Marjorie Grene was born in Milwaukee on December 13, 1910, the only child of Harry Glicksman and Edna Kerngood. Growing up in Madison, where her father was a professor of English, she majored in Zoology at Wellesley, graduating in 1931. Having studied as an exchange student in Germany under Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers from 1931-3, she took her PhD in Philosophy from Radcliffe in 1935. She taught at the University of Chicago from 1938 to 1944, where she met and married the classicist David Grene. From 1944 to 1960, she was without a regular academic appointment, but continued to publish, while raising her two children Ruth (b. 1943) and Nicholas (b. 1947) and working with her husband in running farms first in Lemont, Illinois, and then (after 1952) in County Wicklow in Ireland.

Her books, Dreadful Freedom (1948) and Martin Heidegger (1957), were among the first on contemporary European philosophy in English. She divorced in 1961. Returning to a permanent position as Lecturer in Philosophy in Queen’s University, Belfast in 1960, she was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the University of California at Davis in 1965, where she worked until retirement in 1978, though she went on holding visiting professorships in many other institutions for ten years after that. She made major contributions to the history of philosophy with A Portrait of Aristotle (1963) and Descartes (1985), to epistemology – The Knower and the Known (1966) – and, perhaps most importantly to the philosophy of biology, a subject she pioneered with Approaches to a Philosophical Biology (1968), The Understanding of Nature (1974) and Interactions, (written with Niles Eldredge, 1992). It was appropriate that her last published book (written with David Depew) was The Philosophy of Biology (2004). She was widely acclaimed for her work, being awarded honorary degrees from Tulane University and the University of Dijon, and in 2002 the appearance of The Philosophy of Marjorie Grene made her the first woman to be featured in the prestigious Library of Living Philosophers series. Appointed Honorary University Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech in 1988, she continued to be intellectually active well into her nineties and, after a brief final illness, died in Blacksburg on March 16, 2009. She is greatly missed by her son and daughter, her daughter-in-law Eleanor, her six grandchildren, Sophia, Hannah, Jessie, Clement, Nick, and Lucy, and her great-granddaughter Nazyia.
A Memorial Gathering for Marjorie Grene
May 3, 2009 at 4 pm.
1100 Torgersen Hall, Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Virginia

Prelude: Selections by Haydn and Mozart
Musicians: Linda Plaut (violin), Theresa Conti (viola),
Emily Reisinger (violin), and Jana Ruble (cello)

Welcome: Richard Burian, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and STS,
Virginia Tech

Family Speakers: Ruth Grene (daughter), Nicholas Grene (son), and
Sophia Grene (eldest grandchild)

Reading: Hannah Grene (second grandchild): “The Tower” and
“Long-Legged Fly,” by William Butler Yeats

Musical Interlude: Joseph Haydn, Adagio from the String Quartet op. 20 #5

Colleagues and Friends: David Depew (Iowa), Joe Pitt (VA Tech), and
additional remarks by others.

Concluding Remarks: Professor Burian

Reception

In Remembrance of Professor Grene’s death on March 16, 2009, and in honor of her
life, Virginia Tech is flying its Commonwealth of Virginia flag at half-staff today, by
order of the President of the University, Charles Steger.

A Memorial Fund in Marjorie’s honor has been established by the Philosophy
Department at VT to fund an annual Marjorie Grene Graduate Prize, and to fund
events that honor her memory. Marjorie also supported various good causes and
would have appreciated contributions to the ACLU and Amnesty International.

The family would like to thank Dick Burian and Anne McNabb, Jim Klagge, Bill
Fitzpatrick and Melissa Weiner, Doris and Richard Zallen, and Ava White Howard for
all their kindness and support during our mother/grandmother’s last illness. Thanks
especially for the music, Linda! Many thanks to Virginia Tech’s Philosophy
Department for funding this event.