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Author(s): Doris L. Bergen

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MEMORIAL

Professor Dr. Annelise Thimme
November 24, 1918–April 5, 2005

Doris L. Bergen

ON April 5, 2005, Annelise Thimme died in Göttingen. Trained in Germany in the 1940s, Professor Thimme made her career for the most part in North America. She was a bold and original thinker whose boundless intellectual energy was matched by her profound understanding of humanity. Professor Thimme's critical reassessment of Gustav Stresemann, the Weimar Republic's most celebrated statesman,¹ and her analysis of the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (the German National People's Party) after Germany's defeat in 1918 remain classics in modern German history.² Her insight, generosity, wit, and strength of character are legendary among those on both sides of the Atlantic fortunate to have been her colleagues, students, and friends. Tributes from some of them—Klaus Schwabe, Gerhard Weinberg, Sally Marks, Isabel Hull, Roger Chickering, and Hartmut and Silke Lehmann—are included at the end of this memorial.

Annelise Thimme was born in November 1918 in Berlin, just weeks after the armistice that ended the Great War and in the midst of revolutionary upheaval. Her lifetime spanned a tumultuous century in the history of Germany, and she took part in all of its major events—as an actor, observer, commentator, and critic. Growing up in Potsdam in the Weimar years, she enjoyed the intellectually and politically engaged circles in which her family moved. A trained historian, Annelise's father Friedrich Thimme headed up the German Foreign Ministry's project to publish documents pertaining to the outbreak of World War I, with the goal of disproving accusations of German "war guilt."³ Among the family's friends and acquaintances were the Socialist publisher

¹A. Thimme, *Gustav Stresemann. Eine politische Biographie zur Geschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Hanover/Frankfurt: O. Goedel, 1957).

²A. Thimme, *Flucht in den Mythos. Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei und die Niederlage von 1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969).

³Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Friedrich Thimme, eds., *Die grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922–27).

Heinrich Braun and his wife, the art historian Julie Braun-Vogelstein; the diplomat Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich; the foreign policy expert Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy; and many others.

Although she admired her father, Annelise Thimme came to reject his views about the 1914–1918 war and the Treaty of Versailles. Half a century later, in her own classrooms at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, she showed her students that the much-maligned Versailles settlement had not, in fact, assigned sole guilt to the Germans. Rather than casting moral blame, Professor Thimme pointed out, the treaty's Article 231 laid a legal foundation for the payment of reparations. Anyone who persisted in referring to Article 231 as a war guilt clause, she threatened, without qualifying the phrase with the word “so-called” or at least using quotation marks, would receive an “F” in her class.

Friedrich Thimme was a proud German, but he was no National Socialist. Likewise, Annelise, a teenager when Hitler came to power in 1933, had no illusions about the new regime. In February 1933, when the Reichstag burned and the Nazis blamed the communists, Annelise caused a scandal at school by pronouncing it obvious that Hitler himself had the fire set. Rather than study at a Nazified university or train for a profession in which she would have to serve the hated system, the young Annelise decided to do an apprenticeship in farm and garden work. She spent her late teens in the German countryside, learning the botanical names of plants, butchering and cleaning chickens, pulling weeds, and milking cows. Her antipathy to early morning chores cost her her appendix: by the time she admitted that she had feigned a stomachache in order to stay in bed, the doctor who had been summoned assumed she was just expressing her fear of the impending surgery. With or without the appendix, Annelise acquired skills that remained with her throughout her life. A passionate gardener, she possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of plants—especially flowers—and an ability to make the most unlikely species bloom in the cold climates of western Canada and northern Europe.

Annelise Thimme rejected Nazism, but she could not avoid its impact on her life. Her father, an outspoken opponent of Hitler's government, died in 1938 in a hiking accident, but as Annelise often said, his heart was already broken by what he had seen Germany become. Her brother Jürgen served in the Wehrmacht and subsequently did time as a POW in the Soviet Union. Annelise started university in Berlin, where sirens and air raids often interrupted classes, and continued her studies in Freiburg am Breisgau and finally in Göttingen. It was in that quiet university town in the last days of the war that she was hit by an Allied shell. Severely injured, she was carried to the hospital: one of her feet had been blown off, and doctors amputated that leg above the knee. Months later, fitted with a prosthesis, she returned to her studies. In 1951 she received her Ph.D. in Modern History from the University of Göttingen, where she wrote

her dissertation, "Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der wilhelminischen Epoche," under the supervision of Siegfried A. Kaehler.⁴

Annelise Thimme had an excellent academic training with some of the most renowned scholars in Germany. She had superb family connections and was personally acquainted with Friedrich Meinecke, Golo Mann, and Ludwig Dehio. Energetic and intelligent, she was poised for a brilliant career. Germany in the early 1950s, however, was not an easy place for anyone to make it in the academy, let alone a young woman. Dr. Thimme approached Fritz Fischer in Hamburg to ask if he would be willing to supervise her habilitation. No, Fischer told her; although he admired her work and respected her abilities, he had "enough troubles without a woman like you." Looking back on her training and career in Germany fifty years later, Annelise characterized herself, as she had her father, as an "outsider."⁵

In 1953, Annelise took the first of many trips to North America. A scholarship from the American Association of University Women enabled her to spend two years at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. When she returned to Germany, it was to teach at a girls' school in Hamburg. In the following decade there, Dr. Thimme inspired many young women, including Irene Pieper-Seier, who today is a professor of mathematics at the University of Oldenburg.

Annelise Thimme wrote her books in German and published them in Germany,⁶ but she made her professional home in the United States and Canada. Active in national and international organizations, she served a term in the early 1980s as chair of the American Historical Association's (AHA) Conference Group for Central European History and was a founding member of the Western Association for German Studies, now the German Studies Association. In California (San Jose State College, UC Santa Barbara, and Stanford) and Michigan (University of Michigan) in the mid 1960s, and at the University of Alberta from 1968 until her retirement in 1984, Professor Thimme introduced scores of students to the complexities of modern German and European political and diplomatic history. Her undergraduates learned to analyze primary sources and think critically about the past. Her graduate students benefited from her enormous erudition, kindness, and creativity.

I wrote my master's thesis under Annelise Thimme's supervision and in the process, learned much of what I know about German history and historians of Germany. As a mentor, Professor Thimme was demanding, and she modeled rigor and attention to detail in her own work. I remember her producing draft

⁴A. Thimme, *Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der wilhelminischen Epoche* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1955).

⁵A. Thimme, "Geprägt von der Geschichte. Eine Aussenseiterin," in *Erinnerungsstücke. Wege in die Vergangenheit*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Vienna: Böhlau, 1997), 153–223.

⁶One of her few works available in English is A. Thimme, "Stresemann and Locarno," in *European Diplomacy Between Two Wars*, ed. Hans W. Gatzke (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972), 73–93.

after draft of everything she wrote, taking care to find exactly the right words and phrases. She loved literature, especially the novels of Jane Austen and Theodor Fontane, and her delight in language showed in her writing and her speech, with its idiosyncratic blend of German and English. She was generous and extraordinarily open: she shared with me her vast network of professional contacts and friends, her boundless knowledge of European history and culture, and innumerable, delectable meals. Even months after her death, I forget that she is gone and catch myself noting things I want to discuss with her. Annelise's excitement about history of all kinds was irresistible. In addition to her work in diplomatic and political history, she explored psychohistory (as preparation for editing her father's letters), social history, and history of the family. Years before anyone did gender history or the history of masculinity, she had embarked on a project she never completed titled, "When Men Stopped Crying."

Everyone who knew Annelise benefited from her curiosity, her common sense, and her amazing hospitality. Who could forget the wonderful garden parties she hosted for her classes and for friends and colleagues? She was a fabulous cook whose saddle of venison, moussaka, and rabbit stifado were as unforgettable as her cheesecake, hazelnut torte, and mousse au chocolat. She loved her cats, the Swiss Alps, the Rockies, and the buffalo at Elk Island National Park near Edmonton, and she never tired of beautiful things or lively conversation.

On her retirement in 1984, Professor Thimme returned to Germany, where, within months, history again caught up with her family. Her oldest nephew, Johannes Thimme, was killed when an explosive device with which he intended to destroy a military building went off prematurely. Twenty years later, Annelise's sister-in-law, Ulrike Thimme, published a memoir of her son's life and death.⁷

Annelise remained an indefatigable worker throughout her retirement, first in Munich, then in Lippstadt, and finally, for the last months of life, in Göttingen. Her masterful edition of the correspondence of Friedrich Thimme appeared in 1994.⁸ In 1998, for her eightieth birthday, the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen hosted a symposium in her honor on one of her longstanding interests: historical controversies. Her paper on Gustav Stresemann was the centerpiece of the resulting volume.⁹

In her last years, Annelise lost most of her eyesight, but she remained a voracious reader, a faithful e-mail correspondent, and an avid crossword puzzler. An extraordinarily decisive person, her formidable intelligence was tempered by her

⁷U. Thimme, *Eine Bombe für die RAF. Das Leben und Sterben des Johannes Thimme, von seiner Mutter erzählt* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004).

⁸A. Thimme, ed., *Friedrich Thimme, 1868–1938. Ein politischer Historiker, Publizist und Schriftsteller in seinen Briefen*, Schriften des Bundesarchivs 46 (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt, 1994).

⁹A. Thimme, "Einmal um die Uhr. Die Stresemann-Kontroverse von 1927–1979," in *Historikerkontroversen*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000), 31–85.

absolute graciousness. At her funeral, her niece, Dorothee Trittel, a Ph.D. in history and teacher at the *Gymnasium* in Göttingen, read a poem by Friedrich Hölderlin. Those lines express Annelise Thimme's approach to the past and to her own life:

“Getrost! es ist der Schmerzen wert, dies Leben,
 So lang uns Armen Gottes Sonne scheint,
 Und Bilder besser Zeit um unsre Seele schweben,
 Und ach! mit uns ein freundlich Auge weint.”

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Klaus Schwabe:

My first encounter with Annelise Thimme was intellectual. While preparing my dissertation, I read her study on *Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der wilhelminischen Epoche*, a penetrating analysis of the great Berlin historian and his attempts to maintain liberal standards in a period of growing nationalist radicalism. In 1965, I spent a few months at the Hoover Institution in Stanford and met her personally during her stay at the Stanford Center of Behavioral Studies. Annelise and her friend Jacqueline Strain went out of their way to make my wife and me feel at home in the new, stimulating environment and introduced us to the local, younger academic community and aspiring, junior historians like Jim Sheehan. It was there, also, that we got a first look at hippy culture, flower power, and political protest.

We stayed in touch ever since. Over the years, Annelise kept telling me about her project of editing her father's letters. The publication in 1994 turned out to be an important contribution to our knowledge of a kind of continuity in recent German history that is sometimes overlooked—the link between a moderate stand in the war aims debate during World War I and opposition to the Nazi regime. Friedrich Thimme embodied this link. He was an ardent German patriot and at the same time, a liberal moderate. As such, he despised Nazism from its beginnings.

Annelise shared her father's attitude. It was not by accident that during World War II, she went to the University of Freiburg to become one of Gerhard Ritter's students. There she could study German history untainted by Nazi ideology. When Ritter was put into the Ravensbrück concentration camp because of his ties to Carl Goerdeler, Annelise had the courage (and in view of the turmoil of the last stages of the war, also the stamina) to visit him, bringing along care packages.

To me, a colleague and friend nearly a generation younger, Annelise became a witness of a better Germany that survived the Hitler regime—a living testimony also of the attempts of many of her contemporaries, who shared her decidedly liberal orientation, to come to grips with the problem as to how it can be explained that the majority of the German intellectual class—people with

whom she shared her social background—failed so miserably in the face of right-wing fanaticism. Annelise Thimme's incisive critique and profound understanding of Germany's history during the first decades of the twentieth century will remain my lasting memory of her achievements as a historian.

Gerhard L. Weinberg:

I first met Annelise in the 1960s at AHA meetings. Her book on Stresemann was path-breaking and of enormous interest to me. We became good friends, and she once replaced me for a year at the University of Michigan. She subsequently told me that this was one of her most positive experiences. When I was chair of the Conference Group for Central European History of the AHA, I told the nominating committee that it was about time we had a woman as chair. The committee thereupon nominated Annelise. While modest and somewhat self-effacing, Annelise was always one to take her stand and hold to it firmly. Those of us who counted on seeing her at professional meetings and conferences missed her when she returned to Germany, and the profession as a whole misses her dedicated and productive work now.

Sally Marks:

Those of us who study European diplomacy of the 1920s well know the importance of Annelise Thimme's work. She was among the first to remove from Gustav Stresemann's brow the "good European" halo awarded by some historians, revealing instead a skilled German nationalist. Annelise was consistently clear-eyed about her nation's history. Always interested in younger historians, she quizzed me closely when we chanced to meet at an AHA convention. Thereafter she bought me an annual drink at the AHA, never letting me buy her one.

Upon retirement to her native Germany with her books, cats, and flower garden, Annelise continued to devour the newest monographs. Her last historical writing was in conjunction with her eightieth birthday celebration—for which she also prepared much of the food to spare the slender budget of the sponsoring institute. When "wet" macular degeneration deprived her of ninety percent of her eyesight virtually overnight, she managed with magnifying devices to continue reading and to maintain her brisk e-mail exchanges with me and others. We discussed history; young historians, good and bad; gardens; the misery of enduring male chauvinist colleagues; and always current international politics. As long as she could manage, I was peppered with penetrating questions about the rationale of Bush the Younger's policies in Iraq. I shall miss her, and so will the profession.

Isabel Hull:

I first met Annelise Thimme in 1977 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She had invited my partner and me for dinner at seven. We ate at ten. In between, Annelise

cooked a wonderful meal whose preparation was constantly interrupted by a kaleidoscopic conversation first on one topic, then another, then back again, while Annelise simultaneously searched the kitchen for utensils and ingredients and stopped to feed her Siamese cats. I was reminded of the cartoon of Bismarck juggling the nations, only Annelise juggled subjects and activities, and whereas Bismarck kept five balls in the air at one time, Annelise kept at least ten.

It wasn't easy for the Annelise-neophyte to keep up; it took practice to hold all these conversations in one's mind, because Annelise had the habit of suddenly picking up an earlier thread, with no transition, and developing the tapestry from there, before doing the same with another line of thought temporarily abandoned a half hour earlier. Yet even on that first night, I felt as if I had known Annelise for a long time. I have rarely known anyone who cut to the heart of things so quickly, or who opened her heart so fearlessly for a relative stranger to look into. That evening she said something that has stayed with me vividly ever since. We were talking about her experiences as a student during the Third Reich. I asked her if it weren't awful living in the suffocating atmosphere of censorship and pervasive evil. She looked surprised. "No," she said. "You instantly knew who was worth knowing and becoming friends with."

A couple of years later I met up with Annelise again, this time in Munich, where she had moved in retirement. I became part of a gaggle of historians helping her move from one apartment to another. It was typical of Annelise (as it was for George Mosse) that she was surrounded by young people of various generations. Her mental and physical liveliness, her genuine interest in what was going on and what one was thinking, her humor, her generosity, and her fabulous cooking attracted people many decades younger than she was. Actually, Annelise's energy was daunting. The only thing I can hold against her was that she made me feel elderly. At 10:30 or 11 p.m., she was just getting up to speed when I was fading fast. It was my knuckles that were white and my braking foot that pressed desperately to the floorboards as Annelise gaily sped within millimeters of the parked cars on our way to a must-see church or village somewhere in the Bavarian hinterlands.

I often wondered if Annelise's amputated leg had slowed her down at all (I think not). Her attitude toward her war wound was typical. Did she hold it against the Allies whose artillery shells had hit her just days before the war ended? Certainly not. "I would have felt guilty if, in all the suffering around me, I had not had my share, too," she said.

Annelise did have her share of suffering. The progressive loss of her eyesight was a terrible blow. But she did not give up. In her eighties Annelise learned the secrets of the computer and used it as a device to enable her to read via enlarged type and experimental text/audio exchange. She confronted her disabilities with *élan* and creativity. Someday, some young historian will discover a huge *Akte* in the German welfare-state files, in which Annelise educated the bureaucrats on

the principles of gender- and age-equality in state benefits. Her cogent arguments and indomitable will actually helped to change some of the rules so that women's injuries and needs were equally compensated with men's.

As a historian, Annelise was an uncommonly insightful analyst of politics and intellectual thought in the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods. She had unerringly good judgment; she hit that fine balance between recognizing the limits that contemporaries faced inside their own culture and still criticizing them for their blunders and self-imposed shortcomings. Annelise was a passionate historian, as she was passionate in everything she did. She never stopped thinking about history or about how it was being written. She held high standards, and bad history books (the ill-conceived, uneven, boring, or poorly written) upset her to the end. But Annelise applied the same standards to herself.

Many years ago, my *Doktorvater*, Hans Gatzke, edited a book on interwar diplomacy, to which Annelise contributed an article. She wrote it in German. Gatzke, who prided himself on his spare, lucid English prose, translated it. He was apprehensive she would disapprove of his editorial liberties. He shouldn't have been. Annelise told him, "Now I finally understand what I've written!"

I was so pleased when Annelise decided to forsake provincial Lippstadt for Göttingen. I had planned to see her on my regular trips there and to pick up many of the threads of conversation and controversy we had developed over the years, and simply to enjoy her remarkable personality. I cannot believe she is gone.

Roger Chickering:

It was my great good fortune to know Annelise Thimme for nearly four decades. I had admired her scholarship before I met her. My admiration vied thereafter with affection for this wonderful, dynamic woman, who tamed her ferocious energy with grace, good will, and infectious self-deprecation. As her superb edition of Friedrich Thimme's letters made clear, she was, like her father, *eine kämpferische Natur*; and she, too, paid a professional price. She was too impassioned in her convictions, too irreverent—and too female—for the West German historical profession as it sought secure political moorings after World War II. We in North America were the beneficiaries.

My most vivid recollection is of a dinner at which Annelise and a kindred spirit, Fritz Fischer, shared vivid reminiscences of long careers. I felt like the oldest person in the room. I last saw her on her eightieth birthday, in Göttingen, at a symposium held in her honor on the theme of—what else?—historians' disputes. The highlight was her own paper, which described the disputes that raged over Gustav Stresemann, whom leading West German historians were portraying after the second war as the Good German, the pioneer of the new Europe. Much of her paper was a memoir of her resistance to this portrayal, a late reminder (if we needed one) of her passionate intellectual candor.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the historical profession is the poorer for her death: this much is beyond dispute.

Hartmut and Silke Lehmann:

One of the remarkable things about Annelise was that she remained young in her mind until she passed away. That is to say, she was and remained interested in new ideas; she liked unconventional approaches, and, with few exceptions, nonconformist interpretations. She never posed as someone who simply knew better because of her age. Her openness not only made her an excellent teacher, but also gave her the capacity to foster friendship with people one or even two generations younger than she was. No doubt, she profited from this as much as those did who became her friends.

In the field of scholarship, Annelise's openness enabled her to be inquisitive in cases that others considered closed, and to draw conclusions that were in conflict with accepted mainline views. Most remarkable in this respect were her early studies on Stresemann. Within the rather conservative German profession of historians of the 1950s and 1960s, Annelise never became an insider. But as she moved to Canada and as she became active among Canadian and American historians, her unique talents could prosper, and her critical approach to central figures and key questions of recent German history found much recognition.

Annelise's other outstanding talent was the way she was able to connect scholarly issues with personal matters and personal issues with scholarly matters. There was no conversation with Annelise on a scholarly question in which she did not draw attention to the persons involved. Equally, even in small talk, she was ready to detect broader implications of political and even historical dimensions. This curiosity in personal matters, combined with the ability to observe structural elements, gave her historical studies a special flavor. As she looked at the actions of politicians, past and present, she asked for moral responsibility, and she did not hesitate to make moral judgments. Conversations with Annelise, therefore, were always stimulating and often emotionally moving. In this and many other ways Annelise had much to offer. As a young girl, she had stood in the streets of Potsdam when Hitler made his fatal pact with Hindenburg on March 21, 1933. As an adult, she had not forgotten all of those who had lost their lives as a consequence. We sadly miss her and will always fondly remember her.