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Arturo Vivante, Author of Tales Defined by Their Detail, Dies at 84

By [DENNIS HEVESI](#)

Arturo Vivante, the author of more than 70 short stories for The New Yorker — many set in the Tuscan hills of his native Italy and most bringing a delicate touch to poignant moments and vivid minutiae — died on April 1 at his home in Wellfleet, Mass. He was 84.

He had been ill for a long time, his daughter Lydia Vivante said.

“I wrote to know the mystery that even a small matter holds,” Mr. Vivante said.

Among those small matters were the moment a deaf woman tries to hear a nightingale; the lost chance for a kiss in a rowboat run aground; a small boy’s friendship with a snake.

While most of Mr. Vivante’s stories appeared in The New Yorker, starting in 1958, and later in collections of those works, he also wrote three novels and articles for Vogue, London Magazine, The Southern Review and The New York Times.

“His stories were very much of their time,” Roger Angell, a fiction editor at The New Yorker, said on Thursday. “Short fiction was becoming shorter, coming down to the intentionally modest. He was thoughtful in his perceptions of human emotions.”

In his first novel, “A Goodly Babe” (Little, Brown, 1966), Mr. Vivante wrote of the unspoken fears of a young married couple. A Times review said it “captures the intensity of elementary truth and transmutes it into rare, crystalline beauty.”

Twenty-one of Mr. Vivante’s short stories were gathered in “The French Girls of Killini” (Little, Brown, 1967). One, “The Nightingale,” tells of an old woman who once was a singer but is now deaf. Her family takes her to Italy in the hope that she will hear a nightingale’s song. The bird comes into view, but the woman cannot hear it.

Mr. Vivante's last novel, "Truelove Knot," was published in 2007 by [University of Notre Dame Press](#). It reflects the year he spent in an internment camp in Canada, considered an enemy alien from Italy despite his father's Jewish heritage and his family's anti-Fascist leanings.

Born in Rome on Oct. 17, 1923, Mr. Vivante was a son of Leone and Elena DeBosis Vivante. His father was a noted philosopher; his mother was a painter. In 1938, facing Fascism, the family moved to England. The British then sent the teenage Mr. Vivante into internment in Canada while his family remained in England.

After his release Mr. Vivante enrolled at [McGill University](#) in Montreal, from which he graduated in 1944. He returned to Italy and earned a medical degree from the University of Rome. For nine years he was in private medical practice.

One day an American woman visiting Rome, Nancy Bradish, came to his office. They married in 1958 and moved to New York. There, with the publication of his first New Yorker short story, Mr. Vivante gave up medicine for a career in writing.

His wife died in 2002. Besides his daughter Lydia, of Wellfleet, Mr. Vivante is survived by two other daughters, Lucy Vivante, also of Wellfleet, and Leslie McDowell of Kensington, Md.; a son, Benjamin, of Lexington, Mass.; a brother, Cesare, of Milan, Italy; a sister, Charis, of Florence, Italy; and three grandchildren.

In much of his writing Mr. Vivante imbued detail with deeper meaning. In his short story "Last Rites," a woman is buried without church services. The rites are symbolically performed by workers fashioning her resting place, with a mason flicking mortar off his trowel, an act of benediction.

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