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## Johann Gottfried Seume's Expedition with the Hessians to America, 1781-83

Defying established categories and well-defined contemporary genres, Johann Gottfried Seume (1763-1810) occupies a complex position in literary history and critical thought; hence his appreciation is still likely to fall and rise with the tides of taste and political concerns. His reputation rests mainly on his three autobiographical reports, *Mein Leben*, *Mein Sommer 1805* and *Spaziergang nach Syrakus*, and his sidelined niche in German studies attests to his lack of inventive strategy, and to his unadorned, laconic language. He himself stressed repeatedly that he only wrote about what he had personally seen and experienced, and that he merely wanted to let the facts speak for themselves and was not interested in descriptive embellishments.<sup>1</sup> Like is, therefore, not measured with like, when his writings are linked and compared to such outstanding literary masterpieces as Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-14), Karl Philipp Moritz's *Anton Reiser* (1785-90), or Jung-Stilling's *Heinrich Stillings Jugend* (1777), and then found wanting, nor when they are briefly acknowledged as the most important pre-Goethe experiment to express correspondence between the representation of self and world.<sup>2</sup> Seume had no intention to embroider his language or experiences, to record his private psychological history or to call attention to the stages of his personal growth ("die psychologische Geschichte meiner Bildung"). He starts *Mein Leben* by specifically emphasizing that he had declined a substantial sum offered to him for a narrative constructed on such lines. Instead, encouraged by such eminent writers as Herder, Gleim and Schiller, he set out to relate the incidents of his life in his own particular manner ("nach meiner Weise die Umstände meines Lebens . . . niederzulegen"), in plain language and with the didactic intention of exposing the conditions of life as he had experienced them in order to arouse interest among his readers, provide instruction for young people, and strengthen their moral fortitude ("Wenn die Erzählung unterhält und vielleicht hier und da die Jugend belehrt und in guten Grundsätzen befestigt, so habe ich nicht umsonst gelebt und geschrieben").<sup>3</sup>

He brought some unusual qualifications to this task, for he originated from the rural poor. His family, however, subscribed to exacting moral standards and maintained invigorating memories of a higher social status enjoyed in former times. When Seume's exceptional intellect was recognized, local well-wishers enabled him to obtain an

adequate education, and driven by his own intellectual curiosity he acquired in time ample information and erudition in several branches of learning. Yet he never succeeded in extricating himself from adverse circumstances, for his moral integrity prevented him from conditioning himself to the archaic and oppressive political system, which still held power in the many petty German states. His guiding principles, instilled by his upright parents, were reinforced by his ardent studies in ancient literature and philosophy. Thus he credited next to his mother the Greeks with fostering the good that was in him ("Was ich Gutes an und in mir habe, verdanke ich meiner Mutter und den Griechen"). He also steeped himself in history and geography and became an expert in Bible knowledge, but was really touched only by the inspiring example of Jesus and by the moral standard of his teaching ("der schöne, begeisterte Enthusiasmus Jesu und die liebenswürdige Moral seiner Lehre"). To all this he added intensive reading of Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke, filling his mind with the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> Through his ardor in setting these against the actual situations, in which he found himself and the people with whom he had to interact, he was, and still is, frequently evaluated as political writer in terms of nineteenth and twentieth-century radicalism. Thus Hausenstein, for instance, defines Seume's whole occupation as being a political character (who "einen förmlichen Beruf daraus machte, ein politischer Character zu sein") and hails his patriotism, sharpened by the democratic ideals of classical Greece, as legacy to the working class, to which the future belongs ("Dieser Patriotismus ist Seumes allgemeinstes Vermächtnis an die zukunftschaftende Vaterlandsiebe der Arbeiterklasse"). Seume himself defined as political "was zu dem allgemeinen Wohl etwas beyträgt oder beytragen soll: quod bonum publicum, promovet" (what contributes or should contribute to the common good), and only in this sense he declared that every good book had to be more or less political.<sup>5</sup>

His working class origins and his poverty haunted life have also led to a frequent bracketing of Seume's autobiography with that of the Swiss peasant, Ulrich Bräker, especially as both had to endure spells as pressed common soldiers. Bräker, however, was an autodidact,<sup>6</sup> while Seume was university educated and well versed in theology, philosophy, and classics, and keenly interested in literature and topical intellectual affairs.

When pressed into the Hessian Army, he was trying to make his way from his native Saxony to Paris on the first of his adventurous excursions on foot. With his chronic lack of means this mode of traveling afforded him throughout his life the only possibility to satisfy his "Wanderlust" and intellectual curiosity. It also provided him with the unusual perspective on life and social conditions missing from the records of the numerous grand tours with their resting points at well-established inns, cultural highlights and dazzling courts. Young and optimistic, Seume felt irresistibly drawn to Paris as the center of political change, fully expecting to experience there at first hand the enlightened principles of the French Revolution which fired his enthusiasm. Love of freedom had filled him since early childhood, when his family was hovering at subsistence level and, like most peasants and smallholders, did not own their property outright, but had to pay for it continually through oppressive tithes and harsh service to a feudal overlord. These relentless demands instilled entrenched opposition to all

oppression in the young Seume, and a longing for equity and for an end to all special privileges and class distinctions.

Many aristocrats grossly and heartlessly abused their power, and the lot of those under their sway was pitiful. But not all were unfair and unfeeling. One of them was so impressed by the exceptionally bright youngster that he supported his education and eventually sent him to the university at Leipzig. There he was expected to study theology, one of the few avenues of advancement for those without fortune and connections. Promotion entailed, however, acting as useful member of an establishment in which the ruling prince was practically autonomous and the nobility exempt from taxation and free to lord it over a largely rural, disfranchised population. All burdens were heaped on these, and their only consolation was provided by a religion, which represented this form of government as hallowed and God-given, and promised to the poor and weary recompense only in a next world.

When his father died, chafing under this regime and worn out from the hardships of his dependent condition, Seume was eight years old. All through his life he retained vivid recollections of the unbroken spirit with which the hapless man had resisted injustice and suppression. In spite of a debilitating, painful infection, from which he suffered during the last years of his life, he was not spared the compulsory labor, which the overlord could command in addition to hefty, and often crushing contributions in kind. Thus prevented from attending to his own little property, his family sank more and more into poverty. To see him suffer mentally and physically under this slavery until his early death at barely thirty-seven turned the son into an ardent believer in the principles proclaimed by the Enlightenment, and in particular the French Revolution. Yet, though he never wavered in denouncing class-divisions and class privileges as the root-evil in society, his judgment was not clouded by spite, bitterness or unsubstantiated idealism, and he frequently commended individual noblemen for instances of kindness and personal good will. Their example encouraged him to envisage an uncorrupted monarchy, administered by upright officials to the benefit of all.

One such was Count Hohenthal-Knauthayn, to whom he was indebted for his education, but on whom he did not want to depend any longer, when he fully realized that his own views on religion were quite incompatible with a theology that had adapted itself to co-exist with autocratic rule and with the virtual enslavement of large parts of the population. More and more Seume perceived institutionalized religion as vital part of the social pyramid he abhorred, and to which he refused subservience. His freethinking father had once ironically advised him that to get on in life he must agree with anything said or demanded by those above him. "Boy," he had remarked in self-mockery, "when they tell you from above that water runs uphill, you have to reply instantly: 'Your Lordship, it has just arrived on top.'"<sup>7</sup> Like his father, Seume refused to bend to such obligations, and the progress of his studies was increasingly hampered by his inability to comply with them. Convinced that it would be dishonest to continue drawing on the support of his titled sponsor and impossible to discuss his motivation with him, he decided to leave quietly for Paris, where he imagined that his longing for a classless society had already become a reality.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Seume was no impractical dreamer. He had nothing in common with the romantic movement, which was in full sway when he wrote down his memoirs in 1813, and in which many of his literary contemporaries found relief from depressing reality. He had already clearly distanced himself from the classic as well as the romantic conception of literature in the programmatic introduction to his *Mein Sommer 1805*, in which he set himself the task to describe exactly what he experienced on his tour of the European North, stressing that all perspectives are much more realistic for somebody on foot, than for the traveler in a carriage.<sup>9</sup> The language of his earliest publication rather echoes the passionate commitment of the *Sturm und Drang*, reminding Hausenstein of the style of Karl Moor in *Die Räuber*,<sup>10</sup> while his writings foreshadow the aspirations, realism and politics of *das Junge Deutschland*, the literary movement giving voice to the sentiments preparing the Revolution of 1848. Even as late as this, Paris still appeared as the beacon of freedom to German youth galled by their political impotence, and two of the prominent representatives of *das Junge Deutschland* eventually made their permanent home there, Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) and Ludwig Börne (1786-1837).

When Seume set out in June 1780 to find true freedom, a sword at his side and some spare shirts and several volumes of classical authors in his traveling-bag, his plans for the future were reasonable and feasible. He intended to have a good look at Paris and then proceed to Metz and there enter the military academy to train as artillery officer. He excelled in mathematics and could expect to succeed in a vocation which in Germany was open only to the sons of the nobility and those with means and special connections, unless quite exceptional losses in war depleted their ranks and the most courageous of the lower orders had to be promoted. Germany, at the time, was, however, not a place in which freedom and individual enterprise flourished, and all these hopes were crushed, when, after hardly having touched Hessian territory on his third night, he was forcibly intercepted by lawless recruiting officers, who tore up his university credentials, denounced him as a vagrant and pressed him into military service.

Under these circumstances his prospects were fundamentally different from the martial career he had envisaged for himself, for he now found himself a prisoner of the landgrave Friedrich II. of Hessen-Kassel, the most notorious and detested among those petty German territorial rulers, who sustained their lavish lifestyles by selling into foreign bondage soldiers, whose obedience and complete subordination was mercilessly enforced. England, without a native standing army, was the best customer for these unfortunates, never more so than during the wars in America, when fighting men were urgently needed. In his *Kabale und Liebe* (1784) Schiller passionately denounced this ruler, who dominated and epitomized this disgraceful trade to such a degree that though other princes also sold men, German mercenaries under English command became generally known as Hessians, and in my own youth children were still subdued with the threat: "ab nach Kassel" (meaning: get lost). Much later Seume recorded his misfortunes in *Mein Leben*, an account of his life, which remained a fragment because he was too ill and worn down to carry out his task.

As he wrote so many years after the events described, some later critics felt and feel that not all his remarks should be taken as gospel truth and that the wish to dramatize himself had clouded his memory. The close friends, who eventually finished the account of his life, harbored no such doubts. They were Christian August Heinrich Clodius and Georg Joachim Göschen, the influential bookseller and publisher, who assisted Seume during the last years of his life by providing various literary commissions. They describe his oral, as well as his written reminiscences as modest and truthful, cheerful and serene,<sup>11</sup> and his autobiographic works are, indeed, remarkably free of any sensationalism, gory details, or self-pity, notwithstanding all the hardships they enumerate. The version of events as presented in *Mein Leben* agrees completely with that presented in Seume's letter from Halifax dated 1782 ("Schreiben aus Amerika nach Deutschland"), which is largely ironic, rather than accusatory, and yet describes the Hessian garrison as a devils' nest ("Teufelsnest") which seems to have been one of the very openings of hell ("eine Öffnung nach dem Styx"). His reaction to his brutal and unlawful capture was a mixture of shock, resignation in face of the inevitable, and the faint hope that, maybe, in this extremity fate would yet provide him with some favorable opportunities. He deplored especially that while all his sympathies were with those who fought for freedom, and while he wished the American settlers every success, he himself was, for better or worse, pressed into the service of tyrants and bent to their will.<sup>12</sup>

In *Mein Leben* Seume sums up his attitude after his capture with remarkable understatement, noting that he stopped fretting in the end, consoling himself that life goes on wherever we are, and that he, too, may survive, where others can make it. Besides, getting across the ocean might open a new life for him. Those, who deduced from such statements that his rational acceptance of the inescapable denotes acquiescence with the perpetrated cruelty and injustice, overlook the short and caustic remark following these considerations: "That is what I thought."<sup>13</sup> While Seume pinned his hope on a better future, conditions were so desperate that about a hundred of his fellow captives conspired to overpower their guards and escape from their appalling prison, the Festung Ziegenhayn. Seume was chosen as a leader, but on the advice of an experienced former Prussian sergeant, who had likewise fallen into the clutches of the landgrave, he excused himself with his youth and inexperience. Many previous disappointments had convinced his shrewd counselor that such desperate attempts rarely met with success and usually ended in disaster. Such was, indeed, the case. Thanks to this timely warning, Seume escaped punishment by the skin of his teeth. Retribution was swift and cruel, though eventually only two men were to be hanged, and the landgrave, who had no intention of depleting his potential income, mitigated even these sentences. The men already standing under the gallows were instead ordered to run the gauntlet thirty-six times. Not everybody survived this brutal flogging, especially when thus prolonged. More than thirty others were likewise condemned to run the gauntlet, though less often.<sup>14</sup> Apart from describing this as cruel punishment, Seume provides no details of this atrocious procedure. During the eighteenth century it was still so much a part of the disciplinary methods in German armies that no description was necessary to put his readers into the picture.

Significantly, Ulrich Bräker, enticed by deception into the Prussian army and as a Swiss citizen unused to forcible coercion and arbitrary deprivation of freedom, left a vivid account of this disgraceful penalty. It was frequently and routinely meted out, often at the slightest provocation, thus serving to break free spirits and intimidate those daring to resist. The poor peasant Bräker had been lured into Prussian territory by the promise of excellent employment opportunities and a life of ease and plenty. As soon as he realized where his naïve trust had landed him, he started scheming to escape. "The only thing that interested me and so many others like me," he confessed later, "was how to get to hell out of it and back home!" His account explains why flight was no easy option, for he soon witnessed "the hussars bringing in deserters all the time." He had to listen to the ominous "drum rolls, as the culprits ran the gauntlet—and other such inducements." He understood quickly that his only feasible path to freedom and safety led through the chaos of a battlefield. Consequently he patiently bided his time and eventually escaped—not without grave risk and anxious moments—during the Prussian war against the Saxons, at the battle of Losowitz on 1 October 1756.<sup>15</sup>

Bräker's autobiography is distinguished by a realistic attitude and by observations sharpened by methods pioneered by the Pietist practitioners of self-observation, which left no room for self-pity. Marxists rightly praise him "as a social realist," and his reminiscences as "models of exact and honest reporting of ordinary life as seen and felt by the common man." In all this, and in the similarity of some of their experiences, he has frequently been compared to Seume, who shares Bräker's satiric vein, but lacks his healthy, sunny humor. Hans Mayer, therefore, finds Seume fiercer and sees his social and philosophical theories as revolutionary. In this sense Seume has been claimed as forerunner of various radical movements, but what he wanted was not to incite revolutions, but to show the world as it really was, so that people of all stations could take notice, change their ways and work together for the needed improvements. Both writers had no plans to remodel the world by force. They abhorred misuses of power, and the effects of coercion, and saw clearly that people on all levels of society were prone to infamy, while those of good will and with kind intentions could also be found in all ranks. Each in turn was therefore judged self-contradictory, though it is the world they experienced and described which is full of paradoxes and contradictions. His suffering in the army of Frederick II notwithstanding, Bräker could admire the aspects of greatness in this celebrated king, and Seume, who detested privileges and unbridled aristocratic power, went all the same out of his way to praise the integrity of single privileged individuals. He also continued to regard monarchy with all its failings as the most expedient method to govern a state, provided, of course, monarchs were prudent, honest and responsible.<sup>16</sup>

The conditions described by Bräker so many years earlier still concord with army life as encountered by Seume. Not much had changed. Bräker, the Swiss citizen to whom the situation of impressed men was entirely new and unexpected, provided some of the factual background which Seume left out, obviously counting such conditions among those home truths, he refused to repeat in his reminiscences, because they are nothing new to half the population, while the other half does not at all want

to know about them. He also stated that his particular fate was only one of many, and well enough known.<sup>17</sup> Yet his account added considerably to the general distaste for the practice of selling soldiers abroad, and in particular to the unfavorable opinion, in which the landgrave of Hessen-Kassel was held by those not belonging to his immediate refined and lavish circle, nor profiting from his free spending. Though he has found his apologists down through the ages, he was indisputably foremost among those princes, which the anonymous Bonaventura denounces, because they pay with people instead of with cash, and maintain the most disgraceful slave trade with death. Like Bräker and Seume, Bonaventura was no revolutionary and also realized that such tyrants are frequently benevolent towards individuals, and only massacre people wholesale.<sup>18</sup>

Thus even the hated landgrave was esteemed by some and found champions, who consequently attempted to discredit Seume, the most vocal and widely known victim of his autocratic, immoral practices. William L. Stone, for instance, acknowledges in his introduction to the *Memoirs, Letters, and Journals of Major General Riedesel* that "the landgrave of Hessa was especially an object of indignation." While he concedes that he himself "was not able to say to what extent this censure was just," he nevertheless excuses the practices of this ruler and belittles the traumatic experiences to which Seume gave voice. "Strenuous endeavors have been made to characterize as a great outrage," Stone declares:

the impressment of the well known and beloved poet Seume by Hessian recruiting officers during the American war, chiefly because he was a noted personage. Might, of course, prevailed over right at that time. Still, a similar experience happened to many others, who, like the poet, could not show the necessary passport in their travels, and whose appearance, likewise, indicated that they led a vagabond life.<sup>19</sup>

In his 1782 letter from America Seume gives the number of those imprisoned with him as approximately 1,500, among them men from quite different principalities and from many stations in life. According to Stone and others who view history through the eyes of the powerful, "the recruited soldier belonged body and soul to him to whom he had sold himself" as a matter of fact. The conditions of this supposedly voluntary slavery he then calmly describes as follows: the soldier "was severed from every tie; in short, he was, in every sense of the word, the property of his military lord, who could do with him as he saw fit." Seume recounts in his autobiography that he found a large crowd already installed at the fortress Ziegenhayn, to which he was forthwith dispatched, among them a drop-out from the university of Jena, a bankrupt merchant from Vienna, a haberdasher from Hanover, a monk from Würzburg, a bailiff from Meiningen, a sergeant from a Prussian hussar regiment, a cashiered Hessian major. They all had to wait until sufficient further men had been ensnared from ploughs, roads and towns to make up a worthwhile consignment. Seume does not dwell much on the hardships of this initial stage, yet in his letter from Halifax he likens it significantly to the entrance to hell. From his scant information it would seem that though the

men had lost their freedom, their accommodation and keep was abominable, and their health rapidly declining, harsh military discipline was not yet fully enforced.

Finally the whole consignment was marched to Kassel and to the river Fulda, from whence they were taken in barges to the Weser and on to the port city of Bremen, where English freighters already awaited them. They all resembled the prisoners they were much more than soldiers, for no weapons had been issued to them, while their guards were heavily armed. These beat and pushed all those of the impressed men, who failed to shout loudly and lustily enough "Long live the King," when shortly after Kassel they were inspected by the English officer in charge, Sir William Faucit. This English emissary seemed during this "Seelenverkauf" (sale of souls) like a merchant inspecting his wares to Seume, who was spared the indignity of joining in the enforced shouts, because owing to his shortness he had been placed in a middle row. Thus his refusal to express oral homage went unnoticed, but he prudently waved his hat, like all the others. Before the river, winding through the patchwork of intertwined German territorial states, skirted Prussian territory, the captive Prussians were disembarked and forced to take a detour on land. Seume grasped the opportunity to declare himself a Prussian, as the forced inertia and lack of movement on the overcrowded, narrow barges had become intolerable to him. Although he was known as a Saxon, he was grudgingly allowed to join the group. Before long, escape was plotted among these men, who knew their homeland so near, but this attempt was anticipated and quickly foiled, and when the party rejoined their waterborne companions soon after, all further thoughts of liberty had to be abandoned.<sup>20</sup>

Even on this sorry trip Seume could not help noting the abundant beauties of nature, but his natural sense of observation and enjoyment was blunted by numb and slavish brooding and by the acute humiliation under which he not only suffered on his own account, but on that of his homeland, in which such degrading conditions were permitted. Once the transport reached the mouth of the river the unwieldy barges could no longer be navigated, so the whole motley assembly was shipped by special coastal vessels to the harbor and the English freighters, where they were pressed together, layered and pickled like herrings. Space was at a premium, hence the men were not allotted any hammocks, but squeezed into wooden boxes under the deck, where the dimensions were so restricted that no full-grown person could stand up straight. These boxes were arranged in two layers, so it was even impossible to sit upright on a bed. Each box had to be shared by twelve men. They fitted together so tightly that the last two had literally to be pushed in. None of them could move at all, unless the whole crowd changed position on command at the same time. The food was hardly better than the accommodation: "peas and pork and pork and peas," with rarely a break in the monotony. The pork was four or five years old, black and streaky; the water scarce and stale, any bread to be had was riddled with worms. Rumor had it, that it had been confiscated long ago from the French during the Seven Years' War, and Seume ruminated darkly that now it served to keep Germans alive, destined to kill Frenchmen in America. These conditions were especially intolerable, as the passage encountered violent storms and lasted, instead of the usual four weeks, fully twenty-two. The rations, never ample, became less and less.



The conditions on this journey were by no means unusual, though in Seume's case storms considerably prolonged the hardships. Very similar circumstances are described, for instance, in a historical sketch first published in the mid-nineteenth century in a German periodical. Translated as "The Voyage of the First Hessian Army from Portsmouth to New York," it was published together with "an Extract from the Diary of the German Poet and Adventurer, J. G. Seume, a Hessian Soldier." This account enumerates in unemotional language such calamities as disease reigning supreme, over-crowded conditions resulting in limbs paralyzed even long after disembarkation, death on board, lack of the most basic necessities, "undrinkable and finally putrid" water, utensils smashed by storms or gnawed by rats, only to end with the resigned declaration: "all of these troubles more or less were suffered by most of the transport ships." By commencing his narration with the assembly of the first Hessian army in the harbor of Portsmouth the writer avoids the prickly question of how these men were recruited and assures for himself a detached perspective.<sup>21</sup> Seume and his companions suffered similarly on their later voyage, yet out of approximately five hundred men only about twenty-seven died during the crossing. Among them was the monk from Würzburg, a man of culture and knowledge. Broken by his deplorable fate and unable to reconcile himself with it he abandoned all hope, fell into complete apathy and could hardly be beaten out of his stupor. Finally he was no longer molested by anybody and before long he died of complete despair and self-neglect in his excrements, his hair and nails overgrown and insects crawling over him.<sup>22</sup>

A description of such a sea passage can also be found in the memoirs of General Riedesel, who reported confidently, while escorting a transport of recruits and still on the Elbe: "We have finished our march without desertion, and without the least complaint either from the inhabitants or the men; and, what is the most remarkable feature in the whole of it is, that a large number of those who were very much fatigued held out to the end." His commentary, though phrased in a positive manner, proves that desertions and attempts of desertion had to be expected and occurred frequently. Before the final embarkation, these men were drilled for four days, and then within two hours transferred to the English ship, overseen by Colonel Faucit, the very same who a few years later was to receive Seume and his fellow prisoners. This English agent counted all the men once more, was handed the necessary lists, and commended General Riedesel, because "he had never seen an embarkation of troops which was so quiet and orderly." Riedesel reported all this to Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick. The high-level interchange may explain the claim that Riedesel declared himself "unable sufficiently to describe the contentment of our soldiers. Every one is joyful and in good spirits." These were the same impressed men for whom, as reiterated by Stone: "thirty thalers were to be paid as a bounty for each man. One-third of this sum was to be paid one month after signing of the treaty, and the remainder two months subsequently." It is difficult to know, who was deluded and in how far, but it indicates the illusions—sincere or deliberately deceitful—which were officially kept up to sustain practices completely contrary to the teaching of Christianity, which was publicly not only practiced, but strictly enforced. Pfister is especially expansive on the importance of divine services on board, and on "the religious, sympathetic feeling," which "certainly

prevail in the deeply rooted piety of our (Hessian) people." But what was so regularly preached was hardly compatible with Seume's belief in the rights of men as proclaimed by the Bible, as well as by the French and American Revolution. Altogether, the correspondence of Riedesel dwells rarely on the unpleasant aspects of ordinary army life with which the high nobility, sufficiently removed from the ranks, was not directly connected.<sup>23</sup>

For these details we have to look into different documents, for instance the journal of Lieutenant Johann Karl Philip von Krafft, a Saxon by birth, who was promoted to ensign in a Prussian regiment of fusiliers under Frederick the Great, but resigned his commission and, hoping for greater rewards, made his own way to the New World. America attracted the adventurous, as well as those expecting to better their lot in a country still largely unknown, but attractive through the promise of liberty and fortune. Many succeeded in this quest, but von Krafft's tortuous path demonstrates clearly that the move was by no means invariably easy and smooth. He had intended to join the Braunschweigers under General von Riedesel, but as officers were not needed, his application was not accepted. Only after great difficulties and most disagreeable, dangerous adversities, he finally made it to corporal in a Hessian regiment. His voluntary enrollment secured him a degree of autonomy unattainable to impressed men. His position was low enough to keep him constantly and closely involved with them, yet it elevated him above the lower ranks and allowed him to observe their lot with the detachment of a volunteer and free man. He talks of discipline and punishments so casually that his matter-of-fact accounts make chilly reading. In 1781 he notes on 27 September: "Several desertions having occurred among the Hessians, a gallows was built in front of Fort Knyhaussen in order to excite fear." On 1 October "the portraits of the 3 Hessian officers who had deserted . . . were fastened to the gallows." Soon after he "was obliged to go on fatigue command to take 4 deserting sailors to New York head-quarters." On the same day he had already contacted his superior officer "to report a soldier to him for an offence." The outcome of this communication is not mentioned, but it could have been appalling for the culprit, for on 5 January 1782, von Krafft "attended at a Court Martial on account of a Grenadier who had been stealing while on watch." The details of this crime are not even mentioned, but the man was sentenced "to run the gantlet 12 times on one day through 200 men." Such ferocious punishment was freely inflicted. On 18 February von Krafft also "attended on Court Martial of a rascal who was sentenced to run the gantlet 12 times in one day through 200 men." The sentence was probably carried out on 20 February, when von Krafft, without adding further details, "attended a gantlet 12 times run." Then on 2 June we find him "at examination of a man for insubordination;" on 3 June "on Court Martial of a deserter;" on 4 June "at a gantlet. It being the King's birthday all the Royal troops had to fire after sundown in the evening."<sup>24</sup>

For any indication of how these troops felt on that evening, and of what pain, fear, revulsion and terror these barbaric procedures aroused among them, we have to turn to such accounts as that of Ulrich Bräker, who was forced to watch men run up and down the gauntlet until they fell down senseless, only to be driven through the same torture again on the next day, "with the clothes ripped of their flayed backs, and

once again they'd be flogged with renewed vigour, until shreds of congealed blood hung down over their breeches." Ulrich Bräker and his Swiss comrade in arms "would look at each other trembling and deathly pale, and whisper: "The bloody barbarians."<sup>25</sup> Men who did not wield their whips with sufficient strength, where themselves similarly punished. von Krafft goes on to relate with matter of fact neutrality on 18 July: "In the morning after the watch parade I had to take the usual oath over a deserter (who subsequently was condemned to run the gauntlet 30 times) in the Court Martial, which was my first." The list goes on, even after the entry on 3 August: "To-day proclamations of peace were published everywhere in the papers. Although it is not, generally speaking, reasonable of me to so consider them thus, they are nevertheless thunderbolts to me." This was followed on 23 August by yet another "Court Martial of a deserter," who was sentenced to run "24 times through 200 men." On 26 August von Krafft again "held examination over a deserter. At a gantlet," and a further one he records for the following day.<sup>26</sup>

Negative emotions aroused by the news of peace were not entirely uncommon, even among the impressed men, whose bondage did not automatically end, when they returned home. They also faced a lack of avenues open to discarded soldiers. Officers without private means encountered a bleak future in times of peace, and for many of the ranks hope of integration into civil life was slim. The privations and sufferings of von Krafft, before he managed to win a position as corporal and later as ensign with the Hessians, go a long way to explain his reluctance to welcome peace and also his unconcern to suffering inflicted on others.

Riedesel himself does not mention such details. By all accounts he was a cultured, well-educated man, exceptionally honest, upright, fair and reasonable; this, however, within the standards of a class, who regarded their privileges as God-ordained and unassailable, and accepted the subordination of humbler folk as their due and an established fact of life. Hence thoughts of equity were unknown among them, and the basic ideals of the French and American Revolution were rejected as base insurrection. From birth, Riedesel moved in the highest circles, and that not only in petty German courts. He corresponded with rulers and generals, and on his way back from America he went to London in order to personally "hand the king the dispatches he had brought. The latter received him in the most kind and gracious manner."<sup>27</sup>

The privileges of his class anchored him in a sphere of life even more incomparable with that of the common soldier, as that of the rich plantation owners compared with the status of their lowest slaves. Of these his wife, a religious, devoted and dauntless woman, who insisted on following her husband to the unknown rigors of the New World, wrote with obvious revulsion:

The landed proprietors in Virginia own many Negro slaves, and treat them badly. Many of them are allowed by their masters to run naked until they are fifteen and sixteen years old, and the dress which is then given them, is scarcely worth wearing. The slaves have an overseer who leads them out at daybreak into the fields, where they are obliged to work like beasts or receive beatings; and when thoroughly exhausted and burned by the sun, they come

into the house. They are given Indian meal called hominy, which they make into pastry. But often they are, when they are tired and had rather sleep for a couple of hours, again obliged to go to work. They view it as a misfortune to have children, as they in turn will become slaves and wretched men. As they have not the time to cultivate the little land which they have, they possess nothing, and are only able by the sale of poultry to scrape together sufficient money to clothe themselves. Still, there are good masters, who can be easily told, by their slaves being well clothed and housed. Under such auspices, the Negroes are also good servants, and are very faithful and much attached to their masters. That wicked masters have disaffected servants is not to be wondered at.<sup>28</sup>

Though shocked by such conditions, Friedericke von Riedesel did not draw any parallels between this life of slavery and the lot of the impressed men around her. She repeatedly described them as well contented and specially attached to her husband. Apparently it did not occur to her, nor to most other observers, that those of the ranks, who were charged arranging her private transport, helping with the household chores, fetching wood and water, and attending to her personal needs, were comparable, both in their situation and attitudes, to such house-slaves as were personally involved with their masters and were humanely treated.

On his own level Major General Riedesel was, indeed, a fair, caring and considerate man. His lifestyle and status, however, differed fundamentally from that of the impressed men under his command. On board the ship, which brought him from Bremen to England, Riedesel was allocated, as he wrote to his wife, "a state-room almost as large as your sitting-room," which four other high officers shared. On each side was a small cabin, one for himself, one for the English captain. His daily routine was pleasant: "I rise about seven o'clock in the morning, after having said my prayers in bed," he reported. Breakfast is served "upon the English fashion upon tea and bread and butter." After that, a walk on deck, smoking a pipe, then writing, reading, drinking coffee, strolls on deck with the two Englishmen in command, one or two more pipes and then at two o'clock to a dinner with table cloth and three dishes, lasting about an hour. After that half an hour or three quarters is spent drinking the health: "First the king; second the duke; third, yours and the children; fourth, Captain Foy's wife; fifth, a good sea voyage; and sixth, a successful expedition in America." No shortage of wine, arrack and beer, a pleasant hospitality between the commanders of all the ships which make up the transport, and the confident expectation that when everybody will be transferred to a man-of-war, "everything will be more agreeably arranged for" his comfort. Later conditions changed somewhat, for all on board got seasick "The cook could not cook," and "great lamentation and great blundering arose on all sides." There was nothing prepared to eat, but Riedesel and the captain remained well enough to concoct for themselves "a pea soup in the sailor's kitchen, and eat cold roast beef." However, "the soldiers had nothing."<sup>29</sup>

Expectations and conditions for the impressed men were decidedly different and, though some no doubt expected that any change ahead could only be for the better,

their spirits were by no means unanimously joyful. While Seume failed totally to keep his friend, the monk, interested in life and survival, he took every possible step to remain active himself and fight against despondency and despair. To obtain exercise he voluntarily shared in the work of the sailors and learned as much of their language and trade as possible. On calm days he was allowed to climb into the crow's nest with his copy of the *Aeneid*, drawing consolation from Virgil's vivid tales of adventures, the violent storms at sea he described, and of adversity bravely endured and overcome by heroes of old. Such freedom of movement he owed to the kindly English captain, who happened to pass as Seume was reading in Horace, thereby arousing the scorn of the vulgar ship's mate. The captain, however, was so impressed by this display of learning that he not only affirmed that under present circumstances Horace could offer "a very good diversion," but also took Seume into his private cabin, showed him his own stock of books, allowed him to borrow from them, and even began to augment his unusual passenger's scant and unwholesome fare from his personal stock of provisions. Once they reached land, the captain would have liked to keep the young German among his crew, but Seume was not at liberty to accept the offer of his affable benefactor.<sup>30</sup> Nor could the kindhearted captain do more than mitigate on a very small and restricted scale circumstances over which he had no control. Reporting isolated acts of personal benevolence even in a pitiless environment is a special feature of Seume's narration. It strongly enhances trust in the veracity of his account and demonstrates his gift for fair and detached observation. Such instances of general humanity saved his personal sanity and sustained his continued hope for the better future for himself and all mankind, which remained his permanent ideal. All the same, thoughts of regaining his freedom were never far from his mind, for it was his passionate belief "that slavery is worse than death" ("Sklaverey ist mehr Erniedrigung, als Tod").<sup>31</sup>

It was already late autumn, when the Hessians disembarked in Halifax. Their intended destination had been New York, but by the time they arrived the tide of war had already turned so much against the Royalists, and the settlers around New York had become so dominant that it was considered too chancy to release into this debacle the Hessian captives with their volatile loyalties.<sup>32</sup> In the Canadian isolation chances for successful deserting were slim. Halifax was an ideal harbor with abundant shelter, as Seume quickly noticed, but all other conditions were less than appealing. The place was surrounded by impenetrable woods, everything needful was in short supply or nonexistent; the natural environment was harsh, the weather growing colder by the day. All the same, the men, ravaged by narrow confinement, malnutrition and, increasingly, by scurvy, were overjoyed to feel once again solid ground under their feet. Originally they had been allocated to various regiments, but as the English front was already crumbling, the men were kept together and in reserve, fighting the elements, illness, hunger and above all boredom, instead of the American settlers, with whom lay the true sympathies of Seume and his closest friends.<sup>33</sup>

Again Seume was luckier than most. As he had already proven himself on the passage a diligent learner and willing to work, he had been instantly promoted to petty officer on landing, and when the tents arrived the charge of erecting the one for

his men fell to him. Undaunted by inexperience and utter lack of expertise, he found a seasoned veteran, a former Prussian rifleman, to whom he delegated the task. This "old satyr"—as Seume described him, taking his references habitually from classic literature—ably organized the men, pretending all the while that he was acting under Seume's specific directions. The assignment was far from easy, as the ground was stony, and any stakes and pegs they needed they had to get themselves out of the unchartered wilderness. Few of the tents survived the first storm intact; better techniques had to be improvised. Gradually the community settled down and began to make the best of the unknown and hostile environment, into which they had been deposited. Battlefronts were far away, and the entire community was isolated from the rest of the world by the sea and vast forests, which impeded deserting to such a degree, that even a certain amount of hunting was allowed. For a while Seume took the Prussian veteran with him every day into the woods, ostensibly to hunt, but mainly to be taught by him the drill and army routine, which he himself was supposed to instill into the men under his command. As they were daily expected to join their designated regiments, life was still somewhat lax and disorganized, less restricted than under normal barrack conditions, if far from pleasant.<sup>34</sup>

It was during that time that a young aristocratic officer noted Seume's education and literary aspirations and sought his acquaintance. This was Karl Ludwig von Münchhausen (1759-1836), scion of an influential family, which produced a number of well-known and distinguished personalities, among them the famed Baron Münchhausen, whose purported *Marvellous Travels* (narrated by Rudolph Erich Raspe) were published anonymously in London in 1785, and also the enlightened first governor of the university of Göttingen, founded by George III in 1736, and quickly gaining a leading position under Münchhausen's able leadership.<sup>35</sup>

A warm and genuine friendship soon developed between Seume and the young nobleman, based on similar interests and the shared desire to learn from the other what each of them felt was still lacking in his own education. Münchhausen was at the time, as Seume describes, using the words of Samuel Johnson, "a man of sound strong unlettered sense," but he possessed in full measure the polish and the complex outlook, which Seume, though university educated, still lacked. He, in turn, could introduce his new-found friend to classic authors and German poetry, particularly to the works of Hagedorn and Hölty, in which both delighted. The opportunity to widen their experience was irresistible for both. Their common confinement in an alien, monotonous location enabled Münchhausen to overrule class distinctions and follow his own inclinations to the point of including Seume into his circle of fellow officers, where once again he was able to enjoy stimulating companionship and was relieved of some of the chafing restrictions, which otherwise he would have encountered. In this congenial company he experienced firsthand the considerable difference between the fate of an officer and that of impressed men. This exceptional position amply answers the arguments by the apologist Stone, who attempts to disprove "the philanthropical howlers who were grumbling so continually about 'soul selling,'" by pointing out that Seume himself acceded that:

his military life had its attractions, for it gave him the opportunity of crossing the ocean. Neither was he specially rejoiced when the news of peace came, thus enabling him to return to Europe. Speaking in reference to this, he says: "The news of peace was not very welcome, because young people, desirous of signaling themselves in battle, did not like to see their career thus brought to an end. They had flattered me with the prospect of becoming an officer, in which event a new career might have opened for me; but with peace all this vanished."<sup>36</sup>

Stone, of course, was not or would not be aware that gaining officer rank would lift Seume into educated and polite society, while going home was not necessarily synonymous with regained liberty, for those still in good health and condition were then by no means free and they feared with good reason to be resold to Prussia. For those sick and ill life at home offered few opportunities and inducements.

The generosity of his new friend allowed Seume a thorough taste of the advantages enjoyed by officers. His life was nevertheless far from pleasant, because he was not excused from his normal duties. His special skills, by now well known, earned him the additional task of scribe to Colonel Hatzfeld, who kept him supplied with abundant work, but thought that his patronage and a few condescending words were ample recompense for uncounted hours of extra toil. Seume was even arrested and vindictively threatened with further punishment, when he once tried to avoid this added occupation and went hunting after his official daily chores were finished. But his firmness and honesty finally won over his exacting taskmaster. He was finally relieved of his normal obligations and even awarded some payments for the services he rendered to the general.

On the rare occasions when Seume found opportunities to spend some time with his aristocratic friend, the young nobleman, who himself had literary aspirations, encouraged him to persevere with his poetry. Seume himself makes light of these early efforts, nearly all of which are lost. Only some verses are preserved, because they were edged into his memory, so he could later recall them. Their main interest lies in a vibrant description of the inhospitable, primeval forest, which surrounded the Hessians, and of the dread and fear it exuded. This was considerably, and probably quite deliberately, increased by gory accounts of savages, who lurked in this green wilderness, ready to torture and scalp anyone they could lay their hands on. In Seume's poem this belief is presented as part of the terror incited by the untamed backwoods. However, in his autobiography he emphasizes, that though the cruel custom of the savages to scalp their enemies was common knowledge, he himself had never come across a single such incident. In fact, he had found these supposedly uncivilized people consistently friendly and amenable. Much later he wrote a poem "The Savage" ("Der Wilde"), asserting that it described a true story for which he could personally vouch. Published in 1793 by Schiller, and achieving considerable resonance in Germany, it tells of a distraught and exhausted Indian, lost in a raging thunderstorm and heartlessly denied refuge at the door of a white man. Sometime later the settler also lost his way in the woods and was rescued by the native, who offered him warmth, food and a bed for the night, and safely guided him back the next morning. Only then, to the horror

of the white man, did he reveal his identity, forgoing any revenge and merely pointing out that those considered savage by the settlers were really the better people. Yet Seume was no sentimental promoter of the noble savage image. When he describes the trade between natives and Europeans, he remarks that all of them cheated just as cunningly and readily as they were cheated themselves. He praises the Indians' exceptional skill with their main weapons, the outmoded Dutch firearms, and their unmatched dexterity in and on the water, and he describes the men as good-looking and athletic. But he also mentions their predilection for rum, and the womenfolk he found unattractive. His overall impression of what he assessed as the "so-called savages" was of decent people, peaceful unless seriously provoked, and in their dress and culture rather resembling Estonians and Latvians, European populations oppressed and kept in poverty by foreign rule and exploitation. Seume encountered their primitive conditions, partly under the Russians, partly under the Prussians, when in 1805 he had to escort a young nobleman to the university town of Dorpat—today Tartu in Estonia. For good measure he then carried on alone and largely on foot through Poland and on to St. Petersburg, Finland, Sweden and Denmark, describing his impressions in the autobiographic travelogue, *Mein Sommer 1805*.<sup>37</sup>

Through such extensive excursions and impressive foot-marches, notably the adventurous *Spaziergang nach Syrakus* ("On Foot to Syrakus"), Seume gained literary fame in later life. It can hardly surprise that someone with his stamina, determination and fiery enthusiasm for liberty should have plotted escape from impressment even under the most unpromising circumstances. During his forced sojourn in Canada his plan had been all along to join the republicans, whose cause was so dear to his heart, and in another petty officer he had found a like-minded fellow conspirator. Both resented their involuntary confinement, and chafed more and more under the inclemency of the elements to which they were exposed, the illness, hunger and boredom. If this companion was less circumspect, he was also more worldly-wise and sophisticated. He had stayed for a while in Switzerland with his relation, the famous Kaspar David Lavater, a friend of many notables, among them Goethe, and admired all over Europe for his character studies and his voluminous, widely read *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-78). The desperate plan was to trust to destiny, brave the forests and reach Boston, a gamble for life and death, as the young men fully realized. Seume had held back, however. He was somewhat reluctant to gamble and face such uncertainties, not least because his friendship with Münchhausen bound him to the camp. At last the declaration of peace in 1783 put an end to their scheme. Peace was not welcomed with unmingled joy, even by the impressed Hessians, among whom the rumor that once back they would be sold to the Prussians gained credence through the usual practices of the landgrave.<sup>38</sup>

Peace ended for Seume also his happy and advantageous connection with Münchhausen. Once embarked, their futures led into entirely different directions, and he only saw his friend again on two further occasions. Once, when their homeward bound ships came so near each other that with great difficulties they could exchange a few words, and once more at the end of Seume's *Spaziergang nach Syrakus* in 1802, which he rounded off with a loop through France, walking back to Germany via



Strassburg, Mainz and Frankfurt. Before returning home he stayed a few days in Schmalkalden with Münchhausen and his family. The occasion was not an unmitigated success. Though Münchhausen apparently went out of his way to make his friend welcome and wanted, Seume felt depressed. He was inhibited by the entirely different lifestyle to which mere nobility entitled, and he was too honest to entirely brush aside his antiaristocratic principles or his antipathy towards privileges and class distinctions. Their changed circumstances prevented him from returning to the comparatively easy intercourse of their shared life in the New World.<sup>39</sup> Yet his rock-strong convictions never clouded his appreciation of personal worth and good will, and so the friendship endured, kept alive through letters, of which a number of those from Seume to Münchhausen, written between 1792 and 1806, were published in 1969 in *Euphorion* by Rolf Kraft.

The correspondence starts with a letter Seume obviously found difficult to write, because he began it 1 January 1792 and only finished it 28 March. He had heard nothing from his friend so far and began by inquiring why, where he was and what he was doing. Yet Münchhausen could not have written, because Seume himself had not kept his promise to forward a postal address. It would seem that he had negated on his pledge, because he shrank from revealing his strained, and sometimes desperate circumstances, for he mentions in the last paragraph of this first letter rather casually that now he had just finished his university course and was henceforth permitted to lecture at a university. He mentions nothing of the difficulties and deprivations he had to overcome before he could reach this goal. Throughout the correspondence his overall tone appears deliberately, almost too forcefully, brisk and light hearted. Literary questions still provide common concerns, but he skips lightly over his own problems, and shows not the slightest tinge of envy of his friend's better fortune. Nor does he ever mention their shared, yet very different experiences among the Hessians. His joviality seems mostly somewhat strained; designed to hide real feelings rather than give them vent. True passion breaks forth only in the letter written after the disastrous battle of Jena and Auerbach, when the army, in which Münchhausen was still serving, had been thoroughly beaten by Napoleon, and Seume did not even know what had become of his friend.

For once in this correspondence his true convictions are revealed. He blamed the catastrophe first and foremost on the incompetence of the German princes and their total unwillingness and incapacity to read the signs of the times and adapt to their changing spirit. As these absolute and unbending rulers had refused to consult reason and nature—namely the natural needs and inclinations of their people—to Seume their eventual total defeat was inevitable. There had been no freedom, no justice, no unity, no righteous aim, no sense, and no reason; therefore, in his view, there could be no ultimate resistance or victory. He blamed the defeat on the narrow-mindedness of a system based not on intrinsic merit, but on the privileges of a hereditary caste, which left no room for equity, enterprise and the common good, and he foresaw with dread that after the debacle of lost battles those in power would disregard the needs of the people and be only concerned to secure as many concessions as possible for themselves. In 1815 the Congress of Vienna proved him right. It endorsed the schemes of petty

rulers and ignored the hopes and aspirations of the people and all those, who had flocked to arms on their own free will in order to defend their country. At a time, therefore, when idealists enthusiastically volunteered to fight against the Napoleonic invasion, Seume had lost hope in a foreseeable change for the better. He retreated into personal grief, quoting from Addison's tragedy *Cato*:

Where general shame depresses all the nation  
The post of honour is a private station.<sup>40</sup>

An aphorism among the collection of his mainly politically and socially orientated thoughts (which he called *Apokryphe*), compresses his views into the cryptic observation: "In Ulm and Austerlitz and Jena our flogging system displayed its full glory." Like Juvenal, who found it hard to write without producing satire (*Difficile est saturam non scribere*), Seume believed that all that was necessary to write a perfect satire was to describe everything as it really is. He also deplored that the epoch was a sequence of public infamies to which nobody objected.<sup>41</sup>

This may sound cynical, but Seume had experienced the conditions under which the underprivileged existed, and he knew their problems more thoroughly than most contemporary writers. By the time his military transport took him back to Europe and reached Bremen, he was so desperate to escape a further life of slavery that he resolved once more to desert, come what may. His former fellow plotter and one other man were in the conspiracy, but somehow found an opportune moment during the night to vanish for good from their bondage, and they left Seume behind. In his despair he attempted a wild run while his sergeant was distracted by a squabble about provisions, and here his autobiography ends. Not so his misfortunes and extraordinary adventures, many of which were added to his memoirs and together with it published by his friends. They testified to the human kindness and selfless help, which Seume experienced throughout his life, but also to the shameful trickery he had to endure, and the brutal force and merciless might, which over-ruled right and oppressed the poor, and rendered movements within Germany so precarious. For though Seume finally escaped from the Hessians, he could not win ultimate freedom, but was once more impressed, this time into the dreaded Prussian army. Undaunted, he deserted once more, was recaptured and condemned to the gauntlet, but by that time he had found benevolent sympathizers, who interceded for him and finally helped him to escape forever the soul-destroying life of an impressed soldier. His adventures did not end there, but the rest of his short life was rather less distressful, though rarely free of care and worry.

Seume wrote much, but his intention was not to produce elegant literature, but to witness to the truth as he had experienced it. He became widely known, mainly through his autobiographical travelogues, which still keep his name alive. The importance of his literary legacy owes nothing to a poetic gift of transforming reality into vision. His poetry is, therefore, mostly forgotten, though two lines are still much quoted. They contain the advice to trust in the good nature of those who are fond of

singing, and are taken and slightly transformed from the first verse of his poem *Die Gesänge*:

Wo man singt, da lass' dich ruhig nieder,  
Böse Menschen haben keine Lieder.<sup>42</sup>

His aphorisms are still quoted here and there, and are now increasingly appreciated, owing to their rational and democratic sentiments. The enduring significance of his work stems from his unwavering commitment to personal freedom and equality, with which he denounced slavery and personal subjugation in all guises. Though he admired the achievements of classic civilization, he vehemently denounced the slave culture of Greece and Rome. When he encountered a former American slave ship in the harbor of Copenhagen, he learned with obvious approval that the entire crew had been massacred by the black captives, and he wished that a similar fate should befall all those who shame Christianity by enslaving fellow humans.<sup>43</sup> He vented his feelings fervently and described life honestly and uncompromisingly, especially as seen from the lowest ranges of the social pyramid. Hence he is often claimed by radical movements, but he belonged to no faction. He dedicated his life to inform the public by candid reporting, hoping thereby to expose misuses, activate good will and promote the promising human potential of which he remained convinced in spite of all his adverse encounters. To this end he continued to make facts known, even though he was fully aware that many did not want to hear about them, and that he often had to act against his own personal interest, because he had experienced all too often that because wrongdoing is so widespread, truth offends nearly everywhere.<sup>44</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Johann Gottfried Seume, *Mein Sommer 1805* (repr. Nördlingen: Krater Bibliothek, 1987), e.g., 5: "Schreibsucht ist, wie alle meine Freunde bezeugen können, nicht meine Krankheit." "[Ich] stelle die Dinge vor, wie ich sie sehe." 17: "Meine Äußerungen sind meine Überzeugungen." 23: "Ich habe . . . die Wahrheit jeder Silbe ohne Dichtung behauptet." 35-36: "Es ist in meinen Versen . . . keine Silbe Dichtung; alles ist reine historische Wahrheit nach meiner Überzeugung."

<sup>2</sup> See Johann Gottfried Seume, *Mein Leben*, in *Kindlers Neues Literatur Lexikon*, ed. Rudolf Radler et al. (München: Kindler Verlag, 1991); Günter Niggel, *Geschichte der deutschen Autobiographie im 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1977), 152.

<sup>3</sup> Johann Gottfried Seume, *Mein Leben* (1813), ed. Rolf Max Kully (Basel: Gute Schriften, 1972), 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Mein Leben*, 45, 28, 23-24, 46, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Gottfried Seume, *Ausgewählte Werke Seumes*, ed. and intr. Wilhelm Hausenstein (Leipzig: Leipziger Buchdruckerei, 1912), "Einleitung," 2, 90; *Mein Sommer 1805*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Inge Stephan, *Johann Gottfried Seume: Ein politischer Schriftsteller der deutschen Spätaufklärung* (Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1973), 1, 174.

<sup>7</sup> *Mein Leben*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Mein Leben*, 21-23, 49-50.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Stephan, 2: "Als 'verspäteter Aufklärer' lebte Seume gleichsam als Relikt in der Blütezeit der Romantik und des philosophischen Idealismus, die sich als Gegenbewegungen zum Rationalismus der Aufklärung verstanden . . . Von beiden Richtungen konnte er kein Interesse für seine Dichtungen erwarten." *Mein Sommer 1805*, 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> "Schreiben aus Amerika nach Deutschland," Halifax, 1782, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, 34-38, n. 3. This letter was first published by J. W. v. Archenholz in his journal *Neue Litteratur und Völkerkunde*, 1789.

<sup>11</sup> *Mein Leben*, 85: "eben so anspruchslos und wahr, eben so heiter und gleichmütig."

<sup>12</sup> "Schreiben aus Amerika," *Ausgewählte Werke*, 34: "weil es niemanden behagen wollte, sich so ohne sein gegebenes Gutachten mit den armen Teufeln von Amerikanern zu schlagen, denen wir alle herzlich gut waren, und alles mögliche Glück wünschten."

<sup>13</sup> *Mein Leben*, 53: "Am Ende ärgerte ich mich weiter nicht; leben muß man überall: wo so viele durchkommen, wirst du auch: über den Ocean zu schwimmen war für einen jungen Kerl einladend genug; und zu sehen gab es jenseits auch etwas. So dachte ich."

<sup>14</sup> *Mein Leben*, 53-55; Inge Auerbach, *Die Hessen in America 1776-1783* (Darmstadt: Hessische Historische Kommission Darmstadt, 1996), 290: "Die für sein Urteil über den Soldatenhandel maßgeblichen Schriften sind nämlich erst kurz vor seinem Tode entstanden, speziell "Mein Leben." This statement fails to take into account the letter from Halifax, written in 1782.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Bräker, (*Lebensgeschichte und natürliche Abenteuer des armen Mannes im Tockenburg*), *The Life Story and Real Adventures of the Poor Man of Toggenburg*, tr. and intr. Derek Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 135-37, 138-41.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Meyer, "Aufklärer und Plebejer: Ulrich Bräker, der arme Mann im Tockenburg," in *Von Lessing bis Thomas Mann: Wandlungen der bürgerlichen Literatur in Deutschland* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959), 112-13, 115; Stephan, e.g., 57, 76, 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Mein Leben*, 7: "es geht wider mein Wesen, . . . einige allgemeine Wahrheiten zu sagen, die die eine Hälfte längst weiß und die andere Hälfte nicht wissen will;" 52: "Die Geschichte und Periode ist bekannt genug: niemand war damals vor den Handlangern des Seelenverkäufers sicher; Überredung, List, Betrug, Gewalt, alles galt. Man fragte nicht nach den Mitteln zu dem verdammlichen Zwecke."

<sup>18</sup> Bonaventura, *Nachtwachen* (1804-5) (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 50: "Fürsten und Herrscher, die mit Menschen statt mit Münzen bezahlen, und mit dem Tode den schändlichsten Sklavenhandel treiben;" 60: "Fürsten, die den einzelnen Menschen wohltun, und sie nur in ganzen Heeren würgen."

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Adolphus von Riedesel, *Memoirs, Letters, and Journals of Major General Riedesel*, 2 vols., intr. and tr. William L. Stone (Albany: J. Munsell, 1868), reprt. *Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 1:20-21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ausgewählte Werke*, 35; *Mein Leben*, 55, 58.

<sup>21</sup> A. Pfister, *The Voyage of the First Hessian Army from Portsmouth to New York 1776*, tr. Charles Frederick Heartman, Heartman's Historical Series, no. 3 (New York: Chas. Fred. Heartman, 1915), 26-27.

<sup>22</sup> *Mein Leben*, 58-59, 62-65.

<sup>23</sup> Riedesel, 1:24, 32-33; Pfister, 14-15. Auerbach, bases her chapter on "Deserteure," largely on official war documentation and hence with the views of officers and the administration. Also discussed are the American propaganda leaflets exhorting desertion, but remaining largely ineffectual, due to various circumstances of which the frequently far from welcoming reception by the rebels is mentioned, 264-90, but not the punishments meted out to recaptured deserters. Specially pointed out, but not analyzed, is the "Factor Heimweh, der in der Tat im Verhalten der Hessen eine so bedeutende Rolle gespielt hat, daß 'Heimweh' offiziell als Todesursache neben 'hitzigem Fiebern' anerkannt war," 269 and n. 980. The sentimental euphemism "homesickness," hardly acceptable as professional medical term, obviously provided convenient cover for numerous personal tragedies.

<sup>24</sup> Johann Karl Philip von Krafft, *Journal of Lieutenant John Charles Philip von Krafft* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1882), reprt. *Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), 151, 157, 161.

<sup>25</sup> Bräker, 127.

<sup>26</sup> von Krafft, 164-66.

<sup>27</sup> Riedesel, 2:179.

<sup>28</sup> Friedericke von Riedesel, *Letters and Journals relating to the War of the American Revolution and the Capture of the German Troops at Saratoga by Mrs. General Riedesel*, tr. and intr. William L. Stone, (Albany: J.

Munsell, 1867), rpt. *Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (New York Times & Arno Press, 1968), 159-60.

<sup>29</sup> Riedesel, 1:34-35: "On Board the Pallas," 21 March 1776; 37: 26 March 1776.

<sup>30</sup> *Mein Leben*, 65-66, 61, 67.

<sup>31</sup> *Mein Sommer 1805*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Mein Leben*, 66, Seume concluded: "Man brachte uns wahrscheinlich nach Hallifax, weil es in Neuyork und den andern Provinzen schon höchst mißlich mit den Royalisten stand, und man das Ausschiffen dort kaum wagen durfte."

<sup>33</sup> *Mein Leben*, 80: "Das Leben englischer Söldlinge war uns eben nicht angenehm, und wir beide hatten uns mit dem Gedanken getröstet, wir würden uns gelegentlich an die Republikaner anschließen können."

<sup>34</sup> *Mein Leben*, 66-68.

<sup>35</sup> Freiherr Carl Friedrich Hieronymus von Münchhausen (1720-97), known as the "Lügenbaron," and Gerlach Adolf von Münchhausen (1688-1770).

<sup>36</sup> *Mein Leben*, 68-71; Riedesel, 2:105, 1:21.

<sup>37</sup> *Mein Leben*, 74-79, 118; "Der Wilde," first published in Schillers *Neue Thallia*, 1793, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, 417-20; see *Seumes prosaische und poetische Werke*, 10 vols. (Berlin: G. Hempel, 1867-76), 10:219-20, note: "Diese Erzählung habe ich, als ich selbst in Amerika und in der dortigen Gegend war, als eine wahre Geschichte gehört. Sie interessierte mich durch ihre ächte reine primitive Menschengüte, die so selten durch unsere höhere Cultur gewinnt;" The excursion into the North is described in *Mein Sommer 1805*, where he, e.g., describes a desolate place in Estonia, "wo einst die Ahnherren der heutigen Erbherren unter dem Mantel einer Religion, die ausgezeichnet Bruderliebe lehret, Elend und Sklaverey über ein freyes Volk brachten," 57.

<sup>38</sup> *Mein Leben*, 80-81, 84.

<sup>39</sup> Rolf Kraft, "Unbekannte Briefe Johann Gottfried Seumes an Karl Ludwig Frhr. v. Münchhausen, 1792-1806," *Euphorion: Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 63 (1969): 190-91.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-206, 200-1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ausgewählte Werke*, 511, 529: "Man darf die meisten Dinge nur sagen, wie sie sind, um eine treffliche Satire zu machen," 519.

<sup>42</sup> *Ausgewählte Werke*, 409: "Wo man singet, laß dich ruhig nieder/Ohne Furcht, was man im Lande glaubt;/ Wo man singet, wird kein Mensch beraubt:/Bösewichter haben keine Lieder." The poem was first published in Leipzig in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, 1804, no. 23.

<sup>43</sup> *Mein Sommer 1805*, 185; e.g., *Ausgewählte Werke*, 252-56, "Apokryphen" on slavery," ending: "Jeder Vertrag, der die Würde der Menschennatur antastet, ist unhaltbar, wenn er auch nicht widerrechtlich wäre. Heiliger Spartacus, bitte für uns!! Wenn doch mehr solche Schulmeister des Menschenverstandes aufträten!" Other examples, e.g., in Seume's treatise on Plutarch, 531-43.

<sup>44</sup> *Mein Sommer 1805*, 7, 9: "Wahrheit . . . beleidigt fast überall, weil fast überall Sünde ist."

