted in the loss of a set of galleys; once or twice a particular issue was an article or two “short,” so she speeded up the process, moving the publication of an article to an earlier number, and one obstinate author received a terse, but tactful, email stating that “if you want your article published, here are the changes to which you will agree.” I’ll have to admit, her perfectionism could, at times, be annoying, but it definitely led to a better final product.

Working with Janet as Production Editor of *Hispania* and the *Monographic Review/Revista Monográfica* was an experience that I will cherish for the rest of my life. It gave me multiple opportunities to learn about authors, works, and topics that I otherwise would most probably have never considered. In addition, it gave me a chance to become better acquainted with Janet on a more personal level. Two things are certain: she loved her grandchildren and her cats! She always had multiple pictures of the boys that she would pull out at a moment’s notice, and she would regale my wife and me with episodes of their achievements, how they were growing (physically and intellectually), and how proud she was of them. Her cats, while I’m supposing of lesser importance, did manage to make their presence known every time I received a package from Janet; cat hair would be in the envelope, interspersed throughout the corrected pages of the galleys, and would inevitably end up all over my desk, office, and home, a small price to pay in spite of my allergies.

One final observation, of which many people may not be aware, is that Janet also had a deep sense of humor. One example suffices: at my dissertation defense she was the last person to walk into the room, most probably intentional. Upon entering, she walked up to me, handed me a sheet of paper, proceeded to distribute additional copies of the same to everyone else present in the room, and then stone-facedly announced that these were the guidelines that were to be followed in the defense. The document was titled “Oral Examination Procedure,” written by S. D. Mason (*I.R.E. Journal*, May 1956)—even today it is worth the Google search.