



Anita Vidussoni Grossvogel

December 25, 1926 - November 18, 2010

Anita Vidussoni Grossvogel was born and raised in Italy and received her Laurea in Lettere Moderne from the Università degli Studi di Milano. She went on to earn a Masters degree in Romance Studies at Harvard and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at Cornell with a dissertation directed by Paul de Man.

Anita began her scholarly career by publishing *Le Pouvoir du nom: essai sur Gerard de Nerval* (Paris: José Corti, 1972), an original, convincing, and coherent reading that revealed her fine intuition for poetic language and her extraordinary knowledge of literature. Subsequently she turned her attention to Italian authors, producing articles on Gadda and Pirandello.

Anita was a dedicated, versatile, and successful teacher for over forty years. She began teaching in Grenoble, France in 1950, then taught as a lecturer at Cornell for almost ten years before, in 1973, she joined the faculty of the Department of Romance Studies, with a joint appointment in the Department of Comparative Literature. She was promoted through the ranks and upon her retirement from Cornell in 1994, she was granted the title of Professor Emerita of Romance Studies.

The contribution that Anita made to the Italian literature program at Cornell was immense. Often the anchor person in a program that was in flux, Anita taught courses dedicated to every major period of Italian literature from the Middle Ages (Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch) to the Renaissance (Lorenzo de' Medici, Sannazzaro, and Poliziano) to 18th Century Thought (Vico, Muratori, Giannone, Genovesi, Beccaria, and the Verri brothers) to 18th Century Theater (Chiari, Goldoni, Gozzi, Metastasio, and Alfieri) to all the canonical Italian writers of the 19th and 20th Centuries, as well as many writers who were not part of the canon (from Caterina Percoto to Carlo Cignetti).

In most of her Italian courses, Anita introduced to the curriculum writers and cultural movements that had not been previously taught at Cornell, including Futurism, the “Ermetici” and “Novissimi.” When she taught in the Department of Comparative Literature, she used her extensive literary background to create several innovative courses that compared the writings of Borges, Beckford, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Nerval, Stendhal, Proust, Mann, Kafka, Hawthorne, with those of Italian writers.

Anita was also the first faculty member at Cornell to teach courses on Italian cinema, and literature and cinema. The popularity of her cinema courses was matched by few courses in her two departments.

Consistently involved and caring, Anita mentored students throughout their time at Cornell. She was able to encourage, coax, and cajole many a student into making great progress and becoming more involved in Italian. Her students – a number of them now tenured in the academy -- retain very fond memories of her, remembering her as an extremely knowledgeable and supportive teacher, a truly gentle, kind, and generous person, and a legendary cook.

Having heard of Anita’s passing, Professor David Ward (Professor of Italian at Wellesley College), who completed a Ph.D. in Romance Studies with a dissertation directed by Anita, wrote: “Of all the times and places our paths crossed—in the classroom, in her beautiful house in Ithaca, her apartment in Venice—one comes to mind more readily than others. One December we discovered we were leaving from JFK on the same day and decided to rent a car and drive down. I drove. Anita didn’t drive and as far as I know never had a license. It was a dreadful upstate New York December day, a storm was depositing vast amounts of snow on car and road for most of the trip, cars to our right and left were sliding off the highway. Anita though remained blissfully unaware of the real dangers of driving in a snowstorm despite my ever whiter knuckles and 20 mph driving. The journey took an eternity, but once the weather abated I could not have wished for a better companion. Learning happens in many places—in the classroom, in offices, in houses. That day I learnt, and learnt a lot, about many things in a car during a snow storm with a remarkable woman.

Anita leaves behind her daughter Deborah, living in Seattle with her husband Jay and two children; and her son Steven, now continuing his mother's work as a Professor of Italian at the University of Georgia, with his wife Mia, a daughter, and three grandchildren.

Marilyn Migiel, Chairperson; William J. Kennedy; Jeannine Suzanne Routier-Pucci

Many thanks to Anita’s son, Professor Steven Grossvogel, some of whose prose we have used, with his kind permission, for this memorial statement.