



Western nature--German culture : German representations of Yellowstone, 1872-1910
by Johanna Maria Pfund

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History
Montana State University

© Copyright by Johanna Maria Pfund (1994)

Abstract:

This thesis examines how German travellers represented their own culture via descriptions of Yellowstone National Park in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In describing western American nature, German travellers portrayed themselves. To determine the cultural implications of images, this study connects representations of the West to the social and political backgrounds of the image-makers.

The American West offered a home to many utopias in nineteenth-century Germany, as the first chapter demonstrates. The advance of modernity and industrialization produced dissatisfaction reflected in images of the West. Romantic intellectuals created a benevolent wilderness, frustrated revolutionaries found political liberty, and the working class revelled in a West without restrictions. Germany's shortcomings produced Western images.

The second chapter analyzes how Germany's upper-middle class perceived Yellowstone National Park. Although concerned about nature, the travellers rejected an un-German environment. Germany's privileged classes viewed expanse, uniform mountain ranges, and burnt forests negatively. Although rejected in aesthetic respects, Yellowstone's nature instilled in Germans a nostalgia for wilderness.

Yellowstone Park also provided natural evidence for the evils of the modern age. The third chapter traces how travellers' reports described the Mammoth Terraces and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone as teachers of humility, while the geysers challenged the victory of technology. Resembling factories, yet produced by nature, Yellowstone's thermal features dwarfed technological achievements in the eyes of German travellers. They used Western nature to validate their resentment against industrialization.

The conclusion places the Yellowstone accounts within a broader array of German images of the West. As was the case with Romantic novels, dime novels, and travel literature, Yellowstone travel literature reflected the social status of the authors. Social position, not professional concerns, produced a certain vision of the West, as the common notions of professionally divided travellers show. The journey into Western nature functioned as a rite of passage which distilled conservative fears about a modernizing society.

This thesis uncovers in representations of Yellowstone an early advocacy for wilderness preservation, and reveals anxieties of German conservatives on the eve of the First World War.

WESTERN NATURE--GERMAN CULTURE:

GERMAN REPRESENTATIONS OF

YELLOWSTONE, 1872-1910

by

Johanna Maria Pfund

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

History

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 1994

71378

Φ489

ii

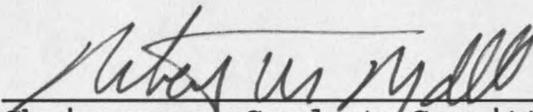
APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Johanna Maria Pfund

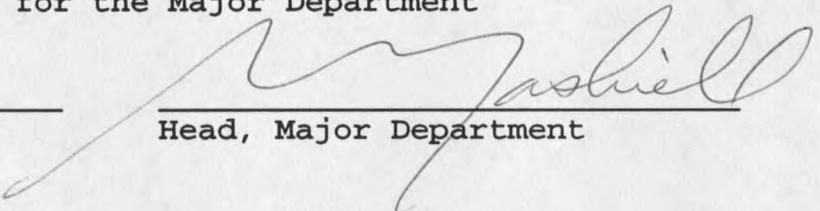
This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

7 April 1994
Date


Chairperson, Graduate Committee

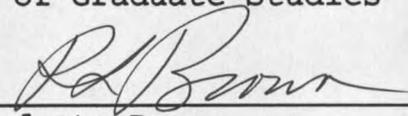
Approved for the Major Department

4/7/94
Date


Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

4/20/94
Date


Graduate Dean

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

If I have indicated my intention to copyright this thesis by including a copyright notice page, copying is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this thesis in whole or in parts may be granted only by the copyright holder.

Signature

Jolanna Ford

Date

4/14/94

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
WILDER THAN THE REAL THING: GERMAN IMAGES OF THE WILD WEST.....	15
WAYS OF SEEING YELLOWSTONE.....	46
YELLOWSTONE: THINGS TO SEE.....	74
CONCLUSION.....	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	109
Primary Sources.....	109
Manuscripts.....	109
Books and Articles.....	109
Secondary Sources.....	112
Unpublished Material.....	112
Books and Articles.....	112
Bibliographies.....	117

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how German travellers represented their own culture via descriptions of Yellowstone National Park in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In describing western American nature, German travellers portrayed themselves. To determine the cultural implications of images, this study connects representations of the West to the social and political backgrounds of the image-makers.

The American West offered a home to many utopias in nineteenth-century Germany, as the first chapter demonstrates. The advance of modernity and industrialization produced dissatisfaction reflected in images of the West. Romantic intellectuals created a benevolent wilderness, frustrated revolutionaries found political liberty, and the working class revelled in a West without restrictions. Germany's shortcomings produced Western images.

The second chapter analyzes how Germany's upper-middle class perceived Yellowstone National Park. Although concerned about nature, the travellers rejected an un-German environment. Germany's privileged classes viewed expanse, uniform mountain ranges, and burnt forests negatively. Although rejected in aesthetic respects, Yellowstone's nature instilled in Germans a nostalgia for wilderness.

Yellowstone Park also provided natural evidence for the evils of the modern age. The third chapter traces how travellers' reports described the Mammoth Terraces and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone as teachers of humility, while the geysers challenged the victory of technology. Resembling factories, yet produced by nature, Yellowstone's thermal features dwarfed technological achievements in the eyes of German travellers. They used Western nature to validate their resentment against industrialization.

The conclusion places the Yellowstone accounts within a broader array of German images of the West. As was the case with Romantic novels, dime novels, and travel literature, Yellowstone travel literature reflected the social status of the authors. Social position, not professional concerns, produced a certain vision of the West, as the common notions of professionally divided travellers show. The journey into Western nature functioned as a rite of passage which distilled conservative fears about a modernizing society.

This thesis uncovers in representations of Yellowstone an early advocacy for wilderness preservation, and reveals anxieties of German conservatives on the eve of the First World War.

INTRODUCTION

On a dusty July afternoon in 1893, Max Wilhelm Meyer, a German geologist and his travel companions reached Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park. Its limestone terraces shone white above the United States Army headquarters of Mammoth, and greeted the nineteenth century tourists with a promise of even greater wonders awaiting them in the Park. Meyer could not marvel enough at the surprises of Yellowstone. He exclaimed: "The enormous riches of most diverse beautiful landscapes lend an incomparable charm to this vast region and one moves past them like in an enchanting moving panorama."¹ Meyer was one of many Germans who visited Yellowstone Park around the turn of the century and published their impressions of this wilderness enclave, so different from the landscape of their native country.

Visiting the American West was nothing new for Europeans. Ever since American independence from England, Europeans had travelled to the American frontier--a destination that kept expanding westward as American national boundaries spread across the continent. Missionaries like Father de Smet,

¹Max Wilhelm Meyer, Im Bannkreise der Vulkane. Ihre Entwicklungsgeschichte in Reiseschilderungen dargestellt, (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für deutsche Literatur, 1907), p. 225. Translation by the author (all translations are, unless noted otherwise).

artists like the Swiss-German Karl Bodmer, noblemen and politicians like François René de Chateaubriand, Alexis de Tocqueville, and the German Duke Paul Wilhelm of Württemberg travelled to the frontier. Especially in mid-1800s, during the era of western exploration, the western landscape induced many Europeans to participate in this adventure. The foremost attraction consisted in the call of the ever receding wilderness. Whereas Tocqueville found wilderness on the shores of the Great Lakes in the 1830s, Duke Paul had to go to the Rocky Mountains in the 1850s.² Due to its untamedness, the West seemed to promise a land that could be shaped according to one's dreams.

These travel accounts helped build images of the West that have persisted until today. The word "images" indicates that the West has not been viewed from a single perspective. On the contrary, impressions of the West, both in Europe and America, have always been shaped by various viewpoints that have shifted with the course of time. Understanding these images has been a source of considerable historical debate.

Americans shaped their own particular image of western nature. In Wilderness and the American Mind, historian Roderick Nash has followed the evolving course of America's

²For Duke Paul see Robert Taft, Artists and Illustrators of the Old West, 1850-1900, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1953), p. 23.

attitudes towards wilderness.³ Inspired by American Romantics like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson in the 1830s, Americans came to appreciate their wilderness in the late 1800s, when the first national parks were founded. In Nash's opinion, this shift represented a true devotion to the cause of nature.

The creation of Yellowstone Park in 1872 marked this apparent change. In opposition to Nash, historian Alfred Runte argues convincingly in National Parks that the creation of national parks was anything but altruistic.⁴ There were two reasons for the creation of parks, one economic, the other cultural. In a nation devoted to capitalism, excluding some areas from exploitation seemed odd. Runte discerns economic reasons for preservation: only economically worthless areas were set apart. In addition, the preservation effort justified the exploitation of the considerably bigger remainder of the American West. Other convenient side effects were the economic gains brought to Western communities through tourism.

Cultural jealousy was another rationale for founding national parks, according to Runte. Despite its rise to global power, the United States felt inferior to Europe until the Second World War. By the end of the nineteenth century many Americans were departing from the hegemony of European

³Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, 3rd edition).

⁴Alfred Runte, National Parks: The American Experience, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

aesthetics, and insisting that their exotic Western nature was a truly national cultural characteristic. Nevertheless, Americans praised their nature with one eye on Europe. Runte finds good examples in the naming of America's West. In the eyes of Americans, Colorado Springs surpassed Swiss mountain resorts, rock towers metamorphosed into medieval castles, and Yosemite teemed with cathedrals and domes. By likening the nature of the New World to Europe's cultural treasures, Americans attempted to conquer their feelings of cultural inferiority.⁵

Another historian, John F. Sears, has explored American travel in the nineteenth century and found that travel agencies used considerable effort to attract Americans to America.⁶ The fact that American travel agencies continued to underline the superiority of American nature--in contrast to the civilized world Europe's--well into the twentieth century suggests that feelings of cultural inferiority faded only slowly.

Intercontinental comparison was mutual, especially with respect to nature. By far the most extensive analysis of the intercontinental controversy about nature is Antonello Gerbi's

⁵Compare also Earl Pomeroy, In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990; first ed. 1957), pp. 31-35.

⁶John F. Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

The Dispute of the New World.⁷ Gerbi analyzed major European intellectuals' treatment of American nature. He finds endless examples of how noted naturalists like the French George Louis Leclerc de Buffon denigrated the importance of American nature, the smallness of its animals, and the ridiculous height of its mountains. German intellectuals did their fair share of slandering. One of the most famous was the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who, based on his nature philosophy, but no visit, found that American nature was an unnecessary accumulation of species resembling Europe's and that the best forms of nature could be found in Germany. On the other hand, a few voices like the poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and the naturalist and traveller Alexander von Humboldt defended the New World, or better, their image of it.

That images are a complicated subject was made clear by a recent art exhibition, "The West As America."⁸ Analyzing American paintings of the West, art historian William Truettner and his co-curators developed the thesis that the nineteenth-century image of the West reflected desires of the American upper class, supporting economic exploitation and social conservatism. Although it focuses on America, this exhibition intersects with the topic of this thesis. German

⁷Antonello Gerbi, The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900, translated by Jeremy Moyle, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

⁸William H. Truettner, (ed.), The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

travel accounts of the American West sculpted a class-specific image, supporting creeds that departed significantly from the values found popular in dime novels.

Europeans in general developed a distinct interest in the American West. Regarding it as a land for projecting their dreams and nightmares, the West became alternately a utopia of liberty or a dystopia of anarchy. Gerald D. Nash's article, "European Images of America," summarizes European fascination with the American West.⁹ According to this account, all Western images in Europe, whether in dime novels, travel reports, and movies, project unfulfilled desires onto a distant Western land. Similar is J. Martin Evans's argument. His America: The View from Europe looks at the various European images spread over the centuries, and discerns in them Old-World longing for a new and better world.¹⁰ Over the course of the nineteenth century, the image of the rather pristine West came to incorporate these dreams of a land of liberty.

Europe's lower classes developed an especially positive image of America. Ray Allen Billington's Land of Savagery, Land of Promise provides important insights into European

⁹Gerald D. Nash, "European Images of America: The West in Historical Perspective," Montana, the Magazine of Western History 42, No. 2, (Spring 1992), 2-16. Compare with his "The West as Utopia and Myth," Montana, the Magazine of Western History 41, No. 1, (Winter 1991), 69-75.

¹⁰J. Martin Evans, America: The View from Europe, (San Francisco: Stanford Alumni Association, 1976).

lower-class images of America throughout the nineteenth century.¹¹ The author examines the links between the interests of the image-makers and the resulting pictures, suggesting that any group, whether emigrants or railroad barons, developed an image of the West suitable to their purposes.

Dime novels have formed a significant part of the Western image in Europe. They have often been the subject of scholarly discussion, especially since Western dime novels remain extremely popular in Europe. Both Nash and Billington dedicate much of their image-analysis to the role dime novels played in European imaginings of the West. According to them, the novels helped build a mythical perception of the West. A closer look at the cultural significance of dime novels is John G. Cawelti's Adventure, Mystery, and Romance.¹² Cawelti distinguishes in these formula stories between archetypes, appealing to all cultures, and specific formulas manipulated by their authors. He argues that the success of any formula stories reflects the audience and the surrounding culture.

In Germany's Western dime novels many scholars found a close relationship of German Westerns to James Fenimore

¹¹Ray Allen Billington, Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the 19th Century, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981). For literature on German Western dime novels see Billington, Land of Savagery, pp. 338-42.

¹²John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

Cooper's novels.¹³ In his Leatherstocking Tales Cooper had developed the pattern of a fight between civilization and wilderness, manifest in the fight between Native Americans and whites. The agony of Native Americans touched Germans who had a long history of adoring nature and primitivism. In addition, the conflict paralleled Germany's struggle between traditional authoritarian society and new democratic forces.

Next to dime novels, travel reports were another source of information about the American West and equally biased despite their claims to authenticity. Germans reported their experiences in the American West with an eye to their own place in society. Recently, travel has attracted increased scholarly attention. Paul Fussell has distinguished travellers from tourists; while the former visit places they really want to, the latter are directed by the tourist industry.¹⁴ In the context of this thesis, the distinction between travellers and tourists blurs. In the late nineteenth century the American

¹³Billington, Land of Savagery and "The Wild, Wild West Through European Eyes," American History Illustrated 14 (1979), 16-23; Preston A. Barba, "The American Indian in German Fiction," German-American Annals 15 (May-August 1913), 143-74; Karl W. Doerry, "Three Versions of America: Sealsfield, Gerstäcker, and May," Yearbook of German American Studies 16 (1981), 39-49; D.L. Ashliman, "The Novel of Western Adventure in 19th Century Germany," Western American Literature 3 (Summer 1968), 133-45, and "The American West in Twentieth Century Germany," Journal of Popular Culture 2 (Summer 1968), 81-92; Gertrud Oel-Willenborg, Von deutschen Helden: Eine Inhaltsanalyse der Karl-May-Romane, (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1973).

¹⁴Paul Fussell, ed., The Norton Book of Travel, (New York: Norton, 1987), p. 651.

West was not yet easily accessible to Germans, considering the financial means of the majority, and the duration of the journey. As the decades passed, however, travellers to Yellowstone Park began to follow a beaten path.

Historian James Buzard, following Dean MacCannell's argument, suggests that tourism is an essential characteristic of modern societies.¹⁵ Researching European tourism in the nineteenth century, Buzard maintains that tourism "fundamentally engages and tests cultural *representations*" and, therefore is best approached "from the direction of literary analysis."¹⁶ German travel reports about Yellowstone confirm Buzard's contention since the travellers represented their experiences always with regard to their own culture. Just as Romantics had considered their representations of nature as a passage resulting in spiritual and moral renewal, so German Yellowstone travellers thought in liminal terms. In describing foreign sights, Germans were actually writing about themselves.

The significance of travel as a cultural rite of passage was the subject of a recent book by John F. Sears. He has argued that nineteenth-century American tourism had become a ritual, which allowed tourists to return to their daily

¹⁵Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class, (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

¹⁶James Buzard, The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 13.

environment with renewed appreciation for it. However, only natural sights providing extra strong stimuli allowed travel to become a mind-clearing rite. The American West and Yellowstone Park, furnished both Americans and Germans with an extraordinary degree of strangeness that contrasted with their daily surroundings. Thus, Yellowstone permitted German travellers to regard their homecountry in a new light.

The topic of European travellers in America has already been widely examined.¹⁷ However, the ways European travellers described Western nature and thus reflected tensions in their own society has not yet been studied historically. My goal is to analyze representations of Western American nature by German visitors at the turn of the century. Germans outdistanced their European neighbors in their love for nature and infatuation with the American West. Romantic ideas about nature as the soul of humans as well as the growing interest in natural history and science laid the foundations for German interest in Western nature. Another important reason for their fascination resulted from the extreme conservatism of

¹⁷A lot has been written on British travel. E.g. James Eckman, "The British Traveller in America, 1875-1920, (Ph.D. Diss., Georgetown University, 1946); Allan Nevins (ed.), "America Through British Eyes," (1923; New York: Oxford University Press, 1948); Richard Rapson, Britons View America: Travel Commentary, 1860-1935, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971). Examining different European travel reports and images of America are: Henry Steele Commager (ed.), America in Perspective: The United States through Foreign Eyes, (New York: New American Library, 1947), and Rob Kroes (ed.), The American West as Seen by Europeans and Americans, (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1989).

Germany's Restoration period and the later Wilhelmine era. My basic contention is that German travel reports mirrored not only German ideas about nature, but also tensions within German society.

Extant German travel reports reflect an upper-middle-class perspective on the wild nature of the American West--a perspective that reveals as much about the visitors' political and social concerns as about the nature of the park. Artists, writers, and geologists, the main groups visiting Yellowstone in the late 1800s, all adhered to common aesthetic and social ideas. Their perceptions of Western nature represented their cultural assumptions as well as the anxieties and convictions of a traditionally oriented class. In a wider sense, they also reflected the angst of a modernizing society about embracing industrialization.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the background and contradictions of German fascination with the American West. Roots can be traced to the Romantics' adulation for nature as the true source for humanity and art. Sources are predominantly the writings of German Romantics, their ideas about nature, and their growing fascination with America. Emigration to and travel literature about America gained influence during the German Restoration period in the first half of the nineteenth century. Unlike Romantic literature, travelogues catered to a middle and lower class audience. From there, the focus will shift to the role of dime novels in

nineteenth-century Germany. Lastly, the responses to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show will illustrate the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Germany's image of the "wild" West. Romantics, travellers, dime novels, and Buffalo Bill reflected the relationship between class and Western image.

The second chapter analyzes German travel reports about Yellowstone. This chapter will contrast German perceptions of the park across professional boundaries suggesting that common cultural assumptions outweighed professional differences and personal variations. The vastness of the park, its mountains, and valleys impressed German visitors, but far from taking the Park on its own terms, they used their experience in Yellowstone to corroborate German nature aesthetics which equated beauty with a carefully managed arcadia.

The third chapter investigates how Germans validated their anti-technological stance, while trying to recapture a religious spirit. The travellers pictured the Mammoth Terraces and Yellowstone's Grand Canyon as nature's masterpieces to instill a sense of awe and humility in their readers. At the same time, the apparent similarity between factory chimneys and geysers called forth sentiments of rejection in the accounts. Nevertheless, geysers remained a natural phenomenon, dwarfing 'unnatural' technology, an argument for Germans to emphasize the limits of industrialization, Yellowstone Park, in short, became a tool to confirm traditional German values,

and a reverence for nature at a moment when industrialization threatened to swallow both.

The final chapter places German travel reports into historical context, emphasizing that the representations of the West reflected the social standing of their authors and were written for an upper-middle-class audience that differed considerably from the readership of dime novels. Travellers' accounts closely mirrored upper-class Romantic views, and, at their core, rejected the wildness of the American West. Their background explains this reaction: coming from the educated upper classes, these travellers pleaded for the maintenance of traditions securing their place in society and denigrated industrialization which threatened to undermine the pillars of traditional society. In this context, their praise of arcadian nature and arguments for its preservation assumed a new importance. Far from merely describing nature, representations of the park were informed by anxieties confronting German conservatives in the decades preceding the First World War.

This thesis offers several new perspectives on nineteenth-century travel literature, on the German perspective of the American West, and German society at the turn of the century. It adds another component to the meaning of German nineteenth-century travel to the West. As for all travellers, it constituted a rite of passage for Germans, which resulted in a clearer look at the home-country. Other than the comparatively cohesive nations of France and Great

Britain, Germany struggled with its recent unity and the rise of social democratic forces, increasing its demand for alternatives which many Germans found in the West. In addition, the pristine West promised untamed nature, which traditionally played a significant role in German spiritual life. Loaded with this baggage, travellers found a host of analogies and contrasts to Germany in the nature of the American West.

In addition, professional barriers crumbled under common cultural assumptions. Whether artists, writers, or geologists, German visitors unanimously condemned technological arrogance while celebrating the existence of pristine nature. In the light of these results, the distinction between science and humanities appears insignificant.

Finally, this study will shed light on the significance of national parks and wilderness in an international context. German travellers saw Yellowstone with the knowledge that industrialization had overwhelmed German nature. Through viewing parts of the West, they recognized the need for wilderness without human occupation as a source for spiritual renewal. Although the limits of German love for nature become obvious in these descriptions, the need for nature becomes even more apparent. Today, when the need for wilderness sparks heated debates, the instance of nineteenth-century Germans regretting the loss of nature might be an example worth considering in any part of this world.

WILDER THAN THE REAL THING: GERMAN IMAGES OF THE WILD WEST

"One studies foreign systems to find one's own system."
Novalis (1772-1801).¹

The American West inspired Germans to create a host of frontier images throughout the 1800s. As the German poet Novalis (pen name of Friedrich von Hardenberg) observed in the late 1700s, authors describing foreign countries disclose more insights about their own culture than about their object of study. This observation applies to the treatment of the American West by German authors throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Observations of the American West served as magnifying lens for German shortcomings, and as a space for escape. Not everyone was pleased with these accounts, however. The often hostile reaction of German authorities testified to the official sensitivity over the criticism of German political culture contained in the representations of the American West.

It also testified to the dreams European civilization had long been projecting onto a Western land. From the ancient Greeks to medieval Christians, Europeans had turned their eyes

¹Quoted in Azade Seyhan, Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 23.

westward to a utopia.² Nineteenth-century Germany continued this tradition, helped by the uprooting social, political, and economic developments of the 1800s.

When Max Wilhelm Meyer and his travel companion Otto von Sommerstorff, an actor and writer, bid farewell to the Hamburg harbor in June 1893 to embark on their journey to the American West, they also said goodbye to conflict-ridden society that had also developed a keen interest in the Wild West.³ Kaiser William II guided his German empire in an extremely reactionary and conservative fashion, trying to obtain world power for the young German nation. Only twenty years earlier it had been unified, as one of the last countries in Europe to gain unity in the nineteenth century nationalist craze. Nationalism did not encompass democratic rights for Germans; discipline and firm social boundaries were the hallmarks of the Wilhelmine era.⁴

Moreover, industrialization had increased conservative fears of new social forces and resulted in oppression of the German liberals after 1848 and in the beginning 1870s and the German workers' party in the late 1870s and 1880s. The side

²G. Nash, "European Images," pp.3-6. Extensive discussion in Loren Baritz, "The Idea of the West," American Historical Review 66, (April 1961), 618-640.

³Date in Otto Sommerstorff, Im Wunderreich der Neuen Welt: Erlebnisse im Fernen Westen, (Karlsruhe und Leipzig: Friedrich Gutsch, 1914), p. 1.

⁴Volker R. Berghahn, Modern Germany. Society, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 12.

effects of the machine age, urbanization, and population growth heightened the feelings of confinement.⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century, German society tackled the problems of modernity and industrialization in a variety of ways. Romantics discovered nature as a remedy, political and economic refugees found the promised land in America, and lower classes escaped through dime novels. The reception of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in Germany with its messages of freedom, wildness, and wilderness showed that Germans appropriated the American West in manifold ways as their land of dreams.⁶ The varying images of the West reflected always the social position of the image-makers.

* * *

The praise of the primitive was a legacy of the Romantic movement which influenced the German intelligentsia in the early 1800s. The roots of admiration for the wild reach into French philosophy. Both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his disciple

⁵While one could find 41 million Germans in 1871, their number had risen to 49.7 million twenty years later. On the eve of WW I, in 1911, the Kaiserreich had 65.3 million subjects. Numbers in Berghahn, Modern Germany, p. 271.

⁶These three terms are intricately connected and merge frequently in the writings about the American West. For the purpose of this thesis "liberty" signifies the absence of arbitrary authority, "wilderness" is the natural environment unmarked by long-term human improvements like roads, houses, whereas "wildness" denotes the untamed factor, both in animals and human beings--in the latter the refusal to conform to their society's standards of behavior.

François René de Chateaubriand postulated that wildness was indispensable for the healthy development of humankind, a thought diametrically opposed to the rational insights of the Enlightenment. In the person of the Native American they discovered the noble savage.⁷ This fascination with the wild became a lasting heritage for Germans. More than one hundred years later, in 1912, Richard Hennig, an amateur-author, celebrated Rousseau's "healthy" reaction to the stiffness of the enlightenment era.⁸ The comment of this economist, natural scientist, and traveller suggested that Romanticism left Germans with an enduring appreciation for nature.

The Romantics' infatuation with nature reflected many issues of the modern age. Nature's crooked lines softened the stiffness of rationalism and the mechanics of the machine age.⁹ In Germany, both Friedrich Schlegel, a leading philosopher, and Novalis, a young poet, praised the irregularity of nature defying human-made rules.¹⁰ Friedrich Schiller, an eminent writer of the Romantic period, placed

⁷Billington, Land of Savagery, pp. 18-19, 24.

⁸Richard Hennig, Die Entwicklung des Naturgefühls, (Leipzig: Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1912), pp. 63-70. For biographical details see Edwin Hennig, "Hennig, Richard," in Neue Deutsche Biographie, vol. 8, edited by Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, (Berlin: Humblot & Duncker, 1969), pp. 544-545.

⁹Doerry, "Three Versions of America," p. 39; Paul C. Weber, America in Imaginative German Literature in the First Half of the 19th Century, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), p. 45.

¹⁰Seyhan, Representation and Its Discontents, p. 29.

this admiration for nature into a wider social context. According to him, modernity and the advance of civilization were detrimental to humans, since both placed reason above human feelings.¹¹ Carried to its ultimate logic, Romantic thought considered nature as a moral corrective and source for creativity while disparaging the achievements of modern society.¹² This anti-modernist strain recurred in western dime novels and travel reports throughout the nineteenth century.

Romanticism's constructive side consisted of its transcendentalism. Not unlike the later American philosophers Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, German Romantics mused at the spiritually uplifting quality of nature.¹³ The young Novalis ascribed a distinctive spirit to nature:

Nature would not be nature if it had no spirit, that only mirror image of humankind, the indispensable answer to this mysterious question or the question to this infinite answer.

[Die Natur wäre nicht die Natur, wenn sie keinen Geist hätte, nicht jenes einzige Gegenbild der Menschheit, nicht die unentbehrliche Antwort dieser geheimnisvollen Frage oder die Frage zu dieser unendlichen Antwort.]¹⁴

In the opinion of Novalis--shared by Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe--only nature could teach humans

¹¹Seyhan, Representation and its Discontents, p. 50.

¹²Compare Raymond H. Dominick, The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1870-1970, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992), p.25.

¹³Dominick, Environmental Movement Germany, p. 27.

¹⁴Novalis, "Die Lehrlinge zu Sais," in Die Deutschen Romantiker, vol. II, edited by Gerhard Stenzel, (Salzburg: R. Kiesel, no year), pp. 116-17.

about themselves. In fact, only the natural environment was able to free humans, lifting them beyond themselves.

Romantics established an intricate relationship between liberty and nature, which would carry into later descriptions of the American West. The principal topic of German Romantics was nature, but how could nature be represented without imprisoning it? To solve that dilemma, Schiller recommended poetry as the only appropriate means to describe nature without destroying the liberty inherent in its beauties.¹⁵ Thus, it was not an actual state of nature that interested the Romantics, but the freedom of imagination which nature--whether benevolent or malign--instilled in humans.¹⁶

Despite the fascination with nature, German Romantics turned to America only after 1815. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, the 1815 Congress of Vienna reestablished ultra-conservative rule across Europe. Facing the tightening grip of censorship by German authorities, the poet Joseph von Eichendorff looked across the Atlantic for an alternative to restrictive European society and politics [*Ahnung und Gegenwart*, 1815].¹⁷ The pressures of a conservative society forced the eyes of the upper middle class towards America.

¹⁵Seyhan, Representation and Its Discontents, pp. 55-56.

¹⁶Hennig, Die Entwicklung des Naturgefühls, p. 83.

¹⁷Weber, America in Imaginative German Literature, pp.55-72.

The political, social, and economic developments of the restoration era also changed Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's mind. In his early years, the influential German poet had remained indifferent towards America.¹⁸ After the French Revolution he began to search for problem solutions more humane than revolutions. Ignoring the American revolution, his stance towards the young nation became increasingly friendly during the 1810s. A number of influential American visitors to his house helped him to see America in a different light.¹⁹ In his novel Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, Goethe developed his fondness for America fully, presenting America as the land of opportunity.²⁰ The German publication of James Fenimore Cooper's novels in 1826 finally infected Goethe completely with the America-virus.

In the wake of Cooper's publications, Goethe asked his fellow-poets to write in the fashion of Cooper, to produce wilderness novels. Goethe himself wrote an adulating poem about America, or better the idea of America, in 1827:

America you have it better
 Than our continent, the older:
 No castles in decay--no halls that moulder
 No memories of use to fetter
 No needless idle strife

¹⁸Victor Lange, "Goethes Amerikabild: Wirklichkeit und Vision," in Amerika in der deutschen Literatur: Neue Welt - Nordamerika - USA, edited by Sigrid Bauschinger, Horst Denkler und Wilfried Malsch, (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1975), p. 65.

¹⁹Gerbi, Dispute of New World, p. 371.

²⁰Lange, "Goethes Amerikabild," p. 68.

To cramp the innermost
 In times astir with life.
 Go use the present and fare well.²¹

Amerika, du hast es besser,
 Als unser Continent, das alte,
 Hast keine verfallene Schlösser
 Und keine Basalte;
 Dich stört nicht im Innern
 Zu lebendiger Zeit
 Unnützes Erinnern
 Und vergeblicher Streit
 Benutzt die Gegenwart mit Glück!²²

According to Goethe, America had it better because its society did not have to cope with political remnants and social traditions, and thus could not be shaken by violent revolutions; his use of basalt provided a geological analogy to the violent origin of basalts--volcanic eruptions.²³ This statement was not anti-historical, but humanistic. In humanistic and Romantic fashion Goethe saw America as the land of opportunity for human betterment, hardly possible in his suffocating Germany.²⁴ Goethe's poem disclosed the profound dissatisfaction with the reactionary course of the German states, with conservative politics suppressing progressive spirits. The reality of American life did not matter; what appealed to Goethe were America's non-German qualities, symbolized in its untamed land.

²¹Translation in Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 222.

²²Quoted after Weber, America in Imaginative German Literature, p. 93.

²³Gerbi, Dispute of New World, p. 360.

²⁴Lange, "Goethe's Amerikabild," p. 69.

Through its admiration for untamed land, the German Romantic movement sewed the seeds for the perception of the American wilderness. Whether this tradition pervaded all layers of society is unclear, but it certainly reached the educated upper-middle classes. Workers, however, were not blind to the attractions of nature. Sunday outings into the countryside were a welcome change to life in the cities.²⁵ No less than the wealthy, the working class derived pleasure from the natural environment. However, upper Bourgeois Romantic ideas had prepared the way for a benevolent reception of nature.

In the wake of the Romantic movement, both nature and America gained popularity in Germany. Travel accounts and popular literature, mixing both facts and fiction reached the middle and lower classes. This literature created a wild and exotic picture of the American West. By the mid-1900s emigration had become substantial enough to stir more interest in America, a fact which in turn increased the production of literature about America. Like intellectuals, German lower classes projected their visions of a new society onto America. Emigration, combined with facts and fiction about America worked to shape a myth about the American West.

* * *

²⁵Dominick, Environmental Movement Germany, pp. 61-63.

The supposedly objective travel literature about America contained as much wishful thinking and subjective imagery as Romantic literature or dime novels. The interest in Americana peaked in the years between 1815 and 1850. Roughly 50 travel reports about America were published in the German states.²⁶ Travel writers came from all classes, proving that the interest in America was shared by Germans across social boundaries. Princes as well as farmers published accounts of their American experiences. The label 'travel literature' was no warranty for accuracy in the reported facts. Published accounts reflected the background and intentions of the respective authors and helped create another image of the American West.²⁷

The contents of travel reports varied, ranging from social observations to contemplations about nature. Paul C. Weber considers the majority of travel reports friendly and detailed, and in some cases even too favorable. A case in point is Gottfried Duden's Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerikas und einen mehrjährigen Aufenthalt am Missouri (1824-1827) oder Das Leben im Innern der Vereinigten Staaten und dessen Bedeutung für die häusliche und politische Lage der Europäer which painted western America

²⁶Weber, America in Imaginative German Literature, pp. 103-04.

²⁷Compare also Bruce Levine, The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 53.

in the brightest colors.²⁸ The author's affluence was reflected in his rosy view of America. Duden, a lawyer and civil servant from the German Ruhr Valley, came to St. Louis in 1824, with sufficient funds to purchase a farm, and hire farm workers, whom he could supervise while he was composing his travel and emigration guide to the United States.²⁹

The subtitle of Duden's work--The Significance of American life for the Domestic and Political Situation for Europeans--is important. Duden saw emigration as the only means to heal Germany's ills; his idealism and prophecies drew some of Germany's young nobility and upper-middle class revolutionaries to America, wanting to enlarge his colony on the Missouri.³⁰ Duden's case illustrates the class bias contained in travel reports. The image of America reflected the upper-middle-class position of the author in his homecountry.

Letters from emigrants sent back to Germany also shed a rosy light on America. As Ray Billington notes, the arrival of letters from America aroused the interest of whole village

²⁸Weber, America in Imaginative German Literature, p. 115. For assessment of travel literature see pp. 115-17. Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 73.

²⁹Adolf E. Schroeder, "To Missouri, Where the Sun of Freedom Shines: Dream and Reality on the Western Frontier," in The German-American Experience in Missouri: Essays in Commemoration of the Tricentennial of German Immigration to America, 1683-1983, edited by Howard Wright and James W. Goodrich, (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1986), p. 1.

³⁰Schroeder, "To Missouri," p. 6.

populations in Europe.³¹ They also induced many to pack their belongings and follow the call of the New World. The letter writers possessed a healthy interest in making their lives appear better than they enjoyed at home and many in the Old World seemed to believe them. As a result, these letters contributed as much to the myth of western America as the sales-mentality of railroad agents.

American railroads also helped to draw a glowing image of America. Eager to sell their lands to finance the construction of the transcontinental lines, the major railroads sent agents to Europe in search of prospective immigrants and land-buyers. By 1883 the Northern Pacific Railroad alone employed 955 agents in Europe.³² Countless brochures, with their display of America's wealth and the promise of land ownership lured many impoverished and starving Europeans to America, frequently under misleading pretenses. The arid, thinly populated areas of the Midwest and West were often depicted in vivid colors of lush meadows and thriving towns. Railroad propaganda added another bright layer to the image of the American West.

Emigration figures speak volumes. Between 1820 and 1871 2.3 million Germans left to seek their fortune on the new continent.³³ The wave crested in 1881 when 1.3 million Germans

³¹Billington, Land of Savagery, pp. 69-72.

³²Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 64.

³³Theodor Poesche, "Deutsche Einwanderung in die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika, von 1820-1870," Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen 17 (1871), p. 279.

left their home country.³⁴ Late nineteenth century emigrants came predominantly from the lower classes, who fled the economic consequences of industrialization and the demise of agricultural production.³⁵ In the first half of the nineteenth century, political motivations for emigration prevailed. The faltered revolution of 1848 caused many German liberals to pursue happiness in the United States.

The case of one revolutionary illustrates how German developments determined the America-image. In 1852, the publisher Ernst Keil had been imprisoned for his revolutionary activities. While in prison, he started to plan a family periodical, Die Gartenlaube. Politics would be taboo. Instead, his journal would focus on literature, ethnography, letters about nature, and functions of the human body. In short, it would be a popular scientific magazine, free of any political discussion.³⁶ Keil's quest for escape from contemporary political debate led him to carry excerpts from dime novels, especially Westerns.³⁷ The Gartenlaube was considered progressive in its time, but it reflected the political weariness in Germany and its longing for a different land, for

³⁴Berghahn, Modern Germany, Table 1, Population Growth and Movements, 1870-1983, p. 271.

³⁵Levine, Spirit of 1848, pp. 20-22.

³⁶Eva Zahn, "Die Geschichte der Gartenlaube," in Facsimile Querschnitt durch die Gartenlaube, edited by Heinz Klüter, (Hamburg: Deutscher Bücherbund, 1963), p. 12.

³⁷Karl W. Doerry, "Three Versions of America," p. 39.

a new society.³⁸

Frank Trommler has noted that it was the goal of most German liberals depicting the United States to convey an "efficient mirror-image to the German state of affairs."³⁹ More than emigrants' letters, the travel literature produced by middle-class Germans shed light on their political convictions which had been shaped by Germany's problems. Economic and political factors, reinforced by misinformation about the real America, engendered both a western myth and mass emigration to America. Germans who stayed behind, found their ways of escape via literature, particularly western dime novels. And these became the most influential image-makers in Germany, being read by a broad audience.

* * *

The so-called *Karl-May-Festspiele* take place annually in Bad Segeberg, a small town in northwestern Germany. For several days, cowboys and Native Americans turn the quiet town into a replica of a frontier settlement in the American West,

³⁸Friedrich Sieburg, "Einleitung," in Facsimile Querschnitt durch die Gartenlaube edited by Heinz Klüter, (Hamburg: Deutscher Bücherbund, 1963), p. 3.

³⁹Frank Trommler, "Vom Vormärz zum Bürgerkrieg. Die Achtundvierziger und ihre Lyrik," in Amerika in der deutschen Literatur: Neue Welt - Nordamerika - USA, edited by Sigrid Bauschinger, Horst Denkler and Wilfried Malsch, (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1975), p. 95.

where Indian attacks are the spice of daily life. The celebrations honor Karl May, a German author, who produced roughly 70 dime novels--half of them placed in a western setting--in the late 1800s. A century later, German children and adults still live out fantasies about the Wild West in the tales of Winnetou and Old Shatterhand--May's heroes. Although May never visited the American West, maps and explicit description of the environment in his novels evoke a sense of reality. May's success in Germany, especially among working, and lower middle classes, illustrates the appeal of western myth to a German audience, surpassing other European countries. His dime novel version of the West incorporated exotic ideas of wilderness and wildness, extremely attractive to the German audience.

The dime novel craze first started in 1826 with the German publication of James Fenimore Cooper's novels.⁴⁰ Dime novels merged "true" travel details, Romantic tradition, and realistic love of detail. John Cawelti's analysis of dime novel fascination provides a clue about why Germans loved Westerns so much. According to Cawelti, dime novels were a prime opportunity to escape daily life, via extra strong stimuli like violence or the clash between wild/wilderness and civilization, apparent in the American West. They attracted readers for several reasons, one being the sheer delight in brutality. On a subconscious level the theme wilderness vs.

⁴⁰Ashliman, "Novel of Western Adventure," p. 132.

civilization touched innermost fears of German readers who tried to cope with industrial age by pushing traditions aside.⁴¹ Although the conflict between wilderness and civilization shed seas of blood, dime novel consumers found always the soothing message that the good would win. The fact that the battle took place in a distant country only made the adventure more pleasant.⁴²

The content of the novels was largely determined by the taste of the readers, mostly people from the lower classes. Improved printing techniques, allowing the mass production of cheap literature, coupled with rapidly increasing levels of literacy enabled the upsurge of dime novels. By 1890 seventy percent of Germans could read, a rate paralleled by other European countries.⁴³ In addition, life in factories and cities increased the demand for escape, if not through emigration, at least through exotic and sensational dime novels. Cawelti has argued that formula stories like dime novels were collective cultural products since the majority of any society enjoys certain fantasy patterns.⁴⁴ Given the widespread distribution

⁴¹Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, p. 14; for conflicts see *ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

⁴²Doerry, "Three Versions of America," p. 40; Cawelti, Adventure, Mystic, and Romance, p. 193; Hennig, Entwicklung des Naturgefühls, pp. 81-82, finds that the game with irreality is attracting readers. G. Nash, "European Images," pp. 6-7.

⁴³Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 47.

⁴⁴Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, p. 34.

of dime novels in Germany, this argument would seem to apply to Germans as well. Apparently, western novels were meeting the expectations of a German lower-class audience.⁴⁵

The work and life of three dime novel authors show common and differing cultural assumptions. Charles Sealsfield, Friedrich Gerstäcker, and Karl May, all a generation apart, were the most widely read western novel producers in nineteenth-century Germany. Their messages, and their description of the natural environment differ, but they have one theme in common: by glorifying the West they criticized their home country. As Billington noted:

Westerns offered Germans and Frenchmen and Scandinavians a mirror image of themselves--a glimpse into a social order where strength and chivalry were virtues as they no longer were in decadent Europe."⁴⁶

The dime novel authors Sealsfield, Gerstäcker, and May confirm Billington's observations, as their novels reflect their ideas about German culture.

Charles Sealsfield was born Karl Postl in 1793 in Austria, at that time still associated with the German states. In 1822 he fled a rigid monastic life in Prague to roam America. Several extended stays in America provided him with an intimate knowledge about the U.S., and soon he wrote his

⁴⁵Nelson van de Luyster, "Gerstäcker's Novels about Emigrants to America," American-German Review 20 (June-July 1954), p. 22.

⁴⁶Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 34.

first book, which compared his Austrian home country to America. Numerous dime novels, all singing the praise of 'real' liberty, followed under his Americanized name Charles Sealsfield. In 1864 he died in Switzerland, after a restless and productive life.⁴⁷

For Sealsfield, America provided the counterpoint to his homecountry. America was safe from city corruption due to its wilderness which would prevent urbanization. Although he abhorred American capitalism, the general image of America was very benevolent. According to Sealsfield, it was the natural environment, defying industrialization and urbanization, which saved America from becoming as restrictive as the German states.

The message was well understood by authorities, who prohibited Sealsfield's first books soon after their publication in 1827.⁴⁸ A general national-liberal thrust ran through all his novels. As Karl W. Doerry maintains, Sealsfield saw all problems as solvable, thereby reassuring his audience that the destructive impact of revolutions they feared would be minimized. Sealsfield's optimism, perpetuated in his novels about America, helped shape the myth about the American West.

Friedrich Gerstäcker, (1816-1872), emulated Charles

⁴⁷Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 36; Doerry, "Three Versions of America," pp. 40-42; D.L. Ashliman, "Novel of Western Adventure," pp. 135-36.

⁴⁸Doerry, "Three Versions of America," p. 40.

Sealsfield. He wanted to deconstruct the distorted upper-class image which writers like Duden had provided to prospective immigrants. Instead he intended to present reality to lower-class immigrants.⁴⁹ Gerstäcker knew America from his own stays. Writing in the middle of the century, he spent several years in America, made several extended world tours, and produced roughly 150 volumes, predominantly about America.⁵⁰

The quest for truth did not prevent Gerstäcker from extolling the wilderness, describing it beyond reality. He copied Cooper's glorification of wilderness in a particular fashion; the American West became an anti-industrial utopia teeming with lush forests, and a possibility for freedom.⁵¹

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.⁵²

Gerstäcker's vision of the American West differed strikingly from reality. He transformed the West into a paradise in which humans could start living again. In this respect, both

⁴⁹Manfred Durzak, "Nach Amerika. Gerstäckers Widerlegung der Lenau-Legende," in Amerika in der deutschen Literatur: Neue Welt - Nordamerika - USA, edited by Sigrid Bauschinger, Horst Denkler, and Wilfried Malsch, (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1975), pp. 138, 143.

⁵⁰Ashliman, "Novel of Western Adventure," p. 136

⁵¹Doerry, "Three Versions of America," p. 43; Durzak, "Nach Amerika," p. 150; Nash, "European Images," p. 8.

⁵²Quoted after Doerry, "Three Versions of America," p. 43.

Sealsfield and Gerstäcker were cultural pessimists, believing that their own societies had been corrupted by civilization. Only America's untamed nature made freedom possible. Like the Romantics, Gerstäcker and Sealsfield rejected modernity and the confines of civilization and found true liberty in nature.

Freedom to develop human virtues--that was what Karl May's heroes found in the West. In his some forty novels about *Westmänner*,⁵³ Indians, and bad white guys, German heroes thrived. Old Shatterhand, the hero, was German and gifted with truly superior intellect and knowledge, complementing his physical eminence. This hero possessed characteristics which many readers, as well as the author, would have liked to have. May found a receptive audience: he was more successful than any dime novelist before or after. Der Spiegel, a weekly political journal, announced in 1962 that May's influence "is greater than that of any author between Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Thomas Mann."⁵⁴

Karl May's life did not foreshadow this success. Born in 1842 into a poor weaver's family, he knew misery early. As a boy he was evicted from school for stealing Christmas candles,

⁵³May's term for frontiersmen, often German trappers fighting for justice in a violent West. For an extensive analysis of their function see Gertrud Oel-Willenborg, Von deutschen Helden: Eine Inhaltsanalyse der Karl-May-Romane, (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1973), pp. 58-84.

⁵⁴"Karl der Deutsche," Der Spiegel XVI (September 12, 1962), p. 73.

not his last conflict with the law. Altogether, he spent eight years in prison, which ruined his career as teacher. Subsequently, he began writing for a Catholic journal, and also became a prolific dime novel writer. A copyright suit in the late 1890s, however, brought his dime novel-activity to public attention and ruined his reputation as serious author. Again he had to struggle. Eventually, in 1908 he visited America, staying in the East. All the facts in his western novels were fruit of reading other authors' travel reports. In 1912 he died, after a lifelong quest for recognition and fame, often through pretense.⁵⁵

In all his novels, Old Shatterhand appeared as May's alter ego. May's wishful thinking came alive in this miraculous person who went West to be a teacher. When a band of Apaches captured his railroad surveying group, Old Shatterhand escaped death in winning a contest against Winnetou, the young Apache chief. This marked the beginning of a 14-year-long friendship in which both spread justice throughout the West.

In his work, May copied Cooper's scheme of the conflict between civilization and wilderness, which had appealed to Germans from the 1820s on.⁵⁶ May's geographical and

⁵⁵Explicit account of his life in Oel-Willenborg, Von deutschen Helden, pp. 13-14. See also Richard Cracroft, "The American West of Karl May," American Quarterly 19 (Summer 1967), p. 250.

⁵⁶Cracroft, "American West of Karl May," p. 256.

anthropological details made them appear authentic.⁵⁷ But what they depicted in reality was an ideal German society.

Unlike nineteenth-century German society, May's West did not inhibit personal growth by erecting rigid social barriers. His vision of a just society materialized in stories about an "uncivilized" country--the American West.⁵⁸ The environment provided the frame for human development. In May's novels Germanic virtues like the cults of brotherhood and male bonding, as well as a belief in authority could thrive.⁵⁹ Those values reflected the norms of May's authoritarian Germany. At the same time May's personal dream, education, proved to be valuable in the hostile West. The happy union of knowledge, *Bildung*, and virtue smoothed the road to success for May's heroes. May projected his personal dreams of justice and education onto the rather untamed and socially undefined American West.

Some scholars have argued that May sent a revolutionary message. Oel-Willenborg, on the basis of her character analysis, suggests that May conveyed an utterly conservative message. In her opinion, "justice, not revolution" was May's concern.⁶⁰ May's characters and their actions corroborate this

⁵⁷Cracroft, "American West of Karl May," p. 254. May's benevolent treatment of Indians, see pp. 254-55.

⁵⁸Compare Cracroft, "American West of Karl May," p. 251.

⁵⁹Excellent discussion in Oel-Willenborg, Von deutschen Helden, pp. 78-83.

⁶⁰Oel-Willenborg, Von deutschen Helden, p. 83.

thesis; the American West served him as a greenhouse for nurturing distinctly German virtues.

Nevertheless, German authorities and conservative forces recognized a threat behind these projections. Starting with the prohibition of Sealsfield's travel reports, police and conservative editors embarked on a crusade against the sensational dime novels. By the 1880s increased mass production of books forced the issue; from 1870 to 1914 roughly 25-30 million dime novels were sold annually.⁶¹ The novels featured not only Westerns, but crime and ghost stories, the extra strong stimuli Cawelti mentioned. The primary consumers were urban lower class youth.⁶²

Nearing the close of the nineteenth century, German conservative forces rallied to implement the *Lex Heinze* which would outlaw so-called "obscene literature." However, the embattled literature also encompassed works by noted modern authors like Gerhart Hauptmann and Henrik Ibsen. Under the guise of a moral crusade, Germany's conservative forces, fearing the corrupting influence of a market- rather than value-oriented entertainment industry, tried to legalize their traditional values.

In the 1890s, a relatively liberal bureaucracy, as in

⁶¹Georg Jaeger, "Der Kampf gegen Schmutz und Schund: Die Reaktion der Gebildeten auf die Unterhaltungsindustrie," Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens 31 (1988), p. 164; passim for history of fight against obscene literature.

⁶²Jaeger, "Kampf gegen Schmutz und Schund," p. 165.

Munich, largely ignored the fight over literature. However, through increased campaigning, and growing insecurity in the decade preceding the First World War, the fighters for morality gained power. At an increasing rate, political satire magazines like the *Simplicissimus* fell victim to censorship of obscene literature. And so did western dime novels. In 1909 Buffalo Bill novels stood on the black list of the Hamburg police since they would corrupt the youth with their message of violence and wildness. Any literature which questioned the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of Wilhelmine Germany was liable to be censored. Conservatives dreaded the erosion of obedience to authority, the pillar of the Second German Kaiserreich.⁶³

The fight revealed that dime novels were considered inimical to the structure of German society. This is not surprising, since dime novels contained the message of social resistance and provided for many an outlet for feelings of social injustice. The dime novel West may have had little in common with the real West, but it served as a distant land for projecting criticism of Germany's present circumstances. In a mixture of fact and fiction the authors emphasized qualities painfully missing in Germany. The ills of their own society,

⁶³For the controversy about the *Lex Heinze* and clash of social forces behind it see Johanna Pfund, "Die Schmutz- und Schundliteratur: Austragungsfeld für soziale, politische und ökonomische Konflikte," (Seminar paper, Department of Modern History, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Winter Semester 1990-91):

not the realities of western American life, were the heart and soul of these novels, reflecting the desires of their lower-class audience.

* * *

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show took up the thread woven by western American literary texts where feelings of fascination and disgust with the American West continued in volume after volume, often centering around positive or negative associations given to the concept of liberty. This ambivalence about the American West persisted in the German response to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show which toured Europe for the first time between 1887 and 1893.

Only a few scholars have examined William F. Cody's enterprise. His autobiography allows more insights about his character than about the true events surrounding his life.⁶⁴ The biography produced by his sister displays a similar pattern of reverential inaccuracy.⁶⁵ Don Russell offers a fairly comprehensive account of Cody's life and adventures.⁶⁶

⁶⁴William F. Cody, The Life of Hon. William F. Cody, Known as Buffalo Bill, The Famous Hunter, Scout, and Guide: An Autobiography, (Hartford, Conn.: Frank E. Bliss, 1879).

⁶⁵Helen Cody Wetmore, Last of the Great Scouts (Buffalo Bill), (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1899).

⁶⁶Don Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

The most recent work about Cody's show is Sarah Blackstone's Buckskins, Bullets, and Business,⁶⁷ analyzing the organization and messages of the show. The author argues that the Wild West Show corroborated the already existing myth of the West.

Colonel William F. Cody's staged representation of the Wild West triggered a craze in the eastern United States as well as in Europe. Accompanied by an extensive publicity campaign which featured distortions of Cody's own adventures, the performances attracted a vast audience in the thirty years of its existence (1883-1913).⁶⁸ Among the Europeans, Germans cheered the loudest; apparently, the dime novel tradition had prepared them well.⁶⁹

The journalists of the 1890s linked Buffalo Bill inevitably to the dime novels they had devoured as boys. Many even claimed to know the West intimately through novels.

To us Germans, the American Wild West is anything but foreign. Who has not stimulated his imagination in past times, if not with Cooper's novels, so at least with Gerstäcker's narratives.

[Uns Deutschen ist der wilde Westen Amerikas nichts weniger als fremd. Wer hat nicht seiner Zeit die

⁶⁷Sarah Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

⁶⁸Summary of European ventures in Clifford P. Westermeier, "Buffalo Bill's Cowboys Abroad," The Colorado Magazine 52, (Fall 1975), 277-98.

⁶⁹Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business, p. 133. Julian Crandall Hollick, "The American West in European Imagination," Montana, the Magazine of Western History 42, No. 2, (Spring 1992), p. 19.

Phantasie, wenn nicht durch die Cowper'schen [sic] Romane so doch durch die Gerstäcker'schen Erzählungen in Spannung versetzt.]⁷⁰

Here, reality and illusion merged; a mixture with which Buffalo Bill captivated his audience.

A more critical journalist also evoked the memory of dime novels, but called them "obscene literature" [*Schundliteratur*]. He discerned only falsities and violence in the cheap reading material. Acknowledging that the show contained some information about the American West, he reproached the violence displayed in Buffalo Bill's performance.⁷¹ Whether positive or negative, these remarks suggest that Cody's show corroborated an already firmly established pattern of German ambivalence about the American West.

The Wild West Show was fairly generous with violence. It featured Indian battles, shooting acts, stagecoach robberies, an attack on an emigrant train, and buffalo hunts.⁷² While some journalists and authorities condemned the violence as corrupting, others revelled in the display of untamed wildness.

The dangerous influence of Buffalo Bill's show was

⁷⁰Unterhaltungsblatt Braunschweig, July 17, 1890. In BB Cody Scrapbook, Germany 1890, BBHC, Cody, Wyoming.

⁷¹Weser Zeitung, Bremen, Sept. 10, 1890, BB Cody Scrapbook, Germany 1890, BBHC.

⁷²See for instance Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business, passim. Example: Boersen Courier, Berlin, July 24, 1890, Cody Scrapbook, Germany 1890, BBHC.

frequently mentioned. One writer argued that already many young boys had fallen prey to the violence of dime novels which had tilled the ground for Cody.⁷³ Appeals to the parents were repeated over and over again. "Parents watch your children . . . that they won't develop a pathological prairie-mania!"⁷⁴ Especially the school-children seemed to be easy victims for the Wild-West virus.

Let us hope, that the Wild West will not root itself too firmly in the heads of our school-children, as it has done before.

[Hoffen wir nur, dass nicht der wilde Westen, wie es schon einmal geschehen, sich zu fest in die Köpfe unserer Schuljugend setzt.]⁷⁵

Another report from Vienna brought the appalling news that children almost suffocated each other by trying to rope their playmates. The number of warnings was endless, and revealed that the unrestricted life illustrated by Buffalo Bill was considered subversive in a society resting on strong social boundaries and conventions.

Because those restrictions were so severe, the show, with its message of wildness and freedom, was attractive for liberal-minded Germans. For some journalists, authenticity and nature merged into one.

You feel *nature*, the wild, powerful, untamed nature of the prairie There is tremendously much nature in

⁷³See preceding footnote.

⁷⁴Lokal-Anzeiger, Berlin, July 24, 1890, BB Cody Scrapbook, Germany 1890, BBHC.

⁷⁵"Der Wilde Westen," Boersen-Courier, Berlin, July 24, 1890, BB Cody Scrapbook, Germany 1890, BBHC.

