

morning after a light breakfast. He will remain a model in the way he faced death as he lived his life. Myron will be long remembered and sorely missed.

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ALAN WOLFE (1944–1998)

Alan Wolfe, professor of Japanese literature and chair of the department of East Asian Studies at the University of Oregon, died of pancreatic cancer on January 21, 1998, in Eugene, Oregon, at the age of 53. A literary scholar of uncommon acuity, a passionate teacher, and a person of deep political commitment and high moral integrity, Alan combined these qualities into a life of intellectual achievement and human connection that spanned Japan, France, and the United States. Although he died at home, lovingly cared for by his wife Marie-Pierre, and his children Mikael and Marika, Alan was briefly hospitalized the week before his death. Dozens of friends came to visit, and a party-like atmosphere prevailed on his corridor, as they shared food, drink, and talk. Alan was too weak to participate but his friends' "bending the hospital rules just a little bit," as one colleague put it, seemed entirely in keeping with Alan's expansive, adventurous life and his uncompromising, *nil admirari* spirit.

Equally brilliant as scholar, critic, and teacher, Alan Wolfe transformed professional relationships primarily into friendships, at the same time that he found friends everywhere in the broader social world he regarded as fundamentally interwoven with his professional one. To get to know Alan was to embark on a long-term conversation, and while his focus was always disproportionately on interrogating and listening to his companions, he occasionally engaged in reflection on what made him what he was. Required, as a child growing up in Boston, to attend Hebrew school everyday after public school, Alan became a prankster and a rebel. Yet he mastered Hebrew, and the linguistic skill he acquired there formed a basis for his later study of Japanese and French. Connected to this early experience must have been the powerful openness to other cultures that eventually manifested itself in Alan's cosmopolitan spirit and intolerance of cultural chauvinism of any kind. As a student at the Brookline High School in Massachusetts in the late 1950s, Alan participated in debates over civil rights and followed the movement of older classmates in radical political directions, including participation in SNCC and CORE-related civil rights action in the Southern United States. Throughout his life he would aggressively analyze and protest against all forms of discrimination based on class, gender, race, or ethnicity, and affirm the struggles for self-determination of victims of state violence, however overt or subtle. It was a position he never wavered in. Today, his many devoted students and two extraordinary children continue to provide proof of his rigor, abiding commitment to his principles, and his generosity.

As an undergraduate at Columbia College, Alan was one of a handful of undergraduates studying Japanese in the 1960s. After graduating with a joint degree in History and Asian Studies in 1965, he traveled to France, where he met his future wife, Marie-Pierre. Alan entered graduate school at Columbia, and in the protest year of 1968 he helped found a chapter of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. In

1969, he declined, on moral and political grounds, a government-funded National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship, supporting himself, instead, as a taxicab driver. Serving for many years as a member of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Editorial Board, Alan remained engaged with CCAS and its *Bulletin* to the end of his life.

Alan and his family spent the early 1970s in Japan, where he conducted research for his dissertation on the writer Dazai Osamu, and later they lived in France, where Alan worked as a researcher for the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). When Alan, Marie-Pierre, and their children returned to the United States in 1979, Alan entered Cornell University, where he completed his doctorate in 1984. He joined the University of Oregon Faculty in 1980.

As a Japan scholar and teacher, Alan was astonishing for the range of his interests and his efforts to trace connections among them. A committed comparatist, he worked tirelessly to build links between the East Asian Literature graduate program at Oregon and its program in Comparative Literature. This was also a political vision, for Alan insisted that Japanese Studies be placed in its properly global context, thus opening up its relation to international political movements such as feminism, anti-imperialism, and Third World liberation movements. He constantly devised new syllabi and new courses to keep pace with this vision. And for Alan pedagogy itself was a consummately political activity. Aware of the intellectually demanding, labor-intensive aspects of language teaching, for example, he took a keen interest in ideas and writings on language pedagogy, especially in its relationship to gender politics. He was a Board Member of the Confederation of Oregon Language Teachers, and a founding member of the Asian Language Teachers of Oregon.

In his own writings, Alan was relentlessly attentive to links between state and culture, to the political and ideological dimensions of art (especially the impacts of modernization theory, the nuclear arms race, and the Cold War), and to perspectives obscured by the effects of class and privilege. He was at once knowledgeable about, and skeptical of, poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, and a host of other contemporary intellectual movements. His daring book, *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu* (Princeton University Press, 1990) was ahead of its time in its witty deconstruction of cultural essentialism as a representational strategy in American Japan Studies. In his readings of texts by, and commentaries on, Dazai Osamu, an icon of cultural rebellion for the postwar Japanese literary establishment, Alan exposed the processes of recuperation through which Dazai's subversiveness had been domesticated by that very establishment. Like much of Alan's work, the book refused conventional disciplinary categories, embedding textual analyses in processes of history, politics, and culture. Other articles took up similar critical concerns: the relations among suicide, narrativity, class, and the postmodern; postmodernity's mind-numbing juxtaposition of mass production, commodity abundance, and weapons of mass production; the imperialism of modern Japan and the United States. Elegantly, and ironically, Alan's writings hinted at how easily and subtly academic discourse on Japan could become folded back within a broader history of Western Orientalist discourse, a discourse he saw as obsessed with control and with the premonition of its own extinction. In the early 1990s Alan spoke often about a comparative project which would develop these themes further, analyzing representations of Japan in French postmodern theory, but this was a project he was never to complete. Also unrealized was his plan, developed with John Lie, to produce an ambitious "multidisciplinary and multinational" book series called *Critical Japan*

which, as he defined it, would simultaneously bring into focus “neglected” areas and perspectives, “while analyzing the processes whereby these perspectives are elided by media and academic interests catering to dominant institutional and economic priorities.”

On June 13, Alan Wolfe was posthumously awarded the Charles E. Johnson Memorial Award by the University of Oregon. In words that will resonate for all who knew Alan, President David Frohmyer cited Alan for his “authenticity—as an individual, a scholar, and a citizen of the world community” whose “work and life exemplified the principles affirmed by the life of C. E. Johnson: ultimate respect for freedom of speech, the ability to change while nurturing the learning process, a belief in the free examination of all ideas, and a fearless willingness to follow the truth wherever it may lead.” An Alan Wolfe Memorial Lecture series has also been established, which was launched in February, 1999, with a lecture by the noted literary critic, Rey Chow.

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