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Instructing and Entertaining: Literary Enlightenment Strategies of Benjamin Franklin and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

He has gained every point who has mixed profit with pleasure,
by delighting the reader and instructing him at the same time.
Horace, *Ars Poetica*, I. 343 (*Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1999).

Parallels between the almanacs of Benjamin Franklin and Georg Christoph Lichtenberg suggest that Lichtenberg was influenced by Franklin's innovative and highly successful model, for though he was targeting the educated middle class and Franklin a rural population, unused to much reading, both almanacs have much in common in structure and intentions. Their similarities highlight shared Enlightenment values, expressed creatively from different perspectives. Their similar didactic plans expose connections over time and distance within the 18th century Republic of Letters, through which contacts between a German professor and the American scholar of international rank were made possible. Lichtenberg's almanac contributions are predominantly based on the researches and interlacing within this self-regulating and -perpetuating community, which also made it possible many years later that one of Lichtenberg's students, Alexander von Humboldt, was warmly welcomed and hosted by President Thomas Jefferson when he came to America in one of his privately-arranged and -financed excursions.

Many were, and still are, astounded, that Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99), a leading German intellectual and professor of natural philosophy at the University of Göttingen, in 1778 took over the editorship of a recently established and still struggling almanac, the pocked-sized *Göttinger Taschen Calender*. He was widely renowned as the first and foremost German experimental physicist, outstanding chemist, mathematician, astrono-

mer, and academic teacher. Almanacs contained each year's important dates, weather information, and a few assorted notes on topical events. They were annual household necessities intended to be discarded when the next one was due. Lichtenberg enriched this genre with significant changes for which the groundwork had already been established, when his friend and landlord, Johann Christian Dieterich, published a first edition in 1776. Added to a calendar with the traditional details was now a *Taschenbuch zum Nutzen und Vergnügen*, intended for current news and novelties, both informative and entertaining. The title alludes to the Horatian advice, to instruct by captivating general interest through amusing, a guideline much followed by eighteenth-century writers and a favorite teaching tool of Lichtenberg.¹ Yet to be really effective, such a didactic plan had to be concealed from readers, who rather wanted to read for personal gratification than to be lectured. Lichtenberg therefore consistently stressed that he took on the burden of editing purely for economic reasons, as indeed it earned him and his growing family free domicile in Dieterich's spacious premises. His methodical editorial work and its success and impact indicate, however, that he had grasped at the opportunity to reach and influence the increasing numbers of the general public keen to read and to improve themselves, but lacking access to the pace-setting centers of learning. Among these, his particular concern were the women, whose instruction was still largely haphazard or altogether neglected.²

As Dieterich's printing business was conducted in the shared abode, Lichtenberg took an immediate interest in the proceedings from the beginning. His involvement in the early concepts of the new *Taschen Calender* was obviously with a view of taking an active part, as shown by a letter of 1776 to Daniel Chodowiecki, at that time the most sought-after illustrator in Germany, asking for illustrations and outlining his personal requests.³ He remained editor and main contributor until 1799, the year of his death. Careful planning was followed by instant success. Even a French edition was needed for the international market.⁴ During Lichtenberg's lifetime this publication spread his name far beyond his academic circles and established him also as the German publicist and commentator of Hogarth. After his death, when the novelty and impact of his essays began to pale and as a result of the posthumous publication of his private notes and thoughts,⁵ he was celebrated as the best and first German aphorist, as master of the pointed expression and as a treasure-trove of ideas. Apart from his Hogarth commentaries, his contributions to the calendar were mostly ignored or sidelined by literary critics and regarded as time that could have been better spent on more profitable projects. Hence the *Nachwort* of the 1781 *Taschen Calender*, reprinted in 1989, still states:

Unter den zahlreichen Kalendermachern des 18. Jahrhunderts nimmt Georg Christoph Lichtenberg eine einzigartige Stellung ein. Man stelle sich vor, ein Physiker von internationalem Rang gäbe sich heutzutage dazu her, anstelle der Gespräche und Reisen von Fachgelehrten zu Fachgelehrten zwischen Sommersemester und Wintersemester Jahr für Jahr einen Taschenkalender zu schreiben, der sich an die ungelehrte Öffentlichkeit wendet.⁶

In 2017, in a fictional “Interview-Collage” highlighting his 275th Birthday, Lichtenberg is asked: “Warum haben Sie sich mit so etwas Trivialem wie einem Kalender abgegeben?” To this he replies with vague resignation: “Der Kalender richtete sich nicht an ein gelehrtes Publikum. In diesem *Taschenbuch zum Nutzen und Vergnügen* waren doch nette Sachen versammelt. . . . Bilder von den neuesten Berliner und Leipziger Frisuren waren auch dabei. Die Damen wollten es lesen und mir hat es oft Freude gemacht.”⁷

Lichtenberg’s undertaking was, indeed, unparalleled in Germany. Yet, there is one distinguished example, the celebrated Benjamin Franklin, a lifelong inspiration and standard of excellence to Lichtenberg, who had already published an almanac from 1733–58. In all of Europe, not least by Lichtenberg himself, Franklin was “admired as the foremost representative of the New World, as a man of learning and harbinger of new attitudes and aspirations,”⁸ and internationally he was acknowledged as foremost physicist and pioneering experimentalist in electricity. But when he turned to calendar-making he was still unknown and in need of acquiring a solid foundation to fund his interests and far-reaching plans. The almanac secured him a reliable source of income, but he also used it for his didactic aims and like Lichtenberg later, he reshaped the traditional form to carry useful and amusing information. His innovative venture soon became popularly known as *Poor Richard*, for its mouthpiece was one Richard Saunders, introduced briefly to the “Courteous Reader” as being “excessive poor” and having a wife “excessive proud,” thus foreshadowing engrossing marital tensions.⁹ This new format pleased his intended purchasers, mainly hardworking farming families with little expertise in reading and writing. It also attracted the attention of educated circles by the uncanny similarity between Socrates and Xanthippe and an impoverished Richard, sagely advising all others how to live well and profitably, and his spouse, sorely dissatisfied with her husband’s lack of social and fiscal success. Franklin infused this marital strife with constant good humor and utilized it to present different viewpoints. To hopeful wishes for a perfect wife, he added the warning that such a paragon has to be specially ordered to measure, for “there’s non ready made” (4). But he balanced this slight by proclaiming: “A house without women & Firelight, is like a body without

soul and sprite” (5). Sarcasms on nagging, spendthrift, and tyrannical women are offset by praise for excellent wives, for “A good wife lost is God’s gift lost” (9) and by jesting banter, as: “One good Husband is worth two good wives; for the scarcer things are the more they’re valued” (97). Bridget, Richard’s discontented consort, is also given a voice, and a reasonable and sensible one at that. Richard explained this softening of the Xanthippe image with the commercial success of his almanac, which gained her financial security and the position she craved. Altogether, Franklin’s aim was to promote marital peace, mutual understanding, sobriety, frugality, common sense, stability and modest, contented prosperity, and at the same time to improve educational horizons by introducing short historic and literary anecdotes, or brief articles popularizing useful knowledge likely to captivate his rural readers’ attention, such as about climate and geography. Though he published the almanac to ease and end his economic insecurity, he methodically used it throughout to instruct with the declared intention to advance “no other View than that of the publick good” (3).

Franklin, always ironic, amused and instructed the untutored, while he also entertained the learned. They noted not only parallels to Socrates, but also that poor Richard’s ruse, to prophesy the death of a rival calendar-maker, a Mr. Titan Leeds, for October 17, 1733 (3–4) was a spoof based on Jonathan Swift’s satiric *Predictions for the Year 1708* (under the guise of Isaak Bickerstaff). Swift predicted for All Fool’s Day 1703 the demise of one John Partridge, who published a particularly successful almanac, but filled with arbitrary, vague and mostly useless forecasts and prophecies, as was then an almost indispensable practice of the trade.¹⁰ Franklin had acquired his literary fluency by studying in depth the linguistic and literary accomplishments of the English Enlightenment, and the extent of his interests and self-acquired learning is mirrored in the breadth of subjects introduced in his calendar. He was well acquainted with this hoax by the greatest of English prose satirists, and like Swift used the ploy to ridicule, and thereby erase, entrenched superstitions and erroneous beliefs. His rural readers accepted his ingenious adaptation at face value. As attested by the numerous reprints of “Poor Richard” learned circles, not least in Europe, appreciated the spoof and Franklin’s imaginative variations on traditional satire, like the ironic criticism of the frequent satiric targets Law, Medicine, and Theology:

Certainlie these things agree,
The Priest, the Lawyer, & Death all three:
Death takes both the weak and the strong.
The lawyer takes from both right and wrong,
And the Priest from living and dead has his fee. (51)

Poor Richard made Franklin's name a household word and opened many doors for him, not least in the international Republic of Letters, the network of those influenced and guided by the Enlightenment's ideas and ideals. At home and abroad, they relished his special brand of humorous, multilayered satire. They, too, expected progress by fitting traditional wisdom to present use, updating it with new perspectives and experience, and to discard superstitions and outworn beliefs they likewise commended factual exploration and experimentation. These enlightened methods became standard practice for the emerging natural sciences, in which Franklin was to distinguish himself with such spectacular success, not least in England. On his visits to Europe he was welcomed and feted, and in London Fellows of the Royal Society sought his friendship, political disagreements notwithstanding. He was elected a member of this leading center of intellectual life in 1756 and his Fame was still at its zenith, when Lichtenberg was accepted into the circle nearly two decades later. Much later on Lichtenberg became himself a member of the Royal Society in London in 1793. By then, he was too ill to visit London again, but kept still in constant contact with new ideas and developments as host to visiting scholars and through a net of correspondence, which "zeigt die Bekanntschaft mit Angehörigen aller Berufe, [und] gibt die Namensregister der Aufklärung."¹¹ He esteemed Franklin as model for his own scientific researches and shared with him many close connections in Royal Society circles, so Joseph Priestly, prominent among the personal friends Franklin and Lichtenberg shared. True to his driving interest in cause and effect, it was his usual practice to inquire "wo die Menschen, die sich durch ihren Verstand gehoben haben, ihren Verstand herhaben" (D 19).¹² Thus, he studied not only Franklin's achievements thoroughly, but also his methods and background. Proper reading was for him extracting and assimilating knowledge. "Lesen heißt borgen," he wrote, "und daraus erfinden abtragen," and he explained this with a food metaphor: "Nichts erklärt Lesen und Studieren besser als Essen und Verdauen."¹³ Hardly surprising, therefore, that in so many ways his calendar strategy parallels that of Franklin. The spontaneous, inspired originality which the Romantics were to demand, still favored in literary critique and humanistic studies, was not expected during the Enlightenment. There writers and scholars agreed with Robert Burton, the author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, that dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants could see further than these titans.¹⁴ When acknowledging his numerous sources, Burton therefore proudly admitted: "I light my candle from their torches." Changing this imagery, Lichtenberg called this: "Neue Blicke durch die alten Löcher,"¹⁵ while Franklin confessed: "as Poor Richard says . . . not a tenth part of this wisdom was my own . . . but rather the *Gleanings* I had made of the Sense of all Ages and Nations" (285). All three authors remodeled and updated such

gleanings and adapted them in quite original connotations to their own aims and times.

The extent of Franklin's borrowings was lost on his common-class readership, but savored by his international followers.¹⁶ Franklin was gathering and reshaping ideas from multiple sources neither randomly nor just for personal gain. His 1748 *Almanack's* brief tribute to Joseph Addison, one of his foremost models, reveals a glimpse into his mind and underlines Enlightenment interrelations generally:

The 19th of this month, 1719, died the celebrated *Joseph Addison, Esq;* aged 47, whose writings have contributed more to the improvement of the minds of the *British* nation, and polishing their manners, than those of any other *English* pen whatever. (152)

Similar notes draw attention to assorted information on literature, history, or geography, spreading rudimentary ideas of learning and new found knowledge in short and easily digested paragraphs. Special emphasis on practical and moral guidance is particularly stressed in the 1758 introduction to the last almanac prepared by Franklin himself, which contains "the most extensively reprinted of all B.F.'s writings" with "some hundred of his maxims relating to savings, industry, and stick-to-itiveness, nearly all drawn from earlier almanacks, and frequently in a revised form."¹⁷ This became known as *The Way to Wealth*, but "Wealth," as Franklin only knew too well himself in a time when those without inherited fortunes or connections had to earn their sustenance the hard way or become destitute, did not mean ambitious accumulation of great fortunes. To the question "Who is rich?" his answer was: "He that rejoices in his Portion" (115), and as to how best get rich, he advises: "The Art of getting Riches consists very much in Thrift" (171). For this final farewell the authorial voice is given to a Father Abraham, "a plain clean old Man, with white Locks," who amidst a crowd eager to attend a country fair, urges restraint and moderation. The most important calendar maxims are all repeated, frequently emphasized by Father Abraham adding: "as Poor Richard says" (278–85). To captivate an audience not ardently drawn to moral instruction, Franklin, following the Horatian advice and ever the realist, seasoned these instructions with good-natured satire. Father Abraham begins with promising to be short, but then goes on at great length: "A Word to the Wise is enough, and many words won't fill the Bushel, as Poor Richard says." He ends by warning: "They that won't be counselled, can't be helped, as poor Richard says" and: "if you will not hear Reason, she'll surely rap your Knuckles." Richard, who is given the closing voice, then reports: "The people heard it, and approved the Doctrine, and immediately practiced the contrary, just

as if it had been a common Sermon; for the Vendue opened, and they began to buy extravagantly” (285).

Father Abraham’s speech had to be separately printed, reprinted, and revised multiple times, especially in England. Lichtenberg visited the country in 1770 as guest of Lord Holland, father of one of the English students he tutored in Göttingen, and a second time in 1774–75, then as personal guest of Georg III, to whom he had been introduced by Lord Holland during his first stay. Residing there with the royal family at their residence in Kew Garden, he forged a lifelong friendship with Jean Andre Deluc, a Swiss physicist with keen interests in geology and meteorology. After moving to England Deluc (also written de Luc) had become reader to Queen Charlotte, which secured him an income and access to leading intellectuals. As Fellow of the Royal Society (1773) and correspondent of the French Academy of Science he shared many of Franklin’s links to the Enlightenment Republic of Letters and opened them up to Lichtenberg, who, though still comparatively unknown, was welcomed warmly into these circles. How Lichtenberg became acquainted with “Poor Richard” is not documented, but it was most likely in this inspiring English trail blazing environment. Only one casual remark proves his familiarity with Franklin’s almanac, in a letter to Samuel Thomas Sömmering, a pace-setting anatomist, pioneer in medicine and related newly emerging fields of research, and likewise a visitor to England and London’s leading research centers. There, after sharing some less than favorable news regarding a mutual acquaintance, Lichtenberg changes into English with the cautious request: “As soon as You have read this Letter, to the Devil with it, as poor Richard says.”¹⁸

Franklin’s personal influence on the Enlightenment-infused *Göttinger Taschen Calender* is not immediately apparent. The rising middle class was eager to read about new discoveries, inventions, and foreign lands, and Lichtenberg’s articles of serious and cutting-edge content, seasoned with various digressions, humor, and irony, respond precisely to this need. He called these essays just “Abhandlungen,” and their diversity, due to his encompassing knowledge and range of interests in these and his other writings, is still often taken as lack of focus, as inability to concentrate on single issues. Using analogies as an heuristic tool, he habitually blended different subjects together, but shaped his essays carefully and according to his conviction that those truly interested in a topic will read whatever is written about it, however specified and demanding, while others have to be first attracted to instructive literature and new subjects by an entertaining presentation. This has to take “einen mittleren Weg zwischen dem Lustigen und dem Ernsthaften,” his formulation of testing, accepting and reshaping the Horatian counsel to combine intellectual profit with pleasure. From the same epistle of Horace, the *Ars Poetica*,

Christoph Martin Wieland, whose writings Lichtenberg much admired, had already abstracted the recommendation to hide didactic strategies “in einem Werk, wo man eine Absicht hat, die bloß erreicht werden kann, wenn sie nicht angekündigt wird.”¹⁹ Following this recommendation, Lichtenberg, much like Franklin, kept his purpose to instruct well-hidden by frequently belittling the importance of his editorial work as being toil, undertaken to support his growing household. Critical literary opinion tended to take him by his word, thus obscuring his impressive achievements and wide-reaching impact.²⁰

His holistic view of life drove him to inquire about as much and in as many fields as possible, and under as many aspects as possible. As astronomer and experimenting scientist (then called “a natural philosopher”), he literally observed the world both through microscope and telescope. His almanac contributions reveal some of his efforts to collect and connect the growing amount of knowledge gained by innumerable researchers in different countries and fields. “Durst nach Wissenschaft”²¹ motivated him to investigate whatever was new and noteworthy. Many novelties in the calendar have meanwhile become irrelevant, and most names of those whose research results he published, are now forgotten, together with their specialized contributions to the advance of human knowledge. But great names still stand out. Not least through the Royal Society network many of these ground breakers among his contemporaries were personally known to him, such as Franklin’s followers in electric studies and experimenting, the Italian Alessandro Volta and the Dutch Jan Ingenhousz, or from other fields of investigation André Deluc, with his metrological researches, Joseph Priestly, investigator of air and gases, and his friend Richard Price, like Priestly a dissenting clergyman and a mathematician with lasting influence, especially in calculating life expectancy and insurance risks. The pioneering work of Price was widely consulted by members of the *Gelehrtenrepublik* and brought him into continuing communication with Thomas Jefferson. Other cutting-edge news from and about Fellows of the Royal Society reached Lichtenberg concerning the English country physician Edward Jenner, who introduced smallpox inoculation with the safe cowpox serum, and as a notable ornithologist was the first to observe and document the unusual breeding habits of cuckoos. A whole biographical calendar-essay on Captain Thomas Cook was largely based on researches Lichtenberg conducted personally among participants of Cook’s famous voyages, especially the botanists Joseph Banks on the first and on the second the Germans Reinhold and Georg Foster, father and son. Georg Foster became a personal friend and frequent collaborator. Joseph Banks, knighted in 1781, was in 1778 elected President of the Royal Society, in which capacity he met with Alexander von Humboldt in 1790. The *Göttinger Taschen Calender*, liter-

ally so small that it fits into a pocket, also featured work of the American-born British loyalist Benjamin Thompson, a physicist and tireless inventor, known in Germany as Graf Rumford and as farsighted creator of the *Englische Garten* in Munich, and member of many international learned associations including the Royal Society of London. Thompson's practical and eminently useful innovations had particular appeal to Lichtenberg, whose "Endzweck" was to search for truth and new knowledge anywhere, and to share in true Enlightenment spirit whatever he found, for:

Der Mensch lebt allein um sein und seines Mitmenschen Wohl so sehr zu befördern als seine Kräfte und seine Lage erlauben. Hierin kürzer zu seinem Endzweck zu gelangen nützt er die Versuche seiner Vorfahren.²²

Though the top physicist in Germany, Lichtenberg's aim was not to excel in any particular field. While endeavoring to embrace as much of the available knowledge as possible, he was ever looking for underlying connections and unifying general forces, believing that ultimately there was "alles in allem" (e.g. L 915, 916). In his time, this was considered a rather exceptional and eccentric idea. One of his students, Alexander von Humboldt, would later rephrase and uphold this concept as "Everything is interrelated."²³ In our time, "Everything is connected to everything else" has turned into a current slogan.²⁴

Lichtenberg's wish and goal were to share knowledge and make it useful according to his resolution: "Alles gelernt, nicht um es zu zeigen, sondern um es anzuwenden." (KA 262). These practical Enlightenment principles are already apparent in his first 1778 calendar. There the title-plate presents the English monarch and his wife, for George III was also Elector of Hanover and as such the highest authority in Göttingen. Both are modestly attired. Immediately follow two plates of the latest female fashions: grotesquely exaggerated high-piled hair-styles, briefly introduced as *Coeffures de Berlin* and 14 plates of the most recent exuberant and extravagantly-dressed hair, hats, and garments from England, all with explanatory French subtitles. Such overkill points to deliberate hyperbole to highlight the absurdity of the reigning fashions. That this was intended strategy is strongly suggested by Lichtenberg's use of French to mock pretentious ostentation, as French was the language used in German courts. His private memorandum notes: "Das französische Wort gibt die deutsche Idee mit einem Zusatz von Wind, oder in der Hofbedeutung."²⁵ In contrast, the "Monatskupfer" commissioned from Daniel Chodowiecki, were amply explained at the end of the lead article, a decisive treatise on physiognomy. It dealt with the fashionable enthusiasm, aroused by Johann

Kaspar Lavater's specifications of how to deduce character traits from visible, unchangeable parts of the body, especially from facial structure. Lichtenberg's disparate views raised such heated discussions and controversies that an instant reprint became necessary. Rejecting Lavater's pseudo-scientific, systematized rules, he championed an individualized approach that takes the entire personality into consideration, including health and social circumstances. Vehemently opposing the concept that people should be categorized by pre-ordained, outward appearance, he insists that conduct and character, good or bad, are greatly influenced by individual circumstances, and that display of honesty and kindness enhance even features ravished by adverse events, poor health, or as not favored by nature. Though he refrains from lecturing openly, his didactic aim to promote reason and moderation is clearly explained in his first letter to Chodowiecki. There he commissioned for each month contrasting impressions of responsible and irresponsible men and women and their differing progression through life from happy childhood to serene or dissipated old age.²⁶

The plates on stylish attire were year by year unobtrusively reduced, and their dimensions and exaggerations were increasingly softened. The *leitmotiv* of wholesome living and sensible, moral conduct is persistently stressed again and again. To vary the impact of his visual message, Lichtenberg had his physiognomic explanations from 1785 additionally illustrated by heads and hands from assorted Hogarth prints, redrawn in Germany by Ernst Ludwig Riepenhausen. Here, character explanations were interlaced with extensive information on England, to which the emerging German middle classes increasingly turned for political and cultural models in pointed contrast to the example of France and its absolutistic regime, which had been embraced by the autocratic German aristocracy. The calendar's Hogarth Commentaries became so popular that from 1794 onwards they had to be printed fully illustrated in separate editions. Lichtenberg derived much information on latest discoveries and progress from the *Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, from which "Poor Richard" had also occasionally abstracted simplified details to foster interest in scientific methods and goals, thus opening interesting insight into the self-taught Franklin's selective and comprehensive reading. The *Göttinger Taschen Calender* could offer far more detail, and when passing on the results of other researchers, its editor invariably expanded on their work by incorporating his own observations and added further information from accessible sources. Later generations, to whom such news had largely become commonplace, deemed Lichtenberg's diversity "eine ewige Ablenkung," much detrimental to his real work, just as his efforts to acquaint the public with "Neue Erfindungen, physikalische und andere Merkwürdigkeiten" were judged that "im Ganzen war jedoch Lichtenbergs Arbeit an dieser

Rubrik eine Prostitution seines Geistes,” and he was even charged to have known this himself.²⁷

Franklin, a much-admired star in the emerging field of natural sciences, is highlighted repeatedly in the calendar pages, and from quite different perspectives, for Lichtenberg, also an attentive reader of Addison, had chosen as a guideline Addison’s imperative: “The whole man must move together.”²⁸ True to this motto, he was not only interested professionally in his pioneering work on thunderstorms, lightning, and electricity, but also in his thoughts and actions. Nothing available, therefore, escaped his search about Franklin, “dessen flüchtigste Äußerungen,” in his opinion, “immer mit Respekt gehört zu werden verdienen.” That Franklin had been “ein großer Freund von dem Luftbad” no doubt encouraged Lichtenberg’s article on this somewhat delicate theme for the 1795 calendar, commending the method as particularly beneficial to health.²⁹ A contribution in the same year, “Über Gewitterfurcht und Blitzableitung,” draws attention to his work, but does not mention him, as it is dedicated to the eradication of superstitions and the promotion of lightning conductors which were already synonymous with Franklin’s name. But a calendar-essay about “Geologische Phantasien” has the under-title “Franklins Geogonie” and deals with lesser known aspects of the wide-ranging investigations of the celebrated American. Introduced by the statement: “Den Anfang unserer *geologischen Phantasien* wollen wir mit der eines Mannes von Keplerischem Adel machen, mit Dr. Franklin,” it refers readers by a special footnote to Franklin’s letter to the learned Abbé Soulavie, a letter discussing all that was officially known on the matter at the time and is known as “On the Theory of the Earth.”³⁰ To this Lichtenberg added his own conjectures and evaluations, and enriches, and expands through analogies and personal observations what was known and assumed. Both he and Franklin use to full extent these still limited research methods available to Enlightenment thinkers, and to both largely applies, what has been stated about Franklin, that he “was unique not in kind but in quality, not in the nature of his genius but only in its extent.”³¹

The wide-reaching and internationally important influence of their literary strategies cannot be fully assessed in detail. “Poor Richard” is not a household word anymore, though its dissemination of cultural values had wide and lasting impact. Even now pearls of age-old wisdom are current in the form Franklin coined so memorably, though meanwhile they are mainly accepted as proverbial wisdom, freely borrowed by him. Neither can the *Göttinger Taschen Calender’s* role in guiding taste and fashions be precisely estimated. Yet, by the end of the century, the stiff and pompous impracticality, highlighted with subtle ridicule in Lichtenberg’s first 1778 edition, had metamorphosed into the comfortable, modest attire shown 1799 in his

last calendar. Causation or correlation? Unquestionably both were at work in shaping changing *Zeitgeist*.

Less effective influence has to be ascribed to a further literary venture in which Lichtenberg followed Franklin's lead, his *Patriotischer Beytrag zur Methyologie der Deutschen*.³² For that he invented a mock-learned vocabulary for drinking and being drunk, derived from the Greek *pinein* to drink and *methyein* to be drunk. This collection of 101 high-German and 43 low-German euphemisms and less tender synonyms for intoxication is usually assessed as manifestation of his fascination with linguistic possibilities. It also occasioned speculations concerning his own alcohol consumption and a possible inclination towards too much fondness for "Spaß an Problemen des Trinkens auf allen Stufen."³³ Much earlier Franklin had already embarked on a very similar scheme that sheds a different light on Lichtenberg's motivations. At the mere age of sixteen and disguising himself as one Silence Dogood, a clergyman's well-intentioned widow, he had sent a series of letters to the *New England Courant*, his brother's publication of current news, in which under the guise of sincerity and naivety, he satirized faults and foibles of his time with astonishing perspicuity. The evils of drink where his chosen topic on September 10, 1722, and his mouthpiece explains artlessly, why "it is no unprofitable tho' unpleasant Pursuit, diligently to inspect and consider the Manners and Conversation of Men, who, insensible of the greatest Enjoyments of humane Life, abandon themselves to Vice from a false Notion of *Pleasure* and *good Fellowship*." The pious widow is not against drinking in general, but censors the "Excess in the Use of it," and stoutly accuses drunkards, those "profligate wretches," of concealing their transgressions and futile efforts to "escape the Imputation of being drunk," by applying to it words of basically harmless meaning, like: "*boozey, cogey, tipsy, fox'd, merry, mellow, fuddled, grottable, Confoundedly cut, See two Moons*," and more.³⁴ Years later Franklin expanded this list to 228 words and phrases and published it as *The Drinker's Dictionary* in January 1736 in the *Pennsylvanian Gazette*. A shorter, but similar list was attached to a letter dealing with "Observations on Drunkenness," signed by a T. Norworth. He has not been identified, so the name could be a pseudonym. Lacking the subtlety and allusive humor of both Franklin and Lichtenberg, this letter appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1770. In the writer's view "perhaps nothing is a stronger proof of the general infelicity of life, than the propensity of mankind in all countries and situations to dru(n)kenness." Its "near fourscore different ways" to euphemize this vice are intended to expose and stifle the extent of this deplorable social evil. Lichtenberg, an attentive reader of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, refers to this letter, which was obviously inspired by Franklin, as so many words on his previous lists are repeated.³⁵ The *Methyologie* successfully reaches the full 12 dozen T. Norworth had failed

to amass, and it, too, expresses the hope that such exposure will shock and shame those who drink to excess into amending their unwholesome habits. To present this in pseudo-academic framework as a satire on scholars and scholarship may suggest a learned audience as prime target, maybe youthful inhabitants of his university town. Satire on the learned, with its origins reaching far back into antiquity and not sparing Socrates himself, was always the least likely satiric genre to cause offence or problems with censorship, as it could only provoke a small and comparatively harmless section of the population. Lichtenberg, therefore, used this sub-genre habitually, and in the *Methyologie* with the topical twist to ridicule the growing learned tendency of constructing theoretical, preconceived systems and then fit research and experience into their inflexible categories. By proposing *Methyologie* as a new field for such academic pursuit, he playfully predicts that interest in drinking and getting drunk will dry up inevitably, once everything pertaining to it will have been correctly sorted, filed, named, and labeled: as good a method as any to check “*dem leidigen Trinken*.”³⁶ His aims and irony were overlooked and his *Methyologie* was not received with this in mind, but as mere “Vorarbeiten zu einer wissenschaftlichen Trink- und Rauschlehre,” as nothing more than an incoherent theory that remained a “Materialsammlung.”³⁷ The article caused amusement, stimulated linguistic scholarship and furthered investigations into slang and the vocabularies of subcultures. It also earned Lichtenberg the added distinction as “Piniker and Methyologe” though, like Franklin, he had consistently commended moderation.³⁸

Standing on the shoulders of giants we now can see so much more and further than these trail-blazers of the Enlightenment. Much of their work has lost its immediacy, their novelties have become commonplace, and much that was once topical is now difficult to recall. Yet their creativity, supported by the best models available, and their methods of advancing their ideas and aims are still fundamental to modern science and technology, their thought processes are still as relevant as ever, and their didactic methods, seasoned by playful humor, are still effective and to be commended. What Alexander von Humboldt, himself a prominent member of the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters, wrote to his teacher Lichtenberg, remains now as true as when he penned it:

Ein Leben wie das Ihrige, dessen erfreut sich, das genießt jeder mit, dem der beglückende Sinn für die Erweiterung der Wahrheit und philosophischer Erkenntnis nicht erstorben ist. Wenn man für Freundschaft und Wohlwollen danken könnte, so müßte ich Ihnen viel danken. Ich achte nicht bloß auf die Summe positiver Kenntnisse, die ich Ihrem Vortrag entlehnte – mehr aber auf die allgemeine

Richtung, die mein Ideengang unter Ihrer Leitung nahm. Wahrheit an sich ist kostbar, kostbarer aber noch die Fertigkeit, sie zu finden.³⁹

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Notes

¹ For relevant data and descriptions see Günter Peperkorn, *Dieses ephemerische Werckchen. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg und der Göttinger Taschen Calendar* (Göttingen: Städtisches Museum Göttingen, 1992).

² To this attest various notes in Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Wolfgang Promies (München: Carl Hanser, 1967ff.), e.g., “Die Mütter bilden, das heißt die Kinder im Mutterleibe erziehen,” 1:451, E 511 [numbering given first for pages, as there are other editions]. The numbers of Lichtenberg’s notes follow this edition’s vols. 1 and 2.

³ Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Briefwechsel*, ed., Ulrich Joost und Albrecht Schöne (München: CH. Beck, 1983) 1: 1765–1779, no. 362, Göttingen den 23 Dec: 1776, 664: “HE. [Herr] Dieterich wird Ihnen bereits gemeldet haben, daß ich seinen Taschen Calendar für 1778 dirigiren und gröstentheils selbst schreiben werde.”

⁴ French was then the language of European communication.

⁵ G. C. Lichtenberg, *Vermischte Schriften*, 1. Ausgabe, 1–9, Göttingen, 1800–1806, ed. Ludwig Christian Lichtenberg u. Friedrich Kries; 2. Ausgabe, 1844–1853, ed. von Lichtenberg’s Söhnen, 1–14.

⁶ Wolfgang Promies, “Nachwort” (n.p.), *Göttinger Taschen-Calendar vom Jahr 1781*, rpr. Mainz: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1989.

⁷ Friedemann Spicker, *Eine Interview-Collage zum 275. Geburtstag von Georg Christoph Lichtenberg*, Deutsches Aphorismus-Archiv, Hattingen, n.d., 22.

⁸ Linde Katritzky, “A Model Scientist: Lichtenberg’s Views on Franklin” in *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 24 (1989): 115–29.

⁹ Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard: the Almanacks for the Years 1733–1758* (New York: Paddington Press, 1976), reprint. Limited Editions Club, Philadelphia, 1964, 3. Page nos. in text follow this edition.

¹⁰ Johnathan Swift, *The Bickerstaff Partridge Papers* (Project GUTENBERG, eBook #10990. 2008). The correlation to Swift was first documented by John F. Ross, “The Character of Poor Richard: Its Sources and Alteration,” *PMLA* 55 (1940): 785–94.

¹¹ Wolfgang Promies, *Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, dargestellt in Selbstzeugnissen und Bild-dokumenten* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rohwolt, 1964), 61.

¹² Lifelong interaction with Franklin’s work and thoughts is mirrored in Lichtenberg’s private notes: *Schriften und Briefe* 1–2, from entries starting with A 227 (1766) to L 922 (1797); Linde Katritzky, e.g., 119–20, 126–27.

¹³ *Schriften und Briefe*, 1:460, F 7, 491, F 203.

¹⁴ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), ed. F. Dell and P. Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1948), 20: “A dwarf standing on the shoulders of a Giant may see farther than the giant himself; I may likely add, alter and see farther than my predecessors” (the earliest source I came across for this much quoted metaphor).

¹⁵ Burton, 765; *Schriften und Briefe*, 1:585, F 879.

¹⁶ *Schriften und Briefe*, 4:565 (letter to Samuel Thomas Sömmering, 12 July, 1784); Jack Fruchtman Jr., *Atlantic Cousins. Benjamin Franklin and His Visionary Friends* (New York:

Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), 240: "*Poor Richard* was reprinted in French translation after 1776, it typically included a copy of the Pennsylvania constitution. Most liberal French writers were delighted with it"; 272: Jacques-Pierre Brissot (1754–1793) even "attributed the outbreak of the Revolution to the French translation of *Poor Richard Almanack*, which had appeared in France as *La Science du Bonhomme Richard*".

¹⁷ *Poor Richard*, 300, n. 46.

¹⁸ *Schriften und Briefe*, 4:565. As the "poor devil" is not taken from Franklin's Almanac, the reference to Poor Richard attests to its general use.

¹⁹ Christopher Martin Wieland, *Horazens Briefe*, Einleitung, 6.

<https://www.lernhelfer.de/sites/default/files/lexicon/pdf/BWS-DEU2-0343-03.pdf>.

²⁰ E.g., J. P. Stern, *Lichtenberg: A doctrine of Scattered Occasions* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1959), 47, points to an inability to concentrate "systematically on a given field of research: no sooner had he come to some (preferably picturesque or immediately useful) results than he was distracted from further pursuing the subject by a desire to publicize his findings in an essay, article, or note." The *Göttinger Taschen-Calender* is noted as another such outlet for unconnected diversity.

²¹ *Göttinger Taschen Calender* 1793, 158.

²² *Schriften und Briefe*, 1:27, A 78, 1:271, D 255.

²³ Gerard Helferich, *Humboldt's Cosmos. Alexander von Humboldt and the Latin American Journey That Changed the Way We see the World* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004), Introductory page.

²⁴ E.g., as the concept of the ecologist Barry Commoner in the 2017 Annual Report of *Population Connection, America's Voice for Population Stabilisation*, 5.

²⁵ *Schriften und Briefe*, 1:419, F 335; Hof in the sense of court, seat of government as German courts mimicked the style of Louis XIV.

²⁶ Briefwechsel 1, No. 362: "Ich wollte nemlich darin vortragen inwiefern Laster häßlich und Tugend schön machen können, also eine Physiognomik, die nicht so niederschlagend ist, als die jetzt beliebte." *Göttinger Taschen-Calender*, 1778, 1–35: "Ueber Physiognomik und am Ende etwas zur Erklärung der Kupferstiche des Almanachs", repr. *Schriften und Briefe*, 3, 256.

²⁷ Franz H. Mautner, *Lichtenberg .Geschichte seines Geistes*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 201, 204.

²⁸ *Schriften und Briefe*, 1:56, B 31,1:155, Title-page for C, 1:260, D 195; taken from *Addison Spectator* 6: "I lay it down therefore as a rule, the whole man *is to move* together."

²⁹ Benjamin Franklin, *Experiments and observations on Electricity made at Philadelphia and communicated in several letters to Mr. Collinson in London* (London, 1751), 470; *Schriften und Briefe*, "Das Luftbad," 3:125–29.

³⁰ Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) trail-blazing astronomer; *Schriften und Briefe*, 3, "Gewitterfurcht," 130–37, "Geologische Phantasien," 115; Linde Katritzky, 124–25.

³¹ Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen. Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York: Oxford UP, 1965), 27.

³² *Schriften und Briefe*, 3:317–23.

³³ Mautner, 82.

³⁴ Virginia Anthology org/an Open Access Digital Account. *The Open Anthology of Literature of English*, Benjamin Franklin, The "Silence Dogood Essays," September 10, 1722 [No. 12].

³⁵ *Schriften und Briefe*, 3:317–23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:320.

³⁷ Albrecht Beutel, "Der philosophische Trinker. Lichtenberg als Piniker und Methyologe," *Lichtenberg Jahrbuch*, 1994, 43; Christoph Michel, "Jenseits der Boutille"—Lichtenbergs methyologische Studien, *Lichtenberg Jahrbuch*, 2001, 37.

³⁸ Re. drinking, e.g., *Schriften und Briefe* 2:432, K 181: "Eine kleine Erhebung durch Wein ist den Sprüngen der Erfindung und dem Ausdruck günstig; der Ordnung und Planmäßigkeit aber bloß die ruhige Vernunft."

³⁹ *Briefwechsel* 3, No. 1747, Alexander von Humboldt an G. C. Lichtenberg, 3. Oktober, 1790, 779–80.