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Coleridge and Cosmopolitan Intellectualism, 1794–1804: The Legacy of Göttingen University

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by Maximiliaan van Woudenberg

THE THOROUGH AND METICULOUS RESEARCH THAT Maximiliaan van Woudenberg has invested in this account renders it an indispensable resource for future studies of Coleridge's readings and activities in Göttingen. In his Introduction he poses the question, "What did Coleridge do in Göttingen?" Previous answers have been selective, telling of his tour of the Harz Mountains, his response to the lectures of Blumenbach on natural history and Eichhorn on the Higher Criticism, and his preparation for a planned *Life of Lessing*. Coleridge's own letters and notebooks, plus a few incidental comments by contemporaries, have provided the sole sources. Van Woudenberg has augmented the sources by consulting the city and university archives.

Further, in adopting Martin Mulsow's *Konstellationsforschung* as his methodology, he avoids reliance on individual and isolated fragments of documentary evidence which lead to misperceptions akin to those in the Indian parable of the seven blind men and the elephant. Arguing the unreliability of partial data, van Woudenberg seeks to reveal the whole truth of Coleridge's experience by assembling the mutually corroborating evidence. The evidence from which he has constructed his commentary is also presented in a sequence of seven efficiently organized appendices: A. Chronology of the German Tour, B. Borrowings from the Library, C. Notes on German Readings, D. Collection of German Books, E. Lectures Attended, F. Map indicating where his Friends Lived and Gathered, G. Outline of German Travel.

In his Introduction van Woudenberg distinguishes between two prevailing approaches to Coleridge's time in Germany. The one assumes that it was a period of idleness and addiction, during which he neglected his poetic powers, wasted his time on occult German philosophy, and a futile scheme to write a biography of Lessing.[2] The other identifies the months in Germany as the period in which he familiarized himself with a broad range of German literature and acquired his skills as critic and mediator in Anglo-German literature and thought. As van Woudenberg acknowledges, this latter role as

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[2] Cf. on his work on Lessing while in Germany: "For these last 4 months, with the exception of last week in which I visited the Harz I have worked harder than, I trust in God Almighty, I shall ever have occasion to work again—this endless Transcription is such a body-and-soul-wearying Purgatory!" (*CL* I 519)

interpreter and spokesperson for the two cultures may have led to his later appropriations from the philosophy of Schelling and the criticism of A. W. Schlegel, but by mid-century his accomplishments were acknowledged in Germany as well as Britain.

To provide a context for understanding the significant differences between the University of Göttingen and Oxbridge, the first chapter is devoted to a comparison of the reform *vs* the confessional systems of higher education. Van Woudenberg makes it clear that conditions in Göttingen were by no means typical of other German universities. Göttingen was the British University on the Continent and could hoist the British flag throughout the first century of its existence. The Hanoverian Georges were on the British throne. The founding of the University followed the decree of the Elector (Kurfürst) Georg August of Hannover, who was also Georg II, King of Great Britain. Bearing his name, the Georg-August University of Göttingen, like the slightly older University of Halle, adhered to the principles of the Enlightenment, declaring that the pursuits of scientific research were free of theological censorship. Such was not the case at Cambridge and Oxford, where students as well as faculty were required to be members of the Church of England. Dissenters might pursue university studies abroad, as did Henry Crabb Robinson at the University of Jena. At Cambridge Coleridge witnessed the restrictions exercised against his mentor, William Frend, who was deprived of his residency as fellow upon his conversion to Unitarianism. As president of Harvard (1810–1828), John Thorton Kirkland sent his best and brightest students to Göttingen to study under its distinguished professors. The American historian George Bancroft completed his doctorate there in 1820. In 1825 Thomas Lovell Beddoes left England to study medicine in Göttingen. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow went from Göttingen to Harvard in 1834. Van Woudenberg rightly kept the events of the 1820s and 30s separate from his account of the earlier period and Coleridge's stay at Göttingen in 1799.

Discussion of reform gained renewed impetus during the years following the fall of Napoleon. In the Hanoverian realm, after several years of debate, a written document (Staatsgrundgesetz) was agreed upon that would insure the rights and duties of the rulers, officers, and citizens. In the committee charged with drafting this new document, Christoph Friedrich Dahlmann, professor of history and law, served as the representative of the University of Göttingen. The very merits of this relatively liberal governance were the grounds for it being summarily revoked with the next succession of rule. With the death of King William IV of Great Britain and Hanover, on June 20, 1837, the union of the two states was also at an end. In Hanover, William was succeeded by his brother Ernst August. On the same day, Victoria was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The university no longer had the financial support of the British monarchy. Academic freedom was curtailed, which prompted Dahlmann to prepare the petition of "die Göttinger Sieben," in which he and six professorial colleagues (including the Brothers Grimm) protested on November 1, 1837, Ernst August's act of suspending the

"Staatsgrundgesetz." As a result of the petition, "die Göttinger Sieben" were dismissed and the University entered into its years of decline.

In his second chapter, van Woudenberg reconstructs Coleridge's plans for the trip to Germany with William and Dorothy Wordsworth. These plans, he emphasizes, were Coleridge's not Wordsworth's, and they were developed as an educational tour guided by Coleridge's quest for continental intellectualism. His experiences at Cambridge had taught him that a serious cosmopolitan intellectualism was missing, and that it could be sought on the current site of Europe's most progressive experimentation in science, philosophy, music, and arts. Chapter three presents a justification of Coleridge's quest for intellectual community by examining the contributing constituent factors that he encountered upon his arrival in Göttingen. In this chapter van Woudenberg's *Konstellationsforschung* serves him well, for he must establish the combinations of the data discreetly catalogued in his appendices, bringing together the books that Coleridge was reading, the professors and their lectures, the acquaintance with new fields of research and inquiry.

In his fourth chapter, van Woudenberg focusses attention on the library at Göttingen, not simply to document which books Coleridge borrowed, but to elucidate as well Coleridge's patterns of reading and his acquisition of methods of research practiced at the university. Chapter Five takes up the research project on the *Life of Lessing*. Dismissed by other critics as an abandoned endeavor, Coleridge's extensive notes, in constellation with other documentation of his studies, provide van Woudenberg with adequate evidence to reveal the appropriation of the historical-critical method of the Göttingen School, and to show how Coleridge pursued and developed the materials for his critical biography. The crucial contribution of this chapter is the exhibition of the intertextuality between the notebook entries on Lessing and the sources consulted in the Göttingen *Realkatalog*.

In chapter six, van Woudenberg judges the aftermath. Having argued the positive results of Coleridge's quest for cosmopolitan intellectualism in Germany, he describes the negative results Coleridge experienced upon his return home. There was antipathy towards, rather than interest in, German literature and philosophy. The lack of public appreciation for his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* may well have contributed to his decision not to continue with his *Life of Lessing*. Coleridge realized that he could still pursue the role of mediator by providing the public with the critical framework that would enable them to understand German literature and culture. Coleridge's German studies throughout the ensuing decade were mostly covert, recorded in his notebooks rather than in publication.

In his conclusion, van Woudenberg affirms that the "Legacy of Göttingen" was indeed forthcoming later in Coleridge's career. He finds it particularly manifest in the intellectual cosmopolitanism achieved at the University during its first century under the Hanoverian Georges. Coleridge found this ideal in the *Realkatalog* of the Göttingen Library, and he developed its organizational principles in his prospectus for the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* (1817) and his

introductory *Treatise on Method* (1818).[3] Founded in 1810 under the influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt, the University of Berlin (subsequently renamed the Humboldt University), instituted a similar model (*Humboldtisches Bildungsideal*) as an academic education in which the disciplines are organized as a holistic combination of research and studies (46–47). The Humboldtian Model, as it is widely described, "integrates the arts and sciences with research to achieve both comprehensive general learning and cultural knowledge." A decade before Humboldt, Coleridge had found his *Bildungsideal* in the *Realkatalog*, and he appropriated its systematic efficiency as his model and method of "philosophical arrangement" applicable not only to an encyclopedia of learning but also to individual learning and to cosmopolitan intellectualism at large.

Van Woudenberg argues that Coleridge's encyclopedic plan was "but one example of how the influence of Göttingen continues to percolate Coleridge's intellectual activities" (229). He also explains why he did not cite the *Biographia Literaria* as another obvious example. Because of Coleridge's "propensity … for misremembrance," his "revisions of his time in Germany," and his "plagiarisms from German sources," the *Biographia* tainted the evidence of the Göttingen legacy (231). The purpose of his study, van Woudenberg asserts in conclusion, is three-fold: first, to document Coleridge's activities in Germany and provide insight into the context of intellectual cosmopolitanism; second, to create a reference tool with accessible chronologies and listings of documentary evidence; and third, to present Coleridge as a participant in a crucial moment of intellectual history and as mediator between two cultures at a time of transition. Readers will find that the author has succeeded brilliantly in all three.

[3] Jim Mays points out a surprising continuity in Coleridge's appearance at Göttingen: 'By a curious irony, C. G. Heyne, the head librarian "&, in truth, the real *Governor* of Gottingen"—almost certainly the only university librarian anywhere to order the newly-published Miscellaneous Dissertations—was the person to welcome STC when he arrived and allow him special privileges as a reader (CL I 472, 475). I doubt if he remembered the surname from thirty years before, but it is possible. However, despite the sense of homecoming STC appears to have felt at the German university, he probably learned as much from what German inheritors of his father's tradition scorned as anything he learned from his father directly.' (*Coleridge's Father*, 12.5.5)