



Report of the Memorial Resolution
Committee for

Helmut Rehder

Documents and the Minutes
of the General Faculty

Prepared by a Special Committee
Consisting of W. P. Lehmann (chairman),
J. Christopher Middleton,
and W. Gordon Whaley

Distributed to members of the General
Faculty on 2 September 1977

In Memoriam Helmut Rehder

Helmut Rehder was born in Hamburg, Germany on June 22, 1905, the youngest son of Julius and Otilie 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 professor 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 PhD 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 Lorraine as clarifying the deep Romantic speculation concerning the problem of the 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 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, focusing 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 inferences 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 effrontery 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 was 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 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 focused 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, DC, 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 part 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 of 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 humanist 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.

By W. P. Lehmann
13 January 1977

We are here to pay our respects to Helmut Rehder, friend, colleague, teacher, devoted husband and father. One of the leading scholars in German literature, he came to this country in the year he married June, 1931, two years after he completed his

degree at Heidelberg with Jaspers, for a notable career of his own. After six years at the University of Missouri, he was chosen to succeed the eminent Goethe scholar, Alexander Hohlfeld, at the outstanding department of the time, Wisconsin's. The headship of another strong department, Illinois's, lured him away after ten years. Ten years later he left Illinois, this time to bring eminence to a department and a university that might charitably have been called promising. The University named him to an Ashbel Smith professorship when these were created in 1963, joining its honor with those of other universities through visiting appointments, from his native country through a decoration, and from learned societies. We take a few moments to try to understand this remarkable man, not from events external in his life but from his actions and writings -- which may disclose his character much in the way he sought to penetrate the character of eminent literary figures and their creations.

We may start from the self-evaluation which he supplied to the last edition of *Who's Who*, where he states: "Benevolent scepticism, developed at early high school age, kept me from falling victim to blind enthusiasm or murky depression. Unhesitating response to people of my world (my teachers, my students, my colleagues) proved more fruitful than mere acquisition of knowledge and research." The more fruitful choice of his reflects the dual forces which he found in the fictional and real world: life and the intellect. His elegant article in the 8th volume of the *Graduate Journal* sees an inherent contradiction between these: life demanding change and renewal, the intellect complete and unchanging. The contradiction, and the conflict between these two forces is for him the thesis of, among others, Germany's great 17th century novel, *Simplizissimus*, and the modern novels of Thomas Mann. The drives of these two forces he also finds as the key to Goethe's *Faust*, in the introduction to the edition he put out with two friends of long standing, Roe-Merrill Heffner and Freeman Twaddell. The *Faust* poem is there characterized as the "poetic portrayal" of the "drive of love and the drive for knowledge." His self-evaluation leaves no doubt of his own preferences, which is also evident from his happy life with June, his sons and their families, and with his friends.

His preference is also evident in the attractive elementary texts to which he gave so much of his energy, exemplifying even in these the conflict between life and the intellect. Long before deans and the public hit on this solution to problems of the professorate, he taught freshmen and sophomores, and also through a series of sparkling handbooks elementary and high school students. In one of these handbooks, with a story based on his older son's life presented with something of the "modern relativism, sophistication, and irony" he found in Mann's Joseph novels, a fanciful anecdote tells of a flier who landed in a Shangri La, remained there for twenty years, and then returned with a single sheet of paper on which was written: "Werde der du bist. -- Become what you are." This playful story repeats his view of the intellect as "complete and unchanging." To him the "mind is old even before it is born," but humans pursue their active lives, growing into a "gradual and approximate comprehension" of it.

His own life exemplifies vigorous, enthusiastic, often artless enjoyment of living, totally free from the pompousness which creeps over many academics. In the search for character, incidents often provide insights or epiphanies. One illustrating Helmut's humor and humanity is a telephone encounter with Harry Ransom. Critical of a proposed undertaking of ours, Harry called and with Texas directness asked: "What do you jackasses think you're doing?" I proposed getting Helmut to explain the situation, and while Harry waited at his end of the line pulled Helmut out of a meeting. Informed of the matter as we returned to the phone, Helmut picked it up and inaugurated the

conversation in his slight foreign accent: "Jackass speaking." When the explosion on the other end of the line subsided, the problem was soon solved. It is no exaggeration to say that in those days there were giants at the University of Texas. The same direct humanity lightened the lives of Helmut's many students and friends, for among his other qualities he was an excellent conversationalist.

We remember him today for his genius in exploring the human intellect and in living, which he did in accordance with a maxim of his in one of his other introductory texts: "Lebe, wie du, wenn du stirbst, wünschen wirst, gelebt zu haben. -- Live, as when you die, you will wish to have lived."

CURRICULUM VITA

Helmut Rehder

22 June, 1905, in Bergedorf-Hamburg -- 10 January 1977, in Austin, Texas

Naturalized citizen: January 1937

Married June Rehder; two sons: Helmut Rehder, Jr., and Christopher Michael Rehder

Education

May 1929- Feb. 1931 U. of Hamburg: State Diploma for Secondary Education
(*Staatsexamen*)

Outstanding Teachers: Ernst Cassirer, Erwin Panofsky, Robert Petsch

Jan. 1929 PhD, Heidelberg; Sponsor: Karl Jaspers

May 1925-Jan. 1929 Universities of Berlin and Heidelberg

Outstanding teachers: Heinrich Rickert, Karl Jaspers, Julius Petersen, Carl
Neumann, Carl Brinkmann, Hugo Lederer

1923-25 Apprentice in Banking

Spring 1923 *Abitur*, Realgymnasium Goetheschule, Karlsruhe (Baden)

Outstanding Teachers: Karl Ott, Franz Schnabel

Academic Positions

University of Texas at Austin

1963-1975 Ashbel Smith Professor, Dept. of Germanic Languages (emeritus, 1975)

1955-1975 Professor, Department of Germanic Languages

1966-1968 Chairman, Dept. of Germanic Languages

Sept. 1953-Jan. 1954 Visiting Professor

University of Illinois

1946-1955 Professor, Head of Department

University of Wisconsin

1937-1946 Associate Professor, Professor

University of Missouri

1931-1937 Instructor, Assistant Professor

Summer Appointments

University of Colorado 1948, 1956, 1960, 1961, 1962

Northwestern University 1950
University of Marburg 1964
University of California (Berkeley) 1966
Declined Appointments
Harvard University Fall 1953
Johns Hopkins University Fall 1958
University of Washington Fall 1959

Honors

Recipient of the Schiller Medal of the West German Republic, 1955
Again, Recipient of the Schiller Medal of the West German Republic, 1959
[Rehder's comment: "which makes me wonder about the value of such honors"]
Verdienstorden der Westdeutschen Bundesrepublik, 1. Klasse, December 1972

Selected Professional Activities

Co-Editor (German), Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 1946-55
-Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 1946-55
(Consulting Board), Studies in Romanticism (Boston University), since 1961
(Consulting Editor), Dimension (University of Texas), 1968
Modern Language Association of America
Member, Committee on Research Activities, 1947-53
-chairman, 1950-1953
Member, Executive Council; Vice-President, 1960-62
South-Central Modern Language Association: President, 1970-71
American Association of Teachers of German: First Vice-President, 1958
Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation: Chairman, Region XII, 1965-67

Book Publications

Die Philosophie der unendlichen Landschaft: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der romantischen Weltanschauung. Buchreihe der Dt. Vierteljahrschr. für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, Bd. 19. Halle, 1932
[= expanded PhD Dissertation, U. of Heidelberg. Wertheim/Neckar, 1930]
Johann N. Meinhard und seine Übersetzungen. U. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, Vol. 37. Urbana: U. of Illinois P, 1953

With various co-authors:

w/ U. Thomas, W. F. Twaddell, & P. O'Connor. *Hausaufgaben II.* New York, 1968
w/ U. Thomas, W. F. Twaddell, & P. O'Connor. *Hausaufgaben I.* New York, 1967
w/ U. Thomas, W. F. Twaddell, & H. Walbrück. *Deutsch: Denken, Wissen und Kennen.* New York, 1966; + Teacher's Manual
w/W. P. Lehmann & H. Beyer. *Spectrum: Modern German Thought in Science, Philosophy and Art.* New York, 1964
w/ Ursula Thomas & W. F. Twaddell. *Deutsch: Lesen und Denken.* New York, 1964; + Teacher's Manual
w/ U. Thomas, W. F. Twaddell, & P. O'Connor. *Deutsch: Sprechen und Lesen.* New York, 1963; + Teacher's Manual
-Revised edition, Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1972

w/ U. Thomas, W. F. Twaddell, & P. O'Connor. *Deutsch: Verstehen und Sprechen*. New York, 1962; + Teacher's Manual
-Revised Edition, 1970

w/ W. P. Lehmann, L. Shaw, & S. N. Werbow. *Review and Progress in German*. New York, 1959

w/ W. F. Twaddell. *Practicing German*. New York, 1958

w/ W. P. Lehmann & G. Schulz-Behrend. *Active German*. New York, 1958
-Revised edition: New York, 1962

w/ R-M. S. Heffner, W. F. Twaddell. *The Gretchen Episode from Goethe's "Faust."* Boston 1950

w/ R-M. S. Heffner, W. F. Twaddell. *Goethe's Faust I & II* (with a specialized German-English vocabulary, critical introduction, notes and commentary). Boston 1950, 1954

w/ R-M. S. Heffner, W. F. Twaddell. *Faust Vocabulary*. Boston, 1950

w/ W. F. Twaddell. *German Area Readings*. New York, 1947

w/ W. F. Twaddell. *Fundamentals of German Grammar*. New York, 1947

w/ W. F. Twaddell. *German*. New York 1947
-Revised Edition, New York, 1958

w/ W.F. Twaddell. *Conversational German*. New York, 1944

Other Publications

-almost 50 articles on German literature from the Enlightenment onward, especially on Goethe
- over 70 short notes, reviews, and contributions to handbooks and encyclopedias

Supervision

MA Theses:

3 Univ. of Missouri
8 Univ. of Wisconsin
6 Univ. of Illinois
6 Univ. of Texas

PhD Dissertations:

5 Univ. of Wisconsin
7 Univ. of Illinois
23 Univ. of Texas
