

Grains of Truth: A Ruminant and Poem for Roger Simon

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As a young teacher in a small town in Newfoundland where everybody claimed to know everything worth knowing, where fundamentalism raised its voracious, even rapacious, head with violent hunger, I needed wise voices who could call me to other possibilities, visions, and stories. Roger Simon was one of the most important wise voices I heard.

As a graduate scholar I gravitated to a circle of scholars I knew as the critical pedagogues, the romantic radicals, a club of apparently cool scholars who questioned everything (and I was on a tireless quest of questioning), but in the midst of that often cacophonous circle, the two scholars I most admired were Paulo Freire and Roger Simon.

As a professor I have always been glad that Roger Simon sustained the spirit of his work. While many others seemed to grow angry or bitter or inconsequential, Roger Simon remained vital and visionary, advancing new proposals and projects ingrained with critical and compelling and complex conversations about the pedagogy of culture and the culture of pedagogy, conversations that celebrated collaboration, conflict, community, and contradiction in a contrapuntal composition.

I have never held to a hope that the world will be transformed by my words or the words of anybody else, but I still hold to a hope that calling out the words is a good and necessary way of living in the world. The world is often vile and violent, but that's not all the world is. It is the "not all" that Roger Simon searched hopefully for, and it is the "not all" that sustains me. I devote the poem "Against the Grain" to Roger Simon who has inspired me for many decades, as he conscientiously continues to call us to deliberate and intentional awakeness.

Against the Grain
(for Roger Simon)

never satisfied with staying
in a singular moment where
he might linger between
past and future, he lived
metaphorically, a bridge
engaged in carrying forward
interpretations against the grain

the prophet's vocation
is to speak, even especially
a message others do not want,

to evoke, invoke, provoke
with a language spelling
the possibilities of prefixes
calling out the grain of the voice

he questioned and challenged,
remembered the world's violence
with conscientious consciousness
in a collective and complex memory,
a witness with a resilient heart
beating between hope and despair
with fecund grains of truth

the keeper of stories remembers
the past, even the wounds wound
tight like ligatures around the throat,
seeks pedagogical imagination,
refuses facile solutions along the grain,
knows politics and ethics are entwined
in a public pedagogy of possibility

he counted on counter narratives
to hold the pedagogy of memory,
steadfast in the dramatic possibilities
of translation for transforming trauma,
will not turn from emergency, instead
insists on the power of a grain of salt
to both seize and season the wound