



In memoriam Sir John H. Elliott.

Several years ago, I began a review of Sir John H. Elliott's *History in the Making* with the following words: "Once there were giants, and some are still with us. We meet them in every chapter of this book: Braudel, Butterfield, Domínguez Ortiz, Ullmann, Vicens Vives, and others. We see them in a painting, *Historians of "Past and Present"*, at the National Portrait Gallery in London: Eric Hobsbawm, Rodney Hilton, Lawrence Stone, Sir Keith Thomas, Christopher Hill, Sir John H. Elliott, and Joan Thirsk. We meet Elliott on the cover of this book, in a wonderful early photo as a young man with his host family in Barcelona, and sitting, much later, in the Prado Museum with Jonathan Brown. These historians, the dead and the living, populate the pages of *History in the Making*, reminders of the enduring links that bind us to entire historiographical traditions and transmit these traditions into the future". Alas! John Elliott, a historical giant for generations to come, and that "amigo de sus amigos... maestro de esforzados y valientes!" is no longer with us.

Sir John H. Elliott's numerous seminal and comparative works illuminate the intertwined histories of the Iberian, transatlantic, and European worlds. His elegant scholarship and devoted mentorship of a whole generation of younger scholars has led to an expansive circle of historians, following (and expanding on) his path-breaking vision of the early modern world. Far more important, John was one of the kindest and most generous human beings I have ever had the privilege of calling a friend. In writing this remembrance of his scholarship and life, the first thought that comes to mind is one of John Donne's poems, "For Whom the Bells Toll" (1624). With its tangential Spanish associations (Hemingway's eponymous novel about the Spanish civil war), the poem reminds the reader that every death diminishes us. That the bells tolling for the dead also toll for us. Both Donne (a contemporary of the Count-Duke of Olivares) and Elliott were animated by a higher sense of morality, by lives engaged in the service of truth, by empathy for other humans, and for the world at large.

While greatly honored to have been asked to write these brief words about a great historian whose life and work inspired me and whole generations, I know that many of my friends among his former students and assistants are far more deserving to write this testimonial. They enjoyed, those happy scholars, the privilege of working with him directly or established bonds of friendship and intimacy that I cannot fully claim. I am also conscious of my own selfishness. John Elliott lived a full and rewarding life. His life is to be celebrated. Yet, I, and numerous others who admire and love him, wished him to live on for our sake. We wished him to remain always in his magical garden in Iffley, in the shadow of Oxford, surrounded by his impeccable collection of old masters. We wish to think of him as always present in his beautiful home, a place of intense intellectual productivity. It was a place of wisdom, beauty, and peace. We all wished that he would continue his decades of writing, his unflinching

wise advice about our work and lives for many more years. In trying to articulate these feelings, I am conscious of the limit of words. They are like “dust in the wind”. Innumerable pages could be written and not a single of them could capture his laughter, his bonhomie.

For me there would always be two Sir John H. Elliott. The first, a prolific and inspiring scholar and teacher; the second, more personal, is about my enduring debt of gratitude for his generosity towards myself and my work. As a historian, several aspects stand out from his very productive scholarly life. First is the precocious and prolific nature of his research and publications. In 1963 he published two books that reflected what was to be his scholarly career. His *Imperial Spain* remains the most comprehensive general study of early modern Spain. Written almost sixty years ago, it has not lost any of its originality, insightfulness, and value as the best general book on the period and on Spain's place in the European world. Remarkably, the same year he also published his monographic study, *The Revolt of the Catalans*, a book that marked his lifelong interest in Catalonia and the Crown of Aragon, regarding Spain not from the perspective of Madrid and Castile but as a complex composite monarchy. These two books alone would have made for a career. But there was more.

Throughout his career, John showed a remarkable ability to work in two genres simultaneously: the synthetic books or monographic articles that provided an eagle eye's view of historical moments; and the exhaustive research on one specific topic that opened new *vistas* hitherto unexplored by historians. Among the first, one could mention *The Old World and the New* (1970) or his comparative study of Richelieu and Olivares (1984). His brilliant study of Hernán Cortés's mental world, an article that has endured over the years as one of the most incisive renderings of a conquistador mentality, deserves a place of honor, as does his reflection on the historian's craft in 2012. The counterparts to these short works are the detailed study of the Count Duke of Olivares (1986), his bold comparative study, *Empires of the Atlantic* (2006), and *Scots and Catalans* (2018) in which he explores the past and present of both societies in their search for a distinctive history. From the very beginning, his scholarly work was distinguished by numerous awards, attesting to the thoroughness of his research and his brilliant interpretative skills. While many of us reach a point where our scholarly productivity declines or disappears, John H. Elliott remained engaged in the writing and making of history. Praise for his work and contributions to history has already been the topic of many memorials and celebrations of his long and productive life. I wish to remember, most of all, John as a person, as a mentor, as an example of a life lived right.

Although I saw him frequently while he was at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton (1973-1990) and then sporadically at Oxford, little did I know that, when I saw and heard him give a paper on *Scots and Catalans* at the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome in late October 2019, the pandemic would prevent me from seeing him again. I vividly remember his indefatigable taste for art and for the beautiful. He and Lady Oonah came to the American Academy in Rome for lunch and afterwards we went for a walk to the church of San Pietro in Montorio, a church commissioned by the Catholic Monarchs with some important art pieces, including in its courtyard Bramante's Tempietto. John's curiosity and delight in art were in complete display. That day is vividly alive in my memory. Not only for his impressive paper (delivered in Spanish) at the Accademia dei Lincei's venerable setting, but for his liveliness

and joy at the sight of monuments seen before and now seen again with the same pleasure.

I have many such memories of John and Lady Oona's engagement with art, his appreciation for beauty, and even his passionate liking for chocolate. Most of all, I owe him a debt of gratitude for my career and my life as a historian. When he arrived at Princeton, already one of the most renowned historians of his generation, I was at the beginning of my academic life with a rather mediocre dissertation just completed. John invited me to lunch, inquired about my work, read it, made comments, and sent it to *Past & Present*. In many respects, everything that followed flowed from his generous counsel, including the privilege of spending a year at the Institute because, as he insisted, I needed to write a book. I have already acknowledged this debt to John in several places, including the dedication of my favorite book, *Spanish Society*: "This book is dedicated to Sir John H. Elliott, *doyen* of Hispanists all over the world. For many years, Sir John H. Elliott's generosity, sensitivity to the works of others, and scholarship have inspired and galvanized a whole generation of scholars. For almost thirty years, I have benefited from his advice and guidance and have incurred a great debt to his work and friendship. His generosity and that of his wife, Oonah Elliott have been extraordinary. This dedication is therefore but a modest token of my enduring admiration and gratitude".

How can one say goodbye to one's *ángel guardián*? Yet, though he is no longer physically with us, he is here within us, in our work, in our remembrance. Jorge Manrique expressed it best: John "...dio el alma a quien ge la dio,/el cual la ponga en el cielo/y en su gloria;/A y aunque la vida murió,/nos dexo harto consuelo su memoria".

Teofilo F. Ruiz
UCLA History