



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects the unique qualities of his or her project. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/fellowships.html> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler, 1880-1918

Institution: California State University, Chico

Project Director: Laird M. Easton

Grant Program: Fellowships

## The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler, 1880-1918

The purpose of this proposal is to edit and translate into English a one-volume edition of the journals of Count Harry Kessler (1868-1937) from the years 1880 to 1918. These diaries are only now being published in Germany for the first time. They have never appeared in English. Besides translating them from German, I will also supply annotations and a brief introduction. The publisher Alfred A. Knopf has granted me an advance contract with a due date of September 1, 2008 for this project.

Kessler, whom W. H. Auden called "perhaps the most cosmopolitan man who ever lived," was a wealthy, well-connected Anglo-German art patron, museum director, and cultural critic. During the First World War he served as a soldier, cultural attaché, and secret agent. Afterwards he became a well-known pacifist and internationalist, dying in exile from the Third Reich in 1937. His greatest work was his diary. Begun at the age of twelve in 1880 and continued until his death in 1937, it is one of the greatest diaries ever written. In 15,000 manuscript pages, it chronicles nearly all of the major events in European art and politics from the 1890s to the 1930s. The estimated 10,000 personal names found in it comprise a who's who of European (and American) arts, literature, and politics during these years. The post-World War One diaries from 1918 to 1937 (translated into English in an abridged version in 1971, reprinted in 2000) are acknowledged today to be a classic, perhaps the single most quoted source for the history of the Weimar Republic in Germany. Yet it was only by chance that the bulk of the missing prewar and wartime diaries, for which people had been searching since the end of the Second World War, were discovered in a bank vault in Mallorca in 1983 and brought to the German National Literary Archives in Marbach am Neckar in 1985. There, a collaborative team of editors, labored for nearly twenty years to establish the definitive edition of the diaries.

Beginning in 2004 the first three volumes of what will eventually be a nine-volume edition (again, I would be translating selections from the first six, covering the years 1880 to 1918) have been published in Germany. The German press has greeted the publication of the long awaited diaries with uniform enthusiasm. Typical of the reaction is the following excerpt from the well-known literary critic Fritz R. Raddatz writing in "Die Zeit:" "A feast for those obsessed with literature, for those who thirst for history and stories. Finally the diaries of Count Harry Kessler, long sunk in a realm of legends and rumors, have been published in an integral edition. [Kessler was] one of the most colorful (yes, even glittering) figures of the turn of the last century . . . the chronicler of an entire epoch and of a society, to which he certainly belonged, but whose later murderous descent into wickedness he predicted early, in fact already by 1894." The reviewer for "Der Spiegel" writes about Kessler's gift for describing personalities: "Microscopically precise and with a touch of irony, he captures firmly what he sees and whom he meets. And he gets them

all right: the actress Sarah Bernhardt and the surrealist Jean Cocteau, Prince Otto von Bismarck . . . and George Bernard Shaw. These are only five of the far more than 10,000 cultural figures with whom Kessler spoke and whom he made immortal." It is no exaggeration to say that the Kessler diaries have been a publishing sensation in Germany.

One can anticipate a similar response from the English and American press for the translation. Kessler not only counted England, along with Germany and France, as one of his three "homelands;" he also had extensive experience of America. His diaries are unusually accessible. The world of Samuel Pepys, for example, is not nearly as familiar to us as Kessler's world. The diaries of writers, like Virginia Woolf, are dependent, to a certain extent at least, on our familiarity with their written work. Some journals, such as those of André Gide, are largely introspective; one must be interested in the personality to enjoy them. Kessler, by contrast, has his eye fixed largely outward on the people and the events of his day (although there are some introspective passages as well). And no one was better placed to observe his times. Readers of his journals for the years 1880 to 1918 will encounter the following topics and personalities:

- Extensive conversations with and descriptions of such leading artists, writers, and politicians as: Verlaine, Rimbaud, Morris, Munch, Strindberg, Degas, Renoir, Monet, Vuillard, Bonnard, Matisse, Maillol, Rodin, Isadora Duncan, Gordon Craig, Shaw, Hofmannsthal, Strauss, Walther Rathenau, Nijinsky, Rilke, Diaghilev, Proust, Gerhart Hauptmann, Max Beckmann, Max Liebermann, Bismarck, Herbert Asquith, Ludendorff, Hindenburg, and many others.
- Trips around the world in 1892 (including several months living in and traveling across the United States); to Mexico in 1896 (again with lengthy descriptions of the United States); several to Greece including the famous one in 1908 with Aristide Maillol and Hugo von Hofmannsthal.
- Cinematic descriptions of both high society and low life in the Paris, London, and Berlin of the Belle Époque.
- Fascinating accounts of: the so-called Nietzsche murders, of homosexuality and sexual scandals, of the battles over the introduction of impressionist and postimpressionist art in Germany, and the political crises leading to the outbreak of the First World War.
- Insider descriptions of the Nietzsche cult, of the genesis of *Der Rosenkavalier*, of the rise of Art Nouveau and the birth of modern architecture and design, of the reception of Ballets Russes, and so forth.
- Vivid depictions of the fighting during the First World War on both the Western and—even more unusual—the Eastern fronts; insider accounts of political and diplomatic intrigues and espionage in Switzerland during the war.

Kessler writes about all of this with great acuity and cinematic scope. His diary is a vastly entertaining work of literature besides being an indispensable source for modern European cultural, intellectual, and

political history.

As the author of the only English-language biography of Kessler, I am well placed to undertake the task of editing and translating his diaries. My book, "The Red Count: The Life and Times of Harry Kessler" (The University of California Press, 2002) received glowing reviews in "The Washington Post Book World," "Harper's Magazine," "The New York Times Book Review," "The Economist," "The New York Review of Books," and "The Times Literary Supplement," which featured it on the cover and as the lead review of the December 27, 2002 issue. It was selected by "The Economist" as one of the five best biographies of 2002. The "St. Louis Post-Dispatch" and "Hot Type," the book show of the Canadian Broadcasting Company recommended it on their holiday book lists. The editors and contributors of "The New York Review of Books" chose to include it in the most recent edition of "The Reader's Catalog," a selection of the most important books in print. The scholarly journals have echoed this praise. "The Journal of Modern History" called the biography "a fluent, incisive, and compelling book." It also was praised in "Central European History," "German Studies Review," and "The Canadian Journal of History." Klett-Cotta, the publisher of the diaries, translated my book into German to serve as a companion guide to the journals. Appearing in October 2005, the translation has received widespread

favorable reviews in both the German print and broadcast media. The prominent book review "Die literarische Welt" listed it as one of the 50 best books published in Germany in 2005. Many German reviews have called it the best biography of Kessler yet written.

I am therefore intimately familiar with Kessler's life and have extensive experience already translating his diaries into English. Since my book has been uniformly praised for its literary style, I am confident that I can produce an elegant and fluid translation from the German. Now that I have a contract I intend to begin work immediately on the first step; namely, to make a selection of the passages I will translate from the six volumes covering the years 1880-1918. Although this will inevitably involve making some hard choices about what to leave out, it is not quite as daunting a task as it appears on the surface. The six German volumes include everything Kessler wrote during those years; I will first eliminate the extensive passages that served as a kind of log for him as well as the voluminous notes that were later incorporated into his books and articles.

Since I am addressing an English-speaking readership, I will emphasize those passages that deal with Great Britain and America at the expense of some of the more obscure German material. I will also choose the most representative passages on various topics. My target is to choose 800 manuscript pages and to do this by the beginning of the summer of 2007 at the latest. I have a sabbatical coming in 2007/2008 (a full year at half pay). If I had a NEH Fellowship, I would have all of the summer of 2007, the entire following academic year, and the summer of 2008 to finish the project. Estimating a translation rate of four pages a day, which seems

reasonable, I anticipate being done with a very good first draft of the translation by the end of March 2008 at the latest. That would give me an additional five months to polish up the translation, finish the annotations, assemble the art program, and write the short introduction, work that I would have begun much earlier. I can do all of this here in Chico where I reside, working from the excellent German edition. Although the last volumes are scheduled to be published in 2008, I already have a CD-ROM with almost the entire text. I also have my own extensive notes and, if need be, can travel to the German National Literary Archives for whatever other material I might need, although I do not anticipate that will be necessary. Given my background, the research for the annotations and the introduction would be minimal. I then could submit the final manuscript by the due date of September 1, 2008 (quite possibly sooner).

This may well be the most important publication of my scholarly career. I am fully aware of my responsibility in producing what is likely to be the only English edition of this remarkable document. This translation will be the perfect crossover book. Scholars of European art, literature, music, culture, and politics will use it in their research; it is likely to have extensive course usage as well, but it will also attract the educated general reader, which is why, of course, Knopf is eager to publish it.

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