

In Memory of John Neubauer (1933-2015): Afterword

Jerusalem, October 2015

To John,

With your soft voice still resonating in me from our last conversation, after a night rereading our mails exchanged over nearly twenty years and recalling wonderful moments shared as colleagues, fellow members of various commissions and committees, co-editors of the journal *arcadia*, and above all as friends, I'm overwhelmed by sadness but also by the awareness of the privilege to have known you. We met almost twenty years ago at a scholarly meeting in Leiden and I walked over to you to express my admiration of your book *The Fin-de-siècle Culture of Adolescence* which I had based one of the first courses I taught as a professor of German literature — a course that I'm teaching, with variations, still today. One of our *jours fixes* and a highlight of my life as a teacher was your annual visit to Antwerp when you gave a guest lecture for this and other courses. I felt that I brought my students an exceptional gift. Your lively presence, your intellectual adventurousness, your enthusiasm inspired us all. These lectures and your talks at the many conferences we attended together demonstrated time and again how an astutely critical and lucid mind can also be infused with passion: for literature, for theoretical reflection, for conversation about books, thought, ethics and politics, music, and life *tout court*. Your writings embody for me the finest we can achieve in our work as scholars, readers, intellectuals. Your exemplary way of combining meticulous attention to details of literary texts with a broad understanding of historical, political and social contexts revealed the driving force of your work: bringing out the potential of literature to oppose discourses of manipulative power and opening up possibilities of resistance and sites of freedom paired with ethical and political responsibility. Your critical oeuvre includes true milestones. Your work on Central Eastern European literature not only challenged received views but redrew the map of an entire region. Your book on Voice, Text and Music, which you struggled — and succeeded — to finish in the last weeks of your life, is a true masterpiece that enwraps your love of music with the rigors and incisiveness

of authentic scholarly research and reflection. What I experienced in our shared work as editors of *arcadia* was less tangible, but nevertheless unforgettable: the exemplary way you dealt with articles that were sent to the journal we edited together for a decade. You attracted papers from all over the world, from Iran and China, from Pakistan and Egypt. They were often written in weak English. You devoted countless hours and days polishing them so that they could enter the scholarly conversation at the highest level. We once received a paper from a female scholar from a country where women had no voice; in her article she very cautiously expressed rebellion against her patriarchal environment. You were delighted, worked hard to straighten out the English and published it, despite the voices that were adamantly against doing so. Throughout the years of our cooperation and friendship I experienced how deeply the concerns that suffused your work were part of your being. Respect, fairness, generosity and a total lack of self-importance characterized your attitude towards your colleagues, your friends, your loved ones. Your admiration for Ursel's work was boundless, as was your love for your daughters and grandchildren. You had strong opinions, yet always remained open to the thoughts and views of others, delighting in discussion and always ready to revise and reconsider your judgments. When there was disagreement you fiercely defended your position and then wisely sought compromise. But when you were faced with unfair behavior or abuse of power — whether in academia, politics or private experiences — you were uncompromising and fought tirelessly for anyone you felt had been slighted, even at the price of personal advantages. That is how I will remember you: strong and gentle, generous and fair, charming and fierce, full of wisdom, yet carrying through life this boyish smile and the rare and precious quality that Walter Benjamin called “Herzenshöflichkeit” — politeness of the heart. It manifested itself in everything, from your delicate letters of rejection to authors who had submitted work to *arcadia*, to your last messages, in which you said goodbye without pathos and sentimentality, expressing appreciation, care and a boundless love of life, which you left in such a dignified way, leaving us all bereft but also infinitely grateful for your presence in our lives.

Vivian Liska
University of Antwerp

Kunming, October 2015

To John,

I repeatedly read your last e-mail sent to me on September 19th when you were in a serious sickness, in which you said, “Just a brief but deep thanks for your kind words. You were always a very special person and friend for me. We’ll keep you posted about my illness.” I can’t believe that just two weeks later, you passed away. In the past few days, your kind face and your warm words always appear in front of me. I keep on remembering that we have known for almost three decades years. You have meant a lot to me.

It was in the winter of 1987 that I met you for the first time. I arrived at Amsterdam as a visiting scholar in University of Amsterdam, and as my advisor, you gave me a visionary proposal and suggested me to learn narrative theory, which I knew nothing at all at that time. From then on, this interesting field has been attracting me until now. Later, you encouraged me to pursue a doctorate degree and in the fall of 1989, I begun to write my dissertation under your guidance. Benefitting from your suggestion, I could write my dissertation from a perspective of narrative theory under the title *Narrative Modes in Lu Xun’s Short Stories*. Over the years, in the process of following you to pursue scholarship, you gave me much more than any student could expect from his advisor. You read my dissertation manuscripts over and over again, and devoted a lot of time revising and polishing it. Without your enthusiasm, support and help, I could not have finished this hard work.

It was in the winter of 2012 that I last met you. You were invited by Dong Hwa University in Taiwan to have a lecture tour. Taking this opportunity, you and Ursula went to Kunming, where we spent very nice days together. Invited by School of Humanities, Yunnan University, you made a very wonderful lecture on “Globalizing Literary History,” and the lecture hall were filled with more than 200 teachers and students. By the end of your lecture, I said a few words to you and to all the audiences: “I’ll express my gratitude to Professor John Neubauer, my promotor. I always remember your help during the the process of writing my dissertation. I always bear your strict requirement for dissertation in my mind...In my academic career, it is from you that I got my most rigorous academic training, from which I denefit for a lifetime. John is one of the best teachers, as well as one of the best friends in my mind.” After that, you went to the platform once again and

we hugged together, my eyes were full of tears.

You will always be remembered by your love for your wife, your care for your daughters, your help for your students, and your friendship for your friends. Your wise thoughts and your erudite books will continue benefitting us and the future generations. Though you left us, you will be dwelling in our hearts forever.

Tan Junqiang
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