

gravel, when seen in this perspective. Hagen's study represents a rather new kind of theoretically informed historical and political geography. By theoretically informed I mean that it relates to current theoretical discussions in a field where cultural geography and history meet, but without being specifically theorizing. Tourism and the politics of preservation, in this case, become the arena on which major political struggles are fought and displayed. The study may also be related to the emerging spatial turn in historical research (cf. Gerner 2004; Schlögel 2003) in which factors such as space, distance, networks and communication are taken into consideration when historical events and paths of development are discussed.

Alexander von Humboldt: A Metabiography. *Nicholaas A. Rupke.* Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2005. 320 pp. (ISBN 3-631-53932-0, US-ISBN 0-8204-7693-5 (hbk)).

In a recent 500-page account of Humboldt's influence on nineteenth-century American environmental and geographical thought, Aaron Sachs (2006) argues that Humboldt was second only to Darwin among scientists in terms of their impacts on American thought. Yet in the twentieth century, Humboldt has been much better known and more frequently acknowledged in Latin America and his native Germany. There are therefore many books and papers about the life, work and impacts of Alexander von Humboldt. Rupke's book is about a sample of this very expansive literature. In other words, this is *not* another biography of Humboldt. Instead it reconstructs debates about Humboldt, drawing largely on German language sources. In this task, Rupke draws on developments in biographical and historical writing, though without extended consideration of these. A short Preface explains that such developments have opened up problematics in biographical narrative. Thus:

In recent decades new critiques of biography have made the problem of whether we can write the true story of an extraordinary life more intractable, not merely in the case of so significant a figure as Jesus of Nazareth but of other notable figures from the past When writing the stories of these people's lives and appealing to their names, do we connect with the essential person? Or are we engaged in a

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more complex process that involves appropriation, whereby the life, work and impact of our heroes and antiheroes are told and retold Putting the questions differently: how are reputations constructed and reconstructed by national, professional and other remembrance cultures?

(Rupke 2005, p. 9)

Humboldt himself was a highly prolific author, but the amount written about his life works and impact is vastly greater. Representations of Humboldt abound (there are at least two universities bearing his name), many beyond the space of the academy: glaciers, ocean currents, counties and animals. Rupke explains that his project began as a study of the broad international literature on Humboldt, but subsequently focused on the German literature. That Germany's major historical transformations have also transformed the image and treatment of Humboldt means that Rupke has ample material for analysis. The account is chronological. Following an Introduction, six chapters chart the representation of Humboldt from the struggle for national unification (1848 to 1871) (Chapter 1) through to the reappropriation of Humboldt in post-1989 German debates about globalization, green politics, postmodernism and gay liberation (Chapter 6). In between, there are treatments of representation of Humboldt during the *Kaiserreich* and Weimer Republic (Chapter 2) and through the Nazi period (Chapter 3), followed by chapters about the ways that both East (Chapter 4) and West (Chapter 5) Germany reconstructed Humboldt. Rupke (p. 173) notes:

Thus during the period of a divided Germany two largely clashing Humboldts were constructed, one a close friend of Western capitalism, the other a forerunner of Eastern communism: one the patron of Jewish elites, the other a sympathizer with the cause of the proletariat. In the re-unified Germany of the 1990s, only one of the two could survive.

Of course, that was the Western Humboldt. But in neither Germany was Humboldt monolithic. And since the 1980s, further discourses about Humboldt have emerged in a reunited Germany. These include reading Humboldt as a precursor of 'globalization', 'environmentalism' and 'post-colonialism'. Moreover, there has been something of a convergence between anglophone and German scholarship on Humboldt (and the publication of Rupke's book in English by a Frankfurt-based publisher will reinforce this). Rupke (pp. 191–192) notes how:

post-war Anglo-American Humboldt scholarship developed in virtually complete and blissful ignorance of the many hundreds of German publications on Humboldt, the brothers Humboldt, Humboldt and Goethe, Humboldt and classicism or idealism, Humboldt and Marxism and so on. The two traditions – Anglo-American and German – have in recent years begun to merge, as in Germany the highlights of the English language Humboldt literature from the past few decades are being attended to.

As part of this, Rupke describes a series of 'Post-modernist Cracks', whereby German Humboldt scholarship was no longer shielded from the series of critical approaches and intellectual fashions that have swept the anglophone humanities and social sciences and humanities since the 1960s. Among the most controversial of these in Germany has been the issue (motivated by gay liberation and later by 'queer theory') and significance of Humboldt's sexuality.

In summary, this is a study of the diversity of representations of Humboldt in German literature and of their consequences. This is done in detail, but in

a way that retains interest and makes them accessible to readers without knowledge of German (and/or without the time to work through an unwieldy literature). The closing chapter focuses upon theoretical themes that have informed and crop up throughout the book, including 'institutional embeddedness' and the relationships between political regimes and biographical truth and a reminder that: 'The task of metabiography is primarily to explore the fact and extent of the ideological embeddedness of biographical portraits, not to settle the issue of authenticity' (Rupke 2005, p. 214).

While Rupke must be congratulated for the breadth and depth of this metabiography, his own location (as a professor of the history of science) seems less attuned than it might be to some of the recent critical work on geographies of scientific knowledge (e.g. Livingstone 2003); their networks and what Trevor Barnes (2004) – writing about the history of geographic thought in the second half of the twentieth century and how it emerged through key institutional sites and ensembles of ideas, individuals and objects – has termed 'truth spots'. Thus this metabiography has much to say about Humboldt and institutions, ideologies and nations, but less about how Humboldt has been mediated through particular spaces and places. Rupke's account of a figure so central to the history of geographic thought invites further geographical engagement.

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