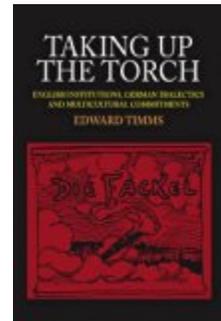


Edward Timms. *Taking Up the Torch: English Institutions, German Dialectics and Multicultural Commitments*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2011. Illustrations. xii + 315 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84519-385-0; \$39.50 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84519-386-7.

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German Studies in Postwar Britain: A Personal Account

Those with an interest in Vienna from the *Jahrhundertwende* to the thirties will know that the author of this autobiography, Edward Timms, has enjoyed a distinguished academic career, confirmed by an equally distinguished list of publications, headed by his two masterly volumes on the Austrian satirist Karl Kraus, published by Harvard University Press in 1986 and 2005. His contribution to German and Austrian studies was acknowledged in a special edition of the journal *Austrian Studies* (volume 15, 2007) which contains a list of his numerous publications and a full review of his final volume on Kraus. The index to this work too, under the author's name, contains references to a very wide range of publications.

As a young academic he took part in the pioneering work undertaken at the founding of the University of Sussex, Brighton, before becoming a college fellow at Gonville and Caius College at the University of Cambridge. The final thrust of his career was provided by his return as professor of German to Sussex, where he established the Centre for German-Jewish Studies. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire in the United Kingdom for services to scholarship and was also acknowledged in Austria by receiving the State Prize for History of the Social Sciences. His intellectual interests and academic career will provide much of major interest to the reader of this autobiography, but the story of his life as he tells it here stretches far beyond the narrow world of academe, extending as it does to very personal recollections of his private and family life; his union with

his Turkish wife, Saime Göksu; and the troubled political life of that country. Indeed, his interest in Turkey includes the publication, together with his wife, of a book on the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet.

Reviewing an autobiographical work is an unusual undertaking for an academic reviewer. Having recently been rereading Stefan Zweig's *Die Welt von Gestern* (1942) where there are perhaps two references to his wife and one to his mother, I find that this book with the full, often intimate details of family and personal life provides a startlingly strong contrast. In chapter 18, "The Autobiographical Pact," Timms tells us that as he was completing these memoirs, he attended the biennial conference of the International Auto/Biography Association at Sussex in July 2010. He found there three basic definitions that came into focus, seemingly defining his own approach. They were Philippe Lejeune's (from *Le pacte autobiographique* [1974]) whose work suggests that autobiography is a "pact," committing the author to a faithful narrative of personal experiences. Then Roy Pascal's (in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* [1960]), which suggests a development of self from memoirs describing encounters with others, and thirdly Northrop Frye's (in *The Anatomy of Criticism* [1957]), which emphasizes the patterning of experience, observing that most autobiographies "are inspired by a creative and therefore fictional impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that build up to an integrated pattern" (p. 292). Timms asks whether autobiography really can be

faithful and fictional at the same time, and recalls in his case “how personal experience is refracted through superimposed patterns and enriched by interactions with others” (p. 292). He suggests that there is a triadic pattern in each chapter of these memoirs which reflects the rhythms of a lifetime. Timms has obviously been a hoarder of personal documents—letters, diaries, notebooks, family histories, and photographs—of which a vast number are used to illustrate this work. In writing his autobiography, he was clearly determined to make use of all this material. It is obvious that he feels these memoirs of childhood and family, through his account of his education up to the beginning of his academic career and well beyond, are an important part of the story he has to tell. Important too are the tremendous number of friends he has made over his life, and of his gift for friendship the reviewer can speak from personal experience.

How is it best to tackle this review? Let me start with some observations on the title, most notably, the symbol of the “Torch,” before giving the reader what I consider to be the more important elements of a life well spent. The “Torch” of the title alludes to the transmission of a radical intellectual tradition and to the specific commitment to the study of *Die Fackel*, the satirical journal edited by Kraus from 1899 to 1936. The cover of the book shows the front of Kraus’s magazine, albeit without the “grinning mask of comedy” and the “goatish face of the satyr, proclaiming the intention of comic and satirical stylization,” as outlined and illustrated on page 78. In chapter 17, “Tending the Flame,” the author examines the various uses to which the symbol of the torch has been put, none perhaps more effective than that on the cover of *Die Fackel*. The first issue noted that it was not what the journal shall bring the reader (*bringen*), but rather “that which we shall bring down” (*umbringen*). And further, the intention was to “shine a light on a country where—apart from the reign of the Emperor Charles V—the sun never rises.”[1]

The aim of this autobiography, Timms tells us, is to relate the shaping of himself to the drift of history, this of course at a time of radical social change, extending from the refugee crisis caused by National Socialism’s takeover in Germany and then Austria, through the problems caused by the Second World War, and on to postwar reconstruction and Britain’s move to a multicultural society. So, set against the author’s academic life in addition to many, often intimate details of family and personal life, there is a range of references to background political events among which the author’s desire to understand German and Austrian attitudes to the Second World War

stand out. Of interest too are the comments on the disturbing events occasioned by the Baader-Meinhof urban terrorist group in Germany and interesting references to the impact on academic life during the period of student unrest in the late sixties.

Those interested in education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels will take note of the relationship between Timms and his tutors—in particular F. J. Stopp and Peter Stern—and also perhaps will be amused by the part played by chance at the start of an abiding academic interest. It was in Germany when looking for German equivalents of Aldous Huxley and Graham Green that a “burly fellow from Rothenburg called Hans Keith suggested he should read Kurt Tucholsky and Karl Kraus.” Tucholsky was to be rejected as “a brilliant journalist” and “very entertaining” while Kraus, as the publications show, was to prove the focal point of his academic work (p. 73).

Having found a subject for his doctorate, Timms was fortunate in obtaining a post as assistant lecturer at the University of Sussex where the map of Higher education was being redrawn. Chapter 7, “Sussex in the Sixties,” provides a fascinating account of the creation of a new type of university teaching in England, influenced, as the author shows, by teaching in the United States. The triumvirate of Martin Wright, David Daiches (dean of English and American Studies), and Asa Briggs (dean of Social Studies) created a program that combined the modern seminar system with the personal rapport of the Oxbridge tradition. Seminars replaced lectures encouraging students to become proactive, taking turns to present papers to groups. But the curriculum also incorporated good practices from other quarters, including one of the strongest features of Cambridge’s modern languages course, the linking of literature with thought and history. This meant that joint seminars would be conducted by teachers from different disciplines, and what appealed to the author most was the openness toward Europe. The most remarkably innovative course was the “Modern European Mind,” a course that had originated from Daiches.

This differed from Timms’s experience as a college fellow to Cambridge. “Could the élan of Brighton be recaptured amid the Fens?” he asks in chapter 9, and reports that back at Caius there were few visible signs of change (p. 133). We learn much about college and departmental politics—the elections of college heads and appointment of head of languages but also about reforms to the much prized tutorial system whereby students were

now required to hand in their essays several days in advance. Teaching at Sussex, Timms suggests, had been less pressurized and enlivened by a more informal social climate, whereas Cambridge “clothed personal contacts in academic rituals” (p. 137). Chapters 10 and 11 describe the period of cultural (and student) revolution and change in Cambridge as well as the author’s own intellectual development, which saw continuing work both on Kraus and the intellectual and cultural life of fin-de siècle Vienna so aptly illustrated in his diagram “Vienna Circles” (p. 182). There was a new and productive interest in Sigmund Freud and the founding with Ritchie Robertson, now Taylor Professor of German at Oxford, of the journal *Austrian Studies*. Timms was to spend twenty-seven years in Cambridge before making the difficult decision to return to Sussex as professor of German.

“Sussex at the Turn of the Century” is the title of chapter 14, in which we find that the university originally conceived for five hundred students was now creeping up toward the ten thousand mark. Further, his arrival coincided with changes, most particularly what he calls “The University’s most hideous secret,” the Annual Planning of Teaching, a system of working out of budgets and work norms (p. 221). However, as Timms worked on planning innovative courses, he came up with one, which has marked the final years of his academic career with distinction. It was, of course, the creation of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies whose aim he outlines on page 227: “The mission of the Centre will not only be historical, but also contemporary and critical. For racial prejudice constitutes a continuing political danger, as recently published anti-Semitic leaflets show, and German-Jewish studies may serve as a model for understanding the problems of other multi-ethnic societies.”

The success of the center, which could be said to have started with Timms’s inaugural lecture, “The Wandering

Jew” in April 1994, and the wide range of supporters it attracted. There was support from filmmaker Richard Attenborough, whose family had adopted two Jewish refugees in 1939, and financial support from Stephen Spielberg (appropriately from the profits of *Schindler’s List* [1993]). The newsletter of the center reached five thousand readers and its work continues today under Timms’s successor, Gideon Reuveni. Timms’s own work and intellectual interests continued unabated and “adventures in the archives” (chapter 15) inspired what he calls his most controversial book, *Freud and the Child Woman* (1995).

This autobiography ranges from the very personal to intellectual achievement and discovery. It is good too to find the work of Bernhard Stillfried, who has just died, commemorated. Stillfried was head of the Austrian Cultural Institute in London and later overall head of the Austrian cultural service and of Österreichische Kooperation. In London he inaugurated a series of conferences on Austrian literature that have taken place ever since in the United Kingdom and Ireland, bringing together Germanists with an interest in Austrian studies and that have resulted in many valuable publications. This wide ranging autobiography is intelligent and written with an easy fluency, the only weakness perhaps, is that it is too personal but then it is an autobiography. In recommending it to the general reader, as well as the academic specialist, one recalls Thomas Carlyle’s words: “A well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one” and Timms is to be admired on both counts.[2]

Notes

[1]. *Die Fackel* 1, no. 1 (April 1899) : 1, 3.

[2]. Cited in *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1979), 131.

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