

IN MEMORIAM PAOLA VIANELLO

It was her laugh. Ten years ago this June, in La Plata — my first time in Argentina, at a conference on “Una nueva visión de la cultura griega antigua en el fin del milenio”. The participants were spread among several tables at a restaurant after the first day’s activities, and I heard lovely peals of laughter wafting over from the far end of the room. Who was it, I wondered, who laughed with such abandon, such irrepressible joy? I strained to listen to the conversation, but I could tell that the excitement and fun came from her. I wanted to know her.

We became friends at once, and from the beginning our friendship was built around laughter. Paola was a cultivated woman, open-minded, compassionate, earnest and light-hearted. She was also immensely energetic, almost too much so: I sometimes thought she would run off in three different directions simultaneously in her passion to do everything at once. But she was always good-humored, and humble, too: she talked to everyone in the same way, students, colleagues, young and old. She treated all with respect.

A couple of years after that conference in La Plata I happened, by some strange chance, to be elected president of the American Philological Association. It was the president’s privilege to organize a special seminar of his choice, and I, in recognition of my many new friends in the South, and also of an odd inaccuracy in the name of our professional society, chose as my topic, “The Classics in the Americas”. I invited several Latin American scholars to participate, among them Paola, who spoke of the state of the classics in Mexico. She was both interesting and amusing. In the middle of the colloquium, a fire alarm went off in the hotel, and we all had to stream out into the street. Paola laughed and laughed.

I saw Paola again at the Primer Congreso Internacional de Estudios Clásicos en México, a year and a half ago, and then once more this past May, when I gave a mini-course on the emotions at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She was constantly busy, and yet always had time for everyone. We went out with a bunch of students to a restaurant near the campus, and talked about forming a literary society under the name of The Huitlacoche Club (for those who do not know the meaning of the word, it refers to a delicious Mexican specialty derived from a fungus that grows on corn). How we laughed. We made plans to see each other the next time I visited — she wanted to show me her library, I remember. I'm sure we'd have laughed some more. I shall miss her very much.

David KONSTAN