

Theodore Gish

**"Three Cheers for Germany, Texas and America!":
Patriotism Among the German Settlers in Texas
and as a Theme in Hermann Seele's *Texas Fahrten***

No region of the United States in the nineteenth century confronted the German immigrant with a more complex political situation than Texas during the middle third of the century. The first German settlers arriving in the 1830s and settling in Stephen F. Austin's colony, were involved very soon, in one way or another, with the Texas War of Independence against Mexico and with the ensuing trials of the short-lived Republic (1836-45). The annexation of Texas to the United States in 1845 coincided with the mass immigration of Germans to Texas under the program of the Adelsverein. With the outbreak of the Mexican-American War itself the next year, many of the recently arrived German males were recruited, literally on the beach at Carlshafen, the Gulf port of arrival for the Adelsverein, to fight in this war. During the 1850s, activities of the Texas forty-eighters (as elsewhere in the United States) caused friction between the German settlers and the dominant Anglo population, especially those with "nativist" and "Know Nothing" leanings. The issues of the Secession and then the Civil War only sharpened this conflict. As in other Southern states, German immigrants in Texas faced agonizing choices during the Civil War period. Although less outspoken than the forty-eighters, many moderates were also against slavery. Yet as newcomers, such moderates also frequently believed that the issues of the war were primarily Anglo issues. They felt, additionally, a loyalty to their adopted state, which often overrode the issue of slavery itself. During the Reconstruction period, finally, Unionist Republican Germans received important political and civil service positions in the state while their Confederate fellow Germans were less fortunate. This understandably sustained the ideological tensions, now among the Germans themselves, occasioned by the war (Benjamin 82-110; Biesele 191-207).

Older accounts of the German settlement of Texas (e.g., Moritz Tiling's, *History of the German Element in Texas from 1820-1850*, written in

1913) make much of the patriotic acts of German immigrants who fought for their adopted country in the War of Independence against Mexico. Such histories also frequently recount as a singular act of patriotic martyrdom the ambush and massacre by Confederates of several dozen young German Unionists from the freethinker settlement of Comfort, as they attempted to flee to the North via Mexico during the Civil War. A plain obelisk erected in Comfort by its citizens after the war bears on one side the inscription "Treue der Union," and on the other, above the list of the victims, the single word, "ermordet." This sole monument to the Northern cause in the entire South is a poignant reminder of the tragedy. Older histories of the German settlement of Texas as well as popular beliefs among Texas-German descendants have, however, occasionally misinterpreted the event itself as a support for the erroneous belief that Texas-German sympathy was universally for the North.

Three accounts of Texas itself, published in Germany during the period of the Republic, particularly influenced German immigration to the Lone Star State by the "patriotic" way in which their authors portrayed Texas. Positive descriptions of Texas from returning travelers so impressed Hoffmann von Fallersleben, the author of Germany's national anthem, that he thought seriously about becoming a settler himself. Hoffmann did not immigrate, but he did write a collection of stirring and patriotic *Texanische Lieder* giving the fictitious place of publication as "San Felipe de Austin," the headquarters of Austin's colony in Texas. Lines such as the following from "Der Stern von Texas":

Hin nach Texas! Hin nach Texas!
Wo der Stern im blauen Felde
Eine neue Welt verkündet,
Jedes Herz für Recht und Freiheit
Und für Wahrheit froh entzündet—
Dahin sehnt mein Herz sich ganz.
(Hoffmann von Fallersleben 1)

doubtlessly had the same inspirational effect as the traditional vernacular "Auswandererlied" on many immigrants on their trek to Texas. Although Charles Sealsfield (Karl Anton Postl) was a frequent visitor to America, it is not certain that he ever visited Texas itself. Nevertheless, Sealsfield's popular Texas novel, *Das Kajütenbuch oder Schilderungen aus dem Leben in Texas* (1841) with its romantic descriptions of the vast Texas countryside, its idyllic portrait of the homesteader's life and its praise of the democratic social institutions of the Republic also encouraged many Germans to undertake the trip to Texas. Count von Castell, the guiding force of the Adelsverein, in fact, is said to have obtained his ideas for the colonization of Texas while reading the *Kajütenbuch* as a bored officer of the guard in Mainz (Benjamin 26). While Hoffmann and Sealsfield fictionalized patriotic attitudes toward the Republic of Texas, Gustav Ehrenberg based his account of the Republic on firsthand experience. The actual facts of Ehrenberg's life make it easy for him particularly to be

singled out as a "Texas-German" hero in the older historical accounts. For as a youth of seventeen, Ehrenberg fought with Fannin's ill-fated army at Goliad in the War of Independence, where only he and three other German youths were spared during the ensuing massacre of the prisoners by the Mexicans (Tiling 35-38). Returning to Germany several years later, Ehrenberg taught English at Halle and published patriotic accounts of his experiences in Texas. Ehrenberg's *Texas und seine Revolution* (1843) authored, as he wrote, by a "Bürger der Republik" and provided with an appropriate epigraph from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, was particularly popular among prospective emigrants to Texas.

A short time after Carl, Prince of Solms-Braunfels, the Commissioner-General of the Adelsverein, and a group of immigrants founded the settlement of New Braunfels on Good Friday (21 March) 1845, Solms laid the cornerstone of the fort which was to protect the settlement. In correct aristocratic demeanor, Solms named the future fort "Sophienburg" in honor of Sophia, Princess of Salm-Salm, Solms's fiancée. At the symbolic level, this event is itself charged with patriotic import for what was transpiring at that time between the Old World and the New. For as an officer in the army of the Austrian Emperor, Solms observed the occasion by raising the Austrian flag on the Vereinsberg where the Sophienburg was to be erected. Below, at the location of the settlement's future public square, however, the recently arrived immigrants enthusiastically raised the Lone Star flag of the Texas Republic and democratically elected a Lieutenant Oscar von Claren as their commandant (Biesele 121-22).

These same immigrants and their descendants were also to engage in continuing acts of public patriotic behavior toward Texas and America (even if, in the early years, it was in the German language) just as their Anglo neighbors. The literary expression of patriotism for the immigrant Texas-German writer, however, was another matter. The national consciousness of the immigrant writer in Texas manifested itself primarily in two ways. Much of Texas-German literature is "hermetic" in nature, treating "German" subjects, without a great deal of ideological or "local color" intrusion from the dominant Anglo-American world of Texas. Both prose and poetry, for example, treat the major theme, the immigration and the settlement itself, from this "hermetic" standpoint. Additionally, much of Texas-German poetry (as nineteenth century German-American poetry elsewhere) deals in a nostalgic and frequently nationalistic fashion with topics such as the "Germanness" of people and institutions, the German language, German locales and German political events. The events of the Civil War, however, caused a second mode of writing to emerge as some of the Texas-German writers began to explore themes of German-Americanism as such and the related issue of loyalties to more than one national identity (just as the issue of the war itself caused American loyalties to be divided). Such is the subject, for example, of August Siemering's novel *Ein verfehltes Leben* (1876) as well as several of the short stories from the postwar period.

Neither of these two sorts of immigrant literature, understandably, is a vehicle for patriotism as such. The *Deutschtum* themes of the first body

of literature are "ex-patriotic." The topics investigated by the second group of writers, the emergence of German-Americanism and the problematical relationship between Anglo and German "identity" in Texas, does involve feelings of patriotism in a profound sense. But the investigation of such themes is not a vehicle for the "celebration" of patriotism as such.

Given the nature of ethnic literature and the rapidly changing political climate of Texas during the settlement years, the general absence of patriotic themes in the literature is understandable. For this reason, the recently rediscovered "musical drama," *Texas Fahrten*, is a unique example of Texas-German literature on two counts. It is both the only Texas-German "musical" ever written and also a highly successful patriotic work, uniquely presenting and interrelating themes of German, Texan and American patriotism. As far as can be ascertained, Hermann Seele, the pioneer cultural and civic leader of New Braunfels, wrote the narrative and the song texts of *Texas Fahrten* in the 1850s. A music teacher and singing-society member from the central Texas farm community of La Grange, named C. Wilke, about whom not much more is known, composed the music. Neither do we know much about the collaboration of Seele and Wilke on *Texas Fahrten*. Seele himself arrived in Texas from Hildesheim in 1843 at the age of twenty. After working in the area of Galveston for a time, Seele participated in the founding of New Braunfels, where he became the colony's first school teacher. In the course of his long life, Seele played such an important role in the cultural, political, and civic life of New Braunfels, that his fellow citizens referred to him with a pun as "die eigentliche Seele der Stadt." In addition to *Texas Fahrten*, Seele wrote hundreds of poems, one short story "Die Cypresse," and a number of historical sketches, which he published in German-language newspapers and periodicals in Texas. During the past decade, translations of most of these works have been published. But until recently, Seele's *Texas Fahrten* itself resided largely forgotten in the archives of the Sophienburg Memorial Museum in New Braunfels. In 1980, I came across the manuscript while making preparations to microfilm Seele's historically important diary. A critical edition of *Texas Fahrten* with an English translation was published in 1985 by Nortex Press of Austin. There were also performances of the work from 1984 through 1986 in Houston, Fort Worth and New Braunfels.

Texas Fahrten consists of twelve narrative scenes or "chapters," written in doggerel-like couplets and interspersed with choral or solo songs. The dramatic structure of the work, consequently, most closely resembles that of the popular nineteenth-century Viennese *Singspiel* with which Seele and Wilke were doubtlessly familiar. *Texas Fahrten* chronicles the adventures of four young immigrants to Texas at the time of the Adelsverein colonization. Honoring the Turner motto *frisch, fromm, fröhlich, frei*, Seele named the four young men Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, and Frei. Since Frei had arrived in Texas earlier and had also fought in the Texas Revolution, he acts as a mentor to his friends in their "travels in Texas." Before taking up the settler's life, the young immigrants enjoy the grandeur of the Texas out-of-doors camping and

hunting. They ride with the Texas Rangers, joining them in a fight with the Comanches. They then visit a Mexican Fandango Hall in San Antonio and afterwards they pay their respects to the fallen heroes of the Republic at the shrine of the Alamo. While they are with the Rangers, the four immigrants become acquainted with a legendary and heroic figure, the whiskey-drinking German-American Texas Ranger Emanuel Sartorius. In a lengthy quodlibet (where the narrative text is interspersed with illustrative verses from thirty-three German and four American popular tunes and folk songs), Sartorius tells the four companions of his misspent youth and university days in Germany and of his travels and adventures in America. True to his heroic nature, Sartorius also performs several acts of skill and daring in the course of the work. *Texas Fahrten* concludes with the wedding festival of Fröhlich and Fromm who have married women accompanying the historical Prince Solms of Braunfels on his trip to Texas.

In *Texas Fahrten*, Seele treats the themes of German, Texan and American patriotism at several levels and also interrelates these themes ingeniously. As a musical pageant, with many characteristics of "folk" literature, the work mythologizes German, Texan, and American institutions and types. By presenting these national myths in a positive light, Seele also celebrates them patriotically. With their love of singing and drinking, the four young men are—at one level—the stereotypical *Burschen* of nineteenth-century Germany. But, by describing the joy they feel at being settlers in Texas and their assimilation and acceptance into Texas frontier society, *Texas Fahrten* also celebrates their successes as pioneers in Texas.

With Frei himself, Seele has created a unique instance of a patriotic Texas figure who is a German. As his name suggests, Frei was a Texas patriot during the War of Independence, having fought at the decisive battle of San Jacinto and he acts accordingly. As a mentor to his three friends, Frei not only introduces them to the life of the Texas pioneer, but he also teaches them about freedom and democracy in the Republic. During their first night with Frei at his homestead Blumenau, he demonstrates to them, for example, the freedoms of Texas hospitality, by putting up a stranger for the night. It is significant, that on this occasion, the four immigrants sing a patriotic song about the United States. Later in the work, Frei also conducts his companions to the Alamo and eloquently explains to them why these ruins are a shrine to Texas liberty. Just as Frei is the mythic Texas patriot who is also a German, Sartorius is the mythic German-American frontiersman. Seele's positive, folktale-like evocation of this popular American myth is a similarly patriotic stance. When the immigrants meet Sartorius, he, like Daniel Boone, had just shot a bear through the eyes. Later, by courageous daring, he saves the Ranger's camp from a herd of wild mustangs. This latter deed, in fact, prompts the legendary Captain Jack Hays of the Rangers to give Sartorius his own Bowie knife, thus conferring, symbolically, on this native German the status of an American hero. Sartorius' two deeds particularly help define him as the archetypal and mythic American frontiersman. But in describing each of

these actions, Seele also points out that "German" skills and daring enabled Sartorius to perform such deeds.

Frei and Sartorius are the primary figures in the work, and they particularly represent the harmonious blending of mythic German, Texan and American patriotic elements. But other Texan and American institutions and types appear in *Texas Fahrten*, also in a mythic and positive and, consequently, patriotic light. Captain Hays and other historical Rangers, for example, are also described as the epitome of the dauntless, cunning, and heroic American frontiersman. The Anglo pioneers whom the Germans encounter likewise reflect the very best of this group of people. Ox-drivers, for example, share their evening meal with the friends on the first night of their journey into the interior, while Anglo settlers help the companions on their travels and later when they begin to build their common homestead on Frei's headright.

Several of the twelve songs of *Texas Fahrten* celebrate the patriotic nature of the work musically. Three of them ("Willkommen," "Die Alamo," and the "Schlußchor") express specific patriotic feelings toward Texas itself, while in "Der Freiheit Heimath" Seele includes the entire nation (which he describes by selected, enumerated states). Both "Willkommen" which describes Texas being freed from the fetters "Mit denen Santa Anna gern uns/ Fest geschmiedet [hat]" (Seele 7) and, of course, "Die Alamo" treat the Republican period. The "Schlußchor" summarizes, on the other hand, the immigrant settler's patriotic feelings toward his new homeland. In particular, this song focuses, in its refrain, on the idea expressed throughout the work: that Texas, as a land of freedom, is the ideal new homeland for the German immigrant. As Prince Solms says in his toast at the wedding feast, introducing this song:

Ich bring ein Hoch dem Vaterland,
Der neuen Heimath. Texas wurde
Uns Deutschen hier, schon auf der Erde
Zum Paradies. Ein neu Geschlecht
Treu aller Freiheit und dem Recht
Blüh' nach uns. . . .

(Seele 67-68)

The refrain itself then of the "Schlußchor" is:

Heil, heil! unserm Texas
Das fernste Geschlecht,
Find hier eine Heimath
Für Freiheit und Recht.

(Seele 68)

It is unlikely that there was ever a public performance of *Texas Fahrten* before those of the last few years. Although nearly one hundred singing societies existed in Texas during Seele's lifetime, they traditionally sang only German folk and popular songs of the sort found in the nineteenth-century *Kommersbücher*, which these clubs often used. Even though Seele was a guiding light of New Braunfels' first singing

society Germania (for which, in fact, he built a *Sängerhalle* at his farmstead) even he apparently would not break with this tradition by producing his own musical. A performance copy of some songs from *Texas Fahrten*, dated 1892, was recently found in the archives of the museum in New Braunfels. But available information from the minutes of the New Braunfels singing societies as well as the published accounts of the annual state meetings of the Texas Sängerbund does not indicate that there was ever an actual public performance of *Texas Fahrten* itself.

Despite then the considerable amount of Texas-German immigrant literature—poems, historical sketches, short stories and a few novels and plays—Seele's *Texas Fahrten* is, culturally, this literature's most unique work. Its expression of German, Texan, and American patriotism, its mythologizing of German, Texan, and American institutions and types and in the figures of Frei and Sartorius respectively, its dramatic and positive symbolization of the Texas-German and German-American experience is found in no other writing. Because of this, as a cultural document, *Texas Fahrten* represents a high point in the development of immigrant German literature in Texas.

University of Houston
Houston, Texas

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