

## MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

**John Dyson**

(1939-2019)

Beginning as an assistant professor in 1965 in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, John Dyson attained the level of associate professor and was responsible – both single-handedly and in collaboration with others – for developing foundational parts of his department of 38 years. John’s research and pedagogical focus were contemporary Latin American literature. And while he was an expert in his field, John achieved much more beyond his field and beyond academia.

John Dyson was born April 13, 1939 in Batesville, Mississippi. Batesville sits in the north of Mississippi on what once was the territory of the Chickasaw tribe, a personal proximity that would shape John’s intellectual pursuits later in life. He earned his B.A. from Kansas State University in 1960, and a master’s degree and doctorate from the University of Kansas in 1962 and 1965, respectively.

John’s link to Latin American literature was forged in part by his experience abroad in Santiago, Chile, which enabled him to write his dissertation on literary criticism in Chile and be witness to the Latin American literary “Boom” that was unfolding. Among other topics, John wrote articles about the works of Jorge Luis Borges, often deemed a, if not the, precursor to the “Boom.” John would ply his editorial skills by founding and editing the journal *The American Hispanist* and, for several years, edited the well-known Twayne World Authors Series for literature from Spanish America and Brazil.

During his time in the department, John wore many hats and is remembered fondly for his wit and understanding. In 1966, one year after arriving to Bloomington, John was tasked with creating from the ground up the undergraduate and graduate programs in Portuguese. He threw himself into his charge by creating a range of language and literature courses in Portuguese and went so far as to organize a lecture series featuring renowned Brazilian scholars and writers. According to John’s long-time friend Kathleen Sideli, associate vice president of overseas study, the creation of the Portuguese program also included a two-week journey through South America with Walter Nugent, then director of overseas study, to investigate possibilities for student programs abroad. That trip took them to capital cities throughout the continent, including Porto Alegre and São Paulo in Brazil. A few years later, Heitor Martins and overseas study settled on the Universidade de São Paulo as the chosen site for what would become a successful IU study abroad program. John also directed the graduate program in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for many years and was instrumental in revamping different facets of that program.

John was a highly respected and popular professor. His former graduate students remember him fondly, and their compliments speak volume about John’s character. A former professor himself at Georgia State University, Steven Dupuoy’s remarks upon hearing of John’s passing exemplify how much John was held in high esteem. Dupuoy writes: “I was impressed not only by [John’s] depth of knowledge but also by the enthusiasm he brought to the class. Later, when

he agreed to direct my dissertation, he offered me assistance with criticism that was relevant to my study of the novelist Manuel Puig. Not only did he share his joy of the novels and criticism, but he also brought a sense of humor to the class that created a camaraderie that is seldom seen. I shall always remember his quick wit and his ongoing support and understanding. My memories of my time at IU are among the highlights of my life and my interactions with Professor Dyson are among the best of these.”

John was a man of many talents. He opened a foreign language bookstore; he sat on the Monroe County Community School Corporation for three years; and he even opened his own barbeque restaurant in Bloomington. Prior to his retirement, John’s research and teaching interests came full circle to his childhood connections to Mississippi and, more specifically, Chickasaw history, language, and culture. John’s publications and conference presentations drew the notice of officials of the Chickasaw Nation’s Division of History and Culture. In 2006, John was accorded the tribe’s Heritage Preservation Award, and in 2007 he was invited to join the Department of Chickasaw Language at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma as a participant in its language revitalization program. John prepared instructional materials and taught adult education courses on Chickasaw grammar for the next six years in Ada. In 2013, he returned to Indiana with work still under contract with the Chickasaw Nation. He contributed two articles a year to *The Journal of Chickasaw History and Culture*, and wrote a definitive book, *The Early Chickasaw Homeland: Origins, Boundaries and Society*,

John’s intellect, energy, humility, and drive will be missed. He is survived by his three children - Terence, Jennifer, and Christopher – as well as a sister, 8 granddaughters, 4 great granddaughters, and 4 nephews.

We request that this memorial tribute to John Dyson be presented to the members of the Bloomington Faculty Council, that it be preserved in its minutes and archive, and that after its presentation copies be sent to members of his family.

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