

At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on December 7, 2021, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Eckehard Peter Herbert Simon was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.

ECKEHARD PETER HERBERT SIMON

BORN: January 5, 1939

DIED: May 2, 2020

Eckehard P. H. (for Peter Herbert) Simon, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures, *Emeritus*, died on May 2, 2020, in Lexington at the age of 81.

Born on the eve of World War II, six-year-old Eckehard was with his mother and sister on the outskirts of Dresden, where they had hoped to find refuge, when that city was fire-bombed. Yet against the violent backdrop of the hostilities, Eckehard and his older sister enjoyed moments of relief, swimming, for example, in the Elbe's insalubrious waters and bicycling along the river. Throughout the family's moves to various refugee camps, the scholarly young Eckehard succeeded in bringing along an incipiently scientific (and still partially extant) collection of birds' eggs. When the East German regime jailed Eckehard's stepfather on suspicion of spying for the West, his mother managed to get her children first to West Germany and then in 1955 to the U.S. under the sponsorship of a close relative.

Eckehard rapidly made his way in his adoptive country. After earning his B.A. (and a letter in men's soccer) at Columbia College, he received his A.M. and Ph.D. at Harvard. Here he rose steadily through the faculty ranks, from an instructorship in 1964 to tenure in 1971 to the Victor S. Thomas Professorship of Germanic Languages and Literatures in 1996, a chair he held until retiring in 2007. He obtained awards for scholarly research from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Fulbright Foundation.

Ever a good and generous citizen within the University, Eckehard unfailingly stepped into the breach to provide administrative service when needed, no matter what the toll on him personally. Most notably, he took the helm of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures for a total of thirteen years. He helped Medieval Studies in the same manner, not only chairing it but also organizing the highly successful symposium that eventuated in a collective volume on medieval theater.

Despite his modest demeanor and self-deprecation, Eckehard was a brilliant speaker and distinguished scholar. In his teaching, he focused on the German medieval court and its

literature and on the emergence of theater and performance in medieval German settings. In his classes, he demonstrated a gift for delivery so that his material appealed even to undergraduates with little or no background: he illustrated his two Core courses richly with images and punctuated lectures with humor. Teaching Fellows who assisted in Eckehard's very popular course *The Medieval Court* mention in particular his skill in preparing tightly structured and engaging lectures. "For all their order," one notes, "they were never point-by-point affairs but fascinating and intriguing incursions into the day's topic. Time flew by."

Without fail, Eckehard ensured that the term "medieval" elicited excitement as he introduced new readers to its literature and culture. Graduate students in Germanic and related departments often gained their first experiences of teaching as TFs in these courses on the Middle Ages. All graduate students in Germanic Languages and Literatures took his introduction to Middle High German literature, where he insisted that they familiarize themselves with at least 200 poems, including courtly epics. Later, he offered classes on the history of the German language from the earliest records to the present. At that time, the department maintained a curriculum that covered the early Germanic dialects of Gothic, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse, and beyond. In this regular rotation, Eckehard oversaw the coverage of Middle High German, the language spoken and written from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, along with related dialects. Numerous students mention having been positively influenced by Eckehard's scholarship and academic rigor and inspired by his exceptional mentorship.

Eckehard Simon revealed his devotion to the advancement of learning in his attention to iconographical and textual details in recently discovered texts as well as in his painstaking identification and analysis of works in medieval manuscripts not only in archives and libraries in Germany but also closer to home in Houghton. His study of such records has particularly enriched our understanding of drama as a crucial element in early urban culture. All in all, Eckehard published five books and numerous essays. From his early *Neidhart von Reuental* to his later oeuvre, including the collective volume, *The Theatre of Medieval Europe*, and his major contribution on the beginnings of secular German theater, *Die Anfänge des weltlichen deutschen Schauspiels, 1370–1530: Untersuchung und Dokumentation*, he established himself as a towering figure in medieval studies. His writings on medieval drama remain paramount in the field.

Certain phrases and sentiments describing Eckehard recur in the reminiscences of colleagues and students: "infectious enthusiasm," "extraordinary generosity," "quiet kindness," "ebullient, cheerful, smiling, and social." He was in many regards a man of Old World manners eagerly accommodating himself to New World fashions, as when one former degree candidate recalled appreciatively, "after I passed my final Ph.D. exams, he clapped me cheerfully on the shoulder in congratulations and said, 'And now you must call me Eckehard.'" Kind as he was, Eckehard could also be fierce intellectually, and others in the profession frequently mention his "immense professional competence," "acute sense of the

corpus,” and love for “the ‘forensic’ side of philological work.” Indeed, Ekehard’s intimate knowledge of his field could be unintentionally terrifying, as when he would casually observe to students and junior colleagues that a medievalist should be able to pinpoint the dialect of a manuscript within a 20-mile radius. One scholar, in recounting how Ekehard had aided her in her inquiries, summed up her sense of the man with the words “philologically competent and unusually lovable.”

A dedicated philologist, Ekehard Simon suffered the poignancy of affliction by aphasia following a medical procedure in 2014 and not long ago fell victim to COVID-19, which cost him his life. He is survived by his widow, Eileen Nicole Simon, and three sons, Anders, Matthew, and Frederick, as well as by two sisters, Hannelore Rogers and Gundula Lee. He was predeceased by his second son, Conrad.

Respectfully submitted,

Josiah Blackmore
Racha Kirakosian
Judith Ryan
Jan Ziolkowski
Stephen Mitchell, Chair

Portions of this Minute have been adapted from “In Memoriam: Ekehard P. Simon, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Emeritus,” Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures’ website, May 6, 2020, <https://german.fas.harvard.edu/news/passing-ekehard-p-simon-victor-s-thomas-professor-germanic-languages-and-literatures>.