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Three Versions of America: Sealsfield, Gerstäcker, and May

In 1827, Goethe wrote an essay, "Stoff und Gehalt, zur Bearbeitung vorgeschlagen," in which he issued a challenge to his fellow authors to compete with James Fenimore Cooper ("mit Cooper zu wetteifern") and he himself had plans for a novel with an American setting. Goethe never wrote that novel and the New World remained a minor though not infrequent motif in serious German literature. In popular German literature, the *Trivilliteratur*, however, the experience of America soon provided one of the favorite subject matters throughout the nineteenth century. Authors like August Stubberg (under the pen name Armand), Otto Ruppis, Balduin Möllhausen, Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstäcker, and Karl May produced an amazing number of tales of adventure about life on the American frontier as well as nonfiction treatments. These appeared as books and also formed a mainstay of the most popular periodicals of nineteenth-century Germany. *Die Gartenlaube*, *Das Sonntagsblatt*, *Die Vossische Zeitung* and *Der Hausfreund* regularly carried stories and nonfiction about America, including works by the authors mentioned above.

This demand for readings about America is not surprising when one remembers that by the middle of the nineteenth century one out of ten persons was emigrating, so that there was scarcely a family without a relative or at least a neighbor across the Atlantic. On the other hand, it seems plausible that the enormous popularity of fiction about America in turn helped to swell the number of Germans seeking their fortune across the sea. One cannot help wondering what expectations these popular fictions, often disguised as nonfiction, implanted in the German mind and, considering the enduring popularity of several of these writers, may continue to do so.

Needless to say, these expectations were only accidentally related to the reality of America. They are much more indebted to the traditions of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, the romance, and, above all, to Cooper. But what is interesting are not the obvious borrowings from these models, but the way these models are adapted to accommodate the particular fantasies of the German public at different periods of history.

These fantasies tend to have two major components: Like most literary

dreams they fulfill wishes and exorcise fears. They show that what is painfully lacking in Germany is available in the New World, but they also show that the more frightening aspects of modern life occur at a safe distance across the Atlantic. America thus can be the focus of the highest expectations (and therefore potentially the deepest disappointments) as well as the focus of deep fears, and sometimes of both.

This ambivalence is well exemplified by three of the most popular writers in nineteenth-century Germany: Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstäcker, and Karl May. Sealsfield, the oldest of the three, was born as Karl Postl in 1793. Brought up strictly and trained as a priest, he fled his post as secretary in a monastery, the *Kreuzherrenstift* in Prague, in 1823 and lived in America for eight years. Under various pseudonyms he returned to newspaper and writing jobs in different European countries and eventually settled permanently in Switzerland in 1837. When his collected works appeared in 1842 they comprised eighteen volumes of both fiction and nonfiction, all dealing with life in North and Central America. For the last twenty years of his life—he died in 1864—Sealsfield wrote nothing new. The fact that a new edition of his collected works appeared in 1972 testifies to the continuing appeal of his work.

In some ways Sealsfield may be said to have taken up Goethe's challenge to compete with Cooper: His novels are set on the frontier, the characters often are Indians, various types of frontiersmen, and officers. But these are superficial similarities because Sealsfield sees America above all as a contrast, a possible alternative to Europe, a preview of the inevitable development toward democracy in Europe's future. His first publication, written in the U.S., is a travelogue: *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika nach ihren politischen, religiösen und gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen betrachtet* (1827). It contains a good deal of factual description but its full significance can be seen only in contrast to its companion volume, *Austria as It Is*, published a year later in 1828. The two books contrast the stagnation and repression of the Metternich regime in Habsburg Austria with the energy, self-confidence, and self-determination he found in the New World. The contrast was not lost on the authorities, for both books were soon banned in both Austria and Germany.

Thus Sealsfield used the New World from the very beginning of his career as a locale where he saw, or wanted to see, a realization of the hopes that he and his fellow liberals had for a united and democratic nation in central Europe. When his six-volume *Lebensbilder aus beiden Hemisphären* appeared in an American translation in New York in 1844, he added this dedication:

To the German Nation
Roused to the consciousness of its power and dignity
These pictures of the
Domestic and Public Life of
Free Citizens of a Free State
Destined to Historical Greatness
are respectfully
dedicated as a Mirror for Self-Examination

by the Author¹

The major story of these volumes relates the adventures of a group of French aristocrats who have fled the Revolution and Napoleon to start a new life in Louisiana. There they meet with Nathan, a squatter and "Regulator," a kind of unofficial sheriff and judge, who has established his homestead in the Louisiana wilderness but without bothering about a legal title to his land. Thus he is eventually driven west, not unlike Natty Bumppo, by the rules of civilization, and founds, as told in a later book by Sealsfield, a new settlement some 100 miles west of San Antonio.

This squatter, unrefined but shrewd, tutors the aristocratic narrator and his party in the ways of the frontier. Although he often shocks their sense of monarchic-aristocratic values, they find—to their unending surprise—that they are attracted to this typical product of the New World. When Nathan proposes to defy the authority of the Spanish crown by holding on to his land without benefit of title, the narrator is forced to exclaim:

. . . there were, however, moments when the attack upon the sovereign right of a monarchy related by blood to our own appeared to us, Frenchmen of old nobility, so natural that it made us forget our typically French sensitivity.

But this interest that we have for the condition of the Americans is in turn a consequence of the natural circumstance of their newness, freshness, their original way of thinking, of working, of being. As long as this natural freshness radiates from their features and masks the cruder features of selfishness, all noble minds will feel sympathies for them.²

Those cruder features of selfishness are there for Sealsfield, and one of his novels, *Morton und die grosse Tour* (1828) warns of the potential evil of Anglo-American capitalism. But this capitalism is essentially confined to the cities, and Sealsfield sees America as definitely a place where, unlike Europe, the corrupting power of cities is not about to take over. On the contrary, providence is working inexorably toward the establishment of a democracy (p. 307), a democracy that is not, however, a reflection of an anarchy or a natural harmony suggested by the wilderness. Sealsfield is fascinated by America much more as an alternative well-organized society rather than as wilderness, and he makes it clear that the freedom evolving on the frontier has nothing to do with the unrestrained *liberté* of the French Revolution. "You are Frenchmen," Nathan says

. . . and you take us for republicans like those you have in your country. They, instead of governing themselves, let the first best street despot lead them by the nose—hotheads who throw the torch into their neighbors' house at the first word from that *sans culotte*, then laugh at the mischief, rob and plunder . . . I tell you it's insanity . . . to try to . . . change a people of slaves and slavemasters, all sunk into sloth and inactivity, overnight into citizens who can govern themselves. (p. 301)

The alternatives for Europe thus are slavery or anarchy, while the New World is protected from revolutionary chaos by self-imposed restraints enforced by public opinion. When unfounded rumors make the community in *Nathan* ostracize the narrator, his American guide defends that practice as necessary:

You must remember that we have no strong hand to govern us, no priests, no police, no army, no military or civilian bureaucrats, no king, who could bury the scandal in a Bastille. We are . . . governed by principles and we must punish high treason against these as severely as you punish high treason against your so-called untouchable rulers. Woe to us if these last and only barriers should be torn down here; we would fall into an anarchy greater than that of the *sans culottes* and more incurable. (pp. 337-38)

Sealsfield's narrator is not totally convinced of the blessings of such conformity, particularly since the principles invoked as protection against anarchy include things like prohibiting dancing, as a group of French Canadians are excluded from trading and other benefits of community life until they give up dancing and conform to the work ethic. But the conformity remains voluntary and therefore bearable, because those who do not like the community standards can always move on, as Nathan himself does eventually.

Sealsfield thus manages to calm the fears of his audience by suggesting that the two dangers of revolutionary anarchy and social pressures toward conformity hold each other in check mutually. He sees unrestrained individualism controlled by social pressures and the pressures toward conformity checked by the ever present possibility of escape into the open spaces. The result is a society where the hope for individual freedom has been fulfilled without the danger of revolutionary chaos.

With similar mechanisms Sealsfield manages to defuse other potential objections to the New World. He vacillates on the question of slavery, which he opposes in principle but finds not nearly as bad as portrayed by abolitionists, and he justifies the incipient imperialism of the new nation as the inexorable progress of civilization. For Sealsfield the conquest of Texas is perhaps illegal but nevertheless as necessary for the advance of democracy as the Norman conquest of England. In the same way Sealsfield acknowledges the lawlessness of the frontier but justifies it as beneficial, for in the conquest of Texas one desperado is worth ten Easterners with moral scruples. "In the prairie," a Texas judge in one of his novels points out, "you start to see clearly; you see how the Great Statesman up there works; he uses for his most beautiful, magnificent works the most desperate elements, yes, veritable devils who behave as if they had just climbed up out of hell."³

As the image of God as the Great Statesman shows, Sealsfield thinks of the New World primarily as a new political world. As a committed German liberal with great hopes for a democracy in Germany, writing for a like-minded audience, Sealsfield projects onto America the image of a state where all the problems of an emerging unified democracy have already been solved or are in the process of being solved. When the political hopes of the German liberals evaporated with the failure of the democratic movements around 1848, Sealsfield's vision collapsed too, and he published nothing more during the last twenty years of his life.

Friedrich Gerstäcker, barely a generation younger than Sealsfield, returned to Germany from a six-year stay in the U.S. in 1844 and published his first book in the same year, the year of Sealsfield's last publication. When Gerstäcker died, thirty-two years and several trips to the New World later, he had published some 150 volumes of both fiction and nonfiction.

The dividing line between the two is not always clear, but both project the same image of America as a radical and individually heroic alternative to a mediocre existence in his homeland, but not through material gain. Indeed Gerstäcker's writings are full of explicit warnings and dire examples discouraging all seekers after easy riches. Even those who do find them usually pay for their fortunes with a corresponding loss of their humanity and come to resemble the negative, city-dwelling Yankee character discussed below. No, the New World is attractive to Gerstäcker's readers as a place where the existence of a friendly wilderness and the absence of civilization afford men—and women—the opportunity to reveal their innate individual humanity, their dignity and individual independence, if they can manage to rid themselves of the remnants of Old World civilization.

The frontier thus becomes a giant testing ground that separates the worthless from the worthwhile individuals. This is in fundamental opposition to Sealsfield's vision. Whereas Sealsfield sees America as the proving ground for the political system of the future, Gerstäcker is no longer interested in political systems. His characters prove themselves apart from political and social structures, and the purest examples of human perfection are found at the greatest distance from civilization: in the frontiersman. It is easy to recognize in him a familiar figure from the mythology of the American West, but Gerstäcker adds a few distinctly Germanic qualities. Jack Owen in *Nach Amerika!*

. . . was a powerful, manly figure. His hair was curly, his eyes blue and the expression of his face was decidedly honest and straightforward . . . in a word, a superb prototype of that mighty steel-hardened race of individuals who traverse the western primeval forest of the Union, first as hunters, and then, with their daring settle it with their "improvements" . . . and . . . armed solely with rifle and ax, create a home for themselves in the shadow of the dense wilderness.⁴

Not only does this frontiersman look a good deal more Teutonic than his predecessor Natty Bumppo, he also is characterized as much by his ax as his rifle. While he will fight Indians if necessary, Gerstäcker's frontiersman really gains his dignity and worth, his heroism, by laboring with and in the unspoiled land. Gerstäcker's novels are full of ecstatic descriptions of a wilderness that is lush, idyllic and beautiful and sustains the frontiersman both physically and spiritually:

What a wonderful interplay of color there is in the foliage . . . with that mighty, dark tree as a focal point, from which beams actually shoot out like rays in every direction!—And those iridescent festoons which are twined around that oak with gold and purple leaves . . . and the masses of dark blue grapes suspended from them—oh how beautiful, how wonderfully lovely is this land. (VI, 83)

This is obviously a frontier that is quite different from the aridly hostile environment of the classical Western or the dark and dangerous forests of Cooper. This is a hospitable paradise that only asks not to be corrupted. And chopping down that stately tree is for Gerstäcker not a corruption of the wilderness. For this wilderness asks to be cultivated. The grapes are

growing there already, offering themselves, and the farmer only refines an already existing Garden of Eden.

But as with most paradises the material fertility of this garden is important primarily as a symbol for its spiritual fertility. For the primeval forest affords a regeneration of one's humanity through the ennobling and liberating effect of a natural kind of labor. Farmers on the American frontier, therefore, seem to Gerstäcker radically different from their German counterparts:

In vain will the immigrant seek in the American farmer for a trace of that coarse, clumsy behavior which distinguishes our farm people . . . The American farmer recognizes no superior group and the feeling of independence which is his gives him that unconstrained—I should like to call it genteel—bearing which in our circles reveals the man of the world. (VI, 167)

By working in the paradisaical forest men thus become natural aristocrats, rather than democrats, as Sealsfield suggested.

So impressed is Gerstäcker by the values embodied by these backwoodsmen that he is willing to overlook the negative aspects of America as atypical aberrations. His fiction as well as his nonfiction are full of confidence men and wily land agents out to defraud the greenhorn immigrant. But these negative characters are relegated entirely to the city, which for Gerstäcker is not the "real" America. "The East was of no interest to him," he writes of one of his characters, ". . . He would only become acquainted with the less civilized parts; he sought that America which he had pictured to himself and which he could not find in Cincinnati or any other city where culture had progressed." (VIII, 190) In another place Gerstäcker declares: "Life itself in the cities consists of nothing but business transactions," (VI, 238) business transactions that are mainly conducted by the "Yankee," a character as thoroughly negative as the backwoodsman is positive:

The Yankee is generally a lanky, carefully dressed and clean-shaven figure, with slicked-down hair, gray vivid eyes, somewhat protruding cheekbones, and somewhat distorted features, which, however, in most cases are caused by a piece of chewing tobacco resting peacefully against the left cheek. (VI, 259)

Tobacco chewing strikes Gerstäcker as a despicable habit, but it does humanize an otherwise satanic figure, who, snakelike, can paralyze even the backwoodsman in his paradise: "The backwoodsmen are otherwise so subtle and agile, in business as well as in every other way of life. In the hands of the Yankee, however, it is as if their innate energy and intellectual powers are lost." (VI, 281) Thus the threat to the values embodied by the backwoodsman is the city where "culture"—the Old World baggage—"has progressed."

Gerstäcker, then, creates an image of America as a battleground between the natural honesty and freedom fostered in the backwoods farmer by his close contact with the land and the deceptive, unnatural city-bred Yankee and his European models. This is a conflict seen in terms of individual morality, not in terms of a conflict between progressive and reactionary historical forces as for Sealsfield, for whom the struggle between the

Spanish-French faction and the United States for control of Louisiana or the fight with Mexico over Texas was an amoral political contest with villains and heroes on both sides. Gerstäcker is only peripherally interested in America as a political arena.

This is reflected in his relative neglect of two of the most acute political problems of nineteenth-century America: slavery and the role of Indians. Neither Negroes nor Indians are essential to Gerstäcker's definition of America. While he is, in principle, opposed to slavery, as he is to lynching and other kinds of uncouth behavior, Gerstäcker considers it in practice a minor issue:

The slaves who possess a kind master are the happiest, most contented people that exist on earth, and although I have no intention of defending the hideousness of slavery, it must be said that it is not a disturbing element or a disgusting sight here. Many Germans own slaves and these always fare better than the farm servants in Germany. (VI, 273)

This cavalier attitude toward slavery—together with the dig at social conditions in Germany—might be considered normal in a liberal nineteenth-century German writer. But Gerstäcker's neglect of the Indian is highly unusual for a writer with an audience steeped in Cooper, Chateaubriand and the noble savage tradition. The Indian, as seen by Gerstäcker, has adopted all the bad ways of the white man and has become irrelevant to the drama of the New World:

We have all raved about Fenimore Cooper's Uncas and Chinchagook. If we found an opportunity, however, to observe in what manner the Chinchagook and the young noble chief Uncas prepared their meals, how seldom they thought it necessary to wash their faces and hands, much of their charm would have left us cold. (VI, 276)

The unfairness of this remark seems to reflect the disappointment of a man whose romantic expectations were disappointed when he traveled to America and met real Indians. His compatriot Karl May, younger by a generation and even more successful as a writer than Gerstäcker, avoided such disappointment by never visiting the American West which he would describe so eloquently and with so many authentic details in his books.

By 1978 May's works had sold seventy million copies, in virtually all languages except English.⁵ Readers as different as Albert Einstein, Albert Schweitzer, and Hermann Hesse have praised Karl May as one of their favorite writers and in 1962 *Der Spiegel* called May's influence "greater than that of any other German author between Goethe and Thomas Mann."⁶

The view of America that German readers may get from the works of Karl May is profoundly different from Gerstäcker's or Sealsfield's vision. Even though all three writers find the essence of America in the untamed frontier, May's frontier has none of the lushness and fertility of Gerstäcker's forested West. May's characters travel a country of open deserts and prairies occasionally interrupted by patches of vegetation or mountains and valleys, all of which can be counted upon to hide some danger.

Sealsfield's and Gerstäcker's America lacks this sense of paranoia. Their heroes also have to prove themselves in many dangerous encounters, but their ultimate purpose is to form a community or to liberate, by honest

labor, their individual dignity in a naturally friendly environment. In contrast, May's alter-ego Old Shatterhand never feels tempted to do any real work or to make a permanent place for himself. Indeed, he reminds the reader regularly that he is not a permanent resident of the West, but only a German who finds the call of the prairie irresistible every time he is back in Germany. These returns to Germany, however, are important, for they identify Old Shatterhand as a cultural—and often also religious—missionary, who performs his heroic deeds in the name of the values of the German middle-class. While Sealsfield idealized the natural community builder and Gerstäcker saw his ideal in the "strong and primitive race" of backwoodsmen because they had rejected European *Bildung* (often called *Verbildung* by Gerstäcker), May sees his ideal in a physically strong and spiritually civilized *Westmann* who upholds bourgeois values like honesty, intelligence, patriotism and piety, or in the few Indians who adopt these values. For in spite of May's obvious sympathy and fascination with the Indians' struggle for cultural and physical survival, his faith in the superiority of the values of Christian middle-class culture remains unquestioned. The criticism of the white man's conduct only confirms this faith: The deeds that are condemned are deeds that violate the rules of civilized white behavior. May's characters thus fall into three easily distinguishable groups: evil Americans, misguided or uncultured Indians, and good Germans with a few Indian converts.

May's villains are almost invariably Americans, stereotyped as "skinny, tall and thin-necked . . . with . . . genuine crafty Yankee features."⁷ In addition they may be half-breeds, hypocritical Mormons or Mexicans, and always they are distinguished by drunkenness and greed. The absence of psychological motivation only emphasizes the representative function of May's white villains. They are propelled toward their evil deeds not by need or other personal circumstances but by the promise of capitalism, i.e., the availability of riches to those determined to get them—here in the form of gold mines, hidden treasures, money transports, or the chance to corner the oil market, as in an episode in *Winnetou II*. Only May's white Americans are subject to this compulsion to pursue money. They thus embody those disturbing capitalist aspects of western culture that negate the humanitarian values also professed by western middle-class culture.

Projecting this greed on American capitalists—and explicitly excluding German farmers and settlers from this censure—safely removes this threat from the world of May's readers, a reassurance which is then reinforced by the inevitable defeat of the villains. For while Gerstäcker's frontiersmen were quite vulnerable to Yankee plots and confidence games, May invites his readers into a world where the profit motive is an aberration, not only unnecessary for the survival of the fittest but even inimical to it. In the West of Karl May fitness is measured by different standards and those relying on money will quickly be weeded out. Old Shatterhand explains that

. . . the prairie has a sharply developed sense of value. Its measure is not a man's purse, but a man's ability. Give that pistol which you handle so well to one of your pretentious oil barons and send him out West. He will perish in spite of his millions. Ask, on the other hand, one of our famous frontiersmen, who rule the plains like sovereign princes, how much money he

possesses. He will laugh in your face. In a place where each man is worth exactly as much as his ability to survive the dangers of the wilderness, riches lose all importance.⁸

This reassuring world, where greed is not rewarded, leaves room, however, for the threat of the demonic and irrational, as manifested in phenomena like drunkenness and the savagery of Indian torture rituals or Indian warfare:

. . . It was an exciting view for the three onlookers, Indians against Indians in a life and death struggle. Here two of them fought with horrible howls, there others slaughtered each other in diabolical silence. Whenever one warrior fell, the victor was immediately upon him to take his scalp and possibly lose his own in the next instant.⁹

This savagery, like the white man's greed, has no basis in the Indians' individual psychology, but is, again, representative of the culture. It is, indeed, the main reason why the superiority of white culture is never seriously in doubt for May. While the white man's greed is an, albeit very common, aberration from his essentially humane culture, the red man's savagery is a natural part of his culture that he must eventually overcome if he is to survive, even though May grants his Indians a grudging admiration for the courage they display in their savagery.¹⁰

What makes this savagery threatening, however, is its affinity to the white villains' equally demonic and irrational drunkenness and gratuitous cruelty. Because of this affinity the Yankee villains often manage to recruit the Indians and exploit them for their purpose. But since the Indians are not innately evil, Old Shatterhand often finds it possible to overcome their culture's inclination to savagery. By his daring but restrained, civilized and humanitarian conduct he wins the respect of at least the less hardened hostiles and proves that neither greed nor savagery are necessary for survival. For if all attempts at persuasion and education fail, providence will take over, destroy the villain in a fortuitous accident of his own making, and save Old Shatterhand from the necessity of an uncivilized act of killing.

The most notable of Old Shatterhand's conquests is, of course, Winnetou, the young Apache chief, who almost becomes Old Shatterhand's equal. This is possible because Winnetou is already an educated young man, educated, naturally, by a German. This formerly dangerous, but now bitterly repentant German revolutionary has fled Germany to expiate the sins of his revolutionary past by teaching the Apaches Christianity and liberal arts. He has tried to make the Apaches abandon their savage customs because he sees in them the same dangers as in the sins of his revolutionary youth. This fact suggests that May again projects, as he did with the fear of capitalist cupidity, his audience's fear of a domestic threat safely across the Atlantic. Not only can his readers view the threat of savage energy unleashed from a safe distance, they can also perceive it as tamed by the gentle Christian virtues of the reformed revolutionary, with his chief disciple Winnetou as the convincing example:

Whoever looked upon him saw immediately that this was an important man. The cut of his earnest, manly, beautiful face, the cheekbones of which

barely stood out, was almost Roman, and the color of his skin was a dull light brown with a breath of bronze floating over it.¹¹

It is easy to recognize the noble savage here, but Winnetou is all the nobler for not being a savage anymore, for having embraced all the best cultural and moral values of Europe while rejecting barbarous Indian customs like scalping. Indeed, what impresses Old Shatterhand most is Winnetou's civilized education:

He was dressed in a light linen robe, wore no weapons, and held a book in his hand. On the cover of the book, in large golden letters, the word Hiawatha was legible. This Indian, the son of a people that many count among the "savages" could apparently not only read but possessed the mind and taste for culture.¹²

It is this taste for culture that makes Winnetou the fitting companion for Old Shatterhand, and he reaches his apotheosis on his deathbed, when he confesses that he has finally become a Christian like Old Shatterhand. But until that moment the two bloodbrothers roam the West for fourteen years, always defending decent if sometimes obtuse settlers and merchants, usually Germans, against the plots of Yankee villains and their misled Indian allies.

Sealsfield portrayed an America where history demonstrated the viability of the hopes of the Young Germans for a unified democratic nation, a demonstration that succeeded for Sealsfield because both the aristocratic and the anarchic insistence on complete self-realization was replaced by the New World's commitment to a democratic society. Gerstäcker replaces this commitment to America as, above all, a society with a vision of America as an agrarian alternative where a natural aristocracy of workers of the soil is made possible by a rejection of "un-natural" German *Bildung*. May reverses these terms. His West is a battleground between uncivilized, uneducated savagery and greed and the German upholders of morality and culture. The attraction that the West has for May and his readers lies in the fact that this is the last place where, for the time being at least, civilized behavior and values still prove superior. For needless to say Old Shatterhand always prevails, either by his superior physical capabilities, the result not of innate ability but of training, or by his superior brain, again the result of study and training. He has acquired mastery in swimming, boxing, riding, shooting, and wrestling. He speaks some forty languages fluently and foils one plot because his command of Chinese lets him overhear two coolies plotting a robbery. His training in physics lets him produce rain in the desert, and as a surveyor he puts the railroad engineer to shame with his superior command of mathematics. In every case Old Shatterhand prevails because his *Bildung* makes him superior.

In the same way Old Shatterhand's Christian training pays off, not only in the conversion of Winnetou, but more practically when he charitably spares the son of his archenemy, the Kiowa chief. Later the gratitude of the son helps Old Shatterhand escape from yet another seemingly hopeless situation. The Apaches, on the other hand, decline after Winnetou's death because they lack a chief whose commitment to Christian and civilized

values would protect them against the greed and drunkenness of the Yankees and a reversal to their savage ways.

May thus creates a New World where the Old World's fears and the latent threats to its values are contained and defused and where those values which the Old World still professes but rarely rewards can still prove themselves superior. May, the son of a poor weaver, struggled to become a teacher. But in spite of his sacrifices—and those of his family—society rejected him, imprisoned him for a series of petty thefts and impersonations of government officials, which in retrospect seem clearly pathological. By sending his alter ego to an American West where intelligent, courageous and genteel Germans prevail, as they cannot at home, May apparently created a fantasy which German audiences continue to find enormously attractive. It is a fundamentally conservative, even reactionary fantasy, a fantasy no more accurate or false than those of Sealsfield or Gerstäcker. But the fact that May's popularity today far surpasses that of Sealsfield and Gerstäcker, is an important indication of the sense of reality from which German audiences continue to seek escape.

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Notes

1. Sealsfield [sic], *Life in the New World; or, Sketches of American Society* (New York, 1844).
2. Charles Sealsfield, *Nathan, der Squatter-Regulator: oder, Der erste Amerikaner in Texas* (Stuttgart, 1837), p. 104. (All translations from the German are my own.) Subsequent references to this edition in text.
3. Charles Sealsfield, *Das Cajütenbuch: oder, Nationale Charakteristiken* (Zürich, 1841), p. 187.
4. Friedrich Gerstäcker, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig, 1872-80), IV, 186. Subsequent references to this edition in text.
5. Translations of *Winnetou, Durch die Wüste*, and *Von Dschinnistan nach Ardistan* were published in 1978 by The Seabury Press in New York.
6. "Karl der Deutsche," *Der Spiegel*, 26 Mar. 1962, p. 176.
7. Karl May, *Der Schatz Im Silbersee* (Frankfurt, 1970), p. 37.
8. Karl May, *Winnetou II* (Wien and Heidelberg, n.d.), p. 197.
9. *Der Schatz Im Silbersee*, p. 437.
10. In the course of May's work the emphasis shifts from admiration for the Indians' courageous but doomed fight for survival in the earlier works to hope and advice for the Indians' survival through adopting the best civilized Western values in the later works like *Winnetous Erben*.
11. Karl May, *Winnetou I* (Frankfurt, 1969), 128.
12. *Ibid.*

