Alan Corkhill

THE IMAGE OF QUEENSLAND IN THE WRITINGS OF STEFAN VON KOTZE AND RUDOLF DE HAAS

Ludwig Politzer's annotated bibliography of German literature on Australia between 1770 and 1947 lists some 260 titles of publications ranging from zoological and anthropological treatises to travelogues, emigrant handbooks and works of exotic fiction. 1 It is surprising that so few of the individual authors commended by Politzer for the "quality" of their respective contribution to an overall image of Australia have been subjected to closer scrutiny. Werner Friedrich in a monograph entitled Australia in Western Imaginative Prose Writings 1600-19602 does in fact single out and quote at length two of the more distinguished literary figures: the German-born Friedrich Gerstäcker(1816-72) with his popular tales of adventure set in all corners of the globe,3 and the Swiss-born "new Australian" Esther Landolt (1893-1943) with her perceptive and highly acclaimed novel about solitary existence on a West Victorian sheep station (Ewige Herde - Eternal Flock (1942)). A contemporary study which endeavours to bring a number of lesser known authors into sharper focus is Jürgen Tampke's edited anthology of translated extracts "... selected from the writings of world travellers, visitors, academics, scientists and people who lived and worked in Australia".4 A subsequent critical essay by Tampke devotes special attention to the steady stream of nineteenth century German "travel literature".5

The emergence of Australian nationhood at the turn of the century was documented in its manifold dimensions by a wave of European "observers". However, the separate identity of Queensland as viewed specifically through German eyes has been largely ignored, despite the fact that it was poignantly captured in the imaginative and non-fictional oeuvre of Stefan von Kotze and his fellow countryman Rudolf de Haas. The former, of aristocratic lineage (reputedly a distant relative of Count Bismarck) was born in 1869 in the Saxon township of Klein-Oschersleben. Preferring the unordered life of freelance reporting, he journeyed to the Antipodes in the early 1890s in

order to find material for his books, and after a sojourn of a decade eventually returned to his native land to record his experiences, where he died of heart failure at the age of 40.

His magnum opus was Australische Skizzen — Australian Sketches first published in Germany in 1903. The bulk of these sketches charts his peregrinations around North Queensland as a cattle drover, cane-cutter and journalist. The partly anecdotal style of the sketches was to spill over into Geschichten aus Australien — Tales from Australia (1909), a medley of five short humorous tales to which are appended translations by v. Kotze of Edward Dyson's and C.A. Jeffries' stories. Some of the original sketches were subsequently reprinted and illustrated with pen drawings under the title Im australischen Busch — In the Australian Bush (1911).

Literary scholarship has made little more than passing reference to v. Kotze's writings. A. Lodewyckx's pioneering commentary on German cultural achievements in Australia accords the author a couple of paragraphs.⁶ Thirteen years later Ludwig Politzer, in translating and adapting Australische Skizzen for a local readership, was clearly aware of the writer's artistic calibre,⁷ though the "rediscovered" opus received a lukewarm review.⁸ Von Kotze also features very briefly in J. Schulz's Australian literary history, where a comparison is drawn with the French "emigrant" novelist Paul Wenz (1869-1939).⁹ More recently, Volker Wolf in a study of the reception of Australian literature by the German-speaking world mentions, but does not elaborate on v. Kotze's involvement with the Bulletin as an active contributor of prose and verse.¹⁰

The Rhenish pastor and author Rudolf de Haas was born in 1870. He studied theology at the universities of Bonn, Jena, Breslau and Koblenz, and after a brief appointment in London as a teacher he was posted to the Lutheran parish of Charters Towers, where he was to make the acquaintance of v. Kotze. In 1900 he was recalled to Germany following a ministry of three years. His first novel Unter australischen Goldgräbern - Among Australian Gold Diggers not published until 1922, is both a serious and lighthearted semiautobiographical account of everyday life in his parish. Fata Morgana - Mirage (1924) is a novel initially located in Queensland, though the action eventually shifts south. A third Queensland-based novel Die Rache des Australiers — The Revenge of the Australian (1928) is cast in the mould of an exotic tale of adventure and conjures up associations of J.F. Cooper, Charles Sealsfield and Karl May on the North American front. Regrettably, none of de Haas's works has ever been translated into English.

Australian Sketches originated around 1890 at a time of persistent German migration, though they hardly qualify as an "emigrant handbook" in the stricter sense applicable to, say, E. Muhling's Führer durch Queensland — Guide through Queensland (1898), which goes into minute detail concerning the patterns of German settlement in the State. The sketches are also free of superficial judgments bedevilling many a hastily conceived "travelogue" such as Count Reinhold von Anrep-Elmpt's triple volumed Australien: Eine Reise durch den ganzen Erdteil - Australia: A Journey across the whole Continent (1886), part of which recounts a "lightning tour" of Queensland rural centres. Indeed, v. Kotze's personal distaste for this category of "Weltreisende" ("Globetrotter") is revealed in the prefatory remarks by Eugen Zabel to the second (1918) edition of Australian Sketches (p. xii). 11 Furthermore, one of the plethora of bush varns skilfully woven into the narrator's reminiscences satirizes such a visitor to the Palmer goldfield, where as a conspicuous "new chum" in his red shirt and yellow boots he is said to have mistaken exploding Chinese firecrackers for a bushranger attack and, much to the amusement of his onlookers, had held up his hands in an act of terrified surrender.

Zabel lauds the author for having "penetrated to the very core" (p. xiii) of the diverse milieux portraved. Similarly, Politzer stresses the "keen observation of the author and . . . his clear almost prophetic vision as regards future events in Australia's domestic history."12 Certainly the first half of Politzer's assumption is borne out by a cohesive series of astute insights into the psychological make-up and behavioural phenomena of bush dwellers which, while generally known and comprehended in Australian circles, might well have been terra incognita to a German reading public. Without sentimental idealization the author touches on the lonely "Grenzreiter" ("boundary rider") accustomed to drift periodically towards the coastal regions in search of human company, or the typical "Buschmann" ("bushie") with his faithful dog as a spouse substitute. 13 Elsewhere he likens the "Herdenmann" ("stockman") to the Wandering Jew and describes how the "Detail Digger" ("fossicker") relieves his ennui by conversing with his animals. Interlaced with these documentary observations are the anecdotes about the eccentric farmer who failed in his bid to manufacture tallow from insects, and the illiterate swagman who, in total ignorance, had been in possession of a vitally important letter. It could be said that v. Kotze's narratorial stance resembles that of Fielding's Tom Jones who relates his experiences but also lets others tell their own story. In defence of these self-contained and resilient bush dwellers v. Kotze points to the rarity of suicidal acts,

though as a direct social consequence of this lifestyle he cites the alarmingly high proportion of deserted Queensland wives.

A recurring topical issue in the sketches is the rising tide of nationalism and its strong undercurrents of racism. The author cannot disguise his personal antipathy towards coloured immigrants, which appears to have been inspired by his own close dealings with Chinese and Afghan cane-cutters and reinforced by an officially sanctioned xenophobia. Noteworthy is his virulently racist poem "The Colour Line" printed in an 1899 issue of the *Bulletin*. Following an antisemitic slur the concluding stanza reads:

Man and Brothers! Will you let the stranger Soil Australia's homes and rob her farms? Will you let him kiss her lips and change her To a harlot flaunting alien charms? — White Man's Land is calling you to arms! 14

The author devotes two pages of the sketches to the demerits of a multiracial society, articulating the usual platitudes concerning the degenerative effects of mixed blood ties, a trend that had proven irreversible in South America (p.120) and was endangering Australia's wellbeing (p.266). Although in several other respects the author's "vision of future events" did verge on the "prophetic", as Politzer contends, his prediction of an Interior densely peopled by capable, energetic and robust Caucasian stock (p.261) was, in demographic terms, somewhat inaccurate.

In the latter connection it would seem logical to consider the role v. Kotze ascribed to Australian Germans in moulding the national character. The sketches are, in fact, free of the rhetoric associated with the propagation of *Deutschtum* (Germanism) within closed German settlements since 1838. If anything, the author understates the impact of German migration, since there are only three minor allusions to it throughout the work. The first actually takes the form of a reprimand to native German viticulturists and brewers in Queensland over the inferiority of their produce. (p.158) Elsewhere leading personalities are mentioned: notably Ludwig Leichhardt and the German merchant and consul to Queensland J.C. Heussler (1820-1907), on whose initiative thousands of German indentured labourers were encouraged to benefit by the generous land order scheme during the early 1860s. 15

For the literary historian the most valuable aspect of Australische Skizzen lies undoubtedly in v. Kotze's assessment of the prevailing cultural scene in the continent at large. His reflections on Australian belles lettres are contained in a chapter headed "Experiences of Early Australian Journalism". Like Emil Hansel, another turn-of-the-century writer who spent a considerable time in Australia and was engaged for six months as a reporter by the Brisbane-based Nordaustralische Zeitung, v. Kotze "... served as a journalist and leader writer on the Northern Miner in Charters Towers under David Green and briefly edited the Eagle in Charters Towers in 1899".16 While mildly supportive of the standard of country journalism which he contrasts with the "trite" reporting tone common to American provincial rags (p.190), his remarks concerning the evolution of Australian literature are decidedly unflattering. Commendable though the Bulletin's attempt might have been to foster a national literature. so he argues. (p.204) no "national epic" (p.208) had yet been composed, and the "mediocrity" (p.210) of Marcus Clarke, Boldrewood. Lawson and Louis Becke (ibid.) had actually impeded the "coming of age" (ibid.) of Australian prose. Furthermore, the bush ballad was plagued by a monotony of hackneyed symbols (bush graves, barbed wire fences and corrugated iron roofs) (p.209), and the non-European metrical schemes were inappropriate given the nature of Australian subject matter (p.207). On a more constructive note v. Kotze (possibly under the influence of Naturalist theories of milieu espoused in turn-of-the-century European literary circles) equates "climate" with the type of literary work produced. Thus the rain forests of North Oueensland, he maintains, could never have engendered the "Volkslied" (p.205), nor could the Edda have issued from Greek shores (ibid.). Since in his estimation Australian literature had rarely transcended the plane of "naive melodrama" (p.208) and "hard realism" (ibid.), he flatly denies the existence of a uniquely Australian genre. Certainly, v. Kotze's assumptions are questionable given the wisdom of hindsight and the international standing of Australian literature. Nevertheless, v. Kotze was the first, if not the only German critic to relay to his compatriots something of the quintessence and general drift of Australian letters in the 90s. These impressions were to be reinforced in a three-page journal review. 17 Mention should also be made of his edited anthology Aus einer Neuen Literatur. Australische Erzählungen und Plaudereien — From a New Literature. Australian Tales and Smalltalk (1909), which includes a German translation of Lawson's "The Drover's Wife".

Rudolf de Haas's semi-fictional novel Unter australischen Goldgräbern is dedicated to ". . . my old friend Stefan v. Kotze with whom I enjoyed many a felicitous hour on Australian soil". 18 A subsequent chapter pays tribute to v. Kotze's bilingualism and his established reputation as a columnist in the Bulletin. While the Lutheran pastor and principal narrator Conrad (alias de Haas) was able to paint a vivid picture of the modus vivendi of the Germans in Charters Towers and their interaction with the Anglo-Australian sector, the novel lacks the diverse insights into Australian culture provided by Australische Skizzen. Nevertheless, despite its provincial flavour the novel has much value as a seismograph of the achievements of an ethnic group at the turn of the century, such as the millionaire status of Messrs Pfeiffer and Steinberg (the former being a true figure). By the same token, the narrator is quick to satirize certain foibles and idiosyncrasies within his flock, not the least being the fraudulent dishonesty of a home-sick parishioner bent on extracting his passage money from a number of unsuspectingly benevolent kinsmen, or the reluctance of a self-respecting farmer to attend church on the grounds of neither possessing a suit nor wishing to be seen publicly arriving in a milk-cart.

On a less flippant note this novel has much to say about the assimilatory difficulties facing Germans in Queensland. The dilemma of national identity is raised in several quarters, for instance by the narrator in conversation with a sceptical coreligionist:

You cannot guarantee that your children will not return home one day; but apart from that, it is our duty to teach them to love Germany more than anything else in the world. . . The blood pulsing through our veins is German, . . . our thoughts and sentiments are German, and you intend severing all bonds, denying your blood ties and adopting an alien mentality, simply because Fate has placed you under a foreign roof. (p.137)

This rigidly ideological line, far from being linked merely with the notion of *Deutschtum*, is advanced some 15 pages later by a Scottish settler who warns of the doubly perilous consequences of deserting the "clan" only to discover that, even with the best of intentions, a Scot could never become a true "blood Briton". (p.152) The contentious problem of allegiance is compounded by factionalism within the German community of Charters Towers (which, incidentally, according to historical records numbered 200 citizens out of a total population of 3000). Hardly surprising, therefore, is the nickname "Querkopf" ("squarehead") ascribed to them by their Anglo-Australian counterparts (p.137). 19 Elsewhere the narrator draws attention to rivalries within other Lutheran congregations, which in extreme cases had resulted in the vandalism of church property or even erupted into acts of violence against the clergy. (ch.26) In short, the novel presents a balanced account of the forces of integration and disintegration within

a migrant enclave, forces identifiable as being linguistic as well as social and religious, since the narrator is quick to observe that his fellow countrymen (mostly from Pomerania and Mecklenburg) had been reared speaking dialect rather than High German (the language of the pulpit), and were to discover that social communication in English was infinitely more convenient than in their mother tongue.

De Haas's second Australian novel bears the full title Fata Morgana. Erlebnisse im australischen Busch — Mirage. Experiences in the Australian Bush and is markedly less myopic in its concerns than its predecessor. The spotlight is trained on a young greenhorn Wolfgang Wittich who, like the hero of a German Bildungsroman (apprenticeship novel), undergoes an "initiation" process and emerges a wiser and more experienced person at the end of a journey of (self) discovery. Wittich is not an assisted immigrant but a rover with no attachment to Australia other than that of making his fortune on the goldfields and deserting the Antipodes in order to elevate his parents socially and financially. Indeed, de Haas reveals his own patriotic fervour in an introductory note to the reader: "This book is a nostalgic song. It reverberates through the souls of all who have grasped what home really signifies once they have trodden upon foreign soil".20 Similarly, towards the close of the novel the German Heimat (p. 162) is eulogized by the hero as the "finest land on earth" (ibid.), destined to release him from the corrupting lure of gold (the titular Fata Morgana): "I shall no longer err from the track leading me to my life's goal. That path leads through my homeland". (p.190) As in Unter australischen Goldgräbern the multicultural crucible is seen as a threat to the very survival of Deutschtum, so that while a visit to the demographically concentrated German settlements of the Lockver and Fassifern Valleys with their culturally intact infrastructure proves reassuring, the widespread anglicizing of surnames (e.g. Müller/-Miller or König/King) is looked upon by Wittich with disfavour. (p.168-9)

Compared with the earlier novel in which de Haas's depiction of nature represents a minor concern, Fata Morgana exhibits a much greater appreciation of natural phenomena. Whereas the Lutheran cleric complains incessantly about the scourge of mosquitoes, Wittich is bewitched by the scenic delights of the Hinchinbrook Channel and the Barron Falls which he hyperbolizes with a lyrical expressiveness conspicuously absent in Unter australischen Goldgräbern. The tropical "paradise" (p.21) is even likened to the mythical "Garden of the Hesperides". (ibid.) The hero's "initiation" into the secrets of Queensland fauna and flora and his (predictable) witnessing of a kangaroo hunt (p.49), are, of course, precisely the sorts of

encounter that would appeal to an untutored German readership, though admittedly by the 1920s even the German literary market was oversaturated with commentaries on the fifth Continent from every conceivable angle.

By contrast, Die Rache des Australiers - The Revenge of the Australian (1928) is a work of pure fiction with a suspense-filled plot and dramatic characterizations. Although not specifically designated as a book for adolescent consumption, its bloodthirsty cowboy-and-Indian theme places it alongside the tremendously popular Wild West adventure stories of German-born Karl May (1842-1912). The novel's subtitle Abenteuer-Erzählung aus der Zeit der Erschliessung Nordqueenslands — Adventure Tale from the Time of the Opening up of North Queensland relates to the goldrush era. Set in the rugged countryside bordering the Flinders River, the story centres on the fortunes of three European pastoralists — Guy Campbell, Jim Barker and Charlie Bumpus - who are embroiled in a life-and-death struggle with a horde of supposedly cannabalistic Aborigines. Bumpus is captured, strapped to a tree trunk, left exposed to the elements and eventually succumbs to a ritual execution. Campbell, though trapped in a ravine, manages to ward off an attack, killing the tribal chief in the process. By the time Bumpus's whereabouts are ascertained, it is too late to save their companion. The novel's title only makes sense in the closing chapter: Bumpus has obtained his "revenge" by impregnating the tribe's flour with arsenic.

On the whole the European attitude to Aborigines in the novel is characteristically unsympathetic. The adjective "diabolical" is applied indiscriminately to the tribe (p.25 & 76),²¹ and even the third-person narrator fails to observe total impartiality with his descriptions of "... ghastly tattooed visages... white-painted breasts and torsos dripping with fat". (p.75) and resultant biased analogy: "Hell had spewed out its ogres". (ibid.) Yet despite these overcharged metaphors, other tracts of the novel furnish a valuable anthropological overview of tribal practices in North Queensland, notably the intricate staging of a lunar festival (ch.1) and the elaborate funeral rites in honour of a slain elder (ch.3).

The literary craftsmanship of *Die Rache des Australiers* derives from a) the narrative technique and b) the evocativeness of language. On the first point de Haas frequently departs from the stance of an omniscient story-teller in order to present the narration as filtered through the consciousness of his protagonists. This is especially the case in those passages where Charlie Bumpus is left to meditate on the prospect of an untimely end. Interior monologue is also employed to externalize the morbid phantasies of Guy Campbell as he roams the

"god-forsaken scrub" in search of his mates.(p.23) As far as the descriptive power of language is concerned, Die Rache des Australiers captures something of the uniqueness of the Australian landscape missing in the preceding novels. The opening paragraphs clearly illustrate this artistic precision:

Noon was approaching on a day in January. The steel grey sky typical of the dry spell spanned the Flinders River in North Queensland. Far and wide the bush had harmonized with this colour. The surrounding eucalypts were conscious of no other hue; year in, year out like tired old men they raised their withered arms skyward in supplication for the end of all being. Now too the bread-fruit trees were enveloping themselves in Cinderella garb, and the ti-trees were drooping over the river bank as though anxious to procure every last drop of oozing moisture, not with their roots but with the magic wand of their crowns; and even the wild plum trees, sallow and dust-laden, bemoaned their lot.

The wide river bed glistened in the sun. The narrow watercourse trickled imperceptibly on the far side of an elongated sand bank. Polished pebbles caught the flickering light and deflected its rays upon a jagged rock formation in the middle of the river. Boulders, larger than life, loomed spectrally from a flat, desolate dune like the bleached ribs of thirst victims. Untidy masses of greyish weed, mouldy brushwood, rotting logs and decaying tree trunks on the water's edge and in mid-stream indicated that the Flinders was wont to awaken from its slumbers, burst into flood and terrorize the barren wastes. Not a single sound pierced the funereal stillness of the landscape. Life seemed extinguished.

All of a sudden the chirping whistle of rosellas resounded through the deathly silence of the bush, as the oppressive sultriness of the day enticed the gaily plumaged birds from their sugary blossoms to the refreshing waters of the Flinders below. The reverberation issued from a cleft in the river, from the leafy canopy of a wild plum tree that had shot up on the bank . . . A human shadow scurried along the base of the tree and slid behind one of the boulders dotted about the floor of the hollow. . . A quarter of an hour later the shadowy outline of a slim, gaunt person the length of a tree fell upon the stones. (p.7-9)

In conclusion it could be argued that v. Kotze's canvas absorbed a broader panorama of data and impressions than the Rhenish clergyman's, whose years of residence in the Colony were substantially shorter and whose movements appear to have been far more insular. Nevertheless, in their own particular way both authors projected a wealth of first-hand perspectives on Queensland without plagiaristic recourse to existing "travel literature". The perceptiveness of their sharp observations was matched by the accuracy with which specifically Australian terminology was rendered in the German language. Regrettably, the literary supplements of the Nordaustralische Zeitung and the Queenslander Herald never featured their works in serialized form, evidently in line with the editorial policy of reprinting fiction strictly "made in Germany" for the benefit of a germanophile readership.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Ludwig L. Politzer, Bibliography of German Literature on Australia, 1770-1947 (Melbourne: Pan Press, 1952).
- ²Werner P. Friedrich. Australia in Western Imaginative Prose Writings 1600-1960. An Anthology and a History of Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p.143-171 & 235-255.
- ³Cf. also Leslie Bodi, "Friedrich Gerstäcker" in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. IV: 1851-1890 (Melbourne: M.U.P., 1972), p.242.
- ⁴Jürgen Tampke (ed.), Wunderbar Country. Germans look at Australia, 1850-1914 (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982), p.xiii.
- 5 J
 firgen Tampke, "Amateurs analyze Australia. Some Comments on the Reiseberichte about the Fifth Continent before 1914" in New Beginnings. Germans in New South Wales and Queensland. Edited by J.H. Voigt (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1983), p.214-219.
- ⁶Augustin Lodewyckx, Die Deutschen in Australien (Stuttgart: Ausland und Heimat, 1932), p.161-2.
- ⁷Ludwig L. Politzer, Australian Sketches (Melbourne: Pan Publishers, 1945). Politzer shortened the original from 211 to 128 pages.
- ⁸Ken Levis, "Germany discovers Australia", Southerly, VII, 3 (1946), 184-185.
- ⁹ Joachim Schulz, Geschichte der Australischen Literatur (Munich: Hueber, 1960), p.156.
- ¹⁰Volker Wolf, Die Rezeption australischer Literatur im deutschen Sprachraum von 1845-1979 (Tübingen: Stauffenberger Verlag, 1982), p.71.
- ¹¹Page numbers appearing in the text refer to the third edition of Australische Skizzen. Mit einem Vorwort von Eugen Zabel (Berlin: Verlag der Taglichen Rundschau, 1921).
- 12See footnote 6.

- 13 The third story in the collection Tales from Australia (1909) features an antisocial fossicker who amasses a fortune and returns from the city not with a wife but in a humorous twist reminiscent of O'Henry with a second canine companion.
- 14 Bulletin (11.2.1899), p.3. It is interesting to note that not all v. Kotze's verse contributions to the Bulletin in the late 90s were written in a polemical vein. Some do not even have any association with Australia, such as the metaphysical poems "The Evolution of God" (16.9/99) and "The Incarnation" (4.2.99), or verse on more generalized themes like "The Breath of Life" (15.1.98) and "A Song of Love" (26.2.98).
- ¹⁵For detailed information on Heussler's life and achievements see Delphine Nagel, "Johann Christian Heussler. A Father of Queensland (1820-1907)" in New Beginnings (op.cit.), p.122-129.
- ¹⁶Jim Manion, "Biographical Notes", LiNQ, IX, 3 (1981), 154. The same issue includes two short stories reprinted from the North Queensland Register (p.88-92 & 93-98).
- ¹⁷Stefan von Kotze, "Das literarische Australien", Aus fremden Zungen, 18 (1908), 1148-1151.
- ¹⁸Page references are to the first edition (Berlin, 1922).
- 19 The rapid assimilation of German diggers into the general population is mentioned in an article "The Germans in Charters Towers" which forms part of a commemorative issue of the Queenslander Herald (1901). See further Alan Corkhill, "The German-Language Press in Queensland (1876-1939)" in New Beginnings (op. cit.), p.223.
- ²⁰Subsequent page references are to the first edition (Dresden: Verlag Deutsche Buchwerkstätten, 1924).
- ²¹Page references are to the first edition (Reutlingen: Ennslin & Laiblin, 1928).