

JEAN VAN HEIJENOORT: AN ALL TOO BRIEF ACQUAINTANCE*

JOHN W. DAWSON, JR.

I first met Jean van Heijenoort in July of 1982, when I became one of those involved in editing Kurt Gödel's *Collected Works*. Thus I never got to know him in the personal way that many others did. But I certainly worked intensively with Van and thereby came to know very well some of those characteristics of his that others have already mentioned. Gentle, patient, persistent – we have heard those epithets repeated over and over again.

Because of our work together on the Gödel Editorial Project, I find it particularly poignant that we are gathered to mourn Van on this day, one month after his death, which happens also to be the 80th anniversary of Gödel's birth. In several respects, Van played a pivotal role in our committee's work: He was one of its instigators; he and Greg Moore were instrumental in convincing Sol Feferman to become editor-in-chief; he was our principal linguist; and, by virtue of his emeritus status, he was actually the only one able to devote his full energies to the project. Of course his historical expertise and philosophical erudition were immense. And they were matched with a formidable tenacity. At times his dogged insistence on matters of style and aesthetics could be exasperating. But I say that with full affection for him.

We had our share of disagreements – all, I'm happy to say, on linguistic matters. I think perhaps we fought over more commas and gerunds than ever before in my editorial experience. In all our disputes, Van presented his arguments most cogently and forcefully. But his forcefulness was always tempered by his respect for all of us as colleagues. I myself felt somewhat daunted by his linguistic competence and the tremendous breadth and depth of his knowledge. Yet, at the same time, I

* Based on remarks delivered at the memorial service at Harvard University, 28 April 1986.