

## IN MEMORIAM:

### MARIO J. VALDÉS (1934-2020)



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Prof. Mario J. Valdés, FRSC, Miembro Correspondiente de la Academia Mexicana, of the University of Toronto passed away on Sunday, April 26, 2020 after a long illness and is survived by his wife, María Elena, and his sons, Jordi and Tim.

Dr. Valdés was an outstanding literary scholar, teacher, and mentor in the fields of Hispanic Studies and Comparative Literature. He began his career at the University of Toronto in 1963, and when Northrop Frye established the Comparative Literature program at the University of Toronto, Dr. Valdés became one of the founding faculty members of the program. He then moved to take on the position as head of the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese at the University of Illinois, Chicago. He would soon return to the University of Toronto when he was asked to be Director of the Comparative Literature program. As a benchmark of his dedication to advancing the study of Comparative Literature, he made the establishment of the Centre

for Comparative Literature a condition of his return. In 1978, he came back to the University of Toronto as the first Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature. Dr. Valdés was also a long-standing member of the Editorial Board of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*.

As one of the earliest members of the Centre for Comparative Literature, Dr. Valdés was also a significant figure in Canadian Comparative Literature. He was the author of central and key works in phenomenological hermeneutics, including *Shadows in the Cave* (1982), *Phenomenological Hermeneutics and the Study of Literature* (1987), *World-Making: The Literary Truth-Claim and the Interpretation of Texts* (1992), *Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense* (1998), and *Cultural Hermeneutics* (2016), all of which were published by the University of Toronto Press. He was also the second Canadian, after Northrop Frye, to become President of the Modern Language Association.

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[f]reedom [...] Comparative literature is the discipline in the Humanities that prepares students to pursue their intellectual and creative interests beyond traditional categories. Areas of specialization should be developed by students in consultation with their faculty advisor going beyond pre-established categories of research. This is a demanding discipline that allows one to examine ideas wherever they may take us and to contribute to the understanding of the world of the creative imagination. This is what Northrop Frye considered the development of the educated imagination. This freedom of inquiry carries with it the responsibility of mastering the chosen area of specialization.

This encapsulates what his focus was during his tenure as a professor: it was not just about scholarship and publications, but about mentorship and being part of a broader concept of “we.” Dr. Valdés was a professor who encouraged his students and others to develop their “creative imagination” as part of their educational path. He also inspired many of us to seek not only to be good researchers, but to give back by being good teachers and mentoring the next generations of scholars and teachers.

Dr. Valdés’s legacy, of course, extends well beyond his students. His students are training students who are training students. His model of generosity, critical engagement, and creative imagination finds its way into classrooms both across the country and across the world.

It is with these few words that we remember him fondly and respectfully.

Cristina Santos,  
Brock University  
Jonathan A. Allan,  
Brandon University