Memorial Resolution for Joseph V. Guerinot

Professor Emeritus Joseph V. Guerinot died near his home in France on September 28, 1999.

Born in Rochester, New York, in 1928, Joseph Guerinot received his bachelor’s degree from St. Bernard’s Seminary in that city, took the Master of Arts at Fordham University, and the PhD at Yale in 1962. He wrote his dissertation under the direction of the pre-eminent scholar of the eighteenth century, Maynard Mack, and the two remained close friends until Joe’s death. Joe taught ten years at Bucknell University and two years Hunter College and joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as Associate Professor of English in the fall of 1966.

He rose to the rank of professor in 1970 in recognition of his scholarship and his critical role in the first years of the department’s doctoral program. He directed or worked with most of the department’s first doctoral candidates and offered seminars in Pope, Dryden, Swift, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Henry James, as well as Chaucer and his contemporaries and successors. What particularly marked Joe Guerinot’s career as a teacher was his versatility. He was a fully qualified medievalist as well as a meticulous scholar of the Augustan age, and he was comfortable teaching the historical sweep of English literature from the middle ages to the twentieth century. He was a tough and discriminating teacher with perfect pitch for English prose; his students remember him fearfully and fondly and many have remained devoted friends of Joe’s and visitors to his retirement home, Brajac, in the Perigord.

Joe published major bibliographic works on Alexander Pope and John Gay’s The Beggar’s Opera. He edited a popular and useful book of essays on Pope and published many reviews and essays on a wide variety of subjects. The life of the mind, for Joe Guerinot, was not particularly a carcerist enterprise. Rather as he once wrote to a colleague, this is “the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us.” Scholarship, teaching, and service to the academic community were the vocation of a deeply religious man, and so he continued to learn and to write during the years of his retirement. Joe read in the New Testament in Greek daily and began to study Hebrew in recent years; within the last year he had completed a monograph on reviews of French fiction by the young expatriate Henry James.
All his life Joe Guerinot suffered from a congenital spinal condition, the complications of which forced him into early and reluctant retirement in 1990. His health continued to decline through the last decade, but the eighteenth-century French farmhouse he shared with Robert Strobridge remained a warm and popular destination for family and friends who came for the lovely scenery, the wonderful things to eat, and the best of talk.