



Ruth Preston Miller Lehmann

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Ruth Preston Miller Lehmann, literary educator and poet, with specialties in Old English and Irish, died on Monday, April 3, 2000. She was born in Ithaca, New York, on February 18, 1912, the third child of Ernest Allen Miller and Lillian Allen Philipps Miller.

She completed the B.A. Degree at Cornell University in 1932, holding the Blauvelt Scholarship during her four years there; she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in her junior year, to Phi Kappa Phi in 1932. She continued her studies at Cornell to the M. A. degree in 1934, and was elected to Phi Lambda Theta in 1933. After travel in Europe she spend a year at Bryn Mawr College as Scholar in English in 1935-36. She completed the Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in 1942, where she was Anne Gorham Research Fellow 1937-38, then served as teaching assistant, and was awarded the Edwin Markham Post-Doctorate Fellowship for 1943-44.

She began her professional career in 1943, as editor of language texts published by the U. S. Armed Forces Institute, Washington D.C. for military personnel to acquire speaking proficiency in the languages of the countries to which they were sent, ranging from Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Turkish to the languages of Europe. Their format had an important influence on foreign language texts published for universities after the war. She was appointed instructor in English at George Washington University (1944-45) and then lecturer at Washington University, St. Louis (1945-47). Devoting herself to research while her children were young, she enjoyed a Kathryn McHale Traveling Fellowship (AAUW) to Ireland in 1953-54, which would later enable her to complete her first book. In 1955-56 she oversaw English Instruction at the Dil-Tarih component of the University of Ankara under the Georgetown English Language Program, for which she and her husband produced the textbook, *American Conversation*. The book provided a year of English instruction for university students and for Turkish professionals who came to this country under U. S. government international programs. The first and only text in the field, *American Conversation*, continued in use for numerous years. On her return to this country she was appointed Associate Professor of English and Humanities at Huston-Tillotson College (1956-58), and served as Chairman of the Department of Communications (1957-58). After another period devoted to research she was invited

to join the English Department at the University of Texas, the University having ended its nepotism policy barring appointments for husband and wife, where she remained the rest of her teaching career. At the University of Texas she was Lecturer from 1960-67, Associate Professor from 1967-71 and Professor from 1972-80 when she became Professor Emeritus.

On her appointment to the UT faculty, she proposed teaching Old Irish, a request that was reluctantly approved. Opinions changed when a large class of graduate students signed up for the course. During her years at the University her graduate courses in Old English and Old Irish attracted a number of excellent students who are now enjoying notable careers. In 1977 several of "her former students" edited a collection of her poetry, simply titled *Poems*. Chief editor, Kurth Sprague, wrote in the introduction: "Ruth Lehmann is a great teacher; the remembrances which follow from students of hers will attest to that. But how to explain the way in which she makes you look at Anglo-Saxon and Old Irish poetry as a part of the continuum of literature? Inevitably, one falls back on words such as 'respect' and 'reverence' which, not unforeseeably, have overtones of religious feelings. All this is in her poetry; there is a flaming of love here."

In addition to articles on Old Irish published in the leading Irish, French, and German journals, and articles on Old English, she published an edition of the Old Irish *Fled Duin na nGedn* (1964). In 1975 in collaboration with her husband she produced *An Introduction to Old Irish* as the first volume of a series of texts on older languages put out by the Modern Language Association. Her next two books were translations: *Early Irish Verse* (1982) and *Beowulf: An Imitative Translation* (1988), selections from which were chosen for inclusion in the *Columbia Anthology of British Literature*. Poet Dave Oliphant, after stating "two courses that for me made the whole ordeal of the doctorate worth the trouble were *Don Quixote* in Spanish and *Beowulf* in Old English," called the translation "a remarkable version of the poem that maintains marvelously the alliterative scheme of the work. . . . The look and feel of the original comes across beautifully, and the translator's diction makes for a truly magnificent sound and a very readable text."

Her last major publication was *Blessed Bastard: A Novel of Sir Galahad* (1997). Douglas MacLean in the preface recalls her skills as a translator and teacher. "I first met Ruth Lehmann in 1978 when I was taking her course in Old Irish language and literature at the University of Texas at Austin. It was an unforgettable class, difficult to be sure, and in some ways, as fascinating as the language we were learning. . . . While her students groped to simply understand the sense of Old Irish poetry, Lehmann herself produced English translations -- years in the making -- which employed the same number of syllables per line that she found in the original verse, along with its complex internal rime schemes. That was how we knew that we were in the presence of a master, but her mastery was not simply a matter of technique. . . . The members of that class took away with them more than a memory of the difficulty of Old Irish as a language. We each found in its literature something we could have found nowhere else, though what we found differed from student to student."

Among her honors was the invitation to deliver the Rudolf Thurneysen Memorial Lecture at the University of Bonn, 1985. Her memberships include the Modern Language Association, the Medieval Academy of America, Early English Texts Society. She delivered papers at numerous learned society meetings, among them the Third International Congress of Celtic Studies, Edinburgh, 1967. She is included in *Who's Who in the World* as well as *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who of American Women*.

Throughout her life she maintained a love of and fascination for the natural world, its wild places and native creatures. It inspired her writing and guided her hobbies. In 1990, she and her husband, in celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary, gave the Nature Conservancy a 160-acre tract of land in the Cypress Creed area near Lake Travis as wildlife habitat and a site for ecological research.

She is survived by her husband, Winfred P. Lehmann; her son, Terry and his wife, Twila; and by her daughter, Sandra and her husband, William F. Looke; as well as two grandchildren, Dr. Jenny Lehmann and Trenton Lehmann. There will be no public ceremony. The family very much appreciates the excellent medical care she received at the Specialty Hospital at St. David's during her last illness, the assistance of Lifeway Home Health and Lone Star Hospice, and the sympathies of her many friends, who may remember her with lines she wrote in Florence in 1956:

The way, the truth, the life -- and now the dying.
Let me endure, not showing pain nor grief.
The sky is mine, the gathering clouds above me,
This ray of sun, and death, the prized relief.

Official UT Memorial Resolution at:
<<http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/2001-2002/memorials/Lehmann/lehmann.html>>

Books

- 1956 (with W. P. Lehmann). *American Conversation. Textbook for Turkish Speakers.* Ankara: Georgetown University Language Program.
1964. *Fled Duin na nGedh.* Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies.
- 1975 (with W. P. Lehmann). *An Introduction to Old Irish.* NY: Modern Language Association.
1982. *Early Irish Verse.* Austin: University of Texas Press.
1988. *Beowulf: An Imitative Translation.* Austin: University of Texas Press.
1997. *Blessed Bastard: A Novel of Sir Galahad.* San Antonio: Wings.

See also
<<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/iedocctr/ie-pubs/rpmlobit.html>>

An Old Irish Poem
translated by
Ruth P. M. Lehmann

Scél lem duib:
Dordaid dam;
Snigid gaim;
Ro-faith sam;

Gáeth ard uar,
ísel grín;
gair a rith;
ruirthech rín;

Rorúd ráth,
ro-cleth cruth;
ro-gab gnáth
gingrann guth

Ro-gab uacht
etti én:
aigre ré:
é mo scél

News is yours:
Stag calls does;
Summer flees;
Winter snows;

Wind high, chill;
low the sun;
short its course;
wild waves run;

Brown leaves blow,
shapeless lie;
frequent now
brent geese cry.

Cold has caught
wings of mews:
ice age rude:
this my news.
