

Donald Barton Johnson

A leading figure in Nabokov studies, Donald Barton Johnson passed away in Santa Barbara, California on Tuesday, August 25, 2020 at the age of eighty-seven. Although Don, as he was called by his family, friends, and colleagues, had been in declining health for some time, tributes from friends and colleagues on *The Nabokovian*, for example, all emphasize his vivacity and vigor, as well as the scholarly generosity, acumen, and humor for which he will be remembered. Indeed, Don had a twinkle in his eye and mischief behind his moustache. In addition to his scholarly legacy, Don is remembered for his interest in the natural world and for hiking the hills near his hospitable ranch-style home in Mission Canyon, Santa Barbara. Indeed, it seems that Don's spirit might, in truly Nabokovian style, roam those hills still with a spring in his step and a sharp eye for birding.

That same keen eye, and the underlying critical acumen it represents, characterized Don's meticulous scholarship, which he published under the name D. Barton Johnson, to distinguish himself from other Donald Johnsons. Yet his scholarship quite distinguished itself, in any case, in its quality, such as in its fractal dimensionality. This is exemplified in his groundbreaking study *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ardis, 1985), which was later republished in a Russian translation by Tat'iana Strelkova as *Miry i antimiry Vladimira Nabokova* (Simpozium, 2011), as well as in countless book chapters and journal articles, including many in *Nabokov Studies* and *The Nabokovian*. The breadth of Don's interests and erudition are demonstrated also in the later monograph *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Painting* (Amsterdam UP, 2006), which he co-authored with Gerald de Vries, or other interdisciplinary articles. Yet, lest Don be reduced to a Nabokov scholar only, his numerous articles on Sasha Sokolov, as well as Aksenov and Jakobson, should also be mentioned, as well as his erudite examination of Nabokov's works in relation to innumerable other Russophone and Anglophone writers.

Don's scholarship often demonstrated an even cryptological attention to the intricacies of language. This meticulous approach to decoding language recalls his wartime service as a Hungarian cryptanalyst for the Natural Security Agency in Washington, DC. Indeed, the colorful experiences of Don's past life as a cryptanalyst seem to inform his Nabokov scholarship, as shown by such titles as "Nabokov as Man of Letters: The Alphabetic Motif in his Work" and "The Alpha and Omega of Nabokov's Prison-House of Language: Alphabetic Iconicism in *Invitation to a Beheading*." These articles later figured in *Worlds in Regression* alongside ambitiously insightful chapters like "The Index of Refraction in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*" and "The Mystery of Infinite Consciousness in *Bend Sinister*" in *Worlds in Regression*, while Don's cleverness and wit are also immortalized in such a chapter title as "The Scrabble Game in *Ada*, or Taking Nabokov Clitorally." These give a flavor of the expert attention to analytical intricacies and playful approach to language that Don practiced with perfect pitch and never to excess, as he unpacked the writings of Vladimir Nabokov and others.

Don's attention to the subtlest workings of language betrayed his linguistic training and polyglot sensibilities. Born near the prophetically named Ladoga in Indiana on June 15, 1933, Don earned a BA in Russian from Indiana University and an MA in Economics from Berkeley, before completing his education with a PhD in Linguistics from UCLA in 1966. He later published the linguistics monograph

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Transformations and their Use in the Resolution of Syntactic Homomorphy (Mouton, 1970) based on his dissertation work. Don joined the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at UC Santa Barbara in 1966 as an Assistant Professor of Russian and Slavic Linguistics, earning tenure in 1971 and being promoted to full Professor in 1980. In all, he served as a Professor of Russian at UC Santa Barbara for 25 years, before retiring in 1991. Yet, even after his retirement, Don remained active as a presence in Nabokov studies, as well as in Sokolov studies.

One of the most influential aspects of Don's legacy was his early and leading role in the development of Nabokov studies, in which capacity he engaged with and supported Nabokov scholars around the world. He also held a leadership role, serving twice as the president of the International Vladimir Nabokov Society. Don created NABOKV-L, an electronic Nabokov discussion forum based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which he launched in 1993, and enabled lively discussions in the field, including during one decade under his watch. Also in 1993 Don founded the annual print journal *Nabokov Studies*, which awards the Donald Barton Johnson Prize for the best essay in Nabokov studies in his honor. In addition to his contributions to Nabokov scholarship, Johnson also was influential and made a significant contribution to research on Sasha Sokolov, including conducting interviews with Sasha Sokolov and compiling many biographical materials.

In the final years of his life Don took the trouble to ensure that his own extensive archival and research materials related to Vladimir Nabokov and Sasha Sokolov, including the Donald Barton Johnson Papers based on his own personal archive, found a permanent home at Davidson Library and Special Research Collections at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where they can be accessed by scholars in perpetuity. In February of 2016, the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara hosted a Symposium devoted to the work of Vladimir Nabokov in Don's honor, which Don was able to attend. It was accompanied by an exhibition in the Special Research Collections and a theatrical performance on Nabokov. The University of California, Santa Barbara Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies will continue to honor Don's memory with the D. Barton Johnson Award, which, since 2017, has awarded the best critical scholarly essay by a student on Russian, East European, or Eurasian literature, art, and culture by a University of California, Santa Barbara student.

Don is survived by his widow Sheila Golburgh Johnson; his stepdaughter Jessica Dora; and his stepson Aaron Moody and his wife Rebecca Vidra, as well as their three daughters Lili, Chloe, and Véla. The Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies hosted a virtual Commemoration of the Life and Work of Don Barton Johnson on Sunday, February 28, 2021. Leading Nabokov scholars who remember Don fondly are discussing compiling Don's uncollected essays in a book volume as another way of commemorating Don's work.

SARA PANKENIER WELD

University of California, Santa Barbara

Kenneth Alfred Lantz

Emeritus Professor Kenneth Alfred Lantz passed away on August 29, 2020. Born on October 21, 1940, in Edmonton, Alberta, into a family of Swedish and Norwegian immigrants, he was the youngest of four sons of Otto and Mayme Lantz. His neighbors were mostly first generation immigrants, not only Scandinavians, but Germans, Ukrainians, French-Canadians, English, Welsh, and one Russian family.

Ken's ambition as a boy was to be a radio operator on a merchant ship traveling the world. Perhaps connected to that, at age 11 he joined the local sea cadets, and eventually had the chance to travel all over Canada and beyond. In 1958 his cadet group sailed on a warship to Australia and other places.

He signed up for the Regular Officers' Training Plan to finance his university education at the University of Alberta, and, on the advice of his high school shop teacher, started out in engineering. After a year he switched to French, and decided on German as a second language. Looking for German, he wandered into the Russian department and ended up receiving his BA in Slavonic and Soviet Studies in 1963.

After university, he served in the Canadian Army in the armored corps and the 8th Canadian Hussars, rising to the rank of Second Lieutenant. The climax of his army career was 1964 in Egypt, in the Sinai Desert, where the Reconnaissance Squadron to which he belonged was serving with the United Nations Emergency Force patrolling about twenty-five miles of the Egyptian-Israeli border south from the Gaza strip.

He considered staying in the army, but was at least partly deterred from doing so by the lack of interest in it in his Russian expertise. He retired from it in 1965 and continued his studies at the University of Toronto, where he received his MA in 1967 and his PhD in 1974, both from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. He spent the academic year 1969–1970 in Russia, researching and writing his PhD dissertation on Chekhov. His thesis advisor was Chekhov specialist V. B. Kataev, and he attended a lecture course on Chekhov's realism taught by another such specialist, M. P. Gromov. His memoir of this period provides a vivid picture of life in the Soviet Union at the time.

He began to teach in the Department at the University of Toronto in 1970 as a lecturer, achieved tenure in 1976, and became a full professor in 1987. His specialty was nineteenth century Russian Literature, on which he wrote many articles and several books. His first book (1979) was on Nikolai Leskov, and he subsequently published highly praised reference books on Anton Chekhov (1985) and Fedor Dostoevskii (2004). He was also a noted translator, starting with a collection of five Leskov stories (1984). His two volume translation of Dostoevskii's *Writer's Diary* won the prize as the best translation of the year from the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL) in 1993. The paperback version of the translation came out in 1997.

In 2006, Ken received AATSEEL's annual award for Outstanding Contribution to the Profession. Over his 35 year career, he was the kind of colleague that everyone is looking for: intelligent, kind, and conscientious. He was a dedicated teacher of both graduate and undergraduate students. He served twice as chair of the Department and took on many other administrative roles in the Department and the University. A highlight of his scholarly career was a sabbatical year spent in Helsinki, working in the Slavonic library there. He was active in the profession at large, refereeing articles for major journals and appraising departments all over Canada. He was secretary-treasurer of the *Canadian Association of Slavists* (CAS), edited the CAS newsletter for several years, and was the co-editor of *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*. He digitalized the first nine volumes of *Dostoevsky Studies* and put them up on the internet.

Ken retired in 2005, but he remained professionally active as a translator. A book of memoirs (*Voices from the Gulag*) translated by him and originally selected by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn from those sent to him by other survivors came out in 2010, and a book of Solzhenitsyn's own short stories (*Apricot Jam: and Other Stories*) in a translation by Ken and Solzhenitsyn's son Stephan appeared in 2012. In the past few years, he has been working as a translator with me on a two volume anthology of war and Russian Literature to be published by Columbia University Press. His contribution to this project has been immeasurable, and I, like all his friends and family, will miss

him greatly. Researching Ken's life for this obituary, I learned almost all of what I have reported from his memoirs, based in part on diaries he kept throughout his life. I had no idea the memoirs existed, and it is typical of his modesty and reserve that he did not share them with anyone but his family. His voice in them is alternately appreciative, ironic, and funny. He is a great story-teller. Reading them, I understand his love of the war memoirs he translated for our project, and I feel in touch with him.

Ken's beloved wife Penny predeceased him in 2017. He leaves behind his two daughters, Kristina and Jennifer, his grandson Nico (Reinders), his son in law Gavin Smith, his brother Edward Lantz, and his brother in law Richard Burley.

DONNA ORWIN
University of Toronto

Rachel Feldhay Brenner

Rachel Feldhay Brenner, the Elaine Marks WARF Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, died on Thursday, February 4 in Madison. She was 74.

Born in Zabrze, Poland, Brenner moved to Israel with her family in 1956. She studied at the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and the University of York in Toronto before coming to Madison, where she joined the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies in 1992. In addition to chairing the department from 2004 to 2007, Brenner was an active member of the George L. Mosse/Laurence A. Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies, the Middle East Studies Program, and the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia. She was also a senior fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities.

An internationally recognized scholar of Hebrew, Polish, and Canadian literatures, Brenner published on a wide range of subjects, including the ethics of witnessing, the literature of the Holocaust, and relations between Israeli Arab and Jewish writers. She served as the president of the Association for Israel Studies from 2007–2009, was a fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and at the time of her passing was a board member of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America.

“In her research she always had a vision for new directions and a unique capacity to identify truth amidst conflicting testimonies,” recalls Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, a professor at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw. Madeline G. Levine, a translator of Polish fiction and memoirs and professor emerita at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, remembers Brenner as an incisive reader who “deployed the analytical skills of a superb literary critic” to probe crucial questions about the experience of witnessing atrocity.

Shoshana Ronen, the chair of the Hebrew Studies Department at the University of Warsaw, describes Brenner as “an interdisciplinary scholar par excellence,” whose writings deal with crucial questions about “the ethical and psychological outcomes of the Holocaust, resistance versus indifference in time of terror, the collapse of the ideas of the Enlightenment, ethics and politics, and whether the art of writing can be a spark in the process of *tikkun olam* (mending the world) after the shatter of the human world during the Holocaust.”

In the classroom, Brenner was known for her energy, enthusiasm, and intellectual rigor, and for the genuine interest she took in her students. “She loved to see students engage with one another,” remembers Hilary Miller (BA 2019), “to exchange ideas and offer insights. She wanted her students to honor their backgrounds and

personal history while setting the expectation that, when entering her classroom, all preconceived notions could be challenged and subject to scrutiny.”

These memories are echoed by Shira Goldenholz (formerly Yuchtman, BA 1999). “I remember to this day the high standards she set for her students and her commitment to making sure each of us truly achieved our highest potential in her class. She expected a lot, but she gave no less.”

Tony Michels, Director of the Center for Jewish Studies, recalls Brenner as “a tireless scholar, fearless in confronting difficult questions. She seemed to gain momentum with each year.” Brenner also had many friends in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic, where her office was located. As GNS chair Thomas DuBois describes her, she was “a confiding, jovial, insightful colleague who always had a wry smile and a word or two about life on our campus, life in our country, or life in general.”

Brenner was the author of seven books and no less than eighty articles. Her 2019 book, *Polish Literature and the Holocaust: Eyewitness Testimonies, 1942–1947*, examines literary responses of Poles to the genocide of Jews during the Nazi occupation. Her book *The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers’ Diaries from Warsaw, 1939–1945* received the University of Southern California Book Prize in Literary and Cultural Studies. Brenner’s other monographs include *Inextricably Bonded—Israel Jewish and Arab Writers Re-Visioning Culture* and *Writing as Resistance: Four Women Confronting the Holocaust: Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank, and Etty Hillesum*. In recognition of her distinguished publishing record, she was awarded the Max and Frieda Weinstein-Bascom Professorship of Jewish Studies, which she held from 2009 to 2014. In 2020, she was selected to be the inaugural Harvey L. Temkin and Barbara Myers Temkin Professor in Hebrew Language and Literature.

A dedicated teacher and scholar, Brenner remained active until her final days. As recently as mid-December, she participated in a live-streamed panel on the uses and abuses of art in representations of the Holocaust at the meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies. Earlier in the year, at a conference in Paris, she presented a paper about her grandmother’s letters from the Warsaw Ghetto. And in 2019, she traveled to Israel, Poland, and throughout the U.S. to give conference papers and take part in roundtables.

As Ronen observes, Brenner’s life was inseparable from her work: “She showed that writing is an act of resistance in a violent and coercive world. I think that Rachel’s writings, and also teaching, were an act of resistance in front of the absurdity of existence. In her work she bestowed meaninglessness a meaning.”

Brenner is survived by her children Guy Brenner and Shelly Brenner, her brother Yoram Feldhay, and her four grandsons, Jacob Asoulin and Eli, Levi, and Ari Brenner.

GWEN WALKER

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