By Richard D. Rabbett (MET’10)

NORMAN E. VUILLEUMIER, a College of Arts & Sciences professor emeritus of English, died on October 22, 2011. He was 99.

Vuilleumier (SED’48) graduated from Harvard College in 1935 and joined the faculty of Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., as an instructor in English. He served in the U.S. Army personnel division at Fort Devens, earning an honorable discharge in 1943. He returned briefly to teaching at Phillips Academy before matriculating to BU’s School of Education in 1946.

While completing a master’s degree in education, Vuilleumier was offered the opportunity to join the BU faculty, an experience he later described as “the happiest day of my life.” He spent the next 29 years teaching poetry and classical literature.

Vuilleumier grew up an only child in a family of moderate means. During the Depression the family had the luxury of traveling to Europe. Vuilleumier made his first solo trip to Europe in 1937, visiting London and Paris. An avid Anglophile, he spent most of his time in England focused on visiting British cultural institutions and making copious notes on classical art, antiquities, and music. He would later use these firsthand impressions as historical reference material for teaching classical literature and poetry at BU.

As an inveterate world traveler and classical music lover, Vuilleumier wandered extensively throughout Europe on his summer breaks, routinely attending operas at La Scala, Théâtre National de l’Opéra (Paris Opera), and Wiener Staatsoper. Fluent in French, German, and Latin, he reveled in enjoying opera without the aid of translation.

Prior to his retirement from Boston University, in 1977, Vuilleumier served as president of the Boston chapter of the Friends of Switzerland. A resident of Manchester, N.H., he was active in numerous arts organizations, including the New Hampshire Humanities Council and the Palace Theatre in Manchester, and also served on the advisory council for the city’s Currier Museum of Art. His passion for classical art and literature led to a fascination with Greek and Roman antiquities. Over the years he acquired several important pieces of Etruscan pottery, which he bequeathed to Harvard University.

Vuilleumier remained an avid reader and scholar for the rest of his life, often regaling visitors to his home with recitations from memory of the many poems he loved and had taught throughout the years. He would also (as he would say) “subject” his guests to selections from his favorite operas, always finishing with an informal literature lesson on the historical basis for a particular opera’s story. For Vuilleumier, life offered the greatest classroom of all, and visitors to his home always came away richer for the experience.

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