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
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.

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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.

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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." 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,

\(^1\)Max 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

attitudes towards wilderness.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{National Parks} that the creation of national parks was anything but altruistic.\textsuperscript{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


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.

The Dispute of the New World. 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." 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


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


lower-class images of America throughout the nineteenth century. 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*. 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


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

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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.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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


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.\textsuperscript{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

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.
"One studies foreign systems to find one's own system."

Novalis (1772-1801).  

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...
westward to a utopia. 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. 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.

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


effects of the machine age, urbanization, and population growth heightened the feelings of confinement.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{5}While 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, \textit{Modern Germany}, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{6}These 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. 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. 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. In Germany, both Friedrich Schlegel, a leading philosopher, and Novalis, a young poet, praised the irregularity of nature defying human-made rules. Friedrich Schiller, an eminent writer of the Romantic period, placed

7Billington, Land of Savagery, pp. 18-19, 24.
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{13} The young Novalis ascribed a distinctive spirit to nature:

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

[\text{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.}]\textsuperscript{14}

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

\textsuperscript{11}\text{Seyhan, Representation and its Discontents, p. 50.}


\textsuperscript{13}\text{Dominick, Environmental Movement Germany, p. 27.}

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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{[Ahnung und Gegenwart, 1815]}.\textsuperscript{17} The pressures of a conservative society forced the eyes of the upper middle class towards America.

\textsuperscript{15}Seyhan, \textit{Representation and Its Discontents}, pp. 55-56.

\textsuperscript{16}Hennig, \textit{Die Entwicklung des Naturgefühls}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{17}Weber, \textit{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. 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. In his novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Goethe developed his fondness for America fully, presenting America as the land of opportunity. 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

---


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

20 Lange, "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. 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.

* * *

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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. 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.

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

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in the brightest colors. 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.

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. 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

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


30 Schroeder, "To Missouri," p. 6.
populations in Europe. 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. 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. The wave crested in 1881 when 1.3 million Germans

31Billington, Land of Savagery, pp. 69-72.
32Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 64.
left their home country. Late nineteenth century emigrants came predominantly from the lower classes, who fled the economic consequences of industrialization and the demise of agricultural production. 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. Keil's quest for escape from contemporary political debate led him to carry excerpts from dime novels, especially Westerns. The Gartenlaube was considered progressive in its time, but it reflected the political weariness in Germany and its longing for a different land, for

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

35 Levine, Spirit of 1848, pp. 20-22.


a new society.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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.

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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,


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. 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.\footnote{Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, p. 14; for conflicts see ibd., pp. 35-36.} 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.\footnote{Doerry, "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.}

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.\footnote{Billington, Land of Savagery, p. 47.} 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.\footnote{Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, p. 34.} Given the widespread distribution
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


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.  

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. 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  

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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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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


\textsuperscript{50}Ashliman, "Novel of Western Adventure," p. 136


\textsuperscript{52}Quoted 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, 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."

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,

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53 May'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


anthropological details made them appear authentic. 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. 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. 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 smoothened 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. May's characters and their actions corroborate this


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-orientied entertainment industry, tried to legalize their traditional values.

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


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,

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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.

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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


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

The most recent work about Cody's show is Sarah Blackstone's *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business*, 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). Among the Europeans, Germans cheered the loudest; apparently, the dime novel tradition had prepared them well.

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

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

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. 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. 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

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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.
it, and that pleases twice as much.

Here, the Romantic legacy, finding truth in nature, shone through. Repeatedly, writers revelled about the wildness of the show, something they were missing in their daily lives.

Cody's show supposedly attracted all classes. Many reports cite the enthusiastic response of Europe's crowned heads, joining the Wild West craze of their subjects. At the same time, the warnings of several journalists, as well as the reaction of the Berlin police, which tried to prohibit open-air performances hint at the possibility that conservative authorities shunned the shows.

Another instance suggested that perhaps the lower classes valued the Wild West most, for its message of wilderness and liberty.

A poem in the "Carver Scrapbooks" followed the thoughts of a domestic servant in 1889 Berlin. She sneaked out to watch 'Doc' Carver's Wild-America Show touring Germany a year before Buffalo Bill. Seeing the show-grounds for the first time, she sighed "After all I am born for the 'wild,' and plain 'nature'

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

77 Tageblatt, Dresden, June 10, 1890, BB Cody Scrapbook, Germany 1890, BBHC.
deems me mockery." She drew a clear distinction between 'wild' and 'nature', which in the German sense did not extend to the American West. Freedom from social constraints distinguished wildness from nature. When the servant returned home, her employers were waiting, full of anger. They told the servant that her complexion was too nice for the Indians. Behind their anger stood upper-class fear of subversive ideas like equality, democracy, and freedom, featured in the Wild West Show.

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Buffalo Bill helped to cement an already existing habit of thinking about the American West in Germany. Starting with the Romantic love for nature and the primitive, America came to be seen as home of liberty and wildness in the eyes of Germans. Depending on the social and political position of the German spectator, this image of wildness occupied any place in the range of political agendas. The West incorporated the national-liberal hopes of the Forty-Eighters, lower-class dreams of independent landownership as well as Karl May’s quest for virtues in a pristine setting. Due to its remoteness, the West became a land of superlatives, the mountains were wilder, the people freer, and nature more

78"Aus Geheimrats-Jettes Selbstschrift," W.F. Cody Collection, Series IV E, Doc Carver Scrapbook, Oversize, Box 1. BBHC. Neither newspaper title, nor exact date available.
impressive. To emphasize their different perspectives, German image-makers extended and stretched the American West in every aspect.

By the time Yellowstone National Park was founded in 1872, the American West already had a long tradition as serving as a mirror for German problems. Just as travel writers, dime novel authors, and Buffalo Bill had manipulated images of the West to serve their purposes, so German visitors to Yellowstone represented the park in terms of their social and political convictions. While dime novel writers used the West to criticize Germany, Yellowstone travellers used their experience to celebrate tradition. Themes of anti-modernism, anti-civilization, and nature-reverence which German Romantics had made popular, were resumed by the scientists, artists, and writers, reflecting their upper middle-class position in and view on society.
WAYS OF SEEING YELLOWSTONE

Yellowstone National Park quickly acquired a place among German images of the American West. Only twenty-eight years after its founding in 1872, Yellowstone Park had attained fame in Germany as Franz Doflein, a Munich scientist, remarked in his travel book:

I do not want to repeat all the exclamations of delight about the beauty, and those of amazement about the natural wonders of the national park at the Upper Yellowstone; a sufficient number of competent and incompetent pens have already done that to the public.¹

Doflein's comment suggests that Yellowstone reports had become another ingredient in the ever-developing western myth in Germany. In the tradition of travel reports and dime novels, Yellowstone descriptions mirrored another class-specific reaction to new social forces and industrialization. Writers, artists, and scientists produced a picture of the West taken from an upper-middle-class view resenting industrialization and its side-effects. At the same time, the Park evoked in German visitors a nostalgia for untamed space which had been lost in Germany as a source for spiritual renewal.

In the four decades preceding the First World War a host of articles about America's first national park appeared in

German journals and periodicals. The principle popularizers of the park were quasi-scientific journals which started publishing articles about the park as early as 1871. Many of these were second-hand reports, based on the Washburn and Hayden expedition journals. Soon after that, the first travel writers, artists, and geologists began publishing their accounts of a Yellowstone trip. Endeavours to publicize Yellowstone peaked in the decades between 1871 and 1914.

Interest in Yellowstone sprang from Germans' love for nature which had been growing since the Romantics revived ancient fascination with primitivism and nature. As a result, by the 1870s, the Second German Reich had transformed the reverence for nature into a full-fledged agenda for nature protection. Nature conservation originated in a host of varying arguments. Romantics reasoned that humans needed nature as a mirror for self-reflection. With the growing

2 Family periodicals featuring easily comprehensible science reports were a phenomenon of the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until the 1920s. They reflected German society in the second half of the nineteenth century, its retreat into family and home (Biedermeier), the apolitical stance of the middle class after the faltered revolution of 1848, and the growing importance of education and science. Compare Zahn, "Geschichte der Gartenlaube," passim. An extensive discussion of family periodicals and the historical background is Dieter Barth, "Zeitschrift für Alle: Das Familienblatt im 19. Jahrhundert; ein sozialhistorischer Beitrag zur Massenpresse in Deutschland," (Ph.D. Diss.: University of Münster, Germany, 1974).

A few examples for Yellowstone articles in scientific and semi-scientific journals: Petermann's Geographische Mitteilungen 17, (1871), Globus 21 (1872), Deutsche Rundschau für Geographie und Statistik (February 1879), Die Natur 21 (1872), Die Gartenlaube 35 (1883), Vom Fels zum Meer 15 (1896) and 23 (1904); Mutter Erde 3, (1900).
environmental destruction through industrialization alternative voices like the medical doctor Max Pettenkofer, or the Garden City Movement (from 1902 on), underscored the importance of nature for human health.³ A third group, represented by early environmentalists like Max Nassauer and Ludwig Ankenbrand, supported a biocentric view, claiming that animals and plants had a right to be protected merely for their existence.⁴ Nationalistic arguments pervaded all those groups, in differing strength. These examples suggest that German environmentalism was far from being a monolithic movement, a diversity which is also reflected in the perceptions of American western nature.

Scholarly interest in natural sciences paralleled this rise of environmentalism. Natural history had its first advocate in Gilbert White, a pastor in a small community outside London, who started observing nature around his hometown during the late 1700s. Late in life, he published his observations in a collection of letters under the title *The Natural History of Selborne*. This work, according to Donald Worster, laid "the foundations for the natural history essay in England and America."⁵ Germany soon joined the endeavor to research natural history.

⁴Dominick, *Environmental Movement Germany*, pp. 30-33, 40.
One of the driving forces behind the rise of science in Germany was the renowned Prussian natural scientist and world traveller Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt's life-work consisted in seeking a holistic view of nature, which earned him the title of "pioneer in ecological biology," according to Worster. An eager traveller in his younger years, the older Humboldt tried to popularize natural sciences and natural history in the German states from the 1840s on. In 1845 Humboldt's Kosmos appeared as a yearly publication featuring articles about ethnographical and natural history issues. Kosmos became the forerunner for periodicals like Vom Fels zum Meer, Globus, and numerous other scientific journals.

The largest boost for science came from Charles Darwin's publications in the mid-1800s. Inspired by Humboldt's holistic world view, Darwin's theory of evolution quickly spread to Germany. German scientists developed Darwin's theory of evolution into the study of ecology. Simultaneously, science became more fashionable in the universities than philosophy and theology.


For development of natural sciences see Worster, Nature's Economy. Growing role of science especially in ch. 7.
At this time, when natural history and science were climbing to new heights of popularity in Germany, the United States government decided to preserve part of its still pristine West. After Henry D. Washburne and Ferdinand V. Hayden had described their expeditions to the Yellowstone region in 1870 and 1871, the U.S. Congress created Yellowstone as America's first national park. The creation of Yellowstone appealed to environmentally conscious Germans who had also developed a nostalgic fondness of the American West.

Thus, Yellowstone Park catered to a host of German interests. It served as a laboratory for scientists and became a natural library for travel writers who were interested in the cultural aspects of the American West. In Yellowstone, writers and scientists discovered an abundance of metaphors for German society. Behind natural phenomena they saw the hand of supernatural forces, of God, of fairies, and of demons. These pictures seemed another version of extremes featured in dime novels. The image of a long-gone wildness served as a

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9German geologists visiting Yellowstone often referred to the report of the Hayden expedition which had appeared in 1883. Although the observations are interesting, this thesis will focus on the aesthetic and cultural notions of all German visitors, whether scientists or writers. For instance, Emil Deckert, "Ein Ritt durch den Yellowstone-Park," Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin 14, no.3, (1887), p. 154; Franz Toula, "Der Yellowstone Nationalpark, der vulkanische Ausbruch auf Neu-Seeland und das Geysir-Phaenomen," Schriften des Vereines zur Verbreitung naturwissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse in Wien 27 (1886/87), p. 285; Gerhard vom Rath, [Yellowstone Park], Sitzung vom 7. Juni 1886, Sitzungsberichte der Niederrheinischen Gesellschaft für Natur-und Heilkunde zu Bonn, (Bonn: Max Cohen und Sohn, 1886), p. 196.
reminder that civilization had rivals in its quest for total
dominance.

In some respects, German nostalgia for wilderness lost
resembled responses of eastern Americans. John F. Sears has
argued in Sacred Places that American visitors travelled to
places like Yellowstone in search of religious experiences.
For both German and American tourists, Yellowstone signified
wilderness and wildness. Seeing the park enabled them to
return to daily life and to accept it.\textsuperscript{10} The difference between
the German and American experience was that it was American
wilderness, an American national treasure. Confronted with
America's wilderness preserve, Germans felt the loss of their
own natural treasures, which could have been an important
counterpoint to the advance of industrialization and
development.

The upper-middle and upper classes of German society,
including geologists, geographers, teachers, artists, and
professional travel writers, travelled across sea and prairies
to view this so-called "wonderland."\textsuperscript{11} Since only relatively
affluent Germans could afford rail travel and the expenses for
the trip through the park, the accounts reveal an elite

\textsuperscript{10}Sears, Sacred Places, ch. 7.

\textsuperscript{11}One German traveller mentions a description of
Yellowstone Park in a German Baedeker guide. This fact
suggests that Yellowstone had become a major sight for German
tourists by 1900; see Karl Tanera, Eine Weltreise: Reisebriefe
illustriert von Henny Deppermann, (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein
perspective, distinctly conservative in their emphasis on respect for old traditions.  

No exact numbers of German visitors are available. Neither hotel registers, nor entry numbers, nor travel agency records exist. However, several documents suggest that Germans visited the park frequently. One German teacher, who visited Yellowstone in 1904, estimated four years later, that by that point in time half of the park's visitors had been foreigners.  

Two years later, H. H. Hays, the passenger agent of the Wylie Company asked the superintendent of the park, Chester A. Lindsley, whether it was true that by 1896 more foreigners than Americans had visited the park. Lindsley admitted his ignorance of attendance figures, due to the lack of statistics. But he suggested that ten percent might be a more educated guess.  

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14H. H. Hays to Chester A. Lindsley, Jan. 3, 1910; Chester A. Lindsley to H. H. Hays, Jan. 10, 1910; in Letter Box: Laws and Regulations 1909-15, Item 103, Pre-File Records,
overseas clients. Driving the spikes across the continent proved to be an expensive venture, and the more customers, the better for the railroads, which often teetered on the brink of bankruptcy. On the occasion of the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1883, Henry Villard, president of the Northern Pacific Railroad, invited notable German and American guests to commemorate this event in a costly trip to the West. The European guest list reads like a Who's Who. Princes, newspaper correspondents, ministers, artists, and professors were asked to witness the event. Being a German immigrant himself, Villard invited his German guests on a special trip through Yellowstone park. In fact, Villard's excursion complemented former and future efforts of the Northern Pacific Railroad to establish and popularize the park.

The Park Improvement Company's Rufus Hatch rivalled Villard's efforts to attract foreign visitors. After his company had received a ten-year lease for running

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17 From 1886 on the name was changed Yellowstone Park Association.


accommodations in the park in 1883, Hatch toured the park with influential European guests.\textsuperscript{20} Hatch needed European investment as badly as the railroad to "improve" accommodations for tourists. Railroad and park company promoters turned Europeans' Romantic infatuation with the American West to their economic advantage. Although Villard and Hatch were eventually fired by their companies, their efforts helped to publicize the Park, both in America and in Europe.\textsuperscript{21} Together with national park superintendents they created a highly stylized park experience by the 1890s.

The road system and the accommodations offered by the concessionaires prescribed what the tourist would find in the Park. From 1883 on, the Northern Pacific Railroad transported the majority of tourists to Cinnabar, and later to the Gardiner station, only a few miles from the north entrance to the Park. A stagecoach brought them to Mammoth Hot Springs. After spending a half or full day in Mammoth, the loop would lead the visitors through the Golden Gate, along the Obsidian Cliff and Beaver Lake south to the bleak steaming stretch of the Norris Geyser Basin. The next day was reserved for the fountains and springs of the Lower, Middle, and Upper Geyser Basins. From there, the tour continued to Yellowstone Lake, and culminated in the sight of Falls and Grand Canyon of the


\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Haines, Yellowstone Story, I, p. 290.}
Yellowstone River. After this final crescendo, the second loop took the tourists back to Mammoth, after 1905 via Mount Washburn and the Tower Falls in the Northeast corner of the Park.

Despite occasional criticisms, the park never failed to fascinate the German visitors. Whether writers, scientists, or artists, the natural phenomena cast their spell. Regardless of personal preferences and dislikes, all groups revealed a fascination with the volcanic appearances and the wilderness itself, although none of the travellers found the sights soothing and lovely. The confrontation with pristine nature produced a nostalgic longing for undeveloped nature, coupled with regret over its loss in Germany. The visitors transposed the German antagonism between tradition and modernity onto Yellowstone Park, rendering the park an allegory about the goods and ills of their present society. By turning the park into a metaphor for the clash between old and new ways affluent Germans recapitulated one of the central plots of dime novels. Perceptions of Yellowstone mirrored the ways in which German writers, artists, and scientists saw German culture and society.

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The immense proportions of the West struck German travellers at first when approaching the Park. In Romantic
fashion, writers underlined both the beauty and sense of dread inspired by the enormity of western American spaces knowing that these natural wonders posed no real threat to them. The space of the American West in general, and the park in particular evoked ambiguous feelings in Germans. Writers associated space with freedom, but in the same breath stressed the perils of liberty. Only seemingly familiar alpine features found favor in the eyes of the travellers. The non-alpine terrain of the park interested Germans, but they never described it as beautiful. This conservative view of nature, shaped by traditional German nature aesthetics, mirrored their conservative outlook on society. Just as they wanted nature to look German, they wanted their German society to remain authoritarian and traditional.

Already the train ride across the plains towards the park opened a view on a landscape which was utterly un-German in its treeless infinity. A stagecoach ride from Billings, Montana, to the Park afforded Rudolf Cronau, an artist for the Gartenlaube, ample time to watch the Rockies emerge from the Plains. Both his drawings and his account of his 1882 trip depicted a landscape bigger than life that foreshadowed the nature of the park.

And, after another half-day ride, the rock giants began to grow mighty and mightier, the enormous ranges of the Snow- and Crazy-Mountains stretched their ragged, snowcovered ridges into the deep blue sky; a most magnificent wildness formed the prologue to the gigantic poem [Yellowstone] crafted of those beauties and peculiarities of nature, which lie in the midst of these giant bodies beyond the clouds.
[Und nach einer weiteren halbtägigen Fahrt, da wuchsen die Felskolosse mächtig und immer mächtiger empor, die ungeheuren Ketten der Snow- und Crazy-Mountains reckten ihre Zackigen, schneeüberlagerten Joche in das tiefe Himmelsblau hinein; eine Wildheit großartigsten Styles bildete den Prolog zu dem gewaltigen Dithyrambus jener Naturschönheiten und Natureinzigkeiten, welche inmitten dieser Gigantenleiber in wolkenentückter Höhe liegen.]

Cronau merged several images into one; the wildness of the West, the size of its mountains, and Yellowstone's treasures awaiting him. All had a common feature: largeness. The artist saw the park and the West through magnifying glasses. Geysers, mountains, and forests metamorphosed into a giant's land, bigger than Brobdingnag in Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels.

The space of the American West could be frightening. The impressive expanse of the Rocky Mountains tempted Cronau to enlarge it to such an extent that it heightened his own concern about facing uncontrollable powers. Vast space and power evoked the illusion of freedom, but also meant a loss of security. For his German audience, the message was clear. However confining Germany might be, Germans should appreciate the security it offered.

Udo Brachvogel, a contributor to the Gartenlaube, affirmed Cronau's sense of the West. They might have been travel companions, since both referred to a trip in 1882. In addition, Cronau's sketches adorn Brachvogel's article in an

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1883 Gartenlaube issue. However, Brachvogel had emigrated to the United States, where he had become a journalist, friend of Carl Schurz, as well as a translator. Brachvogel echoed Cronau's sense of gigantism. Praising Yellowstone as the "biggest and most beautiful park in the world, Brachvogel presented the National Park in superlatives. The Mammoth Terraces were "mighty," and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone "grand" in all its respects."24

A. Kuntzemüller, a Gymnasium teacher, who visited the park in 1904, left a well-written, rather critical account, in which he warned his readers of his adjectives:

If I try in the following to write down some of my impressions, one may forgive me, if I might ceaselessly wallow in superlatives, and if I constantly use all close and distant relatives of words like 'magnificent,' 'splendid,' 'glorious.' [Und wenn ich im folgenden versuche, einige der dort gewonnenen Eindrücke zu Papier zu bringen; so möge man verzeihen, wenn ich mich vielleicht unaufhörlich in Superlativen ergehe und wenn ich alle nahen und weiten Verwandtschaften von Worten wie 'grossartig', 'prächtig', 'herrlich', zu Hilfe nehme.]25

According to Kuntzemüller, Yellowstone was the crown of the West, the climax of strangeness and, in terms of nature,

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25A. Kuntzemüller, Das Wunderland am Yellowstone, p. 31.
utterly magnificent. The absence of a similar nature reserve in Germany made him enlarge Yellowstone's dimensions.

Yellowstone's scenery did not appear different to geologists, despite their knowledge about its formation. Hermann Credner, a German geologist, travelled to Yellowstone in the late summer of 1891. Following a geology conference in Washington, D.C., American geologists took their international colleagues on a tour of America's natural wonders, including Yellowstone National Park. When his train climbed over the vast plains of Montana towards the Rockies, Credner saw a gigantic grey wall rising over the prairies. In his opinion, the Northern Rockies resembled the Alps more than the uniform mountain ranges of the Southern Rockies.26 Like travel writers and artists, Credner admired the size of the Northern Rocky Mountains, and used similar language.

Another case in point was Emil Deckert who toured the Park on horseback in 1886. A schoolteacher turned geographer, Deckert travelled widely in North America, which earned him in 1906 the prize for best knowledge about the United States.27 When Deckert travelled through Paradise Valley toward the Mammoth entrance of the Park he saw the following:


The rocks forming the mountains to the East belong to the archaic group. Different are the rocks which form the mountain range to the West, the Gallatin Mountains. First, these are paleozoic, later mesozoic strata rock, and occasionally, volcanic formations break out of those, rendering the scenery very wild and picturesque.

Deckert joined many scientists in effortlessly interweaving geologic observation with aesthetic judgement. Both Credner and Deckert valued the alpine face of Paradise Valley which reminded them of the European Alps. Their comments, however, indicated that their adulation for size was ambiguous, a reaction which they shared with writers, and artists.

That largeness was not equated with beauty became clear in Berlin doctor Julius Hirschberg's account. After terming the Great Plains 'hideous,' he offered one of the most sober descriptions of the Park. In his 1888 book Von New York nach San Francisco, Hirschberg discussed existing German Yellowstone literature, and found only two valuable reports, Zittel's and Deckert's. When Hirschberg saw the Yellowstone Falls, he remembered his journey towards the park.

The area [around the Falls] surpasses all expectations of the traveller, who, after all, has not been extremely spoilt by majestic natural beauties on the long way through Dakota and Montana. [Die Gegend übertrifft alle Erwartungen des Reisenden, der allerdings auf dem so langen Wege über Dacota und

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Montana durch majestätische Naturschönheit nicht gerade verwöhnt wurde.)

What Cronau had admired in terms of size, Hirschberg considered ugly. The contrast delineated the personal variances in German writers, whose profession certainly influenced their judgement. Expanse, however, produced in both writers uneasiness, whether expressed through awe or through plain rejection.

Better known than either Cronau or Hirschberg was Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, a well-known Austrian travel writer and geographer. He exulted in Yellowstone's size. In his eyes, Yellowstone represented an enlarged version of Switzerland, with its vast lake and pretty mountains. However, he called the Park and its geyser basins ungeheuer, meaning both enormous and eerie. His choice of the word ungeheuer confirmed the ambiguity German writers harbored towards fascinating largeness.

For Germans, there was a small step from ungeheuer to discomfort. Franz Doflein, a Munich zoologist, included a

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30Hesse-Wartegg was member of several geographical societies, which are cited on the front cover of his book: The Royal Belgian Geographic Society in Brussels, the German Athenaeum in London, the Imperial and Royal Geographic Society in Vienna, etc. Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, Nord-Amerika, seine Städte und Naturwunder, das Land und seine Bewohner, (Leipzig: Gustav Weigel, 1892, second edition). For biographical details see Deutsches Biographisches Archiv, edited by Bernd Fabian, (München: Saur-Verlag, 1982).

visit to Yellowstone on his world journey in 1898 which had been sponsored by the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. He dedicated his life not only to science, but also to writing novels, which is reflected in his account on Yellowstone's animal world and landscape. In Doflein's opinion, the mountains looked different than the Alps, and the "flats take up . . . a lot of space." The disparity between Alps and Rocky Mountains displeased even a scientist who claimed a holistic approach to nature.

Karl Tanera, a military officer turned travel writer, corroborated Doflein's judgement. Wandering around Yellowstone Lake he almost started to admire its resemblance to alpine lakes--when the low mountain ranges reminded him again that he was not home. Tanera maintained that they were too low.

Both the expanse and the shape of the Rocky Mountains disturbed German visitors throughout the decades. Geologists especially developed an aversion to the non-alpine characteristics of the peaks. Despite his admiration for the wildness of the Gallatin range, most of the mountain ranges on the way to the park struck Deckert as monotonous.

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34 Tanera, Eine Weltreise, p. 264.

feelings occurred to Zittel, when he summarized his impression of the North American continent. The well-known Munich geologist and guest in Villard's party, found that North America had a "simplicity . . . occasionally culminating in uniformity."\textsuperscript{36}

The absence of trees or bushes heightened the bleakness. Gerhard vom Rath, a renowned German mineralogist from Bonn, considered the area around Gardiner ugly.

The surroundings [of Gardiner] were (in September) quite withered and scorched despite the proximity of the mountains which, despite having partly beautiful shapes, convey hardly an attractive picture, due to their bare, rocky slopes.

[Die Umgebung war (im September) ganz dürr und versengt trotz der Nähe der Berge, welche zwar teilweise schöne Formen besitzen, doch wegen ihrer kahlen steinigen Hänge ein wenig anziehendes Bild gewähren.]\textsuperscript{37}

No matter how interesting the composition and stratification of the mountains was for these geologists, they developed a rather pronounced dislike for their appearance. New, un-Alp-like mountain shapes bewildered them.

Despite their refusal to adjust their aesthetic standards to a new environment, Germans approved the protection of nature. This yearning for wild space pervaded most German descriptions of Yellowstone, and coexisted with the discomfort concerning its expanse. By applauding the concept of a nature preserve, German visitors used the park to demonstrate to Germans what Germany had lost, and what it might have been,

\textsuperscript{36}Zittel, "Wunderland am Yellowstone," p. 3.

\textsuperscript{37}Rath, [Yellowstone Park], p. 206.
without its urbanization and industrialization. In a 1910 publication, writer Wolfgang von Garvens-Garvensburg marveled to his German audience about the wild(er)ness of the park which symbolized for him an utterly natural American West. As Germany became more industrialized and increasingly conservative on the eve of World War I, the value of undisturbed nature grew. Garvens-Garvensburg saw the landscape reflected in the majesty of Yellowstone's game.

Who does not recognize the gloomy, wrathful nature of the Rocky Mountains in the shape of the grizzly (ursus horribilis), which looks like a clumsy, unfinished rock; it looks like these massive, huge, and enormous rock ridges, clad in a shaggy fur of dark pine forests. And is there a more splendid image for the calm soul of the magnificent, mysterious pristine forests than the sacred deer . . . ?

[Wer erkennt nicht in der rauhen und ruppigen, schwerfälligen Gestalt des Grizzlybären (Ursus horribilis), der von weitem wie ein plumper, unbehaunter Felsblock scheint, die düstere, grimme Natur der Rocky Mountains wieder, jener wuchtigen, klotzigen, ungeheuerlichen Felsenrücken, die ein zottiger Pelz dunkler Nadelwälder umhüllt. Gibt es einen herrlicheren Ausdruck für die verschwiegene Seele der großartigen, geheimnisvollen Urwälder als das Wesen des geweihten Hirsches . . . ?]38

For Garvens-Garvensburg, the agile antelope reflected the freedom and endlessness of western prairies.39 A nostalgic tone colored his admiration for the wild animals of the West, as he reflected upon the few remaining German predators vegetating in zoos. Proportionately, western wildlife grew in size and wildness. The western myth found a new home in


Yellowstone Park, this last enclave of wild animals, wilderness, and wildness.

Due to its wildness, the American name "park" for Yellowstone was oxymoronic at best for German visitors. As Germans understood it, a park was a landscape shaped after the English park ideal, carefully manicured, in which trees, ponds, and creeks composed a pastoral idyll. Yellowstone certainly was not a park in the German sense since it consisted only of gigantic high plateaus, as the travelling nobleman Max von Zeppelin observed in 1895.40

Germany's earth scientists felt especially compelled to correct the name Yellowstone Park. Zittel declared: "One could not say that the designation park has been a fortunate choice for this primeval, almost peopleless, and largely forested high plateau."41 Zittel's statement symbolized the leap of faith Germans had to make when confronted with an utterly different nature. Even his colleague Credner, who, as a rule, praised the park, felt uncomfortable with the term 'park.'

The National Park!—In our common understanding we think of a park as a garden, in which lawns change with tree


stands in a harmonic manner and which are carefully managed. This is not even in the most remote sense what the name park means in the Rocky Mountains. As such one calls here the plateau-like basins between the parallel mountain ranges which form the mountain system—high plateaus with large expanse, mostly covered with pristine forest, lying at 2000, even 3000 meters above sea level, framed by mountains and being the origin of most of America's streams. Such a park is the national park.


Credner elaborated on what Zittel had hinted: the American West was too wild for German upper-middle-class taste. Unlike the lower classes, who saw in the Wild West shows attractive wild nature, conducive to liberty and escape, educated upper-middle-class Germans bowed to authority, and resented the concept of wild nature. Thus, they spread a perspective of the West that was ideologically charged at its core.

Yellowstone Park fell victim to all these aesthetic and social distinctions by German travellers. Their refusal to take western nature on its own terms was apparent in their reaction to Yellowstone's forest fires. For German visitors, the park's forest fires were repulsive and needed to be prevented. German visitors never stood so strong and united behind any judgement concerning the Park. Artists, writers,

42Credner, "National-Park am Yellowstone," p. 81.
and geologists condemned the withered and burnt stretches of pine forest which already characterized the park in the late 1800s and early 1900s.\(^4^3\)

In 1883, Rath noticed the stretches of burnt forest in the Firehole area. He was busy observing mineralogical points of interest along the continental divide. He discerned the coincidence of a lava flow and the dead trees.

Perhaps this mysterious streamlike lava flow is somehow related to those forest fires, which have been devastating the 'park' in such a destructive manner. Over a distance of several German miles we did not see any green trees, but only black [verkohlte] burnt stems. [Vielleicht steht die räthselhafte stromähnliche Schlackenmasse in irgend einer Beziehung zu Waldbränden, welche den "Park" in furchtbarer Weise verheeren. Auf einer Strecke von mehreren d. Ml. erblicken wir keine grünen Bäume, sondern nur schwarze verkohlte Stämme.\(^4^4\)]

Rath's scientific interest did not prevent him from perceiving the striking differences in nature. German understanding of nature stopped at the borders of a carefully harvested, lush forest.

Julius Hirschberg, touring in 1887, simply could not comprehend Yellowstone's management policies. While he was travelling from Mammoth to Norris, the numbers of dead trees

\(^4^3\)Only the writers who preferred to paint the park in glowing terms, omitted any mention of burnt forest. Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg is a case in point. Where Rath saw stretches of dead trees in the Upper Firehole area in 1883, Hesse-Wartegg found lush forest in 1878. Whether the forest burnt in the intervening years remains unclear. Striking, however, is the fact, that all German writers, except for Hesse-Wartegg, talk about burnt or withered pine trees. Apparently, the professional intent made here a difference. See Hesse-Wartegg, Nordamerika, p. 239.

\(^4^4\)Rath, [Yellowstone Park], p. 195.
struck him as "unusual and embarrassing." He continued to say that "forest fires have raged awfully," and that there was a horrible mess of stems lying criss-crossed along the roads. As a German, he missed an ordering hand. "Hopeless is this lack of any reasonable forest management," he exclaimed.45

Yellowstone's blackened forests irritated German observers. In 1893, the actor Otto Sommerstorff was confronted with "fields of tree corpses" around the Falls of the Yellowstone.46 Five years later, the zoologist Doflein, searched for an explanation for this phenomenon, suggesting that the roots might have hit poison-layers in the ground.47 The professional traveller Kirchhoff, ran into "tree skeletons" throughout the park, in 1900.48 Four years later, Eckstein mentioned again the burnt forest.49

Paul Lindau, a Berlin journalist visiting in the early 1890s, expressed disgust. "The repulsive spectacle of the gigantic forest fires with the . . . black tree stems and the weather-bleached tree corpses . . ., we also have to see it

45Hirschberg, Von New York nach San Francisco, p. 86.
46Sommerstorff, Im Wunderreich der Neuen Welt, p. 88.
Like other Germans, whether geologists, writers, or artists who were repulsed by Yellowstone's "corpses," Lindau found an unmanaged forest utterly incomprehensible. Even two decades later travel writer Tanera encountered the same circumstances which he termed "spruce-funeral-place." The instances of German disapproval are endless. They expressed regret, anger, and melancholy in the face of burnt forest stands in Yellowstone Park. Coming from a humid Germany with lush and managed forests, which had been the pride of Germans for centuries, Yellowstone's naturally meager or dead pine trees stretched German upper-middle-class appreciation for nature to its limits. 'Good' nature had to bear an arcadian, lovely face to be considered 'natural.' In the forest, German and American ideas about conservation separated.

In final observations about the park, this distinction between 'good' German-like nature and 'bad' uncivilized American nature became evident. Whether in their introduction or in their final comments, German visitors tried to summarize their view of Yellowstone. Invariably they mentioned the park's interchanging features shedding light on the confines of German love for nature. Cronau, for instance, marvelled at


51Tanera, *Eine Weltreise*, p. 263.
the surprising changes between wild and lovely landscapes.\textsuperscript{52} His words reveal that wild nature was considered fascinating, but not beautiful in the traditional sense. Regardless of their profession, Germans drew clear aesthetic distinctions. German-like features fared far better than Yellowstone's unique characteristics. Hesse-Wartegg summarized his impression of Yellowstone accordingly.

Indeed, it is impossible to roam only a mile in this wondergarden without seeing some peculiarity of nature; this garden seems to be equally favored by good and bad ghosts and one would travel hundreds of miles in the Old World, just to see one of those curiosities. [Es ist in der That unmöglich, auch nur eine Meile weit in diesem anscheinend von den guten und bösen Geistern gleich begünstigten Wundergarten umherzuschweifen, ohne auf irgend eine Naturmerkwürdigkeit zu stoßen, die zu sehen, man in der alten Welt Hunderte von Meilen reisen würde.\textsuperscript{53}]

Haunted by spirits, Yellowstone was both heaven and hell, an impression which fits this author's flowery style.

Tanera clad Hesse-Wartegg's surprise and enthusiasm in more sober colors. As Hesse-Wartegg, the former officer Tanera considered himself a poetic soul, however, the Park did not enrapture him. Looking back, he stated that his "mind had gained, but not heart and soul."\textsuperscript{54} Of course, he added, the Park might really please scientists, not poets. Tanera misjudged German scientists as non-aesthetics.

\textsuperscript{52}Cronau, \textit{Im wilden Westen}, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{53}Hesse-Wartegg, \textit{Nord-Amerika}, p. 241-42.

\textsuperscript{54}Tanera, \textit{Eine Weltreise}, p. 274.
To the contrary, earth scientists seemed most explicit in their aesthetic judgement. Zittel's summary of the park was anything but laudatory. He found neither "blissful calmness," "grace," nor loveliness in Yellowstone. This park was merely strange.55 His fascination with space and natural phenomena thinly veiled his discomfort.

In sum, German upper-middle-class visitors perceived Yellowstone and the West differently than German dime novelists. They did not want to stay, but to return home. Geologist Max Wilhelm Meyer breathed a sigh of relief for himself and his audience when he left the park.

By now, we have deciphered what we could read in this big new continent about the history of its destiny, and we feel the urge to go back to our beloved home, whose landscape attractions we might enjoy with much more understanding after this excursion. [Was wir in ihm auf jenem großen, neuen Erdtheile von der Geschichte ihrer Lebensschicksale zu lesen vermochten, haben wir nun entziffernt, und es drängt uns zurück nach der lieben Heimath, deren landschaftliche Reize wir nach dieser Studienreise wohl vielfach verstandnisvoller genießen werden.]

He returned home, with renewed conviction that his homecountry offered one of the world's nicest landscapes. The trip through this strange park had been an important rite of passage for him, strengthening his appreciation for his homecountry.

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The travellers' perceptions of Yellowstone contain a negative vision of the American West. From the safe distance of Germany, the Wild West looked fascinating and many dreams were projected onto it. The longing for 'real' nature, for space, and for wildness, elements lacking in Germany, manifested itself in the demand for western literature and travel accounts. Travel writers complied with this demand, and fulfilled the expectations of finding a truly "wild" West in a gigantic land. At the same time, these qualities shook the security of a well-ordered society. In stressing the discomforts of Yellowstone, the travel writers underscored their conservative attitudes, supporting the traditional order of German society. Subtly, this message transferred into the visitors' ideas about society; if space signified liberty, it signified the dangers of a democratic, liberal society. Yellowstone reports took their readers to the West only for a refreshing outing which firmly corroborated traditional German values.
The first and final impressions of Germans visiting Yellowstone Park often stressed the unsettling nature of the American West. However, between the first and last sight, Yellowstone's natural phenomena offered a series of lessons to Germans which they willingly carried home as spiritual enrichment. Several sights in the park served particularly as moral instructors: the Mammoth Terraces, the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and Yellowstone's geysers. While German writers, artists, and geologists alike realized the limits of human art and assumed a stance of humility in their descriptions of the Terraces and Falls, bowing in front of nature's artistry, they recoiled from the factory-like quality of the geysers. In any case, Yellowstone's features replied to German problems.

On the stagecoach ride from Gardiner to the U.S. Army headquarters at Mammoth, the scenery still seemed alpine. Only Mount Everts, to the northeast of the settlement, with its deepcut ruts and red-brownish stripes looked slightly odd. When the coach drove down into the Mammoth basin something unreal emerged before the eyes of the travellers. The
travertine terraces of Mammoth Hot Springs rose some 200 feet high above the settlement, blinding the tourists with their whiteness.

Rudolf Cronau, the artist visiting in 1882, saw a mythical city emerging.

Three miles long, half a mile wide, the gigantic, dazzlingly white formations of these hot springs, which resemble a suddenly petrified waterfall, move down between high, forested mountain ridges; they fill the whole valley, forming a strange contrast to the dark pine forests around them.

The artist was not only delighted by the dark-light contrast, but by nature's artistic capabilities. A few lines later he observed that human hands produced "pathetic work," if one compared it with the "fantastic wonder edifice of nature." More than other travel writers, Cronau felt the limits of his own skills when he saw the terraces. In his opinion, any rendition would distort reality. His own enlarged drawings of the terraces revealed how impressed he was with nature's artwork. Nature took humans to their limits.

The journalist Paul Lindau repeated Cronau's sentiments. The well-known columnist, friend of Henry Villard and participant of his 1883 excursion, traveled a second time to Yellowstone in 1891 or 1892. Lindau and his friends stood awed

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1Cronau, *Im wilden Westen*, p. 169.
in front of the terraces. "We see the first 'terraces', buildings with such a beauty and grace, with such a splendor of colors, that one imagines an artist's masterpiece." The colors captured most of Lindau's attention. Like Cronau, he thought that an artist would never be able to create a true representation of the colors; a good reason to admonish readers to revere nature.

Cronau's companion, Brachvogel, fully shared the feeling of humility evoked by the terraces. As Brachvogel exclaimed: nature was an artistic wizard, assembling the "most delicate, the fairest, and most graceful" components to create a "fairy-tale of beauty." Both he and Cronau saw the hands of "titanic artists" at work in shaping the terraces and declared that human beings should fall on their knees and worship them. Nature was to be worshipped, Brachvogel proclaimed, because it was a superior power.

German earth scientists interpreted the terraces in the same way as writers and artists. Karl Zittel knew that the terraces consisted of "limestone carbonate," but they represented much more:

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4The perception did not change over the next two decades. In 1904 the schoolteacher A. Kuntzemüller expressed awe at the sight of the terraces. Calling the terraces a masterly creation, Kuntzemüller linked nature to God and its creation. See Kuntzemüller, *Das Wunderland am Yellowstone*, p. 33.
As a fantastic miracle structure the real spring mound rises 300 to 400 feet behind the first terrace, up the mountain slope. Like being formed by an ingenious artist's hand, step follows step, none completely resembling another one and, still, all having a certain uniform face . . . . Since some of these basins protrude sometimes in a semi-circle, sometimes recede, and sometimes touch each other or are separated through clefts, and because the walls, consisting of white limestone tuff, which is grapelike structured—almost like icing, often swell in their center, and because the walls are often supported through a forest of columns, lovely stalactites, the whole structure receives an admirable variety . . . . Trembling, silvery steam clouds rise from the deep blue or light green crystal floods, and their splendid coloring and clarity defies any description.


In his scientific explanation of the Terraces Zittel allowed for an invisible artistic hand in their building. He was not alone. Gerhard vom Rath, travelling in the same year as Zittel, and an equally renowned scientist, felt his eyes were "touched in the most agreeable way," when he glanced at the terraces for the first time.6

6Rath, "[Yellowstone Park]," p. 200.
Berlin geologist Max Wilhelm Meyer stressed the natural other-worldliness of the terraces. A fine line divided his description from a religious ode to the superiority of nature.

A giant stairs, as built of gems! Shining colors play in the oddly shaped steps, and from big basins, in which deep blue water is steaming, water is trickling down over the miracle structure, sparkling, and dazzling. The hot spring has built this miracle structure on the highest of these steps over thousands of years from materials, which it brought from the dark interior of the earth to the light of day, so that we can enjoy its delightful colors. [Eine Riesentreppe, wie aus Edelsteinen aufgebaut! Leuchtende Farben umspielen die grotesk ausgestalteten Stufen, und aus großen Wannen, in denen azumes Wasser dampft, rieselt es glitzernd und flimmernd hinab über den Wunderbau, den sich die heiße Quelle auf der höchsten dieser Stufen im Laufe der Jahrtausende aus den Materialien errichtet hat, die sie aus dem dunklen Schooose [sic] der Erde ans Licht des Tages mit empornahm, damit wir heute an diesen köstlichen Farben uns entzücken können.]

Meyer cherished nature because it delighted humans, not as a value in itself.

Cherishing nature entailed respect for the given natural and social order, a perspective that lent stability to the authoritarian Second German Reich. German visitors to Yellowstone Park felt the need to remind their readers that natural forces like the Terraces excelled human powers and taught important lessons about humility to a society that believed in technological progress.

Descriptions of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone only intensified the lesson in humility. Feelings of almost religious reverence overflowed in descriptions left by German

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travellers. In their eyes, nature had assembled all its artistic skills in this cataclysm. And, more significantly, Germans could appreciate this phenomenon aesthetically, since waterfalls were a familiar sight, and, in this case, only unfamiliar in proportion and colors.

Kuntzemüller summarized the feelings of other authors, when he wrote that the Falls were "beyond any description." He wandered to the brink of the Falls. Seeing an abyss which stunned him, he walked along the rim to Artist's Point which allowed a full view of the Falls and the colors of the canyon. Kuntzemüller could not marvel enough at it.

By and large, Sigmund Bergmann despised the organized tour through the park that he took in 1895. The founder of a German electric plant who had spent his formative years in New York with Thomas Edison, Bergmann regarded Yellowstone with thorough distance, until he and his travel companions started wandering along the rim of the canyon and the rapids. He recalled it as follows:

Like the legendary formations of Ariost's Roland's Rock, the sandstone towers rise and they glitter and shine in a fairy-tale-like play of colors. From the most delicate pink to a dark carmin red, in all shades of yellow, brown, and white, the sandwalls drop down into the river, which meanders like a small dark green ribbon through the gorge. The strange formation, the splendid play of

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8Kuntzemüller, Das Wunderland am Yellowstone, p. 40.

colors, the majestic silence — only interrupted by the sound of the falls and the screaming eagles — all this conveys a grandiose overall impression which even the American superlative cannot honor fully. For hours you stare at this wonderful scenery and you cannot tear yourself away from this magnificent picture.


The unusual sight allowed Bergmann and his readers to escape into mythology and fairy-tales.

The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone absorbed many German travellers. Oskar Eckstein found that the canyon had a "strange beauty," dwarfing the pleasant scenery of the park. In the opinion of Zeppelin, the canyon excelled any other sight on the North American continent. Geologists repeated the sentiments of writers and artists. Credner called the canyon a "gigantic gorge," whose colors evoked "amazed

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enchantment." Credner mentioned that the colors originated in the dissolution of the rhyolitic lava layer through which the river had cut, but the difference between the scientist's and writer's description consisted merely in the addition of scientific knowledge to a shared impression.

In some cases, a scientist would even exceed the glowing description of professional artists and writers. Meyer, the Berlin professor, provided one of the most adoring representations of the Falls and the Canyon.

Unconsciously we touch our foreheads, to make sure that we are not dreaming, for instance of those fairy-tale lands, in which our imagination used to roam in children's days, and where it was easy to create houses of rubins, trees of silver and gold, rocks of diamonds. [Wir greifen unwilkerlich nach unserer Stirn, um uns zu vergewissern, dass wir nicht traumen, etwa von jenen Märchenländern, in denen zur Kinderzeit unsere Phantasie sich erging, wo es uns noch ein leichtes war, Häuser aus Rubinen, Bäume aus Silber und Gold, Felsen aus Diamanten zu schaffen.]

Meyer deemed it necessary to appeal to the imagination of his readers to win receptive ears for his geologic observations which followed. Indeed, the aesthetic part of his description may well have consumed the better part of his audience.

In nature's triumph, aesthetics merged with religion. Many travellers found validation for the existence of God. Kuntzemüller recognized the "forming hand of the Creator" in

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13Credner, "National-Park am Yellowstone," p. 84.
14Meyer, Wunderland, pp. 48-49.
the red and yellow tinted sand walls of the canyon.\textsuperscript{15} It was only a small step from nature’s to God’s artistry. In good Romantic tradition, writers discovered a divine purpose behind nature.

The Romantic heritage, however, had also prepared Germans to expect and enjoy demonic forces. The journalist Lindau, for example, chose words of awe and fright to describe the Canyon. "It is the colors of joy which we see. And precisely those evoke more than anything else an impression of the most powerful melancholy, of the uncanny wildness, of the awful, and gruesome."\textsuperscript{16} But, this work of art had been created by a master of technology, as Lindau had written earlier.\textsuperscript{17} His description melted divine and demonic imagery into an overpowering picture to instill humility and awe in his readers.

Three Germans found the devil in the canyon. Cronau and Brachvogel, the 1882 visitors, imagined demons and caught a glimpse of the underworld when they were wandering along the rim of the canyon. The area was a realm of conflict, death, and destruction.

And now, where this witches’ sabbath roared in its wildest sounds, the narrow rockbed suddenly opened up, and the waters tossed themselves 140 feet down into a gruesome giant gorge; while its sinister walls were shaking from the assault of the enormous masses of water

\textsuperscript{15}Kuntzemüller, \textit{Das Wunderland am Yellowstone}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{16}Lindau, \textit{Altes und Neues}, p. 305.
\textsuperscript{17}Lindau, \textit{Altes und Neues}, p. 214.
The noise became more and more powerful, and the roar sounded increasingly eerie, but light was already falling into the spruce-covered gorge, when, all of a sudden, another abyss opened -- and the underworld yawned there to swallow the river.

[Und nun, wo dieser Hexensabbath am wildesten toste, that es sich jählings auf, das enge Klippenbett, und hundert- und vierzig Fuß warfen die Wasser sich hinab in einen grausigen Riesenspalt, dessen finstere Wände von der Wucht der riesigen Wassermassen erbebten . . . . Immer mächtiger und mächtiger wurde das Toben, immer unheimlicher hallte das Brausen, schon ward es Licht in der fichtenüberhangenen Schlucht, schon tanzten die erregten Fluten freier, da plötzlich that sich auf's Neue die Tiefe auf -- es klaffte die Unterwelt, um den Strom zu verschlingen.]

A most hideous coloring completed this dark picture. Bloody spots covered the walls, interspersed with a foul-smelling sulphurous yellow, and yellow-greenish liquids. The canyon was so demonically fascinating, that Cronau had a hard time leaving.

Brachvogel echoed the artist's impressions. He found the Grand Canyon to be the eeriest sight, ungeheuerlichsten, full of uncanny contrasts. For him, Dante Alighieri's vision of the underworld came true, right before his eyes.

Interestingly, only one geographer felt a demonic presence in the Canyon. Deckert, to whom Hirschberg had ascribed strange aesthetic judgement, perceived a "demonic beauty." He discovered the same startling colors as Cronau. Whether one of these copied from another remains unclear.

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18Cronau, _Im wilden Westen_, pp.183-84.


20Hirschberg, _Von New York nach San Francisco_, p. 78.
What was the sum of the canyon's appeal? It would reverse the angle of vision on the achievements of modern industrial society. Together with the Mammoth Terraces the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone caused German visitors to ponder the achievements and capabilities of humans. In both instances, writers, artists, and geologists came to similar conclusions: nature had powers superior to humans, and this was so comforting because the human element--industrialization--was seen as so unsettling. Like religion, nature taught morals through superior powers. Yellowstone's geysers only reinforced this impression, especially with regard to industrial progress.

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As imposing as they were, the terraces and the canyon only framed stranger wonders. The geysers, Yellowstone's trademark, stimulated the imagination of Germans in a different way than the calmness of terraces and canyon. The Mammoth terraces changed over the years, with some springs drying out, and others emerging in the forest, slowly strangling living trees. When it came to geysers, nature did not conceal its powers that subtly. German visitors were duly impressed, but did not consider geysers beautiful. Rather they described geysers in terms serving anti-technological and anti-modernist notions. Only the placid hot springs received
aesthetic praise. Across the professions, German visitors linked their aesthetic rejection of geysers to the dislike for industrial society. They seemed uncomfortable with the groundbreaking changes of the nineteenth century and voiced their concerns about modern society in descriptions of the park. In the guise of popular scientific literature, the writers sent a conservative message, apparent in their treatment of Yellowstone's geysers.

The first geysers encountered by tourists on the usual tour through the park were those in the Norris Geyser Basin. Some twenty miles southwest of Mammoth Hot Springs, the long stretches of burnt and green forest opened their cover for the bleak clearing of the basin. Cronau, one of the first Germans in the park in 1882, made the trip on horseback. The Norris Basin stunned him. With its steaming holes it appeared like a gigantic furnace. For Cronau, the geyser basins topped the already impressive vastness with the bewitching apparition of steaming holes. That those holes would reach into the interior of the earth, sent a shiver down Cronau's back. Even from a distance, the geyser basins conveyed an idea of uncontrollable nature.

The eerie feeling that had overcome Cronau also seized Hesse-Wartegg. Approaching the geyser areas, he used a host of adjectives, denoting 'big,' 'grand,' and 'gigantic.' However,

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21 Cronau, *Im wilden Westen*, pp. 174-75.
he felt that he had to convey the geyser phenomenon in mythological terms.

Here, in the surroundings of this lake lie the most impressive and strangest geysers of the world, excelling those of Iceland and New Zealand in every respect. The most miraculous and most supernatural region is the valley of the upper Madison River, which is also appropriately called Firehole River . . . . The springs bear the same diabolic face as the witches' cauldron in Macbeth, and if only Hecate and her wild band were there, this creation of poetic imagination would become reality. [Hier in der Umgebung dieses Sees befinden sich die großartigsten und merkwürdigsten Geyser der Welt, selbst jene von Island und Neuseeland in jeder Hinsicht übertreffend. Die wunderbarste, übernatürlichste Region ist das Thal des oberen Madisonflusses, dem man den wohlverdienten Name Feuerlochfluß gegeben . . . . Die Quellen haben dasselbe diabolische Aussehen, wie der Hexenkessel in Macbeth, sie bedurften nur der Gegenwart Hecates und ihrer wilden Bande, um diese Schöpfung poetischer Phantasie zu verwirklichen.]

The geysers belonged to a different world, and Greek mythology served well to produce a sense of unreality. Oswald Schroeder, a travelling German artist, echoed Hesse-Wartegg's impressions. When he saw the Norris Geyser Basin for the first time, he thought he was entering the realm of death. The geyser areas reminded German visitors of the unpleasant or frightening sides of human existence, of human inability to control life and death.

The colors of the Norris Basin, so delightful in the Mammoth Terraces, deepened the sense of death and destruction.

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22Hesse-Wartegg, Nord-Amerika, p. 238.
Hesse-Wartegg's eyes were disturbed by the bright reds, and the pale milk-whites. Hirschberg resumed the color theme. "The content of the [boiling springs] shows the strangest colors, from snow-white over sulphurous yellow to pitch black." The steam completed the image of weirdness. "Steam clouds and sulphurous waves rise from the ground, just as our forefathers imagined the entry to hell." Combined with the underground rumbling, the impression amounted to a perfect image of hell. The Norris Basin was anything but a representation of benevolent nature.

Germans quickly linked their impressions of hell to industry. When Lindau looked at the Norris Geyser Basin in the early 1890s, he felt at home. The journalist wrote "the enormous geyser basin of Norris" afforded a "sight . . . resembling that of a gigantic factory town." In fact, Lindau saw himself looking down upon the industrial cities of the German Wupperthal. A few pages on, Lindau reiterated his impressions in mythological terms, likening the Norris Basin to the workshop of Volcan and his helpers, the Cyclopes. Lindau correlated demonic imagery clearly to the sight of factories.

24 Hesse-Wartegg, Nord-Amerika, p. 238.
26 Hirschberg, Von New York nach San Francisco, p. 90.
27 Lindau, Altes und Neues, p. 238.
28 Lindau, Altes und Neues, p. 244.
Kirchhoff, the all-knowing world traveller, similarly mythologized the park in industrial terms. The Norris Geyser Basin appeared to him simply like a chemical factory. "The first sight of this dirty-white flat which is covered with sinter . . . appears as if a multitude of chemical factories would function here."²⁹

The judgement by geologists was similar. Whether the sober Zittel, or the colorful Meyer, all likened the sight of the Norris Basin to factories. Zittel obviously disliked what he saw.

As if rising from hundred chimneys steam clouds rise everywhere from this gigantic witches' cauldron, and also the slopes and the neighboring plateau are covered with steam springs and geysers.

[Wie aus hundert Essen steigen Dampfwolken allenthalben aus diesem gewaltigen Hexenkessel auf und auch die Abhänge sowie das angrenzende Plateau sind mit Dampfquellen und Geysirn besetzt.]³⁰

Deckert repeated almost verbatim Zittel's words, three years later.³¹ And so did Credner, another five years later, commenting that his first inclination was to think of factories.³² Most of these images of machines in the wilderness were followed by adjectives expressing fear and rejection. Geologists seemed to be as uncomfortable with

³⁰Zittel, "Wunderland am Yellowstone," p. 17.
³¹Deckert, "Ritt durch Yellowstone-Park," p. 164.
³²Credner, "National-Park am Yellowstone," p. 86.
factories as travel writers and artists. And Yellowstone mercilessly recalled industrial images.

What some clad in many words, Tanera summarized in two. Contrasting his impressions of Yellowstone with Yosemite, the former received the label "not enchanting." Because it reminded him of a natural factory, the Park could never please his senses. Geysers, like factories, steamed, smelled, and unnerved observers, but there was a crucial difference. Something other than human hands had constructed Yellowstone's geysers. And those dwarfed any industry, thus proving in the eyes of German travellers that nature still surpassed any human technological achievements.

The demonic power of nature prevailed in Germans' descriptions of the geysers. Demons were everywhere, blowing steam, or throwing water out of their mysterious holes. The geyser cones were "enormous pots with an infernal face, endlessly deep." The eruption of Castle Geyser convinced Hesse-Wartegg that the "furies of the demonic world" participated in this spectacle. The roaring sound which accompanied the eruption, completed the hellish impression. It sounded like a "thunderstorm in the devil's gorge." Hesse-Wartegg's description foreshadowed the most salient points in German accounts, namely emotions of awe, fear, and rejection.

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34Hesse-Wartegg, Nord-Amerika, p. 238.
Demons took Cronau by surprise, when he and his companions were wandering across the Upper Geyser Basin. Suddenly, their guide told them that Beehive Geyser was about to erupt:

For a moment, it was utterly calm; then a low rolling sound started under our feet, which resembled the digging, pounding, and pushing of a gigantic machine in the interior of the earth. The ground began to tremble and to shake; another moment -- and with an awful sound and a demonic scream a powerful jet of water was ejected, roaring, hissing, and sparkling it hurried towards the sky, like a Titan who intended to destroy the throne of the Olympic god.

In the artist's eyes, the eruption of Beehive represented the awful side of nature. The demonic imagery suggested that Germans could not fit geyser eruptions into their nature aesthetics. They needed to genuflect before awful natural powers.

Hirschberg provided a meticulous description of most geysers and their respective eruption habits. For the majority of geysers, the doctor used a mixture of positive and negative terms. Beehive geyser, for instance, showed him an eruption which was both "wonderful and utterly odd." A similar

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aesthetic ambiguity characterized his image of Splendid Geyser's eruption. He witnessed a "splendid as well as powerful eruption, which ended in a true rain of diamonds." Hirschberg voiced less unease than Cronau, but the geyser's weird noises appeared eerie to him. Of all German writers, Lindau expressed most succinctly the effect of geysers on Germans when he described "geysers developing dreadfully their most beautiful violence and power." Ambiguity marked Germans' fascination with geysers.

Geologists were as split as their literary fellow-travelers. Emil Deckert, who observed many eruptions from his horse in 1886, saw Fountain Geyser erupting. At first, he called it an eruption "which cannot be imagined any more marvellous." A few lines down the same page, his impression had changed, he wrote that "a lake in a storm is wild, but this play is even much wilder." One of his geology colleagues, often departing from Deckert in aesthetic judgement, sided with him in describing Fountain Geyser. Credner witnessed the eruption of this geyser in 1891. The fan spreading before his eyes was truly wonderful, but how could he describe the sight? It was a "true battle of boiling jets of water . . . a true gigantomania!"

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41 Credner, "National-Park am Yellowstone," p. 88.
One geyser defied the aesthetics of all Germans, Excelsior Geyser in the Midway Geyser Basin. This geyser, inactive until 1878, photographed by F. Jay Haynes in the 1880s, ceased its major eruptions in 1890. Without exception, German visitors agreed that this geyser represented the sum of awfulness. Hardly any of the Germans witnessed an eruption, but Excelsior Geyser led an exciting life in second-hand descriptions. Apparently, nature's powers, manifested in Excelsior, evoked in every German a romantic fascination with the awful, which reaffirmed their preference for 'kind' nature.

As dime novel writers had toyed with the dangers awaiting humans in the wilderness, German travellers played with the thrill of danger in Yellowstone. Otto Sommerstorff, an actor who accompanied the geologist Max Wilhelm Meyer, referred to a "hellish spectacle" of geyser eruptions. In 1900, Kirchhoff, recalled former accounts, which described the Excelsior eruption as a "demonic spectacle." It was precisely the demonic quality that made Excelsior so interesting, as Lindau recognized: "... the depth of this witches' cauldron, where water and fire are mingling, where it is surging, boiling,

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roaring, and hissing, exerts an irresistible attraction on us." Lindau and travel companions felt compelled to look into the "awful depth."

Cronau, the ever-eloquent artist, called Excelsior the "most eerie phenomenon of the park." He was one of the few to witness an eruption of Excelsior, and apparently, he barely survived.

And now the boiling water reached the top of hell's gorge, gigantic, foaming waves licked up to the plateau, only to fall back into the witches' cauldron. And now, all of a sudden, we saw to our horror that all the water rose in one mass and that it rose in powerful jets up to 300 feet. Rocks, the size of a head, were thrown out and gigantic steam clouds were lifted up. Turning pale, we had fled from the immediate vicinity of the geyser, and now we stood, stiff with horror to watch this awful spectacle . . .; the air was filled with a howl and a buzz . . .; powerful eruptions, like the thunder of heavy artillery, made the ground tremble and they reminded us that we were exposed to the moods of awful elements, that we could be helpless victims in the next minute.


Cronau simultaneously experienced self-humiliation and blissful helplessness as he watched Excelsior erupting. He explored the limits of life, extreme sensations reasserting nature's power and human insignificance. Not unlike dime novel writers, many travel writers toyed with the life-threatening quality of western nature and its destructive potential. Natural liberty, it seemed, was positively terrifying.

The idea of a gigantic, frightening geyser also captured geologists. None of them witnessed the eruption of Excelsior themselves, but everyone described it to their readers. Zittel, one of the earliest geologists to visit the park, broke his habit of using language sparingly, and erupted in words. Lindau, who knew Zittel from the Villard excursion in 1883, remarked that even the distinguished scientist Zittel was awed by Excelsior geyser. The Munich professor adapted a description from a German St. Louis newspaper, which amounted to the following representation.

The lake eventually started a wild surging. It almost reached the fringe of the gorge; gigantic foam-crowned waves rise their dazzling heads and shoot back and forth, hissing and screaming, until they fall powerless back into the gorge. But new wave monsters take their place, the riot becomes wilder and wilder, the wave snakes become higher and higher, the steam cloud becomes more impenetrable, the screaming and thunder in the depth becomes more violent: then, all of a sudden, the whole lake seems to rise in a gigantic water column and a

46Cronau, *Im wilden Westen*, pp. 175-76.

massive water stream, 25 feet in diameter, shoots 300 feet up into the air, the steam cloud rises 1000 feet and more. Hissing, clapping, screaming, thundering, these are the sounds filling the air; . . .

[Bis endlich der See in ein wildes Wogen gerächt. Er erricht fast den Rand des Schlundes; gewaltige schaumgekrönte Wellen erheben ihre glitzernden Häupter und schießen zischend und brüllend hin und her, bis sie ohnmächtig zurückfallen in den Schlund. Aber neue Wogenungeheuer treten an ihre Stelle immer wilder wird der Aufruhr, immer höher züngeln die Wogenschlangen, immer dichter wird die Dampfwolke, immer heftiger das Brüllen und Donnern in der Tiefe: da mit einem Male scheint der ganze See in einer gewaltigen Wassersäule empor zu steigen und ein geschlossener Wasserstrahl von 25 Fuß Dicke fährt bis zu 300 Fuß in die Höhe, die Dampfwolke steigt bis zu 1000 Fuß und mehr. Zischen, Klatschen, Brüllen, Donnern, dies sind die Töne, die die Luft erfüllen; . . .

Scientific detachment fled Zittel. Like other geologists, Deckert in 1886, Credner five years later, or Meyer in 1893, Zittel found scientific language inadequate to the task of describing the violence of this geyser.49

Mud Geyser almost equalled Excelsior’s awfulness in the eyes of German tourists. Lying between Lake Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, it displayed the essence of demonic powers. Schroeder, the artist, was carried away by the exploding mud masses, calling it the "most curious and most eerie [geyser] of the whole park."50 It was not only appalling, but an outright gift of the devil. Kirchhoff, writing in 1900 called


50Schroeder, Mit Camera und Feder, p. 177.
it "satanic."

Sommerstorff, the actor and writer, who accompanied geologist Max Wilhelm Meyer in 1893 described the opening of hell's gorge.

Max von Zeppelin described this geyser as utterly violent and repulsive.

The most interesting thing . . . is the Mud Cauldron, a mud geyser, which is one of the strangest appearances in the park. The real geyser cannot be seen, since it lies under a hollow rock. From this cave, mud masses are ejected all the time, accompanied by a violent rumble and lots of steam . . . . The whole cauldron and its glutinous pulp is constantly boiling and moving; and during this whole spectacle—which is essentially repulsive—one always has the feeling that the whole story is about to explode.

A strange mixture of disgust and appeal pervaded Zeppelin's account. Like others, Zeppelin apparently did not know whether to turn away or watch. Fear and violence helped form a perfect image of fascinating ugliness.

In a second-hand report the Vienna professor Franz Toula termed the Mud Geyser one of the "most interesting" phenomena


52Sommerstorff, Im Wunderreich der Neuen Welt, p. 86.

of the park. The choice of "interesting" illustrates the mixed feelings, Germans harbored towards geysers. They were interesting for their strangeness and power; nature was admirable, but not lovely.

Qualities of beauty were seldom associated with the geysers. Only a few lonesome voices described them in non-demonic terms. One of them was Kirchhoff. Writing about Fountain Geyser, he noted:

Almost exactly at eight o'clock, after a few powerful moves, the geyser ejected a wide mass of water which made us all step back. The blue floods expanded like a fan, mixed with white steam, rising more than 40 feet. They formed a fountain of such a mighty grandiosity, that we all remained speechless.

Kirchhoff still waffled whether he should be more impressed by the beauty of the geyser or its industrial power. Schroeder, writing only four years later, decided that this geyser was beautiful, its spectacle looked "magnificent." Travel writer Hesse-Wartegg was one of the few to see divine beauty in the geysers. He was wandering through the Upper Geyser Basin in 1878 when Giant Geyser erupted.

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56Schroeder, Mit Camera und Feder, p. 165.
And like the image of a god, this magnificent, dazzling fountain is also veiled in a frame of bright, rounded steam clouds, and the sun illuminates their fringes like halos.

[Und wie das Bild einer Gottheit, so ist auch diese großartige, strahlende Fontaine in einen Rahmen lichter, runder Dampfwölkchen gehüllt, deren Ränder von der Sonne wie Heiligenscheine erleuchtet werden.]

Resembling painted scenes in a baroque church, the dazzling fountain and its bright colors also evoked a divine image. Clear and bright, yet powerful, God's hand seemed visible. However, Hesse-Wartegg was an exception among his fellow-writers; he remained the only one to find God in the eruption of a geyser.

Unlike the other geysers, Old Faithful, with its predictability, drew praise from Germans. Zeppelin called it a "moving security." Hirschberg, writing ten years before Zeppelin, considered Old Faithful's water jet a "wonderful apparition." Eckstein, in the early 1900s exulted over this geyser, giving it the title "ideal geyser," which presented a "fairy-like spectacle." The unanimous consent about Old Faithful is striking, and suggests that Germans preferred the predictable side of nature.

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57Hesse-Wartegg, Nord-Amerika, pp. 239-40.
60Eckstein, "Yellowstone Park," p. 1175.
Geologists showed a similar preference for Old Faithful. Zittel used exactly the same language as Eckstein. Even the rather critical Deckert could not help calling it a "splendid spectacle." Meyer presented the most far-reaching interpretation of Old Faithful, drawing a parallel to his own time-obsessed society.

I convinced myself . . . that the clock, under which engineers and machine operators of the underworld work, is more precise than some of those tender tools which our most astute mind has produced, and according to which we rule all our doing . . . .

[Ich habe mich . . . davon überzeugt, daß die Uhr nach welcher die Ingenieure und Maschinenführer der Unterwelt arbeiten, genauer geht als manche dieser zarten Werkzeuge unserer scharfsinnigsten Intelligenz, nach welchen wir unser Tun und Lassen regulieren . . . .]63

Old Faithful's regularity impressed and awed this Berlin geologist. The calm precision of Old Faithful formed a stark contrast to the noises which characterized all of Yellowstone's geyser regions.

Across the professions, German visitors noted the striking resemblance between factory and geyser sounds. A hellish machine churned beneath Excelsior, as Cronau had already observed. The artist also noticed that the whole area around the Constant Geyser in the Norris Basin shook with the motions of an "invisible, infernal machinery."64

61Zittel, "Wunderland am Yellowstone," p. 27.
63Meyer, Im Bannkreise der Vulkane, p. 229.
64Cronau, Im wilden Westen, p. 172.
Two German visitors explicitly linked the noises to steam engines. Geology professor Meyer was watching Beehive Geyser erupt. The side effect of the impressive water column, was a sound "as if suddenly the safety valve of a superhuman steam engine had been opened." The Berlin journalist Lindau observed Steam Vent in the Norris Basin for a while, finding the "perfect regularity of the puffing pushes remarkable. The subterranean steam engine works exactly like the one constructed by human hands."

By way of contrast to the geysers, hot springs represented the sublime in nature. Hirschberg put his finger on the aesthetic distinction between geysers and hot springs, when he tried to recollect his impressions of the Upper Geyser Basin.

Here, enchanting beauty is paired with terrible awfulness. Peaceful, deep blue wells, with walls as if ornamented with pure gems, and with an unfathomable gorge which seems leading into the realm of mermaids. Close to it, sinister caves and crevices, representing the entry to hell for fearful minds, and roaring, hissing, screaming. The . . . . steam is especially eerie on a cloudy day.

Hier ist berückende Schönheit mit grausiger Furchtbarkeit gepaart. Friedliche, tiefblaue Brunnen, deren Wände wie mit eitel Edelstein geschmückt sind, und deren unergründlicher Absturz in das Reich der Nixen zu führen scheint. Dicht daneben finstere Höhlen und Erdspalten, die furchtsamen Gemütern den Eingang zur Hölle darstellen und fortwährend rauschen, zischen und brüllen. Der . . . . Dampf ist besonders bei bedecktem Himmel unheimlich.]

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Hirschberg sharpened the contrast between beautiful and hideous. Interestingly, most Germans, whether writers or scientists, joined him in this aesthetic distinction.

Nothing underscored this distinction more than the seemingly odd coupling of Prismatic Lake and Excelsior Geyser. German visitors invariably raved about the beauty and calmness of Prismatic Lake, shining even clearer in the steam of Excelsior. To Kirchhoff the odd couple appeared "as if nature wanted to unite loveliness with awfulness." Yellowstone's mixture of beautiful and strange phenomena sharpened Germans' sense of beauty. Aesthetic preferences which arcadian German nature had never challenged were now required to be reaffirmed.

The proximity of pools and geysers forced the German visitors to take an aesthetic stance often involving social opinions. Familiar, arcadian features like the pools were shelved with loveliness, strangeness with awfulness. The geyser activity confirmed the conservative perspective of the upper-middle-class visitors. It hardened their already prevalent anti-modernist and anti-technological stance. The use of both factory and demonic imagery to describe the same phenomenon disclosed a negative stance towards industrialization reaffirming the visitors' convictions that

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technology had limitations, and that humans should abandon their faith in industrialization and technological progress.

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Yellowstone's natural curiosities offered metaphors for many questions simmering in the Second German Reich. Social turmoil and the demand for democracy were a burning splinter in the eyes of conservatives. The popularity of Wild West dime novels heightened the suspicion of the elites that the lower classes wanted more than life in a factory. In this context, German writers subconsciously tried to alter the lower-class image of the Wild West via descriptions of Yellowstone Park. A subtle warning pervaded the reports, encouraging people to recognize the mixed blessings of a land without confines and security.

This warning was coupled with an anti-modernist attitude towards nature and its weird phenomena. The negative feelings the German upper-middle class harbored towards industrialization became evident in the descriptions of the geysers. Seen through geyser steam, factories appeared even more awful. Although geysers taught a helpful lesson in anti-industrial notions, they were not beautiful nature in a German sense. Rather, German visitors conveyed a sense of discomfort, barely concealing their celebration of arcadian German nature. They interpreted Yellowstone's phenomena as nature's warning against human conceit engendered by industrialization.
Tourists from Germany's professional classes selected and interpreted Yellowstone's phenomena according to their conservative values which propagated an authoritarian society and demanded a halt to modernization and industrialization.
CONCLUSION

Throughout the nineteenth century, Germans imagined the American West in myriad ways. Travel reports, dime novels, and Buffalo Bill's Show each represented a slice of the West with different coatings. Travel descriptions of Yellowstone, despite their claim to represent reality, were not any different. As dime novels revealed desires of Germany's lower class audience, Yellowstone accounts reflected the concerns of Germany's upper and upper-middle classes in a modernizing society. Journeying to the American West was a rite of passage for upper-middle-class Germans, reaffirming and sharpening their beliefs about German society. The crucial difference consisted in the function of the West: dime novelists perceived it as space for transcendence and reform, Yellowstone travellers as a foreign place confirming their belief in their homecountry's nature and society.

Significantly, the same western nature framed both dime novels and travellers' visions. In dime novels, the wide open spaces of the western American landscape, its flora and fauna formed the background for a life without social constraints, conducive to the development of virtues like courage and strength. This construction of the West appealed strongly to German lower classes, who were, despite their growing numbers, unable to rise to political participation in the Wilhelmine
era. Human wildness in a pristine setting, as western dime novels depicted it, was a dream of German working classes, and reading dime novels allowed a temporary escape which enabled them to bear daily life again. How much dime novels expressed dissatisfaction with the present social order became evident in the conservative battle against the production of trivial literature at the turn of the century. Western dime novels celebrated values threatening to undermine the hierarchical structure of the Second German Kaiserreich.

German travellers to Yellowstone belonged to the same class that battled dime novels. Accordingly, western nature assumed a different face. The wide open spaces and vast mountain ranges in and around Yellowstone appeared negative in German upper-middle-class writings. Professional boundaries between science and the arts, often considered insurmountable, crumbled before commonly held class values. Geologists as well as artists voiced a preference for arcadian over wild nature. To make their point clear, they exaggerated the Park's natural features in their descriptions. A second point German tourists made about Yellowstone was the importance of its undisturbed nature which humbled humans through its superior workings in an almost religious fashion. Unlike the American West of dime novels, nature in the Yellowstone accounts signified natural limits on human narcissism.

A discomfort with industrialization pervaded both dime novels and Yellowstone reports. But there the similarities
ended. Western dime novelists resented the confining character of factories, whereas the German upper-middle class resented social change. In addition, industrialization had been altering not only the social, but also the natural landscape. Yellowstone's chimney-like geysers cast a humiliating shadow over the achievements of technology. The Park's features proved the Yellowstone travellers correct in their suspicion that industrialization was not the pinnacle of human progress. On the contrary, Yellowstone's nature reaffirmed their belief in natural and social hierarchy imposed by superior beings, whether in the form of Nature or God. Yellowstone travellers' accounts rejected change. In Yellowstone's unaltered landscape travellers found vindication for their advocacy of preserving nature and society as they were in Germany. They felt this journey to the American West granted them authority to speak about the value of preservation.

Thus, this study provides a new perspective on German perceptions of the American West. Often dime novels have been seen as the principle vision of America in Germany. In studies about European travel reports depicting America, political, social, and economic comparisons prevail. How the nature of the American West has been perceived by Germans and how it reflected Germans' views on their own culture has never been the subject of a historical study. Yellowstone travel accounts open a new window on German perceptions of western American nature. Unlike the dissatisfaction with Germany's restrictive
society promoted in dime novels, Yellowstone reports, focusing on nature, celebrate preservation of both nature and society. On one hand, the strangeness of Western nature validated traditional attitudes of Germans. On the other, German travellers recognized the importance of wilderness as a place for spiritual renewal. The accounts represent an early advocacy for wilderness as a necessary ingredient of civilization.

Travellers from various professions shared this conviction. German scientists as well as writers unanimously venerated nature and decried industrialization. This fact suggests that common class values overwhelmed professional differences since observations by scientists paralleled those of writers and artists, especially in their aesthetic and social perceptions. Culture and class tied stronger bonds bridging the gaps constructed between professions. In the light of the German experience in Yellowstone, professional concerns about objectivity and importance dissolved into insignificance.

In addition, this thesis opens a new perspective on the chasms dividing Germany in the decades preceding the First World War. Although Germany displayed unity to the outside world, political, social, and economic fissures divided the nation. The differing images of the American West starkly illustrate these divisions. This fact might provide a better
understanding of the forces directing Germany's course on the eve of the First World War.

The struggle of nineteenth-century German conservatives to maintain and reassert their values in a modernizing society reflects the problems industrialization continues to pose for many countries. The angst about the loss of values pervades Western societies despite unseen material wealth. The rapid decline of nature and wilderness coupled with the growing demand for it, indicates that civilizations indeed have other than mere material needs. This study suggests that largely natural places like Yellowstone Park are an indispensable part of any civilization desiring to offer an environment catering to needs of life, whether human or non-human.
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