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Author
Carvalho, Icaro

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Interview with Carmela Zanelli Editor-in-Chief of *Mester* XXII, vol. 1 (1993) Professor at PUC Peru

Ícaro Carvalho

***Mester*: Dear Professor Zanelli, thank you for accepting the interview! We would like to know what Mester was like before...**

Carmela Zanelli: I had been head of practice here at the university where I came from (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú), and I had also been in charge of helping with the department's literary magazine. So, I had experience, but also Dr. Verónica Cortinez told me that at Harvard, where she came from, they were very envious of Mester, because Mester was the best student magazine in a Spanish and Portuguese department. They had a good magazine, but they knew very well that they were not at Mester's level, so when I took over as editor-in-chief, I knew I couldn't disappoint.

I was studying the colonial field, so I was very identified with the topic, and it was my luck to write the volume dedicated to the colonial world. I think that volume came out great, although I had to fight a little, because the wave, the trends at that time, already began to change. Everyone wanted to do the post boom, postmodernism, everything was post. It was a very very enriching experience, but difficult, precisely because I had to overcome issues. I worked closely with my colleague Michael Schuessler, who is now in Mexico, with whom I maintain contact, and he was just like me, a researcher dedicated to Mexico. Of course I was also dedicated to the Andean world, to Peru, but I had to really fight with the opposition to move the magazine forward. There were students who did not agree, well, with a perspective, if you like, more traditional, which was the one I brought.

But it was an experience in which we learned. I mean, the five years I spent at UCLA have been extremely enriching.

I also worked with my thesis advisor Efrain Kristal, who is, for me, a man who knows everything, a wise man. Efrain is a brilliant man. At that time the Chair was Carroll Johnson, the Golden Age specialist. A charming man who told me "You think university is a paradise, but no."

***Mester:* Well, do you have an anecdote to tell us or something memorable, a memorable achievement?**

Carmela Zanelli: Yes and no because it wasn't so positive. There was a lot of opposition, and it has to do with that friend that I mentioned, because he left the year we were publishing the volume of colonial literature. He went with the Spanish Abroad program to Mexico, to Guadalajara. And so, during that quarter, you had to give up on the magazine because you weren't on campus. When he returned, I tried, well, to re-appoint him, but for that, as you know, you have to make an election, a vote. And of course, he was elected, but I was surprised that there were some votes against it, many votes against it.

It seemed strange. The rest of the editorial team accused me that I had doctored the votes to do it, so that he would come back. And I think that was a learning experience for me. It hurt, it cost me, but look, I had the support of the teachers, of Carroll Johnson, of Verónica, of Adriana Bergero, and of other professors. And one of the students who was on the editorial committee called me at my house, and told me, "what is happening? Because they want me to sign a proclamation against you, and I don't want to." It was very difficult, but, look, you face bad weather and you learn. Finally, that made me grow, made me mature, and it was a hurdle, but that's how things are. And that's why Carroll Johnson told me that not everything in academia is right.

In 1989 there was the San Francisco earthquake, which was felt here in Los Angeles, not very strong, but it was felt. In 1990 there were some rains that flooded the campus, but it wasn't such a serious situation. In 1992, I remember the hottest day, which I think was 112 degrees—we all almost fainted in the heat—, but we also saw the assault on Rodney King, which was very scary, because half the city actually burned down. And I also came from Peru, from a country used to coups d'état, but finding myself in Los Angeles with a curfew—I couldn't believe it. I remember so much that when the second trial took place and

the ruling was going to be given at 6 AM, I turned on the TV with my eyes closed to hear the verdict. If they fail again and say that the police are not responsible, you are going to have Troy here, but, happily, they did change the verdict and obviously because they had to. If they fail again and say that the police are not responsible, you are going to have Troy here, but, happily, they did change the verdict and obviously because they had to.

And the other anecdote that I remember from that time is about the O.J. Simpson trial. If you went to any office, all the secretaries were watching it like a soap opera. I remember being at home watching TV, then they stopped the program to show the famous scene where the glove is put on. In other words, it also says that even in the most powerful country in the world, well, dramatic things happen.

Especially with the 1992 riots, you could see the racial tension in the city. It seemed that there was no mayor, no governor, no nothing. It was very impressive, because on the first day things broke out in Flores and Normandie, I even remember the streets, where they attacked this first white motorist who paid the price. There was no authority, there was no one who could stop the issue. Neither the governor, nor the mayor, no one came out that afternoon. At sunset there was going to be a curfew, but I stayed on campus because I wanted to teach my lecture. How can I leave if I haven't taught it? But everyone should go home. We lived in Sepulveda, at the university apartments, which usually took us 15 minutes to get home, but that day it took us two and a half hours. In Latin American countries we are used to having crises every day, but here everyone lost their minds and wanted to leave. That was a Thursday, and we were locked at home until Monday, because the riots broke out.

***Mester:* Our last question is: what advice would you give to the current editorial team?**

Carmela Zanelli: Well, first of all to start you have to be flexible. For example, the same volume of Colonial, which I am so proud of, had a contribution from James Lockhart. James Lockhart, a history teacher, was a very remarkable person.

Also, in another volume, there was Jaime Alazraki talking about fantastic literature. But look, editorial work is very, very rich and teaches you a lot, because you have to learn to evaluate, and you realize your own mistakes. It is no longer the case that when you read your work five times, you do not find the errors. But doing it in someone else's work, as an editor, teaches you, and teaches you how to correct spelling and content errors.

So, I think it's a magnificent learning experience. Becoming editor of a magazine, of an academic magazine, teaches you that academic language is different from everyday language. Now we are in a very fluid conversation like this, but it would be different if I were one of your editors.

But I trusted in the team's skills. And that teaches you. Learning to edit is learning to correct, because one is going to be a teacher too. And practice is also learning to teach.