

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

ALFRED COESTER (1874 – 1958)

Alfred Coester, Emeritus professor of Spanish-American literature, died on December 3, 1958, in Los Gatos, California, at the age of 84. His long life was one of achievement and service, and in it Stanford University, as well as his many friends, can take especial pride.

Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, on September 30, 1874, he began his undergraduate studies at Harvard University in 1892. While at Harvard he studied under some of the most eminent teachers of the " period, such as George Santayana in philosophy, and William James and Hugo Münsterberg in psychology. Prompted by James and Münsterberg, he spent his junior year (1894-95) at the Universities of Berlin and Paris. Returning to Harvard, he was granted the A.B. degree in 1896. Subsequently he spent several years of study and travel in Europe, and began his interest in Hispanic culture during a year's residence in Spain (1901-02). He completed his studies for the doctorate at Harvard in 1906, under the direction of Professor J. D. M. Ford. His doctoral dissertation, entitled "Compression in the Old Spanish Poema del Cid" . was published in the Revue Hispanique.

From 1905 to 1920 Dr. Coester taught modern languages in the Commercial High School, Brooklyn, New York. In 1918 he was sent to Argentina, Chile, and Brazil by the U. S. Department of State - ostensibly as an investigator for the American Geographical Society - to gather information regarding German colonization in those countries.

In 1920 Dr. Coester was invited to join the Stanford Department of Romantic Languages, as an assistant professor of Spanish. During the twenty years he taught at Stanford he helped to build one of the most respected centers of Hispanic studies in this country. Thanks largely to his efforts the Stanford Library contains a rich collection of materials for the student of Spanish American literature.

As a scholar, Dr. Coester achieved international fame. On the occasion of his retirement in 1940, Dr. J. D. M. Ford, of Harvard University, paid tribute to him as "the great pioneer in expounding the magnitude and the worth of Spanish American literature." His Literary History of Spanish America, published in 1916 and revised in 1928, brought the literary output of Spanish America to the attention of the English-speaking world and, indeed, of the whole world. Probably no other single book has been, and remains, so basic to an understanding of the cultural life of Spanish America as this work. After the publication of the Literary History of Spanish America, Dr. Coester continued to produce a long series of studies, both scholarly and popular, concerning various aspects of Spanish American letters and culture. As a collaborator of the Harvard Council on Hispano-American Studies, he prepared two bibliographies, A Tentative Bibliography of the Belles-Lettres of Uruguay (1931), and A Tentative Bibliography of the Belles-Lettres of the Argentine Republic (1933).

One of his favorite fields of investigation was the Modernista movement. His major contribution in this field was his Anthology of the Modernista Movement (1924), which continues to be a valuable work of reference.

His scholarship was not limited to Hispanic America. His list of publications reveals his interest in European Romanticism, versification, and Spanish Peninsular literature. His Practical Spanish Grammar, first published in 1912, is presently being republished by a British firm.

Another important aspect of his career was his contribution to the organization of Spanish teachers in this country. He was one of the most energetic founders of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish, and served as its Secretary-Treasurer from 1917 to 1926. In 1926 he was elected editor-in-chief of Hispania, the official journal of the organization, a post which he held until 1941.

Dr. Coester traveled widely in both Spain and Spanish America. Notable among his trips were his sojourn in Bogotá, Colombia, during the summer of 1938, as official delegate for the United States to the Fourth Centenary of the Founding of the City of Bogotá, and his attendance, in 1952, at the Latin American Congress in the Dominican Republic.

Many international honors were bestowed upon him. He was a member of the Hispanic Society of America and a Knight of the Order of Isabel the Catholic. He was a corresponding member of the Real Academia Hispano-Americana de Ciencias y Artes (Cádiz), the Academia de Bellas Artes (Valladolid), the Academia Nacional de Historia (Buenos Aires), the Academia Colombiana, and the Academia Mejicana.

As a teacher, Dr. Coester had three notable traits which never failed to impress his students and colleagues: his insistence on accuracy, his unpretentious sincerity, and his emphasis on human values. His direction of students was firm, interesting, and profoundly understanding. His insatiable curiosity about human motives in life and literature, and his active, fertile mind made him an inspiring teacher and guaranteed an exciting experience for students and friends, who found in him an adventurous spirit, challenging their best efforts.

Many of his friends remember, also, his creative artistry in the nonacademic aspects of his life - his culinary skill, his cabinet work, his gardening, and his talent for architectural design and detail.

His former students, his colleagues, and his many other friends will long remember him as a talented and honored scholar, a stimulating colleague, a gifted teacher, and a loyal friend.

Aurelio M. Espinosa, Jr., Chairman
Juan B. Rael
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