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In Memoriam: Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1931-2005)

Sandra Pouchet Paquet
anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com

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**IN MEMORIAM
ANTONIO BENÍTEZ-ROJO
(1931-2005)**



Antonio Benítez-Rojo, the Thomas B. Walton, Jr. Professor of Spanish at Amherst College since 1983, died on January 5, 2005 at the age of 73.

A native of Cuba, he was internationally known and respected as a prize-winning scholar, novelist, and short-story writer. He was also much admired for his pioneering work as director of the Center for Caribbean Studies at the Casa de las Americas in Cuba. He defected to the USA in 1980 in the hope of being reunited with his wife and children from whom he had been forcibly separated since 1967. Once settled with his family in the United States, he established himself as a leading scholar in the field of Caribbean and Latin American Studies with the publication of *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. His fiction and scholarship were widely translated, and several outstanding works of fiction became available in English, among them, *The Sea of Lentils* (1990), *The Magic Dog and Other Stories* (1990), and *A View from the Mangrove* (1998).

This extraordinary writer and scholar is remembered admiringly by those of us who came to know him at the Caribbean Writers Summer Institute at the University of Miami, 1994 through 1996. He first visited the Institute in 1994 as a Caribbean scholar and writer, and in 1995 he returned as director of a six-week seminar in Caribbean Literature and Theory. I remember that he read to a standing room only audience at Books & Books in Coral Gables that summer. He returned again in 1996 with his translator, James Maraniss, to participate in a Translation Institute. We remember him as a brilliant and generous scholar, writer, and teacher, as a man of great knowledge and wide-ranging sympathies. He was generous to all of us with his time and knowledge, furnishing our young scholars with finely tuned bibliographies, advising them on their projects, referring them to hard-to-come-by sources, and writing letters on our behalf. He attended every associated event in the years that he was at the Institute, broadening our audience,

and bringing recognition and encouragement to the Latino/a writers and scholars attending our English-centered programs, whether they were Cuban, Puerto Rican, or Nicaraguan in origin. He showed us all what it meant to be a caribeño in vision and understanding, and yet rooted in the specific island landscape of our origins.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo is survived by his wife Hilda Otaño-Benítez, a senior lecturer and Spanish language program director in the Spanish Department at Amherst, and his son Jorge. His daughter, Maria, predeceased him.