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Tom Simone

By Huck Gutman

It is with sorrow that I write of the passing of a great admirer and scholar of Joyce, Professor Tom Simone. Tom taught in the English Department of the University of Vermont, and the Integrated Humanities Program within it, for over fifty years. He was a mainstay in teaching Shakespeare, Dante, Ibsen, Homer, Joyce, Mann, Woolf, Tolstoy, and even Richard Wagner. He taught James Joyce from his earliest years to the last years of his teaching, from introducing first-year students to his writing to in-depth examinations of Joyce in seminars for graduate students.

Tom was drawn to the classics, the greatest creations of the human mind. He loved Bach and late Beethoven, he loved Dante, he loved Shakespeare. He loved Joyce above all, except maybe Dante—but then, James Joyce also loved Dante. We everlastingly argued over Bruckner, whom Tom also loved (and I did not). That was one of the great things about Tom: one could talk with him about large things, about the greatness of art, and at the same time feel that his was a mind that could approach the greatest things and “argue” about those things because they were so, so, important.

Tom had his foibles. He was not always an easy person, friend, or colleague. But he had great courage—the cancer which claimed him in the end was something he battled against, bravely and without complaint, for several years. Even as his physical strength declined, he listened to and recommended BBC 3 broadcasts of both music and musical history. For years, he and Sue traveled to London and New York and other venues to hear the finest in classical music performances. (He loved Verdi and Wagner and only slowly came around to my admiration of the operas of Puccini.)

I can't emphasize enough his bravery, the courage with which he faced the decline which lies ahead for all of us. In some ways, and the Greeks understood this well, a man or woman's life is a preparation for how we face death: in this sense, Tom Simone was a model, a man whose reading and great learning prepared him for the final confrontation of his days.

I knew Tom Simone for over fifty years. What most characterized him was his love of art, his deep attraction to the attempts by human beings to understand life and to celebrate its beauties. In the final decade of his life, Tom taught graduate seminars on James Joyce and delved into what brain science could teach us about the great Irish writer. This research led to a significant essay, “‘Met him pike hoses’: *Ulysses* and the Neurology of Reading,” which he published in the *Joyce Studies Annual*. In his last years, he worked on a book manuscript, “*If there were no brain there would be no mind*”: *A Study of James Joyce, Neurology, and Language*.

In his later years, he also translated the three books of the *Divine Comedy*—translations that have been widely acclaimed, as he was attracted, as so many great minds have been, to the extraordinary creation that Dante fashioned. In his final year, Tom read his translation into a recorder so that his sense of Dante's greatness could be made available through Audible. This final project sustained him. Even as his last days approached, he was moving ever onward, ever deeper, into the art which so enchanted him.

James Joyce and Tom Simone knew this strange thing about art, that it penetrates deeper into our lives than perhaps anything else, except perhaps love; and as one can love art as well as one can love other persons, art may be one of the paradigmatic aspirations and creations of human existence. Tom loved art, loved art. On my mind in recent weeks has been a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin, whose final lines may well be the best way we can remember Tom Simone: “Einmal / Lebte ich, wie Götter, und mehr bedarfs nicht.” “*Once I'll have / Lived like the gods, and more isn't necessary.*”

May he rest in peace.

—The University of Vermont