

**The Man Who Became Weary of America:
Ferdinand Kürnberger's Novel
Der Amerika-Müde (1855)**

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Within the German-American literary tradition, Ferdinand Kürnberger's novel *Der Amerika-Müde*, published in 1855, has acquired a special status. Written by an 1848-liberal who had to flee from political persecution, the book became the most prominent example of a growing disillusion of German intellectuals with the United States. In its rapid trajectory from euphoria to disillusionment, Kürnberger's book presents a critical response to strong forms of German America-enthusiasm in the 1830s and 1840s. The book's title, translated into English as *The Man Who Became Weary of America*, is an allusion to, and ironic inversion of, Ernst Willkomm's rather glowing picture of "America" in *Der Europamüde*, published in 1838, but also to sympathetic travel reports such as Duden's report on his journey to the Western States which had considerable influence on German immigration to Missouri. For the critical intellectual Kürnberger, the existing German literature on the United States was deplorable. A book was needed to correct the mistaken views that had misled so many Germans.¹ *Der Amerika-Müde* serves this

1 Cf. Kürnberger's view: "Die deutsche Literatur über Amerika war zu Anfang der dreißiger Jahre weder an Umfang, noch an Gehalt in einem Zustande, der von der Wichtigkeit ihres Gegenstandes ein Bewußtsein verrieth. Der Umfang blieb hinter der weitläufigen Peripherie des Beobachtungsobjectes unendlich zurück, und die Beobachtung selbst war schlecht. Sie trug den persönlichen Charakter der Stimmung, statt den weltgeschichtlichen der Kritik. Bücher, von einem liebenswürdigen aber unhistorischen Dilletantismus geschrieben, sprachen von Amerika so, wie man ungefähr am winterlichen Kamin von Nizza, Meran und vom Comer See spricht; gleichsam als wäre das sociale Leiden Europa's mädchenhafte Schwindsuchts-Poesie. So schrieben Racknitz und Scherpf über Texas, Bromme über Florida, Duden über Missouri, Gerke über Illinois, Andre über Anderes. Noch mehr aber als durch die belletristische Ornamentik litt die Wahrheit des Gegenstandes durch die politische. Der Liberalismus der Restaurationsperiode fand in Wort und Schrift über Amerika eines seiner wenigen erlaubten Ausdrucksmittel. Er benutzte es eifrig. Er feierte die Sternbanner-Republik als die praktische Verwirklichung seines geächteten Ideals. Aus dieser Tendenz ging zwar die Wahrheit auf, aber nicht die volle Wahrheit. Er hätte es für politische Unklugheit, ja für Verrath gehalten, die Flecken seiner Sonne

purpose. Kürnberger's critical counter-version obviously met a growing demand. The novel was a huge popular success when it came out and went through several editions. Two recent editions² confirm that the book is still considered a key text of German literature on American society because it offers a quintessential illustration of German criticism of America, not only in the nineteenth century but also beyond.³ Ironically

zu gestehen. In dieser filtrierten Sonnenbeleuchtung nun überkamen die Gebildeten der vorigen Generation Amerika's Bild. Wenn wir heute jene Schilderungen lesen, so thun wir es mit dem Hintergedanken ihrer Tendenz, wir betrachten und verstehen sie als Kunstwerke der oppositionellen Beredsamkeit... In der That erkannte Moorfeld seine europäische Lectüre über Amerika jetzt bloß als Unterhaltungs-Lectüre und sah die Nothwendigkeit ein, die Belehrungs-Lectüre von vorn anzufangen. Er stellte sich also die Aufgabe, das Land aus den besten Landesquellen zu studiren." (67-8) ("At the beginning of the '30s, German literature about America was not of a kind—neither in volume, nor in content—that would indicate an awareness of the importance of its subject. The range of texts lagged far behind the spacious periphery of their object of study and the studies themselves remained poor. They exhibited private moods, instead of a critical historical dimension. Books that were informed by a charming but unhistorical dilettantism spoke of America just as one talks about Nice, Merano and Lake Como around a fireplace in winter; as if Europe's social misery were on the level of girlish consumption-poetry. That is how Racknitz and Scherpf wrote about Texas, Bromme about Florida, Duden about Missouri, Gerke about Illinois and others about other matters. Truth was a casualty, in each case, more because of political than belletristic ornamentation. For the liberalism of the restoration period, speaking and writing about America was one of the few approved means of expression. Liberals used it eagerly. They celebrated the Stars and Stripes republic as the practical realization of their own outlawed ideal. Much of what was presented from that perspective opened our eyes to the truth, but not the whole truth. Liberals would have considered it a political mistake, indeed a betrayal, to concede that there were stains on their sun. Hence, the intellectuals of the last generation received their image of America through filtered sunlight. When we read these accounts today, we do it with an awareness of their political sympathies. We see and understand them as masterpieces of oppositional eloquence... Indeed, Moorfeld now considered his European readings about America as entertaining at best and realized the need to start from scratch with a literature of instruction. He set himself the task to study the nation from the best sources available." All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

2 *Der Amerikamüde*, edited by Friedemann Berger in 1972 and an even more recent edition published in 1982, edited by Jan Kressin.

3 See, for example, Max Weber who, in the second chapter of his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, calls *Der Amerika-Müde* (which, in Talcott Parsons' translation is called *Picture of American Culture*) a "clever and malicious" book. (51) In a footnote, Parsons adds: "*Der Amerikamüde* (Frankfurt, 1855), well known to be an imaginative paraphrase of Lenau's impressions of America. As a work of art the

enough, this representativeness is the result of what must appear, at first sight, a major shortcoming: Kürnberger wrote his strong critique of American society without ever having been there. Because he had no first-hand knowledge of the United States, he had to draw on a wide variety of intellectual and literary sources, so that his book is something like a compendium of German—and, occasionally, European—criticism of America.⁴ Perhaps this is one of the reasons why it has remained an important point of reference in debates about German images of America.⁵

As a classic of German cultural criticism of America, *Der Amerika-Müde* thus does not have to be rediscovered for a German-American literary tradition. However, a reassessment seems to be overdue, because critical discussions of the book have pursued only two options until now: either to praise it as a penetrating critique of America or to condemn it as highly prejudiced polemic. The strong reaction of Harold Jantz provides an example for the latter approach: "Der berühmteste dieser anti-amerikanischen Romane... wurde von Ferd. Kürnberger geschrieben und zuerst 1855 veröffentlicht. Alles Negative aus den persönlichen Erfahrungen v. Bülow's und Lenaus, aus den Berichten deutscher und englischer Reisender und aus dem Sensationsjournalismus der Zeit ist hier zu einer monströsen Karikatur amerikanischen Lebens zusammengetragen, die keinesfalls die ernste Aufmerksamkeit verdient, die man ihr gewidmet hat, mit Ausnahme des interessanten psychologischen Umstands, daß naive leichtgläubige Europäer dem Werk Glauben geschenkt haben." (338-39)⁶ On the other hand, Hildegard Meyer has praised Kürnberger

book would to-day be somewhat difficult to enjoy, but it is incomparable as a document of the (now long since blurred-over) differences between the German and the American outlook, one may even say of the type of spiritual life which, in spite of everything, has remained common to all Germans, Catholic and Protestant alike, since the German mysticism of the Middle Ages, as against the Puritan capitalistic valuation of action." (192)

4 Kürnberger uses the terms "United States" and "America" interchangeably but often prefers the latter, because he is primarily interested in the idea and ideal of "America." I shall follow his practice.

5 See, for example, Hildegard Meyer's book *Nord-Amerika im Urteil des Schrifttums bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Eine Untersuchung über Kürnbergers 'Amerika-Müden'* and the recent essay collections by Ritter, *Deutschlands literarisches Amerika* and Bauschinger et al., *Amerika in der deutschen Literatur*.

6 "The most famous of these anti-American novels... was written by Ferd. Kürnberger and first published in 1855. All negative aspects of v. Bülow's and Lenaus's personal experiences, of German and English travel reports, and of the sensationalist

for his skillful synthesis of German criticism of America in the Romantic period: "Verschiedene Vertreter wurden genannt, welche besonders seit Lenau die Züge zu diesem veränderten Amerikabild zusammentrugen. Sie entstammten vorwiegend der politisch erregten, revolutionären Zeit bis zur Jahrhundertmitte, und zu ihnen, zu dieser Zeit und diesen Voraussetzungen gehört auch der Schriftsteller, der alle diese Züge zu einem in sich fest gegründeten, zusammenhängenden Bild zusammenfaßte, Ferdinand Kürnberger." (68)⁷ Rüdiger Steinlein goes even further when he praises the book's self-reflexivity: "Solche Reflektiertheit...ist jedoch nicht bloß Kennzeichen des Helden, vielmehr bestimmt sie die gesamte Struktur des Romans." (160)⁸ Steinlein therefore contradicts Jantz: "Indes handelt es sich im Falle des *Amerikamüden* nicht um das schlichte Aufwärmen längst zu Klischees gewordener antiamerikanischer Vorurteile. Gewiß, Kürnberger benützt sie alle im Pandämonium seines Amerikamodells. Nur weiß er sie so zu funktionalisieren, daß es sich nicht in einem romantisch-irrationalistischen Antikapitalismus erschöpft, sondern kapitalismuskritische Brisanz und Prägnanz erhält." (162)⁹

The widely differing views of Jantz and Steinlein depend on their widely different views of the United States. Both discuss Kürnberger's novel primarily in terms of the adequacy or inadequacy of its representation of American society. For Steinlein, the novel provides an amazingly perceptive insight into the emerging capitalist structures of American society, for Jantz it just circulates outworn clichés. As soon as one acknowledges, however, that Kürnberger's America is an imaginary con-

journalism of the time are brought together in this book and add up to a monstrous caricature of American life, which does not deserve the serious attention it has received, except perhaps for the interesting psychological fact that naive and gullible Europeans have trusted this work."

7 "Different writers have been named which have changed the image of America, especially since Lenau. They are mainly children of the politically turbulent and revolutionary period before the middle of the century. Ferdinand Kürnberger belonged to this period and is the writer who integrates all of these traits into a well-founded, coherent picture."

8 "Such reflectivity...is not only a characteristic of the hero but characterizes the structure of the novel as a whole."

9 "*Der Amerikamüde* is not simply a rehash of anti-American prejudices that have long since hardened into clichés. To be sure, they are all present in Kürnberger's pandemonium of his model of America. However, he knows how to employ them in such a way that they go beyond a naive anti-capitalism nourished by romantic irrationalism. In Kürnberger's use, they become instruments for a politically charged, concise critique of capitalism."

struct, the focus of interest must shift. As a dispute with an imaginary America, the book is of interest not as an—adequate or inadequate—social analysis, but as a form of cultural self-definition. In the context of this self-definition, American society functions as challenge to certain cultural convictions and values that clash with the phenomenon of American democracy. Even if one does not agree with Steinlein's praise of the book, the sweeping dismissal of Jantz is not analytically satisfactory either. The question Jantz leaves unanswered is why *Der Amerika-Müde* could become so popular despite its often embarrassing rhetorical and critical excess. Obviously, Kürnberger provided patterns of explanation that were welcome. At the same time, Jantz is right in claiming that these patterns prevented him from approaching American society openly. This failure of the book cannot be attributed simply to a nostalgic resistance to modernization. Paradoxically, it is the result of a particular argument for political progress. With this argument, liberal intellectuals had set themselves a trap. What makes Kürnberger's book still an interesting example of the German-American tradition is that it allows us to understand this trap. I think, in fact, that the polemical nature of the book expresses the dilemma German liberal intellectuals faced in the middle of the nineteenth century when they tried to argue for political freedom. In the debates on political and social progress, American democracy held a special promise. But it also posed an explanatory challenge, and the strongly emotional response of many books on America highlights the fact that this challenge could not be easily met, because the example of America complicated the argument for freedom in unforeseen ways.¹⁰

Within the larger context of a project on "The German-American Tradition," the discussion of a book like *Der Amerika-Müde* also raises some methodological problems. The greatest danger such a project faces is the uncritical pursuit of an approach in which the recovery of forgotten texts or literary traditions is justified merely on the grounds that they have been forgotten or neglected. This form of legitimation is tempting because it promises a welcome short-cut in the race for professional distinction. One of the easiest (and safest) ways to gain professional visibility is to discover virgin ground. As literary and cultural historians, it is,

10 For an analysis of another form in which this challenge was sometimes met by German intellectuals, see Manfred Henningsen's essay on Marx, Engels, and, particularly, Hegel: "Das Amerika von Hegel, Marx und Engels. Zur Genealogie des europäischen Anti-Amerikanismus."

however, not only our task to recover forgotten texts but also to reassess their significance within a larger context. Without such an assessment, the most likely result of the recovery of a German-American literary tradition might be the creation of yet another ethnic corner. If we want to make a convincing case for why a particular text should still be studied, we have to be able to set up relations to a wider cultural or intellectual field. Contextualization and comparison are methods for doing this. In the following discussion, I have therefore placed Kürnberger's novel not only in a familiar context of nineteenth-century German writings on the United States, but I have also added "unorthodox" comparisons with two texts from entirely different traditions, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and Fanny Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*.

In terms of narrative, Kürnberger's novel stages a growing disillusionment with America, which turns out to be a country in which materialism, not democracy, reigns supreme. This displacement of the ideal of democracy by the reality of materialism is especially irritating for the liberal Kürnberger, because he is in search of an alternative to European absolutism. The experience of an overpowering materialism undermines the idea of America presented at the beginning when the book's main character, Dr. Moorfeld, prototype of the cultured man, summarizes the ideals that have brought him to America:

Amerika! Welcher Name hat einen Inhalt gleich diesem Namen! Wer nicht Dinge der gedachten Welt nennt, kann in der wirklichen Welt nichts Höheres nennen. Das Individuum sagt: mein besseres Ich, der Erdglobus sagt: Amerika. Es ist der Schlußfall und die große Cadenz im Concerte der menschlichen Vollkommenheit. Was unmöglich in Europa, ist möglich in Amerika; was unmöglich in Amerika, das erst ist unmöglich! Ich sehe hier die höchste gesunde Kraftentwicklung des volljährigen Menschenkörpers;—drüber hinaus liegt Convulsion und Delirium!

Amerika! heilige Erstarrung ergreift mich bei deinem Anblicke. Die Schauer der Menschengröße wehen von deinen Ufern. Menschengröße, wer kennt dein Gefühl in Europa? Karl der Große, Ludwig der Große, Friedrich der Große—das sind die Menschengrößen der alten Welt. Was sonst noch groß ist neben ihnen, wird decorirt oder hingerichtet!—O weiche zurück, Andenken Europa's, vor dem blühenden Bilde dieser jungen Erde! Sei mir begrüßt, Morgenstirn, Morgenantlitz, frische, schwellende, ausstrahlende Schönheit! Ein jugendlicher Mensch ist die Freude des älteren, aber eine jugendliche Welt,—ist es möglich, diesen Wonnebegriff in ein sterbliches Herz aufzunehmen? Glückliches Land! mit allen Säften unsrer Geschichte bist du genährt, aber wir sind die größten, du das feinste Gefäß dieser Säfte. Asien die Wurzel, Europa der Stamm, Ameri-

ka Laub- und Blütenkrone—so gipfelt sich das Wachstum der Menschheit. Und die runzeligen Rinden Asiens und Europa's durchkriecht das Insect, auf Amerika's Wipfel wiegt sich der freie, fröhliche Vogel. (1–2)¹¹

From the start, the book recommends itself as an inspection of the American ideal: "Man hält es für ein Land der menschlichen Vollkommenheiten in Europa und darum macht' ich mich auf, es kennen zu lernen. Das ist Alles. Ich will es mir ansehen, wie ein Pferd das ich kaufe." (165)¹² This inspection has great political significance. For in contrast to classicism's literary evocation of the ideal of freedom, there is now, for the first time in history, the chance of its realization: "Man muß nicht in das erlogene Reich der Schatten flüchten, man kann dem Ideale auf Erden näher kommen. Diese Wahrheit zeichnet den Stürmern und Drängern von heute ihre neue Bahn vor. Sie wandern. Der Poet wird künftig Tourist sein...Byron ging nach Griechenland, ich nach Amerika. Er besuchte ein absterbendes Volk, ich ein aufblühendes. Ich glaube den besseren Weg gewählt zu haben." (150)¹³

11 "America! What name holds a promise like yours! If one does not want to enter imaginary worlds, there cannot be anything more elevated in the real world. The individual says: the ideal me. The globe says: America. It is the final stage and the greatest cadence in the concert of human perfection. What is impossible in Europe, is possible in America. What is impossible in America, is impossible indeed! Here I see the greatest and firmest growth in the body of mankind—beyond that lies convulsion and delirium.

America! holy numbness grips me at your sight. Torrents of human virtue blow from your shores. Human greatness, who in Europe knows the feeling of you? Charlemagne, Louis the Great, Frederick the Great—these are the great figures of the Old World. Everybody else approaching greatness is either decorated or executed!—Oh, stand back, Europe's memory, before the flourishing picture of this fresh soil! My greetings, morning star, face of the morning, fresh, swelling, radiating beauty! A young person is the pleasure of older ones, but a youthful world,—is it possible to absorb this bliss into a mortal heart? Fortunate country! You are nourished with all juices of our past—yet, we are the crudest, you the finest vessel of these juices. Asia is the root, Europe the trunk, America is the foliage and blossom at the top—the peak of human growth. Insects creep through Asia's and Europe's wrinkled bark, but in America's treetop sways the free and joyful bird."

12 "In Europe, America is seen as the country of human perfection and that is why I set out to get to know it. That is all. I want to look at it just as I look at the horse I purchase."

13 "One need not escape to an imagined land of shadows—the ideal can be found on earth. To realize this opens up a new path for those today who carry on the legacy of the Storm- and Stress-movement. They roam and wander. From now on, the poet

Kürnberger's guiding question is how freedom can be realized not in exalted statements of purpose but in the mundane reality of life. What social forms can it take? "Nicht wie die Menschheit ihre Freiheit erkämpft, sondern wie sie ihre Freiheit täglich, stündlich, in Haus, Kirche und Schule gebraucht—das muß mir die Menschheit auf ihrem Gipfel zeigen...Hier ist die Werkstätte des Ideals." (150)¹⁴ The playfully hyperbolic euphoria with which the book begins cannot be maintained for long, however. After Moorfeld's first observations, doubt—and then increasingly disappointment—set in. Occasionally, the enthusiastic starting premise is recalled—but only to be contrasted with sobering realities: "Ja, fassen wir's fest in's Auge: nicht was dieses Volk ist, sondern was es bedeutet! Es bedeutet Höheres als Griechen und Römer, es bedeutet die Weltfreiheit! Von einem anderen Sterne gesehen ist nicht Rom, nicht Athen der lichteste Punkt unseres Planeten—Washington ist's. Amerika's Schönheit ist Amerika's Idee!" (136)¹⁵ Beauty, however, cannot merely exist in the form of an idea. It requires a tangible form for expression: "Die Idee wird nur vom abstracten Geiste erfaßt... Wie existiert das Herz? Das Herz existiert nicht in Amerika, war Benthals Antwort." (136)¹⁶ The Americans may be free, but they make an altogether unfortunate use of their freedom: "Wir sind eine Nation von Souverainen; das ist freilich die Wahrheit: aber auch von Beutelschneidern—das ist die ganze Wahrheit." (264)¹⁷ The "beautiful idea" of a new stage of historical progress and the sobering reality of a "heartless" society in pursuit of economic gain clash violently. Increasingly, the book develops into a scathing form of cultural criticism that finds little, and eventually nothing,

will be a tourist. Byron went to Greece, I to America. He visited a dying people, I visited a flourishing one. I believe I made the better choice."

- 14 "Not how mankind fights for freedom but what use it makes of this freedom every day and hour, in the house, the church, and in school—this will reveal mankind to me at its highest. [...] Here is the workshop of the ideal."
- 15 "Yes, let us face up to it: not what this people is but wherein its historical significance lies! It ranks higher than the Greeks and Romans—it stands for freedom in this world. Seen from another planet, not Rome nor Athens are the brightest points on our planet—it is Washington. America's beauty is the beauty of the idea of America!" My translation. Benthall then continues: "Washington bedeutet höheres als Rom und Athen, es ist das Capitol der Weltfreiheit." (175) ("Washington stands for something higher than Rome and Athens, it is the capitol of freedom.")
- 16 "The idea has only an abstract existence in the mind. What existence has the heart? There is no heart in America was Benthall's answer."
- 17 "We are a nation of sovereigns, that is true. But also of rip-off artists—that is the whole truth."

ing, of redeeming value in the New World. Eager curiosity leads to strident dismissal: "Amerika ist ein Vorurtheil." (297)¹⁸ Starting as an exploration of the practical consequences of a political ideal, the book turns into an almost apocalyptic warning, directed at gullible immigrants who are seduced by Duden's travel book and other "fantastic reports" about the New World. Cheated out of the land he has bought by a corrupt judiciary system, the hero finally decides to return to Europe—only to witness a murderous nativist attack on German immigrants on his last day in the United States. In the end, the former America-enthusiast becomes a man who flees in despair and disgust.¹⁹

Der Amerika-Müde is a polemical, highly provocative, and often infuriating book: "Few Readers will find his [Kürnberger's] novel convincing, least of all Americans, who have always responded to it with patriotic indignation." (Robertson, 30) Even sympathetic readers must feel uncomfortable with the often sweeping nature of Kürnberger's judgments. Once his narrator gets going on his critical rampage, (almost) nothing American, it seems, can stand the test.²⁰ The food, of course, is a

18 "America is nothing but a prejudice."

19 As Robertson points out, "[e]verything goes wrong, with an inevitability that becomes almost farcical" after Moorfeld has bought land in Ohio: "Anhorst is drowned in Lake Erie after a collision between two steamers: one had no warning bell and was sunk, while the captain of the other did not stop to look for survivors. A little German girl Moorfeld is fond of is frightened into insanity by a Methodist preacher. Back in New York, Moorfeld finds that his German acquaintances have either become unscrupulous materialists or fallen victim to the terrorism of American 'Rowdies.' He also meets Mozart's librettist Lorenzo da Ponte just as the latter is collapsing from hunger in a Manhattan street; da Ponte tells how, having found Americans too prudish for Mozart, he became a businessman, but became bankrupt and was reduced to penury. (In fact, as Jeffrey Sammons has pointed out, da Ponte [1749–1838], who founded an Italian opera-house in New York and taught Italian at Columbia College, made an adequate if precarious living and praised New York in his memoirs.) On the day Moorfeld leaves New York, thousands of xenophobic rioters burn down the German quarter. As his ship passes through the Narrows, an immigrant ship arrives full of Germans who point to the smoke rising from Little Germany and shout: 'Vivat das freie Amerika!' ('Long live free America!,' iv. 567)" (20–1)

20 The book is told in a third-person perspective that remains tied to its main character Moorfeld throughout the text and thus actually goes in the direction of a Jamesian point of view. The function of this narrative perspective is different, however. While James focuses on the main character's consciousness, Kürnberger's narrator wants to emphasize his character's superiority and thus presents not only his thoughts but also the—admiring—perceptions of others from the outside.

disaster: "Ohne sich nach den Paragraphen der höheren Gourmandise zu richten, fand unser Gast schon als bloßer Naturalist das Frühstück ungenießbar. Sämtliche Gerichte waren entweder halb verbrannt oder halb roh. Es machte ihm den Eindruck, als seien sie gleichzeitig an's Feuer gestellt und nach eben der despotischen Minutenuhr ihrer Schule wieder entrissen worden, ohne jenes liebevolle Eingehen auf das zartere Spiel der Individualitäten, auf die hingebende Empfänglichkeit des Coteletts und auf den charakterfesten Widerstand des Roastbeafs." (32)²¹ This criticism of cooking marks only a beginning, however. Table manners are repulsive. Religious practices are hypocritical. These first impressions add up to a bleak picture: "Wahrlich, unser Freund zieht eine starke Summe seit gestern. Ein Volk, das nicht einmal die Instincte des Gaumens und der Andacht—also die Grundpfeiler der sinnlich-sittlichen Menschennatur—zu erfüllen weiß, das wandelt doch weit ab vom europäischen Wege." (38)²² When Moorfeld takes a boat to get from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh, his verdicts acquire an almost hysterical pitch: "Schlechtere Reisegesellschaft hat wohl selten ein Wanderer gefunden, als ich, Unglücklicher, bei dieser Fahrt. Es umgab mich ein Genre von Menschen, das gar nicht zu charakterisieren ist, denn Alles fehlte ihnen, um Menschen zu sein, und Alles besaßen sie, was zur Bestialität gehört. Ihre Moralität und ihre Sitten waren gleich abscheulich." (276)²³ Moorfeld's dismal experiences reach a peak in the morning: "Als ich morgens Toilette machte, circulierte für die ganze Schiffsgesellschaft ein einziges Handtuch; eben so hing ein allgemeiner Kamm sammt Haarbürste an einem Nagel. Jedermann bediente sich unbedenklich dieser Gegenstände der Reihe nach. Ich hätte gerne gefragt, ob nicht auch eine General-

- 21 "Without even thinking of applying standards of the higher art of cooking, our guest found the breakfast inedible, even from a plain naturalist point of view. All dishes were either half burned or half raw. It appeared to him as if they were all put on the fire at the same time and then following the despotism of fast food, snatched away again without loving attention to the gentle play of individualities, the yielding receptivity of the cutlet and the firm resistance of the roast beef."
- 22 "Verily, our friend has arrived at a powerful conclusion since yesterday. A nation which knows how to take care neither of the needs of the palate, nor of religious faith—the twin pillars of our sensuous-moral nature—strays far off the European heritage."
- 23 "A traveler has hardly ever found worse travel company than I did, unlucky man, on this journey. I was surrounded by a type of human being which cannot be characterized, because these people lacked all qualities of a human being and, on the other hand, possessed all elements of bestiality. Their morality and their customs were loathsome."

Zahnbürste da sei, aber ich glaube, dieses Mustervolk braucht überhaupt keine Zahnbürste." (277)²⁴ The incident strikes Moorfeld as a travesty of the idea of equality: "All men are equal! Heißt das so viel als: all hogs are equal?" (277)²⁵ What could provide material for a satirical vignette leads to another sweeping condemnation. "Welch eine verlogene Kultur! ...Gott, was es heißt ein Volk en detail kennen lernen!" (277)²⁶

After these devastating experiences, Moorfeld's encounter with German customs and culture restores hope in the possibility of civilized life.²⁷ Eating already provides a striking contrast: "Auch ihre Mienen waren mit ganzer Andacht und Bedächtigkeit bei dem Genusse; hier wurde nicht amerikanisch gejagt und geschluckt, jeder Bissen ging in's Bewußtsein über, man speiste im Geiste wie in der Form deutsch." (99)²⁸ In contrast to American restlessness and informality, supposedly typical German qualities assume grandiose dimensions, for example, when Moorfeld warns against assimilation: "Thren deutschen Tiefsinn stemmen

- 24 "When I went to the bathroom in the morning, there was only one towel for all passengers aboard, and there were only one comb and one hairbrush for all hanging on a nail. Everyone made use of these items without hesitation. I would have liked to ask whether there also was only one toothbrush for all aboard, but I think these model people do not even use a toothbrush."
- 25 "All men are equal! Does this actually mean: all hogs are equal?"
- 26 "What a hypocritical culture! ...God, how sobering it is to get to know a nation en detail!"—Kürnberger must have taken his example from Dickens's *American Notes*, published in 1842, in which Dickens describes a night on a steamboat on the Potomac River: "The washing and dressing apparatus for the passengers generally, consists of two jack-towels, three small wooden basins, a keg of water and a ladle to serve it out with, six square inches of looking-glass, two ditto ditto of yellow soap, a comb and brush for the head, and nothing for the teeth. Everybody uses the comb and brush, except myself." (176) On a canal boat, going from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh, the situation has become even worse: "The washing accommodations were primitive. There was a tin ladle chained to the deck, with which every gentleman who thought it necessary to cleanse himself (some were superior to this weakness), fished the dirty water out of the canal, and poured it into a tin basin, secured in like manner. There was also a jack-towel. And, hanging up before a little looking-glass in the bar, in the immediate vicinity of the bread and cheese and biscuits, were a public comb and hair-brush." (194) In contrast to Kürnberger, however, Dickens's tone remains one of amused condescension.
- 27 Kürnberger was Austrian by birth but put all his political hopes in the idea of a national German identity.
- 28 "Their expressions, too, in their rapture and circumspection, were fully occupied by the pleasure of eating. There was no American haste here, every bite was fully absorbed into consciousness. This form of eating was German in spirit and form."

Sie entgegen der routinierten Flachheit, Ihr deutsches Gemüth der höflichen Herzenskälte, Ihre deutsche Religion dem trockenen Sectenkram, Ihr deutsches Persönlichkeitsgefühl dem heerdemäßigen Parteitreiben, Ihr deutsches Gewissen dem Humbug und Yankee Trike, Ihre deutsche Sprache dem Mißlaut und der Gedankenarmuth, Ihr deutsches Weinglas der Mäßigkeitsheuchelei, Ihre deutsche Sonntagslust dem Sonntagsmuckerthum Amerika's." (129–30)²⁹ These clear-cut oppositions highlight one of the paradoxical results of Kürnberger's liberal search for a democratic ideal: it leads back to an emphatic affirmation of German culture and more specifically, of the idea of German identity. As most liberals of the period, Kürnberger was in favor of a unified German state. At present, America might be the only hope for a survival of political freedom: "Für unsre Zeiten bleibt die Sternbanner-Republik das Kleinod der Welt. Amerika ist die Baumschule, in welcher die Freiheitsbäume Europa's gezogen werden; Amerika ist die große Cisterne, welche die Erde grün erhält in den Hundstagen des Absolutismus." (175)³⁰ Americans may not make good use of their political freedom, but at least they keep the idea alive, until another nation will be in a position to make better use of it. This nation might be Germany: "Seh ich aber dunkler in Amerika's Zukunft, so benimmt mir das nicht die Spannung meiner Adern, wie Sie sagen, denn in dieser Zukunft erblicke ich wieder eine andere Größe—unsre, die deutsche Größe." (175)³¹

The German immigrant Benthall, who develops this vision as part of an unsparing analysis of the inner contradictions of American society, is then carried away to an even larger vision of an "awakening" of Germany which temporarily unites him, Moorfeld and the women of the von Mildens household in a strong communal bond:

29 "They pit German profundity against routine shallowness, their German soul against polite cold-heartedness, their German religion against dry sectarianism, their German individuality against the herd-instincts of party life, their German conscience against the humbug and Yankee Trike, their German tongue against discord and lack of thought, their German wine glass against hypocritical appeals for moderation, their German enjoyment of social festivities on Sunday against America's Sunday philistinism."

30 "In our times the Stars and Stripes republic remains a precious treasure. America is the tree nursery, in which Europe's trees of freedom are grown. America is the large well, which keeps the planet green in the dog-days of absolutism."

31 "Although I see darkness in America's future, it does not take away the excitement in my veins, as you call it, because the future promises another greatness—ours, the German greatness."

Nein, ich werde ausdauern, Deutscher im Yankeethum, und der Sturz, den ich diesem Mischvolke bevorstehen sehe, kann mich so wenig bekümmern, als uns das Loos einer Ziege kümmert, die einen Jupiter groß gesäugt hat. Mag's dann hereinbrechen, wie diese Blätter zu prophezeien wagen, wir werden in den Bürgerkriegen der Union nicht zu Grunde gehen. Deutschland wird seine Flotte schicken, und seine deutsche Provinz Pennsylvanien sich zu schützen wissen. Was sag' ich: Pennsylvanien? Ganz Nord-Amerika wird deutsch werden, denn unsre Einwanderung stützt sich dann auf ein mächtiges Mutterland sowie sich Yankee-Englisch auf Alt-England stützte. Aber was sag' ich ganz Nord-Amerika? Die ganze Welt wird deutsch werden, denn mit Deutschland's Aufgang wird England untergehen, wie Holland vor England unterging, und sämtliche englische Colonien werden dann dem Deutschthume zufallen, wie die Franzosen in Canada, die Spanier in Florida, die Holländer auf dem Kap und die Portugiesen in Indien den Engländern gewichen sind; die Wachposten der Cultur auf dem ganzen Erdenrund abgelöst und mit deutscher Mannschaft bezogen werden. Deutschland erwacht, und kein Volk der Welt behauptet seinen alten Rang, denn Alle leben vom deutschen Schlafe und verderben mit deutschem Auferstehen. (176)³²

32 "No, I shall persist—a German in Yankeedom—and the fall which I predict for this mixed race concerns me as little as the fate of a goat that raised Jupiter on its milk. Even if a war will break out, as these papers have predicted, we will not perish in the civil wars of the Union. Germany will send its fleet and its German province Pennsylvania will find a way to protect itself. What am I saying: Pennsylvania? All of North-America will become German, because our immigration is based on a powerful motherland, just as Yankee-English profited from Old-England. But why am I saying all of North-America? The whole world will be German, for the rise of Germany will be the fall of England, just as England precipitated Holland's fall, and all English colonies will pass to Germany, just as the French in Canada, the Spanish in Florida, the Dutch on the Cape, and the Portuguese in India gave way to the English. All posts for the guardianship of culture around the globe will be replaced by German squads. When Germany awakens, no other nation will keep its old rank, for at present they still profit from Germany's slumber. They will fall when Germany rises." My translation.—The first impulse today in reading these lines is to look for satirical intentions but the following description of the reaction of Moorfeld and the women of the von Mildens-household leave hardly any doubt that they are in fact, presented in serious terms: "In der Stube aber umfing die Gesellschaft jene tiefere Einigkeit jetzt, welche mit Wortumtausch nicht mehr gefördert werden kann. Moorfeld war voll von Benthall's Charakterbild, das wie ein scharfer Abdruck in heißem Wachs von ihm empfangen wurde, die Frauen konnten nie aufgehört haben, den neuen Urwalds-Gedanken, der ja unmittelbar sie selbst anging, stilbildend weiter zu denken, Benthall endlich, um einen Freund reicher, einer Braut näher, auf zwei Seiten, wie durch eine plötzliche Flankenbewegung zugleich siegesglücklich, mußte am strömendsten bewegt sein. Alle fühlten einen Geist der Zusammengehörigkeit

Kürnberger, we said, had never been in the United States when he wrote his book. His sources were travel reports, political analyses, and newspaper accounts.³³ The main inspiration for his criticism, however, seems to have been the experience of the German poet Nikolaus Lenau, the so-called poet of *Weltschmerz*, who was bitterly disappointed by the United States and claimed that he had been cheated out of a piece of land in Ohio by a corrupt judiciary system. The hero of *Der Amerika-Müde* is exposed to the same fate; he is, in fact, modeled after Lenau and there is a passage which signals to the reader that the name of Kürnberger's hero Moorfeld is actually a pseudonym for Lenau: "Dringend faßte sie Moorfeld's Arm—so dürfen Sie nicht von uns! das darf Ihr letztes Wort nicht sein! Es ist's nicht! antwortete Moorfeld,—ich werde den Frauenherzen noch manches Souvenir schreiben! Verfolgen Sie den Dichternamen Nicolaus..." (494)³⁴ The model of Lenau shapes Kürnberger's book decisively. It is not a positive influence. For, apart from the fact that Lenau gave an extremely prejudiced report about his travels in America, he also misrepresented his own legal problems. Apparently, he was not the victim of unscrupulous Yankees but of a German immigrant whom he had left in charge of his farm while he travelled through the Western states and who then deserted the farm after a while. Thus, the German idealist was not swindled out of his farm by corrupt American businessmen and judges, as is Kürnberger's hero in *Der Amerika-Müde*. He was,

über sich verbreitet, der sich noch nicht aussprechen ließ, der aber nicht duldete, daß Anderes ausgesprochen würde. Man konnte sich nicht mehr als Gesellschaft behandeln, man fühlte sich als Gemeinde." (176f.) ("In the parlor people were united by a common bond which could not be enhanced by the exchange of words. Moorfeld was absorbed by Benthals vision, which struck him like a sharp imprint in hot wax. The women remained occupied with the new jungle-idea, which concerned them most directly. Benthals, finally, having gained a new friend, having moved closer to a future bride, having gained victory on two sides by a sudden flanking maneuver, was moved most strongly by a rush of feeling. All felt a spirit of community spreading among themselves, which could not yet be articulated, but which also kept them from talking about other matters. It was no longer possible to treat each other as mere society members because they were part of one community.")

33 Altogether, it is amazing to see how many discussions of American democracy already existed in the German-speaking countries of the time. Cf. Hildegard Meyer's *Nord-Amerika im Urteil des Deutschen Schrifttums bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*.

34 "Urgently, she grabbed Moorfeld by the arm—you can't leave us that way! This can't be your last word! It isn't! Moorfeld answered,—I shall still write many a dedication to women's hearts. Watch out for the name of the poet Nicolaus..."

in fact, deceived by a *Landsmann*. In consequence, Lenau lost his property for the mundane reason that he failed to keep up his payments on property tax. Moreover, Lenau himself, although he presented himself as a victim of crass materialism, had obviously gone to America for primarily economic reasons, as Manfred Durzak has pointed out:

Lenau hatte keineswegs daran gedacht auszuwandern, sondern seine Amerika-fahrt war eine Geschäftsreise, ausgelöst durch eine geschickte Finanzaktion, einen "Gewinn von Staatspapieren", den er möglichst effektiv anzulegen gedachte. Als er Ende Juli 1832 von Amsterdam aus aufbrach, war seine Rückkehr von vornherein eingeplant: "[...] drei bis vier Wochen bleib ich dort, so daß ich mit Ende Oktober bei euch sein kann, oder wenigstens wieder in Europa." Er hatte lediglich vor, sein Geld in einer Farm anzulegen, die er mit geschäftlichem Bedacht eben im fruchtbaren Ohiogebiet aussuchte, um sie an einen bereits vorher dafür gewonnenen Auswanderer zu verpachten und möglichst in kurzer Zeit ein reicher Mann zu werden, d.h. in Europa Nutznießer seines in Amerika angelegten Kapitals zu sein. So erläutert er ausführlich in einem Brief an seinen Schwager: "In drei bis vier Jahren hat sich dann der Wert meines Eigentums wenigstens auf das Sechsfache gesteigert. [...] Ich kann mich auf meine Leute ganz verlassen und eine gute Rente in Österreich genießen." (136)³⁵

Kürnberger, in contrast, has Moorfeld buy land out of a Utopian vision. He also turns the unreliable German *Landsmann* into a tragic figure who has lost everything and is saved by Moorfeld: "Sein Wesen schien das eines ehrlichen, ja selbst noblen Charakters, die eiserne Hinterwaldsarbeit hatte sein Äußeres verknechtet, sein Inneres machte noch eine Art von Figur." (304)³⁶ As a noble victim, Anhorst becomes part of a melo-

35 "Lenau never had the intention to emigrate. His journey to America was a business trip, triggered by a skillful financial transaction, the profits from treasury bonds which he wanted to invest with maximum profit. When he set out from Amsterdam at the end of July 1832, it was clear that he would not stay permanently: '...I shall stay there for three to four weeks, so that I will be with you, or at least in Europe, by the end of October.' His idea was to invest his money in a farm, which he chose with care in a fertile region in Ohio, business considerations uppermost in his mind. The farm was to be leased to a willing immigrant with the purpose of becoming a rich man in as short a time as possible, i.e. to benefit in Europe from the capital he had invested in America. In a letter to his brother-in-law, he describes his scheme in detail: 'In three to four years the value of my investment will have increased six times at least...I can fully rely on my tenants and will be able to enjoy a good pension in Austria.'"

36 "His inner nature seemed to be that of an honest, indeed a noble character. The extremely hard work in the backwoods had affected his outer appearance and given it a serf-like aspect, but his inner nature remained still unaffected."

dramatic contrast between German honesty and American unscrupulousness: "Er contrastierte eben so fremdartig als vorteilhaft zu den Physiognomien um ihn her, denen die Wolfs- und Luchsnatur eines schlaun und raubgierigen Materialismus grell aufgeprägt war." (305)³⁷ This is one example among many for the polemical use Kürnberger makes of the Lenau-case as one of his main sources of evidence for the deplorable decay of moral principles in American democracy.

It would be too easy, however, to reduce Kürnberger's book to a mere recycling of prejudices. The book also contains remarkable passages. One is the analysis of the social masquerade of the black servant Jack which provides, in the form of an ironic inversion, almost an anticipation of Du Bois's description of black double consciousness:

Drittens hatte Jack einen Charakterzug von satyrischer Laune in sich, der unsern Freund zugleich ergötzte und auch ernsthafter anregte. Der Neger liebte es nämlich, auf eine eigenthümliche Art mit seinem Identitäts-Bewußtsein von Ich und Nicht Ich zu spielen: er setzte sich sein schwarzes Ich als Object, und schimpfte im Charakter eines weißen Subjects drauf los. Durch Haus und Flur konnte man ihn beständig mit, d. h. gegen sich hinbrummen hören: Achtung, schwarzer Esel! merk auf, verdammtes Niggervieh! [...] Moorfeld lachte anfangs über diese Sorte von Humor, aber eines Tages fiel es ihm plötzlich auf, was für ein Sinn darin lag. War's nicht der nämliche Sinn, in welchem er selbst Herrn Staunton gegenüber sich der Ironie bediente? That das der Neger nicht auch, indem er die weiße Race verspottete durch die Selbstverspottung seiner schwarzen? (74)³⁸

In another chapter Benthall provides a penetrating analysis of the professional pride that hampers the German craftsman in America and contrasts this paralyzing status consciousness with an American philosophy of doing: "Ich gebe Ihnen mein Wort, Herr Merbach, ein amerikanischer

37 "In a strange but advantageous way, his face differed from the physiognomies around him, on which a materialism was stamped that had the cunning and rapacious nature of wolf and lynx."

38 "Third, Jack had a satirical trait which delighted and inspired our friend. The Negro loved to play, in his own odd way, with an awareness of his own identity as split between I and Not-I: he would address his black I as an object and scold it in the manner of a white subject. He could be heard constantly, throughout the house and hall, grumbling to, no, against himself: Watch out, black donkey! Listen up, damned nigger beast! ...Moorfeld first laughed about this sort of humor, but one day he suddenly realized the meaning of it. Wasn't it the same reason that motivated him to deal ironically with Mr. Stauton? Didn't the Negro do the same—ridiculing the white race by mocking his own black race?"

Kohlengräber aus Pennsylvanien baut in ein paar Wochen auf alles Mögliche. Er fragt nicht: bist du fähig? er greift zu und denkt: du wirst fähig. Aber freilich, wenn Sie diese Bescheidenheit in's Aufnahmebureau mitbringen, so kostet sie Dollars. Man engagiert Sie nach der Höhe oder Niedrigkeit Ihres Selbstwertgefühls." (109)³⁹ Benthall's advice leads straight to the affirmation of a very un-German philosophy of self-fashioning and self-empowerment: "Glauben Sie an Ihr Glück und es wird sich erfüllen. Was macht den Yankee groß? Daß er keinen Moment zu fixieren, sondern jeden zu überbieten strebt. Anders der Deutsche. Er liebt das Beharren, Alles, auch das Schlechteste, wird ihm zum Ruhepunkte." (127)⁴⁰ Benthall concludes by advocating a combination of qualities which dissolves the melodramatic contrast between German and American national traits and conceives of personal identity as a cultural mix: "Ja, meine Herren, halten Sie Ihre Nationalität fest: Sie sind es dem Lande schuldig; aber fügen Sie ihr vom Yankeetum das brauchbarste Stück ein: Sie sind es sich selbst schuldig." (133)⁴¹

On yet another occasion, Benthall extends his social analysis to an analysis of the American political system and provides a penetrating analysis of "the first industrial state of the world" and its inner problems. His major point is that the social contract, established by the founding documents of the nation, is only fragile and threatened by industrialization on the one hand, slavery on the other.⁴² The Civil War is predicted, the problem of a possible tyranny of the majority discussed and the explosive potential of a growing inequality between rich and poor is emphasized. At another point of the book, at the reception of Mr. Bennet, a superb satire of Southern justifications of slavery is provided by the

39 "I give you my word, Herr Merbach, an American coal-miner from Pennsylvania will try anything within a short period of time. He doesn't ask: can I do it? He gets down to work and thinks: Yes, I can do it. But certainly, if you insist on parading your modesty at the hiring office, it will cost you dollars. The strength or weakness of your self-esteem will determine what you get."

40 "Trust your fortune and you will be rewarded. What is it that makes the Yankee successful? That he never tries to arrest any given moment but is always out to outdo it. The German is different. He loves persistence. Everything, even the worst, will be a resting-place to him."

41 "Yes, gentlemen, hold on to your nationality: you owe it to your country. But add to it the most useful elements of Yankeehood: you owe it to yourself."

42 In contrast to a book like Fanny Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, *Der Amerika-Müde* is uncompromising in its negative verdict on slavery.

monologue of a Virginian slaveholder,⁴³ while the mechanical application of enlightenment principles is satirized through Lord Osmond's obsession with the perfectibility of his dog: "Ich behandle also meinen Omar als Geist. Ich ignoriere seine niedere Natur und wirke auf seine höhere. Ich wecke seine schlummernde und gebundene Sittlichkeit." (181)⁴⁴ In such passages of satirical comment, the book has one of its strong points.

Passages of parody, even self-parody, can also be found in reference to the project of the book itself. After Benthall has ended his devastating analysis of the, in his view, bleak political prospects of the American system, Moorfeld ironically foregrounds the dystopian lust of Benthall's apocalyptic scenario by using Benthall's introduction of his analysis as a fragment (*Bruchstück*) for a word-play: "Bei Gott, ein Bruchstück! rief Moorfeld unter der Last des Gehörten—Alles geht ja hier in die Brüche!" (174)⁴⁵ In passages like these, Kürnberger takes advantage of the potential of fiction to put judgments into perspective through the interaction of characters who respond to each other and thereby relativize a statement. Judgments are tied to certain persons and limited by their personal characteristics. For example, most of the sweeping analyses of the American political system, it turns out, are voiced by Benthall, who is finally compromised by his own opportunistic surrender to the lure of money. Even "our hero" Moorfeld is not exempt from occasional

43 With another superbly ironic version of "doubleness": "Sie würden überall die wünschenswerthe Herrschaft der Vernunft erblicken. In der That, die Vernunft des Negers ist sein Herr. Sie steht verkörpert außer ihm, und das ist das Ganze des Unterschieds zwischen Freien und Sklaven. Wie der Dichter mit der glücklichen Kunst des Contrastes das empfindende und das denkende Wesen in uns oft in zwei getrennte Personifikationen darstellt—Ihr Goethe liebte das—so stellen wir den Carlos, den Antonio, den Mephisto, wenn Sie wollen, und unsre Sklaven das instinctivere Wesen des Clavigo, des Tasso, des Faust dar." (203f.) ("You would encounter manifestations of the most desirable rule of reason everywhere. Indeed, reason is the Negro's master. It stands, in its own *Gestalt*, outside of him and that is the whole difference between the free and the enslaved. Just as the poet—in drawing on the clever art of contrast—often presents the feeling and the reasoning side in us by two separate characters—your Goethe loved that—so, if you wish, we embody his Carlos, Antonio, Mephisto, and our slaves the more instinctive nature of Clavigo, Tasso, and Faust.")

44 "I appeal to my Omar's soul. I ignore his base instincts and encourage his higher nature. I awaken his dormant and still fettered moral self."

45 "By God, a fragment! cried out Moorfeld under the oppressive weight of what he had heard—everything falls to pieces here."

weaknesses. There is, in fact, a moment of unexpected self-irony when he reveals his plans for buying a farm in Ohio and draws attention to a clash of ambitions by saying: "Was werden unsre verehrungswürdigen Damen denken! Ein Dichter ist angemeldet und ein Landspeculant kommt." (164)⁴⁶ On the other hand, the book never acknowledges Lennau's materialistic motives. The reason for Moorfeld's plan to buy a farm is always presented as a vague yearning for a new, utopian beginning.

In many ways, *Der Amerika-Müde* is a very knowledgeable book about America. Historical figures like Channing or Monroe are introduced in novel-of-manners-style and presented on the basis of a detailed knowledge of American politics and intellectual history. The book contains remarkable analyses and observations which do not appear dated even today. And yet, there are many other passages where both the initial enthusiasm and the subsequent criticism appear to be entirely out of proportion. One striking characteristic of the book is the strong emotionality of many of its judgments.⁴⁷ The book starts with a euphoric view of America. This praise of America is part of a glorious teleological vision of historical progress. When America disappoints such grandiose expectations, strong words and emotions begin to dominate: the vulgar newspaper boy is associated with an ape, the surprising American penchant for titles is "disgusting," the traveling Yankee is "a monster," marked by "bestiality," his morals and manners are equally repulsive, and so is the music played at a public frolic. After the young German protégée Annette is scared into madness at a Methodist camp meeting, the book's highly charged language reaches a melodramatic peak:

Zu groß ist, was hier beginnt, es muß barbarisch beginnen. Die Sieger von Teutoburg, die zweimal Rom überwunden, sollen deutsches Geistesbanner auf Washington's Kapitol pflanzen. Die neue Welt ist ihnen gegeben, wie die alte.

46 "What will our revered ladies think? A poet has been announced and a land speculator appears."

47 One cannot help but think of Heine's famous apodictic verdict: "Oder soll ich nach Amerika, nach diesem ungeheuren Freiheitsgefängnis, wo die unsichtbaren Ketten mich noch schmerzlicher drücken werden, als zu Hause die sichtbaren, und wo der widerwärtigste der Tyrannen, der Pöbel, seine rohe Herrschaft ausübt! Du weißt, wie ich über dieses gottverfluchte Land denke, das ich einst liebte, als ich es nicht kannte." (Heinrich Heine, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, Berlin 1970, 129) ("Or shall I go to America, this immense prison of freedom, where invisible chains will wear even more heavily on me than the visible at home, and where the most repulsive of tyrants, the mob, exercises its coarse rule! You know what I think about this god damned country, which I once loved before I got to know it.")

Voran, deutsche Jungfrau, heilige, weihe! Du leidest für dein Volk; du bist Deutschland! armes, frommes, mißhandeltes Kind. Mit deinem Unglück ist dieser Boden deutsch geworden;—könnte der Geist denn siegen, wenn er nicht zertreten wird? Wir haben, liebes Kind, eine große Schuld in dieses Land eingeführt: wir sind unschuldig! Wir sind wahrhaftig unter den Lügner, wir sind aufopfernd unter den Selbstlingen, wir sind zart unter den Ungeschlachten, wir sind keusch unter den Frechen, wir sind tiefsinnig unter den Stumpfen, wir sind fromm unter den Heuchlern, wir haben Herzen unter Ziffern, wir sind Menschen unter Bestien! (399)⁴⁸

Although one may be impressed by some passages of analysis in *Der Amerika-Müde*, a rhetoric of excess undermines the novel's analytical promise. As a contribution to an intellectual debate about American society, the book has glaring shortcomings from today's point of view. Is the book worth recovering, then, for a tradition of German-American literature? What makes *Der Amerika-Müde* a fascinating and instructive book today is the insight it provides into a clash between American and German culture in the nineteenth century. The interest this encounter still holds lies on two levels: methodologically, Kürnberger's book highlights a characteristic mode of cultural and social analysis; intellectually, it provides the fascinating spectacle of a cultural and philosophical system wrestling with the social and political realities of modernization. In view of some of his strident criticisms of American democracy, one may almost forget that Kürnberger was a liberal in search of political freedom. How is it possible, then, that he arrived at (or should one say: wrote himself into) such a harsh and highly emotional rejection of American democracy? For a German reader, the inquiry into his contradictory stand also promises to provide insight into the difficulties which the dominant German cultural tradition had with the political system, and, above all, the political realities of democracy.

48 "So great is what commences here—it has to start barbarously. The victors of Teutoborg, who twice defeated Rome, should plant the banner of German culture on Washington's Capitol. The New World, just like the old one, is waiting. Ahead, German virgin, holy, consecrated! You suffer for your people; you are Germany! Poor, pious, ill-treated child. Through your suffering this soil has become German—could the soul ever triumph, if it hadn't suffered before? We have, dear child, brought guilt into this country: we are innocent! We are truthful among liars, we are self-sacrificing among egotists, we are sensitive among the uncouth, we are pure among the brazen, we are profound among the dull, we are pious among hypocrites, we still have hearts beneath figures, we are humans among beasts!"

Kürnberger's mode of cultural analysis and his uncompromising judgments are generated by the same source, his grounding in the culture of German classicism. Methodologically, his basic premise is that of an organicism in which part and whole are linked organically, so that the smallest part can become the symbol of the organism as a whole. This assumption is tailor-made for the purpose of cultural analysis and cultural criticism, because it allows for a metaphorical mode of representation in which vast generalizations can be based on single incidents and observations. Just as each blossom reproduces the biological blueprint of the whole plant, so does every single phenomenon within American society represent the whole. Only if part and whole are linked organically, so that the part represents the whole, does it become possible to use single observations or incidents as the basis for broad generalizations about society. This solves the central methodological problem of cultural analysis, the question of representativeness, in an ingenious and easy way. Obviously, the critic or traveler who wants to analyze another society cannot inspect all of its different aspects and manifestations in their full variety (especially, if he or she does not even take the trouble to go there on his own, as in Kürnberger's case). Thus, a method of analysis and a mode of representation has to be found that can authorize large-scale conclusions. This can be most effectively achieved by regarding single observations as symbols of society as a whole. The foreign observer who sees a well-to-do middle-class woman reading the newspaper at breakfast can thus conclude with confidence that American society is uncultured, because the single incident stands for society as a whole. To a certain extent, such generalizations are inevitable in cultural analyses, because an analysis of a whole society would not be possible without ascribing some kind of larger representativeness to selected observations. However, there are obvious differences in the method and the extent of generalizing. Kürnberger provides an extreme case by often drawing grand conclusions on the basis of brief encounters and fleeting impressions. In fact, he belongs to that class of intellectuals who only need an afternoon of random observations in order to arrive at a verdict about another country. Taking a walk or having a meal can thus already provide the intellectual observer with enough material for a final judgment about another society.

Kürnberger's tacit organicism has two consequences. One is that—almost at will and depending on changing emotional states—almost everything can become a symbol of American society. Thus, in the enthu-

siastic beginning of the book, the special quality of the light is seen as symbol of America's promise:

Unser Ankömmling empfindet ihn voll. Sein Auge ist wie von einem Zauber gefesselt vor dieser Lichtwirkung. Es ist ihm, als sähe er in der neuen Welt ein neues, sich selbst übertreffendes Tageslicht. Und das sinnliche Bild wie ein Symbol deutend, ruft er aus: Ja, nur Amerika hat Tag, Europa das Phosphorlicht seiner faulenden Stoffe. (4-5)⁴⁹

Soon, however, negative impressions begin to dominate. Following a familiar pattern, American food is interpreted as symbol of civilizatory immaturity. Drinking, too, can be culturally expressive: "Im Trinken liegt ja...eine gewisse Symbolik." (33)⁵⁰ In fact, some American drinking habits produce a culture shock in Kürnberger's observer ("ahnungsvolles Erschrecken"). Unwittingly, American society has revealed its true character through these drinking habits. In this view, everyday customs become significant symbols of the general state of American democracy, because they represent society as a whole. Robertson fails to grasp this organicist premise of the book when he says: "Kürnberger is hampered by numerous deficiencies. Most obviously, his attempt at a serious critique of America is mixed up with trivial objections to American table manners, zig-zag fencing and so forth..." (30) For the cultural critic who bases his analysis on organicist assumptions, even the lack of a nightingale can reveal the inner state of a whole society.⁵¹

49 "Our newly arrived feels it strongly. His eye is touched like magic by the light. It appears to him as if he had encountered a new kind of self-surpassing daylight in the new world. Interpreting this sensuous image as a symbol, he cries out: Yes, only America possesses daylight; Europe has the phosphorescent light of its decaying fabric."

50 "Undoubtedly, there lies a certain symbolism in drinking."

51 The case of "the absent nightingale" has become a famous, often quoted example of Lenau's American impressions: "Bruder, diese Amerikaner sind himmelanstinkende Krämerseelen. Tot für alles geistige Leben, mausetot. Die Nachtigall hat recht, daß sie bei diesen Wichten nicht einkehrt. Das scheint mir von ernster tiefer Bedeutung zu sein, daß Amerika gar keine Nachtigall hat." (137) Lenau, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, 207. ("Brothers, these Americans are revoltingly petty-minded. Dead to all spiritual life—stone-dead. The nightingale is right not to stop by these wretches. It seems to me of deeper significance indeed that there is no nightingale in America.") The theme has provided Rolf Weber with the titles for his anthology of German travel reports, *Land ohne Nachtigall* (A Country Without Nightingale); for the Lenau-quote, see p. 78.

The missing nightingale is of significance also because of a second consequence of Kürnberger's organicist premise: the identity not only of part and whole, but of form and content, of outer appearance and inner substance (*Gestalt und Gehalt*). Thus, the introduction of the book's central character Moorfeld already reveals his true character. "Ein künstlerischer Wurf geht auch durch seine Bekleidung. Sie hat nichts zu thun mit dem entsagenden Negligé des abstrakt Gebildeten. Sie verräth Formensinn. Sie stellt eine Persönlichkeit dar, welche über die Identität von Gestalt und Gehalt durch ein natürliches Gefühl, durch eine angeborene Poesie belehrt ist." (3)⁵² The organicist premise of the identity of *Gehalt* and *Gestalt* can explain Kürnberger's outrage about the lack of taste in American society (certainly not a view restricted to him). For Kürnberger, the colorful furniture of the businessman Staunton, following an aesthetics of conspicuousness, resembles the stark, unbalanced preferences of the child, and therefore provides telling proof (*sinnliche Anschauung*) that American society is still in an infantile stage. Philosophically speaking, informality signifies a lack of form and thus indicates that an identity of form and content has not yet been achieved or, worse, has been willfully discarded. In both cases, informality symbolizes immaturity. Where, on the other hand, manners and interior decoration are governed by harmonious form, as in the house of the culture-conscious Mr. Bennet, this is taken as hopeful sign that maturity may still arrive in America.

The example of Bennet illustrates the crucial role culture plays in Kürnberger's discussion of America. Everyday objects may be significant symbols, but the realm of culture provides the true test, because it represents the essence of society.⁵³ Culture is the manifestation of a nation's soul. One of the most telling and devastating facts about America is what American society has done to the Italian Da Ponte, the librettist of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, who dies like a stray dog in the streets of Manhattan, because, as an artist, he cannot make a living. Music provides

52 "An artistic quality also marks his clothing. It has nothing to do with the spare deshabelle of a person of merely formal education. It reveals sense of form. It depicts a personality that, through natural feeling and an inherent sense of poetry, knows about the identity of form and substance."

53 Cf. Meyer's apt characterization: "Denn die eigentliche Frage, die der Kürnbergerschen Schrift zugrunde liegt, ist ja zuerst die nach der Kultur oder Kulturfähigkeit des Landes." (72) ("The key question that stands at the center of Kürnberger's writing is that of the state of the country's culture, as well as its suitability for culture.")

a crucial point of reference throughout the novel. The disharmonious instances Moorfeld encounters at the beginning already reveal a barbaric dimension of American society:

So z. B. stimmt gleich im nächstgelegenen [Platz] ein Orchester von Schwarzen seine Instrumente, und veranlaßt unsern Gast ein Glas Eis zu nehmen, als Folie seines ersten amerikanischen Kunstgenusses. Das Concert beginnt. Ein seltsam zerhackter Rhythmus, dessen Tactart in einigem Dunkel schwebt, und überdies von jedem der einzelnen Künstler ziemlich selbständig gehandhabt wird! Aber wie wird unserm Zuhörer, als die Melodie, ohne alle Vermittlung, plötzlich aus Dur in Moll überspringt? Entsetzt fährt er auf, reißt dem Vorgeiger die Violine aus der Hand, und spielt ihm die Figur correct vor. (10)⁵⁴

On the other hand, in his attempt to express the grandiose dimensions of Broadway, Kürnberger's narrator draws a parallel to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony! In correction of the "disgusting" disharmony of America's mostly (black) music, German music finally resets the cultural balance:

Als Moorfeld unter den stillen Nachthimmel heraustrat, ward ihm eine freundliche Ueberraschung. Deutsche Handwerker zogen am Hause vorbei und sangen eines ihrer schönen Heimathslieder. Das Lied bewegte sich von den wohlklingenden Männerstimmen getragen in wenigen glücklich gruppirten Accorden, es stieg wie reine Goldstrahlen aus dem Herzen. Moorfeld stand und lauschte. Es war ihm wie die Berührung einer Freundeshand, nach dem Anfall eines Straßenräubers. Nie hatte ein Lied eine glücklichere Wirkung. Wie hob sich deutsches Maß von amerikanischer Graßheit hier so sonnenhell ab! Die Sänger woben ihrer Nation ein Ehrenkleid, von dem sie selbst nichts ahnten. (97)⁵⁵

54 "At the next [square] there is, for example, an orchestra of blacks tuning their instruments which induces our guest to order a glass of ice cream, as a foil for his first treat of American art. The concert begins. A strangely chopped up rhythm—its beat floating somewhat in the dark and handled moreover by each musician quite independently. But how does our listener feel when the melody suddenly shifts from major to minor key? Horrified he jumps up, tears the violin out of the hand of the first violinist and shows him how to play the part correctly."

55 "Stepping out into the quiet night, a pleasant surprise awaited Moorfeld. German artisans passed by the house and sang one of their beautiful songs from home. In a few, well arranged chords, the song was carried by melodious male voices and rose like pure golden rays from the heart. Moorfeld stood and listened. This was like the touch of a friend's hand after the attack of a street mugger. Never had a song had a happier effect. How brightly did German harmony distinguish itself from American grossness! The singers wove their nation an honorary robe without realizing it."

The centrality of the idea of culture reflects Kürnberger's debt to the culture of German classicism and its elevation of culture to the level of a supreme moral and spiritual inspiration. In a helpful essay, Ritchie Robertson has pointed out to what extent the legacy of German classicism pervades Kürnberger's book and informs its judgments. Emphasizing the far-reaching influence of German classicism on Kürnberger, Robertson claims quite rightly: "His classical aesthetics preclude him from giving an adequately realistic depiction of American life." (26) Judged by the standards of German classical aesthetics, "everyday America must of course seem ugly and grotesque." (27) Kürnberger's "allegiance to German classicism leads him to over-estimate the importance of culture and to confuse it with politics and with morality." (31) There are, at various points of the novel, references to Marquis Posa,⁵⁶ Novalis, Beethoven, Goethe, Schiller, and Heine in order to authorize critical statements or judgments. There is also an interesting critique of German classicism when Kürnberger claims that writers like Goethe and Schiller still accepted the separation of life and art. In contrast, Kürnberger wants to overcome this separation. This is why a poet like Moorfeld can and should become the judge of the American political experiment and why the discussion of the political potential of American society takes, literally, the form of *cultural* criticism. As Robertson points out: "Kürnberger thinks that the liberalism of the *Vormärz* overestimated the importance of politics at the expense of culture. He therefore shows us America through the eyes of a poet, in order to demonstrate that cultural decline necessarily brings political degeneracy. The poet, as Moorfeld explains, can best judge how far the ideal has been realised in any political system." (Robertson, 25–26) In Kürnberger's view, American democracy is built on the Enlightenment assumption that political freedom will automatically liberate human reason. In contrast, Kürnberger regards the political system as a context in which human potential can develop—but will not automatically do so. Culture therefore has to become the agent of *Veredlung* (ennoblement) and the refusal of American culture to even attempt this must be seen as a disastrous mistake which deserves the strongest condemnation.

56 "So werd' ich bewohnen ein festes, wohlgezimmeres Haus, ein Haus gebaut auf die erste aller Wissenschaften, auf die Wissenschaft vom Volke. Marquis Posa *sans phrase* ist der Hausherr darin." (3) ("Thus I shall live in a solid, well-built house; a house built on the first of all sciences, the science of the people. Marquis Posa *sans phrase* is head of the household.")

The problem with Kürnberger's premise is not so much that he regards culture as a crucial source of social values but that he defines cultural value in a particular, limited way, which prevents him from analyzing American culture on its own terms and in relation to the political system of democracy. A comparison with Tocqueville, and especially his second volume on the effects of democracy on American culture, is instructive here. In both cases, Kürnberger's as well as Tocqueville's, the object of analysis is culture. However, these two foreign observers approach the problem in entirely different ways. While Tocqueville is curious about the new forms culture takes in a democracy, Kürnberger is angry about the fact that these forms fall short of his ideals. Tocqueville is not out to judge but to understand the reasons for the characteristic aspects of American culture.⁵⁷ Dominant among these reasons for him is not a rude, unrefined national character but the new historical phenomenon of democracy. For Tocqueville democracy is more than just freedom. It is a whole way of life characterized by inevitable consequences for all social arrangements and the changing functions of cultural expression. It transforms philosophy, the arts, customs, everything. Culture is thus shaped by political structures, in fact, may be even deformed by them—for example, in its tendency toward commercialism and sensationalism. However, such developments are a price one has to pay for democracy's egalitarian thrust. From Tocqueville's point of view, a cultural criticism that starts out with culture and makes it the basic criterion for evaluating the state of society is unduly narrow, because it ignores the mutual dependence of the political and the cultural sphere. One cannot have one without the other: one cannot have aristocratic standards of taste without the political dominance of the aristocracy and one cannot have democratic liberation without a democratization of culture that must also affect the authority of certain standards of taste.⁵⁸ That political freedom and

57 See, for example, Tocqueville's explanation of American informality: "This American way of relying on themselves alone to control their judgement leads to other mental habits...Being accustomed to rely on the witness of their own eyes, they like to see the object before them very clearly. They therefore free it, as far as they can, from its wrappings and move anything in the way and anything that hides their view of it, so as to get the closest view they can in broad daylight. This turn of mind soon leads them to a scorn of forms, which they take as useless, hampering veils put between them and truth." (430)

58 A fine example is provided by Tocqueville's treatment of the "lack-of-taste"-theme: "There are, too, in any democracy men whose fortunes are on the increase but whose desires increase much more quickly than their wealth, so that their eyes devour the

cultural dehierarchization may be inextricably linked is a possibility Kürnberger does not grasp.

If Kürnberger's model of relations is metaphoric, Tocqueville's is interactionist. He develops his analysis of American democracy in an ongoing comparison between aristocracy and democracy. Single elements are seen in interaction with other elements in that comprehensive system called democracy.⁵⁹ They reinforce each other or work against each other, but they do not stand for the whole. They illustrate the shifts and changing forms of mutual dependency that are created by the new political system. The trend toward sensationalism in American culture, for example, does not reflect the superficiality or lack of "inner substance" of Americans (the famous German *Innerlichkeit*). It is one of the consequences of the restlessness of individuals in a democracy, no matter whether these individuals are superficial or substantial. This means that the same person can act differently in different social and historical

good things wealth will one day provide long before they can afford them. They are always on the lookout for shortcuts to these anticipated delights. These two elements always provide democracies with a crowd of citizens whose desires outrun their means and who will gladly agree to put up with an imperfect substitute rather than do without the object of their desire altogether. The craftsman easily understands this feeling, for he shares it. In aristocracies he charged very high prices to a few. He sees that he can now get rich quicker by selling cheaply to all. Now, there are only two ways of making a product cheaper. The first is to find better, quicker, more skillful ways of making it. The second is to make a great number of objects which are more or less the same but not so good. In a democracy every workman applies his wits to both these points." (466)

59 To what extent Tocqueville's analysis is superior to Kürnberger's or Trollope's forms of cultural criticism is most strikingly apparent in his description of American manners: "There is too much mobility in the population of a democracy for any definite group to be able to establish a code of behavior and see that it is observed. So everyone behaves more or less after his own fashion, and a certain incoherence of manners always prevails, because they conform to the feelings and ideas of each individual rather than to an ideal example provided for everyone to imitate. [...] New political institutions and new mores then bring together in the same places men still vastly different in education and habits and compel them to a life in common; this constantly leads to the most ill-assorted juxtapositions. There is still some memory of the former strict code of politeness, but no one now knows quite what it said or where to find it. Men have lost the common standard of manners but have not yet resolved to do without it, so each individual tries to shape, out of the ruins of former customs, some rule, however arbitrary and variable. Hence manners have neither the regularity and dignity frequent in aristocracies nor the qualities of simplicity and freedom which one sometimes finds in democracies; they are both constrained and casual." (606)

contexts, depending on the range of choices that are opened up by a political system. Kürnberger himself provides an example in the story of the German immigrant Benthall, who is first introduced with the memorable sentence "Ich danke Ihnen für dieses *deutsche* Wort,"⁶⁰ but who is then shown to completely surrender to the American success myth. For Kürnberger, this is a betrayal of the absolute priority of spiritual values and, especially, the value of *Innerlichkeit*. Tocqueville, on the other hand, would not see it that way. To be sure, he would analyze the political and social consequences of an unfettered success-drive. But he would not condemn it on moral grounds, because such behavior reflects certain logical consequences of the new political system. Because of his interest in how the political system works, Tocqueville became a far more perceptive observer of American society than Kürnberger and provided a more productive model of cultural analysis.

Kürnberger's metaphoric mode of cultural analysis is tempting because it solves the problem of national representativeness in an easy way. Whatever strikes the observer as significant can be taken to represent the whole. Moreover, if culture is the site of true values, then cultural matters can become key symbols. This must be especially gratifying for the intellectual who is, after all, *the* (self-appointed) expert on cultural matters and can thus also become the expert for society as a whole. (Kürnberger's gestures of sweeping condemnation have therefore not gone out of fashion with intellectuals.) The cultural critic who bases his criticism on organicist premises need not consider the possible relativity of his comments. Here, too, a comparison can be instructive. In her controversial travel report *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), Fanny Trollope consistently attempts to put her observations into perspective: "Yet were I, traveller-like, to stop here, and set it down as a national peculiarity, or republican custom, that milliners took the lead in the best society, I should greatly falsify facts. I do not remember the same thing happening to me again, and this is one instance among a thousand, of the impression every circumstance makes on entering a new country, and of the propensity, so irresistible, to class all things, however accidental, as national and peculiar. On the other hand, however, it is certain that if similar anomalies are infrequent in America, they are nearly impossible

60 "I am grateful to you for this *German* word" (in the sense of a comment based on idealist principles).

elsewhere." (6)⁶¹ After having found harsh words about the, in her view, repulsive "incessant, remorseless spitting of Americans," she immediately qualifies her comments: "It is possible that in this phrase, 'Americans,' I may be too general. The United States form a continent of almost distinct nations, and I must now, and always, be understood to speak only of that portion of them which I have seen. In conversing with Americans I have constantly found that if I alluded to anything which they thought I considered as uncouth, they would assure me it was local, and not national; the accidental peculiarity of a very small part, and by no means a specimen of the whole. 'That is because you know so little of America,' is a phrase I have listened to a thousand times, and in nearly as many different places. *It may be so*—and having made this concession, I protest against the charge of injustice in relating what I have seen." (10)⁶² In the end, the empirically-minded writer, in the best Anglo-Saxon tradition, assures the reader that she has carefully checked the representativeness of her own statements and claims: "While reading and transcribing my notes, I underwent a strict self-examination. I passed in review all I had seen, all I had felt, and scrupulously challenged every expression of disapprobation; the result was, that I omitted in transcription much that I had written, as containing unnecessary details of things which had displeased me; yet, as I did so, I felt strongly that there was no exaggeration in them; but such details, though true, might be ill-natured, and I retained no more than were necessary to convey the general impressions I received." (218–9) In contrast to Kürnberger, Trollope shows a persistent awareness of the precariousness of her generalizations, while Kürnberger, on the other hand, introduces a brief moment of potential self-scrutiny only in order to defend his procedure—significantly by drawing on another organicist metaphor: "Es ist wahr, ich schließe von kleinen Zügen oft auf den ganzen Charakter. Diese Mikrologie mag ihr Grausames haben, wenn der Schluß ungünstig ausfällt. Ich gebe das zu. Ich

61 It is very likely that Trollope used these reflections strategically in order to create an image of fair-mindedness, especially for potential American readers. However, by doing this, she also has to concede the limits of her generalizations. For Kürnberger, such an acknowledgment would undermine his whole project.

62 See also the following of Trollope's qualifications: "I by no means give this history of Nick, the chicken merchant, as an anecdote characteristic in all respects of America..." (89); "but so far as my observation has extended..." (132); "It must be remembered, however, here and every where that this phrase, 'the Americans,' does not include the instructed and travelled portions of the community." (239)

sehe aber nicht ein, warum ich den Baum nur am Stamm und nicht auch in seinen zartesten Aussprossungen erkennen sollte." (245)⁶³

There is another side to this comparison between Trollope and Kürnberger, however, than the mere opposition between sober-minded Anglo-Saxon empiricism and idealist speculation. Both of these descriptions of America from a European, "Old-World"-perspective also show some interesting similarities. Both emphasize the unreliability of law enforcement and the many contradictions produced by an egalitarian ideology, they stress the cold, calculating materialism shaping human relations, thoroughly demystify life on the frontier and present camp-meetings as significant instances of the fate of religion in the New World. Above all, they agree in their criticism of American manners which they regard as manifestation of a deplorable lack of taste. And while Kürnberger's hero turns away in disgust, Trollope is hardly less outspoken in summing up her American experiences: "I suspect that what I have written will make it evident that I do not like America [...] I do not like them. I do not like their principles, I do not like their manners, I do not like their opinions." (302-3) Both, Trollope and Kürnberger, see the main reason for the shortcomings of American society in the leveling effects of a mechanically applied idea of equality. But the consequences are defined quite differently in both cases. For Kürnberger, the worst influence lies in the area of cultural values, in which materialism and relentless vulgarization deprive democracy of its vision of moral progress; for Trollope, a naive affirmation of the idea of equality endangers "the graces, the honours, the chivalry of life." (307) One longs for ennoblement of the soul, the other for refinement in manners; one is afraid of losing a utopian vision of human development, the other a mannered mode of life.

Kürnberger's major criticism of American society is that it has not gone far enough in realizing its ideals, Trollope's that it has already gone too far. Both write for audiences at home—in the case of Kürnberger in order to prevent a trivialization of the idea of political freedom, in the case of Trollope in order to warn idealists at home against unforeseen consequences of democracy:

63 "It is true: I often take small traits to draw conclusions on the whole character. This micrology may have its cruel side when the conclusion is unfavorable. I admit that. However, I do not see why I should make out the tree by its trunk only and not by the delicate tips of its branches as well."

I know that among the best, the most pious, the most benevolent of my countrymen, there are hundreds, nay, I fear thousands, who conscientiously believe that a greater degree of political and religious liberty (such as is possessed in America) would be beneficial for us. How often have I wished, during my abode in the United States, that one of these conscientious, but mistaken reasoners, fully possessed of his country's confidence, could pass a few years in the United States, sufficiently among the mass of the citizens to know them, and sufficiently at leisure to trace effects to their causes. Then might we look for a statement which would teach these mistaken philanthropists to tremble at every symptom of democratic power among us; a statement which would make even our sectarians shudder at the thought of hewing down the Established Church, for they would be taught, by fearful example, to know that it was the bulwark which protects us from the gloomy horrors of fanatic superstition on one side, and the still more dreadful inroads of infidelity on the other. (268)

For Kürnberger, "die sittliche Selbstverpflichtung des Menschen"⁶⁴ prevents a collapse of democracy into anarchy, for Trollope society's institutions. For Kürnberger, the alternative to American informality is aesthetic form as the deliberate attempt to create a semblance of the ideal; for Trollope, the alternative is manners as evidence of the continuing authority of an idea of civilizatory refinement.

Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* is a levelheaded travel report with a certain degree of self-awareness about the dangers of sweeping generalizations. Still, in the final analysis, it remains a superficial discussion of American society. Trollope never provides a convincing legitimation for the normative claims she connects with her major criteria of manners and taste. They draw their authority simply from the pleasing spectacle of civilizatory self-control they provide. In contrast, Kürnberger insists on the impossible—an organization of social life that is guided by a philosophical principle—but, at least, he is searching for an ideal that may function as a utopian challenge to society. In order to fulfill this function successfully, however, his analysis would have to be freed from its organicist premises, its insistence on the identity of *Gestalt* und *Gehalt*. Interestingly enough, however, the novel eventually begins to undermine the organicist base of its own judgments, for example, when Moorfeld points out that the poetical Germany is not to be confused with the real one. High standards of culture cannot guarantee civilizatory elevation.

In a similar vein, the signifier "German" is gradually losing its moral force during the course of the book. At the beginning, it stands in clear

64 Most likely a reference to Kant's categorical imperative.

semantic and moral contrast to all things American and poses a ready alternative to American shortcomings. America has the political freedom but not the humanistic ideals to use freedom's potential; German culture has the ideals but lacks the freedom. Increasingly, however, not only Americans but also Germans disappoint the high hopes placed upon them. The institutions of American democracy have not led to an ennoblement of character, as Channing points out at Bennet's reception: "In einer Hinsicht haben unsre Institutionen uns Alle getäuscht. Sie haben nicht jene Veredelung des Charakters bewirkt, welche die köstlichste und in Wahrheit die einzige wesentliche Segnung der Freiheit ist." (214)⁶⁵ But the Germans in America have adapted to these conditions and have done nothing to transform them. The Germans Moorfeld meets in the American West present some of the worst tendencies in German life. The man who seems to be one exception, "der Thatmensch Benthall" (the man of action, Benthall), who, at one point, envisions a mutual enrichment of American and German culture, provides a painful disappointment to Moorfeld when he betrays their common vision (as well as the idealized German *Fraulein*) for the very American prospect of his own individual success-story. The apocalyptic ending of the book, it seems, is not only a final melodramatic illustration of the degeneration of American democracy into mob rule but also a punishment of those who have disappointed Moorfeld and who are now left behind by the poet who returns to Germany in a gesture of defiant self-righteousness.

Moorfeld's disappointments about the Germans in America have an equivalent in another major setback which finally explodes the book's organicist premise of the identity of *Gehalt* und *Gestalt*. One of the few exceptions in Moorfeld's sweeping verdict about the deplorable tastelessness of American society is the reception he attends at the house of the rich businessman and art lover Bennet. Both, the man and his house, express an admirable sense of aesthetic form and seem to support Bennet's claim that, in the history of civilizations, *Geld* has always metamorphosed into *Geist* eventually—a development which he also predicts for American society. In Bennet's salon, in which American thinkers like Channing and Griswold are at home, the possibility of a better future of American society thus seems to emerge. But when Moorfeld returns from his trip to Ohio, he learns to his dismay that Bennet is actually a terrible

65 "In one way, our institutions have deceived us all: they have not produced that ennoblement of character which is the most magnificent and, in truth, the only substantial blessing of freedom."

tyrant who has hidden his true nature under the mask of a cultured man. Harmonious form, it turns out, can be entirely deceptive and does not necessarily represent a noble character. Undoubtedly, Kürnberger wants to demonstrate that cherished aesthetic ideals are corrupted by American society and that even art is transformed into *humbug*. But, in making this point, Kürnberger also negates his own organicist premise that aesthetic form can serve as a guide to truth.

In the end, Moorfeld has nothing. Both Americans and Germans have disappointed him. Aesthetic form is not a reliable manifestation of inner character. Political freedom has not led to an ennoblement of character. Culture cannot guarantee democracy's moral elevation, nor is it a reliable indicator of superior moral or spiritual values. How could such hopes be cherished in the first place? How could the intensely critical mind Kürnberger be so devoid of any self-critical awareness of the problematic nature of his own assumptions? And how could the radical liberal Kürnberger indulge in fantasies of the Germans as "chosen people" (135) or, though playfully, have Benthall call the moon a "born German."⁶⁶ *Der Amerika-Müde* is still a fascinating book because it demonstrates both the (progressive) political function of the idea of a German national identity and the trap that is set by it. In Kürnberger's thought (and that of his time), the signifier "Germany" still serves as reference to an imaginary community that does not yet exist. This imaginary community promises to provide the liberation from absolutism. But in order to legitimize this goal, it has to be justified as a superior value. The culture of German classicism provides an ideal resource for this purpose, because it is based on the ideal of a human potential for which freedom from tyranny is a prerequisite; where such freedom is not yet possible, humanity's fate must be tragic.⁶⁷ The idea of an imagined Germany, not yet in existence,

66 "Sehen Sie, da kommt unser Landsmann! Der Mond ist ein geborener Deutscher. Dacht' ich's doch! wo zwei Deutsche beisammen sind, kann er nicht ausbleiben." (145) ("Look, there comes our *Landsmann*! The moon is a native German. I thought so! Where two Germans are together, the moon cannot fail to appear.")

67 Cf. Hildegard Meyer's description of the link between national identity and a classically defined culture in Kürnberger's generation: "Deutschtum bedeutet ihnen vor allem anderen eine Kultureinheit. [...] So sehen sie, wenn sie auf Amerika blicken, vor allem gerade das Fehlen dieser kulturellen Grundlagen des Staates, ein Vorherrschen nur materieller." (49) ("Above all, the term German refers to a common cultural identity. [...] When they look at America, it is therefore the lack of such a cultural foundation for the nation and a predominance of materialism that strikes them as significant.")

and the ideals of German classicism as a superior, "cultural" justification of political freedom, thus go hand in hand. In the argument of intellectuals like Kürnberger, one is dependent on the other. By propagating a classical ideal of human potential, Kürnberger makes himself immune to the charge of political subversion, for who, after all, could possibly be against moral progress and human ennoblement?

However, by linking the call for political freedom with the aesthetic ideals of German classicism, Kürnberger also sets up a trap for himself. There is, after all, already a country in which political freedom exists, the United States. "America" thus poses a challenge to Kürnberger's (and his generation's) strategy of legitimation (and that of subsequent generations). For America, the democratic model republic, cannot carry the weight of an idealist justification of the idea of democracy. Kürnberger has to denounce American society in order to be able to preserve his own political ideals. He is trapped by the logic of his own legitimation. His approach prevents him not only from achieving a balanced assessment of American society but also fails to establish a self-critical mode of cultural analysis. Not surprisingly, Kürnberger's discussion of American society has its (occasional) strengths in its dramatization of the discrepancy between democratic ideal and reality. As an analysis of American democracy, however, it is unsatisfactory because of the melodramatic excess of Kürnberger's judgments. Paralyzed by his own cultural norms, Kürnberger is unable to comprehend elementary aspects of democracy, as Tocqueville does so superbly. As a liberal, Kürnberger is out to support the idea of democracy. But he is unable to liberate his own perception from the cultural justification he has developed in order to counter the challenge of legitimation he faces in a political system that is still absolutist.

One of the striking results of Kürnberger's failure is that it also undermines his own ideals. At the end of his critical inspection of American democracy, his guiding ideas of the saving powers of culture and the potential of Germany to bring the American Revolution to a successful end have been compromised. What remains is a disaffected intellectual who catches the last boat while everything collapses around him. The critical intellectual has been disappointed and betrayed by everybody—Americans, Germans, his German "brother" in spirit Benthal, the exquisitely cultured Mr. Bennet, even the fair Coleste who has become engaged to the eccentric Lord Osmond during his absence. Ironically, however, the greater the disappointment, the greater Moorfeld's sense of

superiority. In the end, Moorfeld is the only one who preserves his moral integrity, the only one who does not compromise and succumb to the lure of money. Thus, paradoxically, the novel, despite the dystopian horror with which it ends, leads to an effect of intellectual self-empowerment. What is, in the final analysis, most irritating about America is that this superiority is not recognized and duly appreciated. The intellectual who arrived confidently to provide help and enlightenment has lost all control at the end. However, the novel makes up for this insult. America is dismissed as unworthy of the heroic intellectual, and the Germans who remain there are symbolically punished for their "betrayal."⁶⁸

As most discussions of foreign countries, *Der Amerika-Müde* is also a book about the observer's own country, in this case, not so much a book about America but about Germany, as Robertson has pointed out: "In the reflective passages of *Der Amerika-Müde*, Kürnberger is attacking the tendencies already present in the liberalism of the early 1850's: the development of economic laissez-faire unimpeded by culture and morality." (31) In the struggle for political freedom, America presents one option. But it is not an option Kürnberger finds very inviting because it falls short of the high hopes in civilizatory progress and inner ennoblement which he and other German intellectuals of his generation had tied to the idea of political freedom. In the difficulty Kürnberger had with America, his novel illustrates an exemplary—and ultimately tragic—dilemma: the philosophically ambitious attempt to link the argument for democracy with the cultural ideals of German classicism created a fateful legacy. It prevented German intellectuals (and with them the German bourgeoisie) to comprehend the pluralistic dimension of the democratic system. What remains is not so much a reliable guide to America but an early version of an intellectual's "advertisement for myself." In this case, however, the intellectual still hides his self-advertisement and self-empowerment, as generations of intellectuals have done, behind the mask of the heroic cultural critic who acts in the service of ideals that appear to be endangered.

68 In this final punishment of those whom the hero set out to save, the book bears striking similarities to the story of another missionary of democracy who did not get proper recognition, Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889).

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