

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 **Mrs. Julia Coburn Antolini** in honor **of** her husband.

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

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Luigi Salvatorelli's interpretation of the Risorgimento appeared in 1971 and of Tomas Maldonado's work on urban planning in 1972. Mario also completed 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 has 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 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. Student 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 behind in Florence: "if everyone is gone, and the naughty ones left you 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

tried **to** revive. "Humanitas" is also the best **word** to describe Mario's Tega of more than twenty years **as** teacher and department chairman. It was imposs **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 mone **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,

Clyer Güchle

Clyde Griffen, Chairman

Elizabeth A. Dandel,

Elizabeth Daniels

Benjann T. Kohl.

Benjamin Kohl

Hausei Padomi...

Housei

Manfredi Piccolomini