

IN MEMORIAM

HELMUT REHDER

Helmut Rehder was born in Hamburg, Germany on June 22, 1905, the youngest son of Julius and Ottilie Rehder. His father was a well-known painter. The early family contacts with the visual arts formed one of his continuing major interests. His father's profession also brought about changes in the location of the family, with the result that Helmut completed his schooling in southern Germany, contributing in this way to the cosmopolitanism characteristic of him. And like students of the time he attended several universities, studying at the University of Berlin in 1926-27, especially with the well-known literary scholar Julius Petersen. He took his degree at the University of Heidelberg in 1929, writing his dissertation: Die Philosophie der unendlichen Landschaft under the direction of the distinguished philosopher, Karl Jaspers. His entire career was devoted to the humanities, with particular attention to literature, philosophy and the visual arts.

He completed his degree when academic positions were scarce. His first job after his abitur was in banking. After receiving his Ph.D. degree he continued his work towards the Staatsexamen, also completing the traditional reworking of his dissertation, which was published in 1932 as a "contribution to the Romantic world-view" in the distinguished book-series of the Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift. Its foreword, giving credit to Aby Warburg as well as Jaspers, cites the "break-through into the infinite" of the dome at Florence as a parallel to the descent of the Romantic into the infinite within himself, and the attempt

to "reach behind the bounds of space" in the landscapes of Claude Lorrain as clarifying the deep Romantic speculation concerning the problem of time which can be taken as the dynamic principle for a landscape. The visual arts and philosophy thus assist in the interpretation of the concern of German Romanticism with the "Romantic landscape," which in turn illuminates the Romantic movement as a whole.

The foreword was written at Columbia, Missouri, the site of his first academic position. At Jaspers' seminar in Heidelberg one of his responsibilities was the library. One day he was asked to retrieve overdue books from an American student, June Kruse of St Louis. He recovered more than the books. On April 4, 1931 he and June were married. And in September, 1931, he assumed his instructorship at the University of Missouri. He entered at once into American academic activities, publishing first of all reviews in the standard journals, such as the Monatshefte of the University of Wisconsin and the Journal of English and Germanic Philology of the University of Illinois. He also engaged in other professional responsibilities, attending meetings of the Modern Language Association at a time when universities did not provide support, so that travel to the post-Christmas meetings was undertaken with frequent adventures in the uncertain winter weather of the midwest. During a period of slow promotion he was raised to an assistant professorship after three years.

When a successor was sought for Rudolph A. Hohlfeld, the outstanding Goethe scholar and long-time chairman of the dominant German department in the country, Helmut Rehder was one of the two final candidates. He received the invitation. And in 1937 he was appointed associate professor at the University

of Wisconsin, becoming full professor in 1942.

Conditions at the time soon changed the emphases of his career. Continuing at first with the expected activities of a research scholar, he published in journals of this country and Germany, where he also carried out research. On the last of his prewar research journeys in 1939 he and his family barely escaped from his native country, returning through Scandinavia. Several years later his father, now a widower, joined him in Madison, leaving Germany by the even more difficult route through Siberia; after the war his sister Gertrude also came to Madison, bringing a large number of his father's paintings. The Rehder family then came to be centered in Madison. The war also brought about a reduction in the number of graduate students, and it led to new activities, through the government-supported language programs.

At the beginning of the war it had become clear that the traditional foreign language training, with its emphasis on reading and translation, was unsuited for the new needs of society, which centered on oral communication. When civilian and military specialists were sent to the universities, these had to develop new programs of instruction. Teaching the students conversational German led from initial improvisations to new texts. These were produced with a colleague, W. Freeman Twaddell, in a collaboration which extended throughout their academic careers. The first of many textbooks, Conversational German, was published by Holt in 1944. In it and subsequent textbooks he exhibited his literary talents, providing witty short anecdotes and longer stories, often written with the irony he admired in contemporaries like Thomas Mann. One reviewer commented on the existentialist flavor of his writings, which are

far superior to the dreary materials found in many foreign language texts.

The teaching method was also new. Often referred to as mim-mem, from mimicry-memorization, it naturally made use of the tape recorder when this became available in 1947. It also was the basis of foreign language teaching methods used after sputnik, when foreign language education was widely extended in American universities, high schools and even elementary schools. Rehder and Twaddell also contributed to this extension, producing in collaboration with others a widely used series of high school texts with teacher's manuals and other aids. These activities, which once seemed beneath the dignity of an eminent scholar, attracted his energies because of the far larger audience that might be educated through such texts than through the publication of specialized monographs and articles. Besides his skill in producing the texts, he was a forceful and effective teacher, at all levels. After his appointment at the University of Texas he long taught elementary German, presenting the basic material in lecture sessions which were followed up by smaller classes directed by teaching assistants.

Yet his publications during this period were by no means confined to elementary textbooks. In collaboration with Twaddell and another Wisconsin colleague, R.-M. S. Heffner, he prepared the subsequently standard American edition of Goethe's Faust, with a full introduction and commentary, as well as a separate Vocabulary. He also continued his publication of articles: on German literature, on literary criticism, and on "literature as an experience."

While the period at Wisconsin was productive, he was attracted to the University of Illinois in 1946 when offered the headship of another large and

important department of German. His administrative duties did not stop his research, which at this period was concerned especially with Goethe and his contemporaries. A monograph of 1953 dealt with one of the lesser figures, Johann Nicolaus Meinhard, focussing on Meinhard's translations--in this way illustrating another continuing interest. But his happy years at Illinois were disrupted by one of the not infrequent interferences of regents in matters where they are invariably wrong. President Stoddard, a man Rehder admired, objected to the promotion of a spurious cancer remedy, krebiozen, by one of the faculty members in the administration. The Regents took a stand against Stoddard, leading to his resignation.

At this time the University of Texas had an outstanding president, who had persuaded its regents to take seriously the constitutional requirement that the university be "first-class." In the fall of 1953 Rehder came to Austin as visiting professor. In 1955 he accepted a permanent position here. His appointment gave notice to the academic world that the University of Texas could now compete for eminent scholars. The upper limits on salaries before Logan Wilson's presidency were widely known, so that during the negotiations to bring Rehder here Provost Paul Boner was called by his counterpart in Urbana, who spoke lightly of the University's effrontry in trying to lure a man from the University of Illinois, as well as the futility of such a move. Boner responded amicably, arranged the necessary terms, and in this way accomplished one of the important steps which led to the Department's rating among the two or three best in the country.

Rehder's years at Texas represented the height of an eminent career. He

attracted excellent graduate students, also from abroad; some of these have contributed to the commemorative volume which is being prepared under the editorship of Lee B. Jennings and George Schulz-Behrend. He set out to produce a graduate program with requirements that covered the outstanding achievements of German literature and culture, and with examinations that led students to productive research while also testing their abilities. In the undergraduate curriculum he introduced alongside the time-honored period surveys courses focussed on topics; some of these were highly original, such as one centering on the essay as well as the lyric on the grounds that both were examples of personal expression. He was a member of influential university committees, such as the Graduate Council. He brought to the institution a keen sense of what a university had to be to nurture the only level of scholarship he found acceptable. Both within the institution and his remote home, in which he did much reading and writing, he put a high premium on peace that would allow his ideas to evolve to their fullest and on surroundings that would enhance inspiration. He gave much of his energy to the expanding program of the Department, which involved annual symposia resulting in a series of publications as well as regular exchanges with eminent scholars abroad. He served as chairman of the Department from 1965-1969. He encouraged the research and publication of others, including the journal Dimension founded by A. Leslie Willson. And his publications continued, generally spanning two or more of his interests, as in his article on the "significance of Hegel's phenomenology for literary criticism," in his introductory comments on two sets of drawings by John Guerin, and in his elegantly produced article in the Graduate Journal on Planetenkinder, subtitled "some problems of character portrayal in

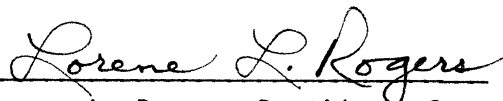
literature." The latter article illustrates well a characteristic of most of his writings. They contained completely new original interpretations and sometimes the unique use of ideas that made them broadly useful not only in relation to his subjects but throughout many disciplines in the humanities.

He also received academic honors. Colorado, Northwestern, Berkeley, Rice and Marburg invited him to occupy visiting professorships. The West German government decorated him with an Order of Merit of the First Class. The South Central Modern Language Association elected him to its presidency. And his own university made him an Ashbel Smith professor.

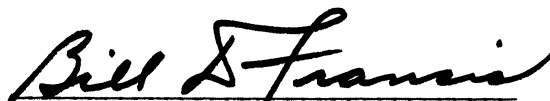
Here as wherever he had been he enjoyed living, now in his spacious home on one of the highest hills in the county. Its attractions led him and June to give up their California summer home that had been a yearly refuge when they were in the midwest. In his Travis County home he also spent the greater part of his retirement, until his death on January 10, 1977. He was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery. He is survived by June, two sons: Helmut Julius of Austin and Christopher of Washington, D.C., and five grandchildren, and by his sister Gertrude of Madison, Wisconsin and two brothers who stayed in Germany, Otto and Gerhardt.

Helmut Rehder may be characterized, as he did his teacher Jaspers, as a humanist concerned with the future of humanity who aimed to interpret the writings of the past under the assumption that they have an active mission to fulfill in the present. The humanities to him were distinguished by their search for authenticity and truth. When proposing his interpretations he rejected--in his own words--"mere acquisition and

knowledge," choosing instead to respond to people of his world: his teachers, his students, his colleagues, whether as an excellent conversationalist or writer. They in turn responded to him, probably in the recognition that a humanistic teacher like him was as he characterized Jaspers: the heart of the life of his time, able to define it, to hold up a mirror to it, and intellectually to mould it.



Lorene L. Rogers, President of  
The University of Texas at Austin



B. D. Francis, Secretary  
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of W. P. Lehmann (chairman), J. Christopher Middleton and W. Gordon Whaley.