

At a Meeting of the
Faculty of Vassar College
held
November fourteenth, nineteen hundred
and seventy-nine, the following
Memorial
was unanimously adopted:
Mario Domandi, Professor of Italian on the Dante Antolini Chair, was
born
in New York City on February 5, 1929, the son of Santo and Filomena
Domandi.
Educated in the city's public schools, he took his undergraduate
degree at
St. John University College. He spent the 1950-51 academic year as a
Fulbright
Fellow at the University of Rome and then completed a Master's degree
in history
at Columbia University in 1952. After two years of military service,
he resumed
his studies at Columbia in European intellectual history. His
dissertation on
the German youth movement was supervised by Jacques Barzun. For Mario,
Barzun
represented the life of the mind at its best, urbane and elegant, yet
humane
and deeply serious.
Mario came to Vassar as an instructor of Italian in 1956. From 1958 to
1963 he served as House Fellow in Jewett dormitory and from 1961 to
1964, as
Dean of Freshmen. His success as teacher and administrator and his
productivity
as a scholar were rewarded with early promotion to tenure. In May,
1964, he
delivered the convocation address at the request of the senior class.
Characteristically, he told his hearers that the result of their
education
"should be a refined sensibility and a civilized instinct. Just as the
entirety
of our personal experience is embodied in what we call our
'instinctive' reaction
to a situation, so too our whole intellectual experience is contained
in our
instinctive judgments about art, politics, ethics, and the rest. If a
college
has done its job well, the instinct should be healthy, free of myths
and
prejudices." In 1965 Mario became chairman of the Italian department.
In 1969
he became the second recipient of the Dante Antolini chair in Italian
language

and literature which had been given by Hrs. Julia Coburn Antolini in honor of her husband. H

Mario maintained a lifelong interest in modern German history and culture, but at Vassar he soon turned to the field where he was to make his scholarly reputation: the translation of significant works on and of the Italian Renaissance from both German and Italian. His first translation was of Ernst

Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* published

by Basil Blackwell in Oxford and by Harper and Row in New York. The book's

immediate scholarly and commercial success cemented Mario's close relationship

with Harper's history editor, Hugh Van Dusen, and over the next decade Mario

translated five books for the Torchbook Series. _In 1965 appeared Mario's

translation of Guicciardini's *Ricordi* under the title of *Maxims and Reflections*

of a Renaissance Statesman. It made his reputation as a Renaissance scholar

and remains in print today. In 1970 Mario published Guicciardini's *History*

of Florence with introduction, glossary, and notes. His translation of -2-

Luigi Salvatorelli's interpretation of the Risorgimento appeared in 1971 and of Tomas Maldonado's work on urban planning in 1972. Mario also completed a translation from the German of Ernest Nolte's massive study of the rise of European fascism which was never published.

Mario's special knack as a translator was his ability to convey difficult philosophical ideas and a tangled skein of events in clear, readable, and flowing English prose. This talent attracted the interest of Charles Singleton who enlisted Mario's aid as translator of Latin and Italian sources quoted in the commentary to Singleton's edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This task kindled Mario's interest in the early Florentine chroniclers and for a time he toyed with the idea of providing in English a documentary volume on Dante's Florence. But ultimately he abandoned this plan in favor of two large projects on Medicean Florence that were to lie unfinished at his death. One was a volume of the familial letters of Lorenzo de' Medici and his circle done in collaboration with the Florentine paleographer Gino Corti. The second was a translation with notes and glossary of Giovanni Cavalcanti's *Florentine Histories*, a prime narrative source on the origins of the Medici regime, for which Mario received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

To his students Mario brought the same qualities of sound scholarship, his clear but never simple exposition, and the magic of his manner.

Students flocked to his renaissance classes especially because Mario's recreation of that civilization permitted students to discern some of the most humane aspects of the teacher himself. He would talk of Machiavelli and murder, of Ariosto and the poetic forms, of romance and history, of fortuna and virtù, but ultimately for Mario the Renaissance was best represented by a letter Lorenzo de' Medici wrote to his young daughter whom the family had left alone, do not worry. "if everyone is gone, and the naughty ones left alone, do not worry. I will come back purposely to stay with you, and will stay only with you." Mario used to comment, "He was a good daddy." This artificer of balance of power and of artistic excellence exemplified for Mario that virtue the Latins called "Humanitas" and the Italian humanists of more than twenty years as teacher and department chairman. It was impossible for anyone to remain indifferent to his warm, almost fatherly, ways and not to love him, immediately. In 1952 Mario married Agnes Koerner who had come to the United States from Germany after escaping from the Soviet Zone. Their marriage ended in divorce in 1972. Their only child, Mary Charlotte, was born in 1961; his delight in her development was extraordinary. Mario and Agnes quickly became known for their hospitality and for the diversity of their friends. They bridged worlds easily, turning differences of opinion and taste into exhilarating conversation. Mario's pride in his own cosmopolitanism as a scholar never detracted from his pride in his Sicilian ancestry or in his father's success as a garment manufacturer. Who will forget the aphorisms he attributed to Uncle Luigi, such as "rich or poor, it's nice to have money." Who will forget the accordion on which he ranged with such zest from polkas to pop tunes to Protestant hymns? In recent years his favorite form of party followed from an invitation to drinks at six o'clock. Unlike many such gatherings, Mario's parties customarily were occasions where a mixed group of people engaged in lively

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discussion on a wide range of topics, taking the key from their host who treated the party as an event rather than as a mechanical routine. It was not unusual for him to ask members of his classes and Italian majors to the parties; he deferred to them with the same cordiality that he extended to his friends from the faculty and from the community. It was the rare party that did not end with Mario in the kitchen making spaghetti al dente or some other preferred dish. But in between the coming and the going at the party, those invited to share it knew that they had a host who took seriously the mandate to honor guests. When a guest comes, Christ comes, Mario said, and he meant it.

Every part of Mario's life contained the other parts. His dying was part of his living. Learning that he had a large, malignant tumor which made survival improbable, Mario chose to deal directly with his fate. Defiant, he discovered that in Houston, Texas, there was a project experimenting with nuclear radiation therapy. In the face of uncertainty about the outcome, Mario went to a hospital there as a participant in the experiment. He was subjected to routines which, as he told his friends over the long distance phone, stirred in his mind passages from Dante's Inferno. Mario underwent an operation in the Fall of 1978 which removed the tumor. He was able to spend the next several months in Poughkeepsie, recuperating and preparing to reengage in his scholarly activities. On February 4, 1979 he was married to Ann Hedlund whom he had known for many years and who gave him the most loving support in his final months. when the cancer recurred, he first was hospitalized in New York. In lucid moments, he retained his geniality and his flair for telling a story. In the midst of pain, he remained gentle and considerate. He returned to Poughkeepsie and died here on July 8, 1979. He is buried in Little Compton, Rhode Island, where he had spent his summers for many years.

Respectfully submitted,
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Elizabeth Daniels
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