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Review of *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections* Edited by Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemiinden, and Susanne Zantop

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REVIEW ESSAY

Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections. Edited by Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemünden, and Susanne Zantop. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. xii + 352 pp. Photographs, maps, tables, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

DO GERMANS REALLY LOVE INDIANS?

"Of all Europeans, the German has the greatest love for the Indian." This 1939 quote from a German novelist, reproduced in the book's introductory chapter by Christian Feest, could serve as the motto for the 1999 conference ("Germans and Indians/Indians and Germans: Cultural Encounters across Three Centuries") held at Dartmouth College, from which this book evolved. The idea that Germans have a special affinity with Indians is a long-standing conviction that is, nonetheless, difficult to prove. But the converse, that Indians might have a special affinity for Germans, was disproven by the conference itself: only a few Native American scholars were found to take part. "Why, after all, *should* Native Americans be interested in Germans?" asks Susanne Zantop, herself a German, in the introduction. And so it was that German and American scholars from various disciplines had the conference almost entirely to themselves, with Native American participation limited to discussion periods. In order to include Native American voices in this publication, however, the editors have "framed" the volume with stories about Germans that appear in the works of Emma Lee Warrior (Peigan Blackfoot) and Louise Erdrich (of Ojibwa and German origin).

In his introductory essay, "Germany's Indians in a European Perspective," Feest provides an overview of Indian-related activities by Germans in America and in Germany, reaching far back into history because the fate of

the Germanic tribes during Roman times has often been compared to that of the North American Indians. Further on in his essay, Feest argues—in contrast to other contributors to this volume—that people in different European countries identify similarly with Indians, the presumed special German affinity with Indians being above all a question of scholarly interest and publication activity, larger in Germany than other European countries. Feest is surely correct as long as the term "Indians" is used to describe only "real" Native Americans. But, as we shall see further on, fictional characters like Karl May's Winnetou have much deeper emotional resonance and are more commercially successful in German-speaking countries than in the rest of Europe.

The essays in the following section, "Historical Encounters," confirm Feest's view about the relationship between "real Germans" and "real Indians." In his historical overview, Colin Calloway discusses various themes, from "Germans in Indian Country" and "Show Indians in Germany" to "Indian Soldiers in Two World Wars," and comes to a similar conclusion when he writes: "Unlike the Spanish, French, British, or Americans, Germans did not enter Indian country as members of a colonizing nation, but they participated in the colonizing process. . . . [R]elations between Indian people and German people seem to have been not much different from those

between Indians and other groups of Europeans" (77).

This idea is also expressed in "American Indians and Moravians in Southern New England," by Corinna Dally-Starna and William A. Starna, as well as in Liam Riordan's "The Complexion of My Country': The German as 'Other' in Colonial Pennsylvania" and Russel Lawrence Barsh's "German Immigrants and Inter-marriage with American Indians in the Pacific Northwest." Nowhere can it be seen that Germans behaved differently with Indians than did colonists or missionaries from other countries. But in "A Nineteenth-Century Ojibwa Conquers Germany," a fascinating essay on George Copway, Bernd Peyer notes that the Ojibwa statesman was greeted by the German delegation more enthusiastically than by others at the Third World Peace Congress, held in Frankfurt in August, 1850. Copway "consciously acted the part of the romantic noble savage in this controversial gathering" and was viewed by some critics "as a tractable symbol for the illusionary position of the entire peace movement" (148).

The book's third section, "Projections and Performances," begins with an essay by Hartmut Lutz on "German Indianthusiasm." This term illuminates the true nature of Germans' infatuation with Indians: the heroes of their dreams are not *real* Indians, but fictional ones. Germans don't go into raptures over Sitting Bull, Geronimo, or Chief Joseph, but over Winnetou, the Super-Indian, who is not only good-looking, but brings countless Western desperadoes to justice with the help of his *German* blood-brother Old Shatterhand. The figure of Winnetou, created by German adventure novel writer Karl May, has become so deeply rooted in German collective consciousness that he is more authentic to most Germans than any real Indian. As Lutz emphasizes, the belief in a "German-Indian brotherhood" was misused in the Third Reich for propaganda purposes, most notably in books for young readers: "Such ideologized books, ostensibly about Indian history, were used to mentally prepare young people for the war to

establish a Greater Germany, a Grossdeutsches Reich, and even for systematic genocide against 'inferior' races" (179).

In his essay on "Nineteenth-Century German Representations of Indians," Jeffrey L. Sammons examines the work of German novelists Charles Sealsfield, Balduin Möllhausen, Friedrich Gerstäcker, and Karl May. While the first three have fallen into neglect in the twentieth century, the influence of Karl May remains strong even today. "A German obsession with Indians has been notorious for decades. . . . There seems to be a longing to act out an exotic, utopian identity, relieved of modern alienation and unburdened by the complicities of culture and civilization. Perhaps Germany's Indians have been entirely absorbed by fictionality . . ." (191-92).

Karl Markus Kreis's contribution, in contrast, deals with "real" Indians in Germany, and with "real" German missionaries in Indian country. In the first part Kreis analyzes the enthusiastic reaction of the German press to Indians playing Indians (from Buffalo Bill's Wild West show to the Indians in the German circus Sarrasani); in the second he looks at the paternalistic role of the Jesuit Missions in South Dakota, where many Germans lived and worked.

The theme of "Playing Indian" is explored further by Yurok filmmaker Marta Carlson. In 1999 she visited Germany and witnessed with disdain German hobbyists acting out their fantasies in carefully reconstructed Indian costumes. In her view, German hobbyists appropriate American Indian culture and spirituality through their club practices. Her resulting film is meant "to investigate and expose the troubling and dangerous aspects of these practices . . ." (213). She describes the different approaches of the former West German and East German hobbyists, but is not able to investigate the common roots of the German hobbyist tradition, which spring from the late nineteenth century. She sees this hobby as a form of racial consumption and comes to the rather harsh conclusion: "What all of these hobbyists are doing is making entertainment

out of genocide" (215). Carlson is apparently unaware that Indian hobbyists in other European countries do more or less the same thing, and, in addition, that Indian hobbyism in America is not significantly different—in fact, that hobbyists there hold occasional gatherings with Indians on reservations (for example, International Brotherhood Days, held annually on the Pine Ridge reservation).

What is Indian hobbyism in Germany? It is basically a reenactment of the rather peaceful time of the fur trade in the upper Missouri area between 1820 and 1870. It is part of the even more popular Western hobby in Germany and therefore includes interaction with fur traders, mountain men, Mexican vaqueros, cowboys, and the US cavalry. The most important activities during the large yearly councils are trading, showing off self-made costumes, and acting out Plains Indian societies' activities as they are described, for example, in the travel report of the German prince Maximilian zu Wied. In these camps of nearly 2,000 participants, a certain "tribal" structure is created which is, however, usually superceded by a typical German clubbiness. A minority of hobbyists have also been influenced by esotericism, practicing the "Indian way" as a spiritual exercise.

The essay by Katrin Sieg, "Indian Impersonation as Historical Surrogation," is also concerned with German Indian hobbyism. Several books and articles have already been written on the German hobbyist scene, as well as magazines and books by hobby groups themselves, which provide valuable insights into the development of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, Sieg ignores these sources, instead interviewing a few individual club members whose views cannot be seen as representative of the approximately 5,000 Indian hobbyists active in Germany today. The result is a gross misrepresentation of German Indian hobbyism. Especially distressing is her unbalanced use of interview material from her primary informant, Curt Dietrich Asten of Berlin. In her zeal to uncover the racist roots of German hobbyism, she devotes almost four pages to a

minute psychoanalysis of his character. Additionally, Asten claims that Sieg has misrepresented him, either printing words attributed to him which he never said, or taking them entirely out of context (Curt Dietrich Asten, personal communication with Peter Bolz, November 2002). The author has such fixed ideas about German hobbyism that she attempts, in absurd fashion, to paint the entire hobby movement as something close to fascism. The ridiculing attitude of her article may be meant to sympathize with Native Americans, but it contributes little or nothing to the scholarly analysis of German Indian hobbyism.

This section concludes with Gerd Gemünden's brilliant analysis of East German Indian movies, "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA *Indianerfilme*." The success of the Karl May movies in West Germany in the 1960s sparked a similar Indian movie-making effort in the socialist East. "The exclusive focus on Native Americans was at the time without parallel in film history; it allowed for a historical accuracy that most Hollywood films had always lacked," Gemünden writes (245). But because the East German government saw itself as an adversary of the American capitalist system, these films were required to contain a socialist message, portrayed through unrealistic "good" Indian versus "bad" white guy plots beyond anthropological credibility (248).

The two literary contributions to the book, by Emma Lee Warrior and Louise Erdrich, offer an interesting glimpse from "the other side." Over centuries of contact, Indians have experienced Germans as missionaries, explorers, settlers, farmers, schoolteachers, and, more rarely, outsiders who have, for one reason or another, become part of Native American communities as adopted tribal members. The selections presented here explore two extremes of this last "type": the German as cunning captive who earns his way to a position of respect in the community, and the German as unwelcome interloper, an arrogant "wannabe" disliked by most tribal members (except presumably his long-suffering wife), who supports

himself by writing and selling books on traditional Indian culture.

Warrior's Helmut Walking Eagle character is an extravagantly negative, paperdoll cutout of the Bad German, a flat character rendered with a minimum of humor. "Compatriots," the short story in which he appears, was first published in 1990, which may mean it was one of the first pieces of contemporary Indian fiction to broach the highly-charged subject of "whiteshamanism," the white appropriation of Native American spiritual practices. Despite its one-dimensional characterization of Walking Eagle, the story has merit based on its bold content: Warrior was exposing emotional currents that run deep in reservation communities, as rituals like Sun Dances are increasingly taken over by non-Indians (witness the controversial 1997 *Indian Country Today* series on white participation in Lakota Sun Dance ceremonies that generated heated discussions on reservations). An accompanying essay by Renate Eigenbrod critically analyzes "Compatriots" in conjunction with two indigenous Canadian texts in which German characters appear. These German characters, Eigenbrod says, tend to reveal "two opposite ways of appreciating 'a culture that is not your own culture': celebration and appropriation" (269). They also set in relief the indigenous characters' own explorations of identity.

Louise Erdrich's contribution, from her 1998 novel, *The Antelope Wife*, presents the much more likeable character of Klaus Shawano, a German prisoner-of-war in Minnesota who is somehow spirited out of the prison camp by local Ojibwa wanting to avenge the death of a relative at German hands in World War II. Shawano saves himself through his skills in the kitchen, baking the most wonderful cake the men have ever tasted, a cake that becomes a tribal legend and a part of the tribal diet. Shawano himself goes on to become an accepted member of the community, and his unusual initiation a humorous piece of tribal lore. As essayist Ute Lischke-McNab notes, the communally-shared cake is a brilliant metaphor for the positive forms of shar-

ing that can take place between different cultures. In other works, including the more recent *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Erdrich continues her deep and sensitive probing of the cross-cultural relations between her Ojibwa community and the various Germans who ended up making that cold lake country their home.

The various contributions in this book reveal that people in German-speaking countries share stereotypes about Native Americans that unfortunately are common throughout the world, and that their behavior toward "real" Indians in the colonizing process was no different from the behavior of other European nations. If Gerd Gemünden, for example, comes to the conclusion that in Germany "there exists a common, widespread, and existential identification with Indians that seems to surpass that of other nations" (254), then his conclusion stems from his analysis of German Indian movies, not from a representative questionnaire examining German attitudes toward real Native Americans. For the average nineteenth-century reader, information about Indians was available only through fiction. As Feest (37) demonstrates, a German tradition of Indian fiction writing existed long before Karl May; he simply brought this "Indianthusiasm" to a climax through the invention of Winnetou. This *literary* Indian fiction wave lasted until the 1960s, when it was supplanted by a *visual* Indian fiction wave, in the form of the West German Winnetou movies and the East German Indian films. The especially successful Karl May films (produced in Yugoslavia with a French actor in the role of Winnetou) released a stream of merchandizing in which the romance of the American West was sold to the German public. This new form of "Indiancommercializing" has been particularly lucrative in association with the numerous Karl May festivals that have sprung up in the past few decades on open-air stages around Germany. Indian plays are shown there alongside fantasy "Wild West towns," where Indian kitsch of every description is offered to the "Indian-loving" German visitor, in addi-

tion to a briskly growing market in Indian esoterica—Indian horoscopes, tarot cards, dream catchers, and so on. These German Indian fantasies are acted out on the lowest cultural and intellectual level and have nothing whatever to do with the life and culture of real Native Americans. The most well-known of these stages is in Bad Segeberg, where in 1986 “Indiancommercializing” was ratcheted up a notch by including “real” Indians in the proceedings. The Winnebago spiritual leader Reuben A. Snake from Nebraska was invited to participate in the making of a “peace treaty” and presented to 10,000 enthusiastic German spectators as the “Chief of all Chiefs of the North American Indians” (Reinhard Marheinecke and Nicolas Finke, *Karl May am Kalkberg. Geschichte und Geschichten der Karl-May-Spiele Bad Segeberg seit 1952* [Bamberg and Radebeul: Karl-May-Verlag, 1999], 240).

The German people certainly love Winnetou and other fictional Indians who embody an idealized image handed down to them

from fictional fantasies of the past two hundred years. But they have little concept of or interest in real Native Americans of either the past or present. For their knowledge of the Indian past, they are happy to substitute clichés from Karl May stories. In contemporary times, Native Americans seem to interest Germans only if they can sell them a spiritual experience, either here in Germany or on the numerous Plains reservations across the central United States and Canada. Therefore, it was no surprise that last summer a “Sun Dance” was held near Berlin under the leadership of Blackfoot from the Peigan reserve in Alberta, the most recent form of “Indiancommercializing” in Germany to date.

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