

Janet Ross
1911 – 1963

Janet Ross, Professor of French at Vassar College from 1945 to 1963, was born in Monto Carlo, Monaco, on March 29th, 1911. She was the daughter of Sarah Gaitley and Alexander Malcolm MacPherson, who was then serving as British Consul to Monaco. Mrs. Ross was a graduate of the Lycée de Jeunes Filles de Versailles, France, and she received an A.B. from the University of Oxford in 1932. She was granted the M.A. degree from the University of Toronto in 1939 and the Ph.D. degree from Radcliffe College in 1951, both in Romance Languages. In 1952 Mrs. Rose received a Vassar College Faculty Fellowship for research in the University of Paris on early 19th century French critics of American literature.

Mrs. Ross taught a variety of courses in French at Vassar. Her particular interests were in the lyric poetry of the Renaissance and in the writers in the 18th century. She revealed her English background in her love and knowledge of English poetry.

Mrs. Ross used both French and English with extraordinary wit, precision and flair. Her conversation in either language was always stimulating and delightful to her associates, because she always held it a point of courtesy and good manners – even in the most casual encounter – to give to any conversation the charm, verve, and wit which she could command. This always reminded her friends that her study of the 18th century was no superficial academic pursuit but the consequence of a deep feeling for the civilization represented by the best spirits of that age. Mrs. Ross was dedicated to the intellectual virtues so much praised by the 18th century: clarity, honest feeling of all facts, and the belief in the ennobling power of ideas. Her scholarship and teaching always reflected her devotion to those qualities; it had bite, vigor, sharpness, and liveliness. She studied feminism in the 17th century, but her interest in that subject was not confined to remoter times. In commentary on her participation in a travel-ling scholar's seminar she once described herself as "spreading among alumnes the gospel of female responsibility," and indeed her rigorous professional standards were reinforced by her feminism. She studied xenophobia in Charlotte Bronto; and at the time of her death her translation of Paul Claudel's *Les Musca* was in process of publication.

Mrs. Ross always served Vassar College to her utmost power. Her quick-mindedness designated her as an effective speaker and she was often called on to take part in panel discussions or conferences ranging from culture in the nuclear age to foreign languages in the elementary schools. She shared fully in the work of the French Department, serving some time as chairman. No matter what responsibilities were put upon her by family life or by illness, she was always devoted to her

JANET ROSS (continued)

professional duties. It is characteristic of her that when she was too ill to come to her class room, she received her students in her own house as though nothing were wrong. As an administrator she was decisive, efficient, and forward-looking, seeking in that role as she did in others the well-being of the college and the furtherance of its work.

Mrs. Ross was elected a member of the Council on the Junior Year Abroad in 1955 and also served as a member of the Evaluation Committee of Secondary Schools and Colleges of the Middle East Association of Teachers of French.

in keeping with her expressed wish, this memorial minute was not read at a meeting of the Vassar faculty.

Ruth Venable

Dean T. Mace