

Memorial Minute for Margherita Silvi Dinale

Read by Alfonso Procaccini at the April 27, 2011 Faculty Meeting

Rita Silvi Dinale, Professor of Italian Language and Literature, came to Smith College in 1954, and retired from the Smith faculty in 1990, following her last year as director of the Smith JYA in Florence, Italy.

At the invitation of the late Professor Michele Canteralla, Rita left her native Tuscany in 1954 to join and become an instructor in the Italian department at Smith. When she left, she did so with the thought that a year or two in the United States could only provide her with a unique and valuable experience following her graduation from the University of Florence. Little did she realize, much less plan, that her projected one-year journey would turn into a thirty-six-year odyssey at Smith College.

Professor Dinale's passion and talents were devoted to maintaining and cultivating the long and distinguished tradition of Italian Studies at Smith College. She particularly cherished the opportunity of guiding and directing the Smith Junior Year Program in Florence - which she did six times, but also gladly dedicated much of her energy to supporting and promoting the high academic standards that have consistently defined our JY program since its very inception in 1927 - yes, the oldest academic program in Italy by an American private university.

A proud Tuscan by birth and culture, a spirited citizen of that "*nobil patria*" (noble birthplace) that Dante so deeply loved, Rita was always a staunch and valiant apologist for humanistic ideas and ideals. Her wide knowledge of literature, art history, music and the classics made her uniquely qualified and valuable to a department whose curriculum is both nourished by such disciplines as well as intrinsically connected to them. Indeed, the Italian department program of studies was enriched and expanded by Professor Dinale's intellectual interests, as she was also an early advocate of film studies, as well as one of the early pioneers to offer and promote courses on women's literature.

A similar attitude and talent was likewise present in Rita's other aspect of her professional life, namely her love of poetry and her commitment to writing poetry.

Like the renowned Italian Nobel-prize poet, Eugenio Montale, whose lyrical quality Rita so highly admired and in many ways sought to resemble, she turned to poetry to voice her own wayer: to express and relate that intimate yet mysterious inner experience which at best can only be intimated by poetry.

In closing, I would like to remember and honor Rita by sharing with you the beginning stanza of, *Poesia e` una voce (Poetry is a voice)* - the poem which opens her published volume, *Una Quieta Pazienza (A quiet Patience)*.

*Poesia e` una voce che risponde
a una voce in segreto,
un patto nascosto
a tutti ignoto
eccetto alla donna che parla
a se stessa, lentamente*

*come in un incontro
tra timidi amanti,
le loro lunghe carezze nella notte...*

Poetry is a voice that responds
to a voice in secret
a concealed pact
privy to all
except to the woman who speaks
to herself, slowly
as in an encounter
between two coy lovers,
their prolonged caresses in the night...