

Was Karl May in Canada? The Works of Max Otto: A German Writer's "Absurd Picture of Canada"

Historically, Canada was a country that most Germans associated with wild animals, an abundance of nature, and Indians. Ever since Hessian mercenaries aided Great Britain during the American War of Independence, there was an awareness of Canada in Germany. Even the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) professed an interest in this new country.¹ Traditionally, Canada was admired in Germany as a country of immense size that offered new possibilities for many emigrants.² Prior to World War One (WW I) Dr. Hammann-Perleberg noted that "for most of those that belong to the educated elite Canada is hardly more than a geographical expression."³ Shortly after WW I a German civilian wrote, "Canada is very little known over here. Indeed, during the war when Canadian troops were mentioned one could hear among common people that they took them for red Indians in feathers and war paint."⁴ More recent writers, including Boeschstein, wrote that some German authors commenting on Canada "felt themselves commissioned – to see and say what Germany wanted to hear."⁵ Helfried W. Seliger followed a similar line of thought stating that German literature on Canada written between the World Wars fell into two basic categories. One was the traditional travel account presented by such individuals as Nazi sympathizer Colin Ross, or Lutheran emigration consultant Hermann Wagner; the other was that of a hunter or trapper in remote areas. Of the second category, a good example can be found in the works of Max Otto, whose writings perpetuated stereotypes of Canada. Seliger stated that such writers were more skilled with a gun than a pen and once their vendetta against Canadian wildlife had ended, they felt compelled to preserve their victims in literary form, "invariably, these writers concentrated on those aspects which had always intrigued the European armchair traveller who searched for things his own environment no longer could provide: the wide open spaces, the vast forests, wild waterways and pristine lakes as yet untouched by the threatening advance of civilization."⁶

Otto emigrated from the German state of Saxony in 1912, intending to spend three years in Canada. His intent was to explore the forests and experience the hunting and trapping prospects in western Canada. Little is known of Otto's education or personal background in Germany, but he quit his job as a forester to experience life abroad. In keeping with Otto's purportedly masculine character, he intended to settle in the northern wilderness and test his prowess as a fur trapper and hunter. He specifically chose the western Canadian province of Alberta. With the advent of WW I, his three-year residence abroad turned into, in Otto's own words, "a nine-year adventure."⁷ This article will look at Max Otto's alleged experiences in the Canadian province of Alberta between 1912 and 1921 as portrayed in his four major books. These are *In kanadischer Wildnis* (In the Canadian Wilderness), 1923; *Trapper und Farmerleben in kanadischer Wildnis* (Trapper and Farmer Life in the Canadian Wilderness), 1925; *In Kanadas Urwäldern und Prärien* (In Canada's Primeval Forests and Prairies), 1926; and *Das*

Kreuz in der Wildnis: Erlebnisse (The Cross in the Wilderness: Adventures), 1930. Within this article special attention will be paid to contemporary secondary literature, which gives an indication of how the author's views on Canada were blindly accepted in Germany. But within Canada another image of Otto emerged. In 1925 Reverend C.A. Gutensohn wrote a newspaper article entitled "German's Absurd Picture of Canada" declaring Max Otto's writings to be lies. German language newspapers in Canada later followed suit.⁸ In his first book, *In the Canadian Wilderness*, Otto described his experiences in Canada from 1912 to 1921. This publication was the most widely read of Otto's four major works and received the most comments in journals and book reviews in Germany. In this work he explained that prior to the war he was able to enjoy his life in Canada accompanied only by his German wife and their farm animals. With the start of WW I, Otto saw his world collapse. Wanting to do his duty for the "Fatherland as a German soldier of German blood,"⁹ he claimed to be a member of a group of Germans and Austrians that engaged in sabotage and propaganda in Alberta. He narrated that he was betrayed by fellow Germans and put on trial, but fled from Canada to the United States.¹⁰ From New York he was able to return to Germany. Otto's second book, *Trapper and Farmer Life in the Canadian Wilderness*, was merely a scaled down youth edition of his first major work, which was also widely read and accepted. In both books Otto claimed to portray Canada with both its positive and negative aspects unbiased by his personal opinion.

His third book, *In Canada's Primeval Forests and Prairies*, covers the period from 1919 until his supposed exit from Canada in the fall of 1921. The book began in the wake of WW I, which was a time rampant with anti-German sentiment. Prior to WW I Otto reflected that his life in Canada was almost perfect. The opening chapter saw Otto accompany a prospector and his niece into the Canadian wilderness. Due to the hostile post-WW I environment, he felt that he could not leave his wife alone on his farm. Thus Mrs. Otto joined her husband in the Alberta bush. After Otto's description of his successful vocation as a paid guide in the Canadian forests, the book indulged in an array of masculine hunting escapades, which portrayed Otto's constant success over Mother Nature. Otto also explained how he helped ethnic German army deserters and draft dodgers flee Canadian authorities.¹¹

Otto's fourth book, *The Cross in the Wilderness: Adventures*, explained his life in Canada during WW I and German patriotism. This work described the effects WW I had on a closed group of German speakers and their attempt to aid Germany and Austria through sabotage and propaganda activity in Canada. The publication received some attention in Germany because of its nationalistic content, which revealed his desire to explain his actions as a true German trapped in an enemy nation. His fourth book captured many of Otto's consistent ideals regarding life in Canada, e.g., the positive portrayal of Indians, sparse population, detailed descriptions of nature, hunting scenes and his patriotic feelings for Germany.¹²

Otto's books with their constant themes of success over Mother Nature, and superiority over both natives and Canadians were warmly received in Germany. His writings conveyed a respect for nature and life, but his works were pure fiction passed off as his actual experiences. Between the two World Wars Otto was a frequently used literary source on Canada that was widely available for Germany's reading public. To some readers he provided information on Canada as a land of immigration while

to others, Otto explained in detail the immense challenges and beauty of its nature. Unfortunately, Otto also provided a distorted view of Canada for Germany's readers as the reality of his actual lifestyle in Canada did not correspond to that within his published works.¹³

In correspondence with Canadian authorities, Otto stated that he intended his first book, *In the Canadian Wilderness*, to be used as an informative guide for German emigrants.¹⁴ In 1920 Otto explained his reasons for leaving Canada and asked the Canadian government for his confiscated Mauser rifle to be returned to him. This letter serves as an example of Otto's poor English, but also offers testimony on the influence and support Otto believed he commanded in Germany. Otto explained:

I am a book-writer and my name as author of many "democratic" books is well known in the old Countries and in U.S. During my stay in Canada I have written many good storys for the benefit and welfare of Canada and more will be written by my later in favor of this Country. In Europe and other Countrys of the world are millions of peoples looking for immigration to Canada. Canada need these mens if it wish to "grow up." In my books and phamplets written in favor and praise of Canada- shall I be compel'd to amend my good Sentence and this Country and tell the millions of Emmigrants all over the world that Canada is no place for "foreign born peoples" because "fair play" is there not home?- Sir- I love Canada verry much and only the ill-health of myself and my wife compels me to leave Canada for a warmer Country. I hope not to leave whit a bitter feeling against them, and I hope not, that circumstances compel me, to amend my good means about it. Hoping that verry best, I would be verry thankfull to Canada, if my Right would be fulfilled.¹⁵

For potential German emigrants obtaining reliable information on lands of immigration was a real problem. For many Germans, their knowledge of North America came from reading Karl May (1842-1912) and his fictitious experiences as a German immigrant. Karl May was a German writer known in the German-speaking world for his Wild West books set in the United States. His influential fictional accounts have no direct basis in experience, but derive from source literature and his creative imagination. Today known as a notorious armchair writer, May was widely accepted in Germany as an authority on the United States. Most Germans believed only adventure awaited them in North America, or at least the life of a cultural pioneer.¹⁶ A number of Germans turned to Otto to obtain information on Canada. Part of Otto's success can be ascribed to the fact that his literature was seen to offer some information for Germans contemplating emigration to Canada. Undoubtedly, his narrative style helped his popularity and contributed to its widespread distribution. As Alfred Pletsch correctly assessed, Otto's book, *In the Canadian Wilderness*, apparently found a large readership in Germany – "the popularity of the book was extreme if we consider six editions which were published within one year of its first publication [1923]."¹⁷ In 1925 the eighth printing was available for distribution.¹⁸ In 1929 the German-Canadian newspaper "Der Herold" reported that Otto had sold 75,000 copies of his first book.¹⁹

Some German emigrants, such as Baron Manfred Ropp's and Hugo O. Halluschka's commentaries support Pletsch's argument that prospective emigrants relied on Otto's literature as a source of information of what awaited newcomers in Canada.²⁰ Ropp's

article noted that he did not receive the same positive initial reception in Canada as Otto. Otto wrote that a children's choir sang for the European emigrants aboard his ship from shore as a greeting as they approached Montreal.²¹ Ropp chose to settle in Alberta. Reports to the Deutsches Ausland Institut (German Foreign Institute) listed his place of residence as Dapp, Alberta, north of Edmonton²² similar to the claim made by Otto.²³ Another German emigrant, Hugo O. Halluschka, emigrated from Germany in the early 1920s, perhaps solely due to Otto's works. He lived in northern Alberta, to be exact in Goodfare, Alberta. Halluschka read some of Otto's publications and stated that he was correct in warning German emigrants about the trials of an immigrant's life in Canada. Halluschka was disappointed in Canada, believing he had been misled by Canadians authorities.²⁴

Another plausible example of Otto's influence on an emigrant involved Max Hinsche, who decided to live in western Canada as a trapper, similar to Otto's claim.²⁵ Hinsche admitted that there was literature in Germany describing a German nationals' hunting, trapping, and traveling experiences in western Canada, but Max Otto was not specifically mentioned.²⁶ Perhaps due to Otto, Hinsche decided to live in northern Alberta, but he also lived in northern Manitoba and the Yukon. Sigrist, in comparing Hinsche and Otto, noted that both men claimed life in the bush was a happy time period. Sigrist wrote that Hinsche emigrated from Germany in 1927 "in order to hunt in and explore the wilderness like Max Otto." But Hinsche did not encounter any problems with the Canadian government nor its administration as Otto bitterly maintained. This may have been due the fact that Hinsche arrived in Canada after bad feelings caused by WW I against Germans had largely faded.²⁷ The German-Canadian press stated that Otto's works had achieved a large readership in Germany and provided misleading information for German nationals on Canada.

Unfortunately, Otto's lies caused misery for some newcomers because of his false portrayal of Canadian life. Some had immigrated to Canada, planning to live exactly as Otto claimed to have done; they too wanted to experience life in western Canada as a trapper and hunter. These individuals could not make a living selling furs. There were no hunting parties that one could lead through the bush. Those that came in Otto's wake and followed his tried and true methods did not find financial reward. Unfortunately, such readers experienced only disappointment on the Canadian plains, as they could not earn a living as Otto boasted.²⁸

From the major publications that Otto produced during his lifetime, it was his first book *In the Canadian Wilderness* that received the greatest attention in Germany. His success was partly due to its fast-paced narrative style, but he also fabricated events and copied ideas to mould his publications to the expectations of his potential readers. Otto's early success appeared to wane as his subsequent publications did not capture the attention of the German public to the same extent as his first book. In the light of articles published by newspapers in Canada, and Government of Alberta, and Government of Canada documents, it is highly unlikely Otto experienced the adventures he claimed. Otto's recipe for success, most notably hunting tales with a patriotic flair, had been tried in Germany previously and met with success—most notably by Karl May.²⁹ This formula had been used again by Otto, which gained him some degree of recognition in his homeland. The authenticity of Otto's tales for most German readers was unimportant, for his works supported their stereotype of Canada. Clearly some

Germans wanted to experience life outside the realm of normal society, e.g., a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) upon finding a single person in the isolated western Canadian bush and discovering that this individual was from Germany stated, "that you are a German I believe because you are running around alone in the wilderness. When a foreigner does that it is usually a German."³⁰

Otto appeared to be influenced by May's romantic Wild West vision of North America. He took advantage of a marketing niche to target the uninformed and naive German reading public. He transformed his actions in Canada to a super-hero image similar to May in order to sell his books. In a German book review Herbert Schneider made a direct comparison to Karl May. Schneider wrote, "the writing style is excellent. Otto narrates [his stories] with lively dramatic vividness that is as gripping as Karl May or Zane Grey."³¹ The American author Zane Grey was well known for writing colorful westerns, which gained popularity in both North America and Europe.³² Otto's books imitated May's adventures of Old Shatterhand as portrayed in *Winnetou I*. The similarities to May's publications were much more than mere coincidence, but rather a deliberate copying of other's ideas, e.g., Old Shatterhand displayed many of the same abilities manifested in Max Otto—most notably their deep personal friendships with Indians. May invented the characters of Winnetou, the wise Indian, and Old Shatterhand, Winnetou's white partner.³³ Otto also had an Indian friend Nick Tahn. Both Otto and May shared adventures with their wise native friends. Natives in both Otto's and May's publications were portrayed with admirable and humane characteristics. Although May divided American Indians into two groups—either good or bad—Otto only met natives with positive qualities.³⁴ Canadians in contrast attributed to natives undesirable habits such as unhygienic lifestyles and filthy living quarters.³⁵

Throughout his works, Otto gave his German readers what they expected to experience by conforming his Canadian adventures to May's American tales. His books were a deliberate attempt to capture a German reading audience, without regard for the truth. Unlike other German nationals that came to Canada to experience nature and test their limits against the elements,³⁶ Otto never explicitly stated that he had read May's works, but it does appear that the author was highly influenced by his publications. For example, Otto admitted having romantic ideas regarding Indians and he mentioned the Indian usage of the all-comprehensive utterance—"Ugh (Uff!)."³⁷ May explained that "Uff was an all-purpose word, intended to convey admiration, scorn or surprise—depending on the context."³⁸ May, through the actions of Old Shatterhand, received unwanted attention in the Wild West because of his apparent knowledge of nature and wildlife.³⁹ Otto was also the subject of awe for both whites and Indians due to his success as a trapper and his intimate knowledge of forests and the prairie.⁴⁰ Both individuals possessed two superb rifles, Old Shatterhand his Bärenlöter (bear slayer) and Henrystutzen,⁴¹ Otto a Mauser and a Drilling.⁴²

Old Shatterhand, similar to Otto, avoided shooting animals needlessly—only in situations of grave danger did he draw his weapon.⁴³ Both men profess an intense distaste for game hunting done simply for sport. Otto's books preach his love for nature and all living things, but the works are pure fiction passed off as his autobiography. Both Otto and May explain in detail their concept of greenhorns in the west,⁴⁴ while displaying an intense pride in being German,⁴⁵ and reveal their cunning and vigour by slaying a bear with a knife.⁴⁶ Supposedly both men had an abundance of free time to

travel and were not constrained by a steady job or family life.⁴⁷ A testimony of May's influence on some readers can be found in Carl Schwerla's book (*Kanada im Faltboot*, Canada in a Collapsible Boat, 1930) which described his exciting hunting and traveling activities in the Canadian west. He also claimed to have experienced many adventures in the bush, but Schwerla readily admitted being influenced by May. Schwerla wrote that similar to May's tales:

Such adventures I was now experiencing in the wild west. It was no dream and no fairy tale. Prairie, primeval forest, Indians, tent and campfire – all this had become reality. And I part of this [reality]. How had this come about? Why had I undertaken this? Why was I sitting in this wilderness? Perhaps "this terrible Karl May" was to blame. Often enough my teachers predicted the worst for me, when they caught me reading one of those thick green volumes under the desk.⁴⁸

In contrast to Schwerla, Otto never mentioned May by name, but May also appeared to be a curious model for Otto to follow. After all May was an armchair writer and had never been to North America to research his works. Nevertheless, May encouraged his readers to associate the adventures of Old Shatterhand with those of himself on the American frontier. As time revealed Max Otto was as much a master of deception as May.⁴⁹ However there was one crucial difference: Otto lived in Canada, albeit not in the fashion he so avidly claimed. Otto's experiences were more authentic than May, but Otto's abuse of artistic license tainted his works as deliberate deception. Otto was in fact an opportunist who lied his way to financial gain through his publications, which ensured him success in Germany.⁵⁰ Otto's experiences in Canada can also be compared to that of Grey Owl, another European seeking what he could not find at home, namely open spaces, large forests, wild waterways and unspoiled lakes still untouched by the advancement of man and his technology. Grey Owl was in reality an Englishman, Archibald Belaney.⁵¹ In 1906 Belaney immigrated to Canada, and invented the name Grey Owl. He claimed to be an Apache half-breed and gained worldwide attention in the 1930s posing as an Indian nature writer and lecturer. Similar to Belaney, Otto fabricated his adventures in order to gain a readership in Europe. Otto's books were part of a combination of nature and travel literature about Canada that seduced the German psyche. Many German writers described their travels and experiences in Canada, yet none were so widely quoted during the inter-war years as Otto.⁵² Although Belaney lived in the bush and experienced the Canadian wilderness, he lied about his ethnic heritage and background.⁵³ Doubts about his Amerindian identity appeared shortly after his death for it was revealed that he was "a fake or fraud, an imposter. He is one of the numerous members of the Wannabe Tribe who claim to have special insight into the Aboriginal way of life."⁵⁴ Although Otto never claimed to be an Indian, both men found acceptance in their home countries by deceiving their readers. However, Otto was never fully exposed in Germany as a liar although some questioned his possible embellishment and exaggeration. Otto never mentioned May in his works, he does compare his lifestyle in Canada to Robinson Crusoe, a fictitious man who coped with harsh conditions and challenges presented by nature.⁵⁵

Reviewers in Germany such as Alker cautioned that Otto's style was designed to capture the attention of a not so demanding, but still hard-to-satisfy reading public,

namely Germany's youth. Although Otto's alleged wartime espionage in Canada was described as heroic for German readers, Alker believed the propaganda and espionage activities of ethnic Germans in Canada were meaningless within Europe. Alker was also appalled by Otto's glorification of this senseless struggle, although he acknowledged that Otto had poetically described the peaceful solitude of rural life in Canada.⁵⁶ Otto often praised the heroic thoughts and deeds of Germans thwarting Canadian war efforts. He casually mentioned the help of the Irish in aiding their efforts—some Irish maintained that all that they did to help Germany was, in reality, directed against Great Britain and therefore helped Ireland.⁵⁷ This view is in sharp contrast to the research conducted by Reinhard Doerries in which the courageous and determined acts of the Irish consistently surpassed German bravery.⁵⁸

Other contemporary sources praised Otto as offering German readers something truly special. In the *Preussische Jahrbücher* (Prussian Yearbooks), Otto's works were seen to be of great appeal to all hunters and nature lovers. Canada was portrayed as a country that offered Germans incredible beauty and solitude through its untouched nature but could be shockingly brutal. The article portrayed Otto as a loyal and staunch German who tried to do his best to support the Fatherland in its fight for victory against allied efforts – “all in all a book that deserves to be widely distributed, not only due to its specialized content, exciting and gripping hunting and nature descriptions but rather due to its true national character, especially its desired influence among our German youth.”⁵⁹ Another writer, Fridolin Solleder also believed Otto was a positive example for German youth.⁶⁰ This may have been particularly true as large numbers of emigrants fled Germany's post WW I quagmire, e.g. in 1923 over 115,000 Germans emigrated abroad, over 93,000 to North America. Due to the seemingly precarious position of Germany's younger population, Otto's nationalism may have been viewed as a positive counterweight to those fearing the future. Otto's publications for Germany's younger readers were deemed appropriate because of its patriotism and dedication to the German Fatherland.⁶¹ Some accepted Otto's tales as fact and were spellbound by his stories, often recommending them to a wider reading public. An advertisement, which appeared in the *Deutsche Zeitung*, stated:

Otto's descriptions are tremendously riveting, vivid, and, in an incomparable manner, instructive. Finally, a work has been produced in which the soul of a real trapper acting in the noblest fashion has been excitingly captured from the first to the last sentence. Otto masterly portrays the enormous size of the Canadian winter scenery, the magnificent power [of nature], the still boundless forests, and amidst these the amazing boldness of the single individual who in this great solitude has to prevail. Here is a work that deserves to be widely distributed.⁶²

Dr. Ernst Alker gave another positive review. He compared Otto's works to Friedrich Gerstäcker. Alker thought that Otto's writings could be as popular and informative for Germans interested in Canada, as Gerstäcker's works had been for those interested in the United States of America.⁶³ Gerstäcker had traveled widely and wrote various works, which examined many parts of the world. He was praised for his informative and descriptive accounts of life abroad, but his area of specialization was the United States. Gerstäcker's first publication appeared in 1845 with his most famous

works include *Die Flußpiraten des Mississippi* (The Mississippi River Pirates - 1848), *Die beiden Sträflinge* (The two Prisoners - 1856) and *Unter dem Äquator* (Under the Equator - 1860).⁶⁴ Interestingly, Boeschstein posed the question if ever "a German immigrant or settler [has written] so knowingly about Canada as Friedrich Gerstäcker and others about the United States?"⁶⁵ In Alker's opinion Max Otto could be viewed as a Canadian equivalent of Gerstäcker for information and historical reliability. One example of this occurred when Oskar Hintrager, director of Germany's Reichsstelle für das Auswanderungswesen (Imperial Authority for Emigration Matters - RA), used Otto's book *In the Canadian Wilderness* as a primary source. Through this book Hintrager noted that German nationals were being unfairly treated in work and labor matters in Canada. The RA sent this information to other emigration consultation offices in Germany. Otto's appraisal confirmed to Hintrager that Canada could not be recommended as a land of immigration.⁶⁶ Throughout the Weimar Republic the RA claimed low wages, substandard living accommodations, terrible working conditions, and mistreatment awaited them.⁶⁷

Most book reviews regarded the author's writing skills as captivating, but others had problems with his hunting tales, e.g., Otto's self-appointed title of "Kanadajäger" (Canadian hunter)⁶⁸ made him subject to some ridicule within Germany and Canada.⁶⁹ One critical review on Otto's alleged Canadian experiences came from Hans Maier. He remarked that the bulk of the first book richly described Otto's hunting escapades "in which certainly sporadically the truth is somewhat stretched." Maier was also sceptical of the author's accuracy regarding Canada and its administration.⁷⁰ Although Otto had been exposed as a liar and fraud in Canada, this was largely unknown in Germany.

The fact that Otto either committed plagiarism or duplicated ideas from others became known in Canada through German-Canadian newspapers. Ethnic Germans from Edmonton, Alberta, noted that Otto had delivered novels to the German-Canadian newspaper *Der Courier* for publication, claiming he was the author. Later, the truth was exposed that he had copied literature that had already been in print in Germany.⁷¹ Otto's publications also included numerous photographs showing the author in a variety of masculine hunter poses and photos of Indians.⁷² Louis Hamilton and Gutensohn noted that although Otto alluded that he was the photographer of all pictures appearing in his first book *In the Canadian Wilderness*, this was clearly untrue, e.g., one photo of a Sarcee Indian was originally copyrighted in Canada in 1907. In addition, other photos could be traced to previously published or copyrighted sources.⁷³ The editors of "Wild und Hund" (Game and Dog), in an attempt to promote Otto, wrote glowingly of Otto's style and form and praised the usage of photographs depicting Canadian natives, wildlife and scenery. These pictures had been processed and improved upon by Karl Wagner.⁷⁴ Wagner was well known in Germany as an authority on photography. Otto's collaboration with an expert of Wagner's calibre only served to reinforce Otto's status and reputation in Germany.

Although Otto wrote detailed stories of his adventures in the Canadian wilderness, it is important to note that it was never revealed in his publications exactly where he lived in Alberta. Otto explained that this was done deliberately in order to hide the identity of ethnic Germans that had conducted sabotage, spying activities on behalf of Germany, draft dodgers or those unwilling to fight on Canada's behalf.⁷⁵ No government documents support Otto's claim of carrying out espionage activity nor did a court trial

occur as Otto so adamantly claimed. Otto did have scrapes with the law. One occurred in October 1916 for not handing in his Mauser rifle to the proper authorities, another in 1921 involving a personal altercation with another German speaking resident.⁷⁶ Otto claimed to live in the town of "L" at the end of a Canadian Pacific Railway line, which had a German sounding name. Both the end station and nearby town had the same name. He indicated this was about six hours north of Edmonton, supposedly in the Lake Athabasca area. It was in this area that Otto claimed to have forged a living as a trapper, hunter, and later a wild game tour guide.⁷⁷ Otto described himself as a physically strong, disciplined outdoorsman who was able to withstand great physical pain and mental torment to limits most men could only imagine. In addition, his prowess in all aspects of life dictated that success and victory followed him wherever he went. According to Otto, his reputation in these avenues of outdoor life was legendary. The reality was that Otto was trying to hide the fact that he never lived in a rural setting. Although Otto made gallant claims about his life and accomplishments in Canada's wilderness, the truth was that Otto had never lived in the Alberta bush but in the German-Canadian community of Bruderheim, which was then known as Brüderheim. This was evident as all articles in the Canadian press on Otto and correspondence he had with Canadian authorities gave his address as Brüderheim, Alberta.⁷⁸

Ethnic Germans in Alberta maintained that Otto never committed any heroic or patriotic deeds on behalf of the German government – Otto's books were "nothing more than pure fraud and lies." Canada's Germans had already known that Otto was not a hunter or trapper and that his tracking adventures were fabricated - no one had witnessed his hunting adventures. The photographs in his books were not taken by Otto. German-Canadian newspapers wanted their readers to know "that Otto had lied in all his books from A to Z."⁷⁹ German speakers from Brüderheim maintain that from the first day of his residence until he returned to Germany, Otto never left the area. He worked as a farmhand for Samuel Kittlitz from the time of his arrival in 1912 until the summer of 1913, thereafter he resided south of Brüderheim. It was not noted what work Otto pursued in Canada, but he probably continued to work as a farm laborer. Otto became a subject of ridicule and scorn by Canada's ethnic Germans while being widely accepted in Germany as a primary source of information on Canada.

Gutensohn stated that Otto told everyone he met that he was a German spy, "that phase of his work was the joke of the community. His experiences in Canada were very limited because he never went anywhere and his knowledge of the English language was so limited that he was very much handicapped in many ways." Otto could only fool those individuals who did not know him; his actions and behavior in Canada caused all who knew him to regard him with contempt.⁸⁰ Another long-time German resident of Brüderheim, Mrs. I. Queck, wrote that Otto lived just three miles south of their community. Queck described Otto as lazy and a liar. Otto had not travelled extensively as he claimed, yet perhaps he had inadvertently encountered some wildlife in Canada. Queck stated that possibly Otto had seen some buffalo, deer or elk from the nearby Elk Island National Park, but his hunting tales were fabricated. Elk Island National Park was twelve kilometers from Brüderheim.⁸¹ Proof of this fact is supplied through Government of Canada documents, e.g., according to Order-in-Council No. 2283 passed by the Canadian government on September 3, 1914, all "Enemy Aliens" could not possess a firearm and in 1916 Otto's Mauser was seized by Canadian authorities.⁸² The RCMP

believed they had been lenient with Otto, owing to the fact that he had been allowed to retain the use of a 22-calibre rifle and a shotgun. Interestingly, in correspondence with the federal government and Alberta's provincial administration no mention of a Drilling rifle was ever made.⁸³ Both provincial and federal administrations specifically refer to a 22-calbre rifle and a shotgun. The Mauser appears to have been returned to Otto in the summer of 1920.⁸⁴ Due to the fact that Otto never owned a Drilling rifle in Canada and his Mauser rifle was in possession of Canadian authorities between late 1916 and mid 1920, Otto's wild hunting escapades could never have occurred in the fashion he portrayed.

The first Lutheran Immigration Board representative in Europe, the Reverend Dr. Friedrich Caspar Gleiss, wrote one of the sharpest critiques of Otto. His article appeared in the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (Society for Germans Abroad - VDA) publication "Deutsche Welt" (German World) and referred to how Otto's experiences in Canada were viewed by ethnic Germans presently living in Canada. Gleiss quoted Dr. Hans Theodor Güssow⁸⁵ who was viewed both in Germany and Canada as a respectable representative of the German community in Canada, with his views having some weight.⁸⁶ Güssow stated that he, like many other ethnic Germans in Canada, was angered by the writings of Otto for his inaccurate portrayal of the country and its German speakers. Gleiss warned that readers should not take Otto's books seriously because they contained much boasting and were nothing more than "a cock and bull story."⁸⁷

Otto's publications confirmed to his German readers that Canada was a large and very sparsely populated country.⁸⁸ Other individuals also came to the same conclusion as Otto, e.g., C. R. Henning described the geographical relationship of Germany to Canada as follows: "if Germany is a land without space then Canada can be called a land without people."⁸⁹ This appraisal coincided with passages from Otto's publications, e.g. in one representative chapter Otto explained in painstaking detail how he crossed eight hundred miles by dog sled in the dead of a Canadian winter. His tales described the majestic Canadian winter with its inherent beauty while reinforcing the stereotype that Canada was utter wilderness.⁹⁰ Hamilton calculated that the route allegedly taken by Otto was not more than five hundred miles even with generous allowances for detours and scenic routes.⁹¹

Ludwig Kempff, Germany's ambassador to Canada, noted that even though Canada had numerous cities and large tracts of cultivated land with a growing agricultural base, many educated Germans viewed Canada as nothing more than "a geographical description that is connected to vast areas of forest, wilderness and the absence of civilisation." Some German visitors' disappointment began shortly after they disembarked from their ship because they could not see any Indians. Kempff wrote that for many Germans, Canada was tightly connected to images of Indians and nature. One of the main reasons that Kempff cited for this false stereotype of Canada was a publication that gained great popularity in Germany. This book was entitled *In the Canadian Wilderness*, by Max Otto.⁹² Kempff and others maintained that Otto's publication contributed to many Germans' misconception that Canada was, above everything else, wilderness.⁹³ Kempff's statements are not to be taken lightly; he was not a man prone to exaggeration. Jonathan Wagner, in describing Kempff, wrote that he was "a man with a military sense of duty, of proper conduct, and of service to the state." He

was meticulous and thorough in all the responsibilities his position demanded of him—he also held a doctorate in law.⁹⁴ Patrick Opdenhövel wrote that in modern Germany “Canada was viewed as the land of the beaver, Rocky Mountains, great distances and adventure and this is the image that strongly influences the German public.”⁹⁵ Alfred Pletsch seized on a similar vein of thought when he wrote, “to many Germans Canada is above all wilderness.”⁹⁶ The statements of modern writers concur with Kempff—both support German stereotypes of Canada that linger to this day.⁹⁷ German images of natives and nature in Canada were certainly compatible to Otto’s hunting and trapping tales no matter how richly enhanced they may have been. His readers were entertained through such publications because Otto spiced his stories to a degree most accepted in Germany, although some found excessive.⁹⁸ Within Canada, the painful truth slowly surfaced that Otto did much more than inflate the facts of his hunting stories. Otto deliberately lied in his publications.⁹⁹ Regardless of Otto’s influence in Germany, his books revealed some happy times in Canada, a country where he claimed he was able to enjoy himself away from the pressures of modern society. But Otto never lived in the Alberta bush, nor did fate intervene with the approach of WW I and turn him into a traitor to his new land of residence in favor of the land of his birth.¹⁰⁰ His writings confirmed what Germans had already believed about Canada to be the truth, namely that it was a land of wilderness, Indians, and wide-open spaces.

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Notes

¹ Boeschstein, Hermann, “Is there a Canadian Image in German Literature,” in *Seminar* 3, no. 1 (1967), 1-6.

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