

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



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The biographical sketches were written by staff and colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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RONALD EDWARD SURTZ



Professor Ronald Surtz has taught at Princeton since 1973. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in Romance languages and literatures, and a B.A. in Spanish from Yale University. The summa cum laude distinction he earned when graduating from Yale and his induction into Phi Beta Kappa might be interpreted as evidence that Ron was, even as a young man, the epitome of the humanist, excelling in all of the liberal arts. His love for the humanities is most apparent from his fluency in multiple Romance languages. Many scholars of European studies may be able to understand and communicate in second and third languages, but few can joke (and joke successfully) and liberally impart aphorisms in Spanish, Italian, and French. It is certainly Ron's humor that has helped graduate students at Princeton successfully pass nerve-wracking exams and colleagues survive scores of faculty meetings.

Ron had no small part in advancing the way in which we perceive religious texts and, in particular, religious writings by women in the pre-modern period. His prolific publication record on these subjects speaks for itself. His first book, *The Birth of a Theater: Dramatic Convention in the Spanish Theater from Juan del Encina to Lope de Vega* (Princeton University Press/Castalia, 1979), studies the influence that medieval liturgy and courtly festivities had in the development of early modern Spanish drama. It convincingly establishes that Lope de Vega should be credited for codifying the *comedia* and not necessarily for inventing it. *The Birth of a Theater* was followed by an edition of the one-act play *Aucto nuevo del Santo Nacimiento de Christo Nuestro Señor* by Juan Pastor (Albatros, 1981) and *Teatro medieval castellano* (Taurus, 1983), an anthology containing six edited plays. As a highly successful book, it has been reprinted several times, and has become a required text for students of medieval literature in the United States, in Spain, and in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries.

Ron developed a lasting fascination with the works and the lives of women writers who were marginal in their own communities because of their gender yet found the means to assert their subjectivity through writing. In his second monograph, he uncovered the little-known

world of women writers in early modernity. In his acclaimed *The Guitar of God: Gender, Power, and Authority in the Visionary World of Mother Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534)* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), he explores the fascinating mind of a Franciscan nun who wrote a series of visionary sermons (written for the liturgical year of 1508–1509 and compiled in a manuscript under the title *El libro del Conorte*). Ron's study of Mother Juana's sermons broke new ground in the understanding of early modern gender and spirituality. In her sermons, Mother Juana presents herself as a visionary who transcends the authorial limitations of both genders. As she fashions her own voice as androgynous, or as what would be considered to be traditionally masculine, she casts key Catholic figures, such as Saint Francis or Christ, as exhibiting female characteristics. Mother Juana maintains, however, that like a musical instrument delivering divine music, her revelations are ultimately coming from God.

A follow-up to the previous effort, Ron's *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: The Mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) studies the texts of five religious women from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He shows that the women writers he examines countered male devaluation of female agency by making sure that they could not be charged with the two major qualities that were believed to make women inferior to men: intellectual incapacity and carnal weakness. Thus, these women became educated and vowed celibacy. They also conveyed a feminist discourse that was rooted in their readings and interpretations of strong female characters — the mothers — of the Bible. Figuratively speaking, these writing women served, in turn, as the mothers who inspired Teresa of Avila. Accordingly, *Writing Women* concludes with an analysis of one of Teresa of Avila's lesser-known works, the *Meditaciones sobre el Cantar de los Cantares* (1566).

As this biography was being prepared, Ron's latest production, *Mother Juana de la Cruz, 1481-1534: Visionary Sermons*, was published by the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (The Toronto Series, 2016). In this edition and translation of a selection of Mother Juana de la Cruz's sermons, Ron and his coeditor Jessica A. Boon (along with his cotranslator Nora Weinerth) revisit the visionary experiences of this extraordinary figure in the history of the Catholic Church and provide an accessible translation of six of her works for Anglophone scholars of the pre-modern period across disciplines.

Ron has also edited two collections of essays: *Creation and Recreation Experiments in Literary Form in Early Modern Spain: Studies in Honor of Stephen Gilman* (Juan de la Cuesta, 1983) and, with Jaime Ferrán and Daniel P. Testa, *Américo Castro: The Impact of His Thought. Essays to Mark the Centenary of His Birth* (Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1988).

Ron's dedication to his department and to the University at large has been constant since his arrival at Princeton forty-three years ago. He has mentored countless students throughout his career not only in his department, but also in history, religion, music, art, architecture, and comparative literature. On October 12, 2013, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese held a symposium in recognition of Ron's fortieth anniversary at the University. The event was small and intimate at the request of the honoree. In the aftermath of the event, the participants in the symposium wanted to more publicly acknowledge Ron's impact in their professional careers and decided to collectively dedicate a compilation of essays to him. This volume, *Reading and Writing Subjects in Medieval and Golden Age Spain: Essays in Honor of Ronald E. Surtz* (currently in press), includes essays that are representative of his academic interests and professional trajectory. At their very core, they address the themes that have run through many of Ron's seminars: the efforts of pre-modern writers to highlight the agency of marginalized individuals, and the crucial functions that the acts of reading and writing had in representing the latter's imagined or lived experiences and subjectivity.

Ron's emeritus status will allow him to focus on his research and writing. He looks forward to having more time to devote to his growing list of unread books and to explore new areas of scholarship. His colleagues are thankful that he will also continue advising and supporting graduate students, mentoring junior faculty members, and participating in departmental events.