

# Traveling Traditions

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Nineteenth-Century Cultural Concepts and  
Transatlantic Intellectual Networks

Edited by  
Erik Redling

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Daniel Stein

## 15 Transatlantic Politics as Serial Networks in the German-American City Mystery Novel, 1850–1855

In *Subversive Genealogies: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (1979), Michael Rogin coined the phrase “the American 48” (103) in order to connect the literature of the American antebellum era with the revolutionary transformations that reshaped Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. While Rogin focused on one of the authors whom F. O. Matthiessen had included in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) and who also loomed large in David Reynolds’s *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (1988), this essay turns to much lesser known authors whose writings constitute a crucial nexus between “the American 48” and the popular print media of the time.<sup>1</sup> I examine a body of texts that Michael Denning calls “the genre of 1848” (86) in *Mechanical Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (1987): so-called city mystery novels, mysteries of the cities, or urban mysteries. These sensationalist novels about urban vice and crime appeared in cheap newspapers in the wake of Eugene Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris*, a feuilleton novel serialized in the daily *Journal des Débats* in 1842 and 1843. Depicting the plight of the urban poor vis-à-vis the corrupt aristocracy, the novel was translated and serialized in many European countries, as well as in the U. S., and it inspired adaptations set in cities such as London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Marseilles, and St. Petersburg.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, George Lippard’s *Quaker City, Or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1844–1845), Ned Buntline’s *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1847–1848), and George Thompson’s *City Crimes, or, Life in New York and Boston* (1849) were among the most popular city mysteries of the decade.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On antebellum print media culture, see Lehuu 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See Siepe 2008 for more information on translations of *Les Mystères de Paris*.

<sup>3</sup> For analysis of the *roman feuilleton*, see Bachleitner 2012; Hülk 1985; Neuschäfer, Fritz-El Ahmad, and Walter 1986; on American city mysteries, see Erikson 2003 and 2005; Knight 2012; Looby 1993; Zboray and Zboray 2000. This essay stems from my research project “Serial Politization: On the Cultural Work of American City Mysteries, 1844–1860,” which is part of the DFG-Research Unit “Popular Seriality – Aesthetics and Practice.” For further analysis, see Stein 2014 and 2015.

Within the city mystery genre, a specific subset of serial novels existed: *Geheimnisromane* by German American authors published in German-language newspapers in the U. S. in the early 1850s.<sup>4</sup> I situate my approach to these texts and the literary practices they embody within the field of transatlantic (specifically German-American) studies and understand it as part of the continuing refocusing of American literary history as multilingual project that critics such as Werner Sollors (1998) have advocated.<sup>5</sup> I conceive these texts as actors within the realm of popular serial literature that significantly shaped American culture. Instead of assuming that technological innovations and new infrastructural capabilities simply enabled the increasing production and reception of popular literature in the antebellum era or suggesting that commercial incentives and personal interests alone initiated these changes, I see these developments as mutually reinforcing within a larger network of practices that came to bear on, and existed through, the agencies of human and non-human actors.<sup>6</sup> This includes material carrier media, such as the printed mass-circulation newspaper, and genre formations like the city mysteries, as well as the serial fiction writer as a popular intellectual and the antebellum reader as a serial consumer. My analysis extends Leslie Butler's (2007) study of nineteenth-century Victorian intellectuals and their role in transatlantic liberal reform. However, I focus on popular serial literature and how it enabled German American immigrants to perform lucrative and powerful roles as public intellectuals.

This essay turns to three *Geheimnisromane*: Heinrich Börnstein's (1805–1892) *Geheimnisse von St. Louis (Mysteries of St. Louis)*, serialized in the *Anzeiger des Westens* in 1851, Emil Klauprecht's (1815–1896) *Cincinnati, oder Die Geheimnisse des Westens (Cincinnati, or the The Mysteries of the West)*, which appeared in 1854 (details of its serialization remain uncertain), and Ludwig von Reizenstein's (1826–1885) *Geheimnisse von New-Orleans (Mysteries of New Orleans)*, serialized in the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* between 1854 and 1855. I argue that these novels constituted a periodical network, unfolding their cultural work in the medium of the serialized newspaper novel and through the particular genre of the city mystery novel at a specific moment in time – the “American 48” – which they reflected as well as helped shape.

<sup>4</sup> On these *Geheimnisromane*, see Herminghouse 1985 and 2004; Klotz 2012; Merrill 1988; Rowan 2002; Schuchalter 2011; Shore 2002; Sollors 1986; Stein 2014; Williams 2005.

<sup>5</sup> For more on German-American literature and culture, see Fluck and Sollors 2002; Lang 1988; Trommler and McVeigh 1985; Tatlock and Erlin 2005; Trommler and Shore 2001.

<sup>6</sup> This approach is based on Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (1993; 2005).

## 1 Intellectual Networks

Klauprecht, Börnstein, and von Reizenstein were popular transatlantic intellectuals within their ethnic communities, whose understanding of the new world had been shaped by their experiences in Germany. Börnstein had left Germany in the early 1840s for Paris, where he published the journal *Vorwärts! Pariser Signale aus Kunst, Wissenschaft, Theater, Musik und geselligem Leben* (Forward: Parisian Signals from the Arts, Science, Theater, Music, and Social Life) and had been part of a politically active German émigré community that included Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Börne, Karl Ruge, and Heinrich Heine. He left France in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution and soon became the owner and publisher of the *Anzeiger des Westens*. The newspaper's Forty-Eighter platform included an anti-slavery, anti-Temperance, anti-Catholic, pro-labor and pro-homesteading stance that was part of a local and transregional network of periodicals, including the *Missouri Republican*, the Whig *Deutsche Tribüne*, and the Catholic *St. Louis Tagesschau*, as well as the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* and similar publications in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, New York, and Boston. These newspapers participated in a transnational exchange of news reporting. Börnstein had been the Paris correspondent for the German *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Deutsche Schnellpost of New York*, and *Vorwärts!* had featured excerpts from the German American press, including the *Anzeiger des Westens*.<sup>7</sup>

As a Thirtyer (*Dreißiger*), Emil Klauprecht belonged to a generation of immigrants who had left their home country before the revolution and were less radical than the Forty-Eighters. He had fled from political repression in the wake of the Hambacher Fest in 1832 and settled down in Cincinnati in 1837. In the late 1840s, he became the editor of the Whig daily *Der Republikaner*, and Don Heinrich Tolzmann (1996) describes him as “political polemicist” (xvii), as well as an “active ethnic individual” (xx) in Cincinnati's German American community. Ludwig von Reizenstein, a member of the Bavarian aristocracy, was a refugee of his own sexual revolution; he had engaged in homosexual activities in his youth, much to the distress of his father, who sent him to America as a disciplinary measure. He was politically less active than Börnstein and Klauprecht but also used the city mystery genre to negotiate the German presence in America. All three immigrants were newspaper editors, novelists, and figures of local public life, intellectuals with an interest in promoting German culture in the U.S. They “were the opinion makers” of their time, as

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<sup>7</sup> On Börnstein, see also Herminghouse 1985; Rowan 1990; Williams 2005.

Steven Rowan suggests, and they embodied the role of the German American intellectual as “author, entrepreneur, and political broker” (1990: vii).

## 2 City Mysteries as Genre Network: Paratextual Analysis

If we want to understand how these transatlantic intellectuals inscribed their *Geheimnisromane* into the network of the city mystery genre in order to pursue a political agenda that was simultaneously local, national, and transnational, we must study how they used paratexts – especially prefaces – to discuss the transatlantic scope of the genre and the political purposes of their own contributions.<sup>8</sup>

Klauprecht’s Foreword begins with a negative characterization of the genre that anticipates the reader’s reaction to the text:

Yet another contribution to the *Mysteries* literature! Yet another wrung-out sensational title serving up second-hand speculation for idle curiosity, marketing the hidden, ominous, horrible and terrifying encounters between the different levels of society!” This is no doubt what is being said by many of my contemporaries taking this book in hand only to put it aside after the first glance [...]. (Klauprecht 1996: 3)<sup>9</sup>

Popularity can be a burden; an affiliation with a bestselling genre like the city mysteries may result in “wrung-out” and “second-hand” story formulas and an adherence to a sensationalist hype of the past (it had been more than a decade since Sue’s *Mystères de Paris*). To become a legitimate participant in the genre, Klauprecht sought to establish narrative authority by promoting the series as a pioneering work beyond the well-trodden paths of previous publications: “It was the goal of this collection in novelistic form to call the attention of German writers to rich trans-Atlantic material whose mines remain unworked, despite the fact that the stream which spills on its shores is our own, the German emigration” (Klauprecht 1996: 3). By presenting his novel as a genuine contribution to German literature, Klauprecht grounds the story in a locale of interest to his readers, who find their hopes and frustrations dramatized in a narrative authored by one of their own.

<sup>8</sup> On the significance of paratextual analysis in nineteenth-century serial fiction, see Looby 2004; for a broader approach, see Okker 2003.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of convenience, all German sources in this essay are cited from their English translations.

Klauprecht suggests that German literature about America had been beholden to an outdated fascination with the Western American frontier. Recalling Sue, who cast *Mystères de Paris* as an urban reformulation of James Fenimore Cooper's novels, Klauprecht maintains that the American city challenges the German literary imagination:

The few German novelists who have made America's West the theater of their poetry have consciously followed the paths of Cooper, Sealsfield and other pioneers of new literature [...]. They seldom or never exchange their blanket in a log cabin or wigwam for the comfortable bed of an urban hotel. Certainly American towns lack those perennial sources of the imagination provided by the ruins of a romantic past [...]. What charm could these towns, which are nothing more than rows of shops, of warehouses for bacon and flour, where dickered Yankees breathlessly pursue the almighty dollar and a European proletariat struggles for a new home with the sweat of its brow, provide to European readers? (Klauprecht 1996: 3–4)

This is a self-confident call to competition between the *Amerikaliteratur* produced in the homeland and German literature created in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Klauprecht reverses the understanding of nation as center and colony as periphery by making the transnational scope of his work explicit. This reversal identifies his novel as a modern synthesis of American and German fictions of the new world. Curiously, it presents itself as less the result of Klauprecht's literary imagination than as a response to decidedly non-romantic American realities. The Foreword speaks of the "life of the towns of the West [as] producing continuously novel and strange events like a kaleidoscope, animated with the nationalities of two continents" (4). This focus on the agency of kaleidoscopic diversity is comparative, as well as competitive: money-driven Yankees clash with hard-working European immigrants, and the resulting "strange events" add a distinctive new-world flavor to the city mystery genre.

If Klauprecht positioned his novel *vis-à-vis* Cooper and German *Amerikaliteratur*, von Reizenstein's "Memoranda for the Sympathetic Reader" casts Sue's virtuous protagonist as a metaphor for the genre:

Ever since Eugène Sue's delicate Fleur-de-Marie resisted the enticement of the "wedding night" with a prince, preferring to end her young life in a cloister, Fleurs-de-Marie have lost their charm, and since they are what blooms in the garden of mysteries, mysteries

<sup>10</sup> Examples of such *Amerikaliteratur* are Charles Sealsfield's (Carl Anton Postl) *Die deutsch-amerikanischen Wahlverwandschaften* (1839/1840) as well as Friedrich Gerstäcker's *Streif- und Jagdzüge durch die Vereinigten Staaten Nord-Amerikas* (1844) and *Nach Amerika!* (1855). German views of the United States were strongly influenced by these and similar publications as well as by newspaper coverage from foreign correspondents. See also Wagner 1985.

have ceased to be fashionable. It is a decade too late to sow Fleurs-de-Marie [...] because, as every lover of flowers knows, they can only produce seeds for two years. (von Reizenstein 2002: 1)

The city mystery genre appears as a garden here: individual novels are flowers, and genre evolution is part of a natural process of seasonal renewal within a textual network naturalized as an ecosystem. Von Reizenstein endorses a notion of genre continuity; the “Memoranda” reads like the beginning of a sequel to *Mystères de Paris*, with which the intended reader is supposed to be familiar. Nevertheless, it also emphasizes the ephemerality of individual texts: Sue’s novel only blossomed for two years, so readers must make the most of their daily encounters with this text. They must purchase the newspaper now and react immediately to its political demands; they must become active in order to secure the serial continuation of this politically charged narrative.<sup>11</sup>

Like Klauprecht, von Reizenstein (2002: 1) is aware of the problem of genre competition: “The disreputable novelist Ned Buntline launched the literature of mysteries on American soil and thereby utterly killed all their enchantment as well as any interest in them.” This dismissal could have been motivated by Buntline’s involvement with the nativist movement, which German Americans generally opposed. Buntline also had published a city mystery novel set in New Orleans only a few years before von Reizenstein, which compelled the latter to stake a discursive claim on the genre and setting by refuting the former’s work. In *The Mysteries of New Orleans* (1851), Buntline supported the policy of expansionism and advocated the annexation of Cuba, while von Reizenstein strongly opposed Cuban annexation and created a literary scenario in which the expansion of slavery would destroy the American Republic.

Underscoring the network among local German American newspaper communities,<sup>12</sup> von Reizenstein wrote:

[Börnstein’s] “Mysteries of St. Louis” flowed from a German-American pen and is of importance only insofar as its appearance coincides with the struggle of Germans at that time against the attacks of Jesuitism. [Emil Klauprecht’s] “Mysteries of Cincinnati” are a pale reflection of the *Mysteries of Berlin* or *New York*, and they unfortunately contain too much that is familiar for a well-read man. (von Reizenstein 2002: 1)

Von Reizenstein dismisses preceding novels as dated and repetitive, while promoting his own work as a timely and original addition to a popular literary

<sup>11</sup> For a longer version of this argument, see Stein 2014.

<sup>12</sup> On the German-American press of New Orleans around the middle of the nineteenth century, see also Keil 1999.

genre. This statement is inherently ironic because von Reizenstein's self-promotion is obviously indebted to the serial nature of popular genre narratives and to the necessity of competing against other genre narratives in a capitalist economy, where variations of existing products are habitually hailed as innovations.

Heinrich Börnstein's "Dedication to Thomas Hart Benton" legitimizes the narrative by crafting a political origin story: by promoting German Americans as an integral element of a national network of "immigrants from all nations." Börnstein recalls his friendship with the former Democratic U.S. Senator (1820–1850) and candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives: "to that evening I owe my first idea of this book" (xvi), he states, and then offers a tribute to Benton that naturalizes the Germans of St. Louis:

You were raised here in Missouri, which has been populated chiefly by immigrants from all nations, among native and adopted citizens – and, although American in heart and soul, you have ever been the sincere and warm friend of the adopted citizens – you worked for their true interests, and did your utmost to carry out their wishes and feelings. (xvi)

Börnstein addresses his novel to these "free German adopted fellow citizens," who constitute the base for his activities as a public intellectual.

### 3 City Mysteries as Genre Network: Textual Analysis

Once these German American *Geheimnisromane* have staked their literary claims and declared their political aims, they launch serially unfolding sensational stories set in the urban contexts their readers inhabited. Börnstein's *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, for instance, proposes a powerful combination of anti-Catholicism and anti-slavery advocacy that culminates in a clandestine meeting of American Jesuits on an island on the Mississippi River. "All is silent," and "dark objects take their direction to the 'bloody isle,'" while the city's "citizens are asleep" and "know not what is passing on the river" (1990: 158). These "dark objects" pledge their allegiance to the Catholic Church; they are "laborers in the great work" (159) of subduing the American Republic. Their leader exclaims: "the day of decision is drawing near [...], and with the aid of heaven we shall reconquer this land for the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church" (159). Börnstein uses the precarious nature of serial storytelling to express heightened political urgency. The reference to "the day of decision"

functions as both a political and a narrative threat. If Catholic rule is established, Börnstein's novel will be over. The political goal of foiling Catholic take-over and the readers' potential wish to continue the pleasurable consumption of suspenseful fiction go together, establishing a nexus of serialization and politicization that achieved great popularity in the decades before the American Civil War.<sup>13</sup>

Börnstein taps into the social, political, and religious uncertainties of many antebellum Americans, a seedbed for politicized serial narratives, when the Catholic leader states:

[O]ur exertions have succeeded as to bring the struggle between the Roman Catholics and the Anglo-German Protestants to a decision. This America, discovered and conquered by the Most Catholic Rulers of Spain, paid for and watered with Catholic blood – this providence and inheritance of the Roman Church has fallen into the hands of heretics and infidels – into the power of the Anglo-Saxons, the Germans, the followers of Luther; they have invaded the patrimony of the Holy Church, and Providence is punishing them for it. (1990: 160)

The assertion that the first Spanish settlements in America had established Catholic rule before the emergence of the nation attacks the founding myths of the Republic. In the leader's account, legal rights based on the initial discovery of the new world reinforce a claim to ownership through the expense of human sacrifice in warfare, while Protestants appear as "invade[rs]." Börnstein presents his novel as a counter-narrative to such fraudulent claims and appeals to his audience – the maligned "Germans" and "followers of Luther" – to stem the Jesuit tide and prevent the destruction of the American Republic. His readers must save the "proud Union" and "asylum of all revolutionaries and unbelievers," as the Catholic leader defines America, recalling the rhetoric of Thomas Paine's political pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776). They must become "active audiences" (Jennifer Hayward's term) in order to prevent national secession in the wake of the slavery crisis:

The South is rising against the North, they will dilacerate each other, and the downfall of the republic will be the consequence. We have thrown the slave question between them, and fanned the flame. The brethren are busy, mingling with the abolitionists of the North and laboring among the agitators of the South. Congress can no more heal the breach dividing the North and the South [...]. There is no remedy; the South will be cut loose; then we shall be the victors. Already we have adherents and friends in all places; in the administration, in Congress, faithful lay brothers are at work. (160)

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13 On Catholicism in nineteenth-century America, see Gjerde 2012.

This scenario not only enables Börnstein to reveal an alleged Jesuit scheme but also connects the novel with Sue's *Mystères de Paris* and his later *Le Juif errant* (1844–1845), which provided a thematic template for Börnstein that included an anti-Jesuitism bent on blaming the Catholic Church for supporting feudal rulers in Europe. Börnstein adapted leftist European ideologies to an American context, promoting the *Anzeiger des Westens* (as well as Börnstein himself) against newspapers like the Catholic *St. Louis Tagesschau* and deflecting nativist doubts about German immigrants onto the Catholic Irish.

Jesuit villains are never merely literary fantasies but always also actors in the author's "sensationalist designs" (Jane Tompkins's concept) on his readers. We realize this when the Catholic leader in Börnstein's novel finishes his prophesy:

The old parties are being broken up; after the next session of Congress there will be no more Whigs and Democrats, but merely our friends or our adversaries, for or against the Union, and the Union will be overthrown. [...] The South [...] cannot have a separate existence, and it must fly to our arms, by our mediation to gain protection of European Catholic powers. It is to enter into a league with Catholic Mexico [...]. The next presidential election in Mexico will give us the victory. Mexico will become a monarchy. It is we that will give a king to that monarchy, and it will be a Catholic prince of old royal blood. Monarchy, however, having once taken root in the South, the republic at the North is at an end, too, and the Anglo-German element must give way to the Roman. (1990: 160–161)

These words address German readers throughout the U.S., as references to the "Anglo-German element" and "Protestant Anglo-Germans" indicate. Buzz phrases such as "monarchy," "king," and a "Catholic prince of old royal blood" must have resonated with German immigrants who had left their home country in disillusion after the failed uprising against feudalism. Yet even in America, they are subject to European power politics; British aristocrats and the high Church of England call for Catholic protection against "the rising torrent of democracy." The effectiveness of Börnstein's novel depends on his abilities as a literary spin doctor who uses actual events to prod readers toward reexamining their understanding of American politics and relies on the narrative affordances of the serialized newspaper novel to promote his political demands.

Klauprecht's *Cincinnati, oder Die Geheimnisse des Westens* offers a variation on Börnstein's anti-Catholicism, a typical move in popular serial storytelling. Klauprecht's Jesuit arch-villain is Signore Viteschelli, whose schemes remind readers of the high stakes in antebellum America: "No legislature receives its political contour, no governor, no president, is elected in the Union against our will" (1996: 208), Viteschelli notes, announcing that "the day [will] come when the thunder of the Vatican will sound from the heights of the Capitol" (208). In Klauprecht's analysis (voiced through Viteschelli), American soci-

ety is vulnerable because of “the childish naiveté of a people which knows neither us [i.e., the Jesuits] nor our history, the freedom of instruction, the rottenness of the party leaders, the corruption of statesmen, the sectarianism, the armies of European voters at our command” (208). Viteschelli’s vision of the United States is represented on a map in his office on which “the borders of the states and the territories have vanished. The entire vast region of the Union has been divided into nine brightly-colored sections” (204–205): into dioceses and vicariates. Klauprecht’s readers must organize a vocal (and perhaps also violent) opposition against American Catholics in order to prevent this map from becoming a reality.

If Börnstein merely identified the national controversy over slavery as the cause for the downfall of the American Republic, Klauprecht devotes much of his novel to slavery, offering a German American perspective on this issue that contextualizes Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sentimental bestseller *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851/1852).<sup>14</sup> Among his central characters are the virtuous Creole Isabelle Beaufort, her husband and slave owner Blanchard Beaufort, and his mulatto step-sister Zenobia. While Isabelle embodies an idealized European-American synthesis, Blanchard and Zenobia represent the decadence and cruelty of the Southern planter aristocracy. Blanchard owns “vast stretches of land [...] equal to the value of a European kingdom”; he has “millions in the bank [and] command[s] an army of Negroes in the cotton fields and sugar plantations” (Klauprecht 1996: 70). He and his step-sister wield absolute power over their slaves. Zenobia boasts:

[T]here is not a court which would dare to entertain a case against the house of Beaufort over a Negro body. Do you know that my brother disposes of a horde of voters which would bring any court official to heel. The house of Beaufort is as absolute as the Czar of Russia. It can roast a Negro on a spit, hang him by the legs and whip him to death, or feed him to the hogs [...]. No policeman would concern himself, even if some abolitionist would be so crazy as to make a charge. (Klauprecht 1996: 111)

The abusive Southern slave owner appears as the American version of the tyrannical European monarch in this passage, as a quasi-Russian Czar who holds the fate of his subjects in his hands and abuses his power at whim.<sup>15</sup>

In a later passage, Blanchard and Zenobia even advocate the annexation of Cuba and the re-enslavement of free Cuban blacks: “They’ll be auctioned off to the [U. S. American] plantation owners. They are slaves by God and the law

<sup>14</sup> See also Bergquist 1989.

<sup>15</sup> I cannot go into detail here about the complicated treatment of race and slavery in the city mystery genre. For further analysis, see Helwig 2006; Ostrowski 2006; Stein 2014.

anyway” (120), Blanchard argues. Representing Klauprecht’s opposing convictions, Isabelle’s lover Alphonse Gonzales responds:

If we assume that the Congress would sanction such a peculiar proposal from the South, – do you really believe that this army of free persons, consisting not just of Africans but of Cuban Negroes, among whom you will find many a well-cultured man, would let itself be sold into servitude so lightly? The emancipation proclamation of the French Convention precipitated dreadful scenes on San Domingo; [...] returning these emancipated colored people to slavery [...] would conjure up a blood-bath, delivering the land to the Negroes and granting autonomy to a second Haiti. (120)

Zenobia’s melodramatic and evil reply exposes the slave-owner mentality that makes possible such a statement as well as insults the political analysis of a (self-proclaimed) German American intellectual like Klauprecht and the sentiments of his core readers: “[w]e would whip it out of them” and that “we’d purge the island of such Douglasses” (120).

The discussion between the Southerners then turns to the role of the North in supporting slavery. Zenobia accuses the North of hypocrisy by alleging that it treats white wage laborers above the Mason-Dixon line as inferior to wealthy whites whereas the South elevates white workers above the status of the slaves:

Don’t you find more poverty and misery in all of its [i.e., the North’s] cities than in the South? Isn’t the white man there degraded under the yoke of daily hard labor, doesn’t the rich man look down on him as if he were of a lower caste? While with us the white color bonds poor and rich together as a being superior to the black. (121–122)

Comparisons of the slave system to the treatment of workers in the North were nothing new in the 1850s, even though Zenobia’s stance is peculiar in that it ignores the myth of Southern paternalism, instead concentrating (somewhat ironically) on slavery as a means of overcoming class divisions between wealthy slave owners and poor white workers.<sup>16</sup>

If the goal of many German-American intellectuals was to orchestrate a voter shift from the pro-slavery Democrats to what would soon become the Republican Party, then they had to present slavery as an evil that implicated the North. Alphonse thus complains about a “cheap sort of philanthropy” in the North:

If even one of these states had set us the noble example of emancipation, they would seem a bit purer in motive. But abolitionism began blustering in the North only after it

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<sup>16</sup> Only a few years later, George Fitzhugh would propose comparable ideas in his book *Cannibals All!, or Slaves Without Masters* (1857).

had sold the South almost all its own slaves. The “*smart Yankee*” has the money in his pocket, so now he demands that the Negroes be set free, in his lovely phrase, “on the basis of human rights.” Just let the North put its preachings to work on its own little Delaware! That state has only a few score slaves, so that with the sum of twenty thousand dollars it could become a free state [...] But when it is a matter of money, the Pharisees close their eyes. (122)

Commerce trumps the promise of freedom here, and abolitionism is only an outlet for Northern reform fantasies. Klauprecht’s Midwestern doubts about Northern abolitionism reinforce the duty of German Americans to fight slavery’s financial incentive with a republican insistence on universal freedom. Yet they also register the city mystery genre’s generally dismal view of abolitionism as a religiously driven middle-class reform movement that ignores the plight of the urban poor in the North.<sup>17</sup>

While *Cincinnati, oder Die Geheimnisse des Westens* is anchored in Klauprecht’s adopted Midwestern home city, von Reizenstein’s *Geheimnisse von New Orleans* centers on New Orleans. Using the yellow fever epidemic that had ravaged New Orleans shortly before its serialization, the novel connects the peculiar body politics of this city with a national body politic that will ultimately falter through a violent slave revolution. The novel voices an inside critique of the American South rare in its explicit condemnation of the Southern social order and also in its focus on the failed immigration of a German aristocratic family (cf. Rowan 2002: xxviii). Most of the European aristocrats succumb to American hedonism as they become criminals or abandon their wives in search of sexual gratification with the city’s mulatta women. For these misdeeds, a superhuman avenger – the freemason Uriah Hiram – sends a yellow fever epidemic into New Orleans that wipes out the German aristocrats. This plot undermines the hopes of many Germans to fulfill their political objectives in the U.S. Even virtuous German émigrés cannot survive in an uncultured and money-driven American society, a plutocracy that cares little about slavery’s human toll.

*Geheimnisse von New-Orleans* imagines a revolutionary threat to the United States issuing from Haiti. Haiti had become an independent nation in 1804, and the bloody revolt against the French colonial government preceding independence had spread fears of slave revolts throughout the American South. The novel transposes the German fascination with Haiti as a case of successful national revolution to an American context when it reifies Southern fears of slave revolt by prophesizing the coming of a “yellow savior,” a second Toussaint Louverture, the bastard child of a mulatto woman and a German aristo-

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<sup>17</sup> See also see Helwig 2006; Ostrowski 2006.

crat. The new *Louverture* will grow up to be the leader of a slave revolt that will destroy the United States in 1871. This scenario reformulates Manifest Destiny as the threat of Manifest Demise. It calls on readers to prevent the expansion of slavery and work towards its abolition in the South.<sup>18</sup>

The novel seeks to stop this expansion, as a passage about the Kansas-Nebraska-Act of 1854 indicates. The passage envisions a “triad of moments” in which three birds symbolize the failures of American politics: first, the “Bald eagle, *our eagle*,” which represents the federal government. Its “favorite dish is the flesh of black people,” and it seeks to extend its “hunting region” beyond “the area of fifteen states” (i.e., beyond the Southern slave states). Second, the Nebraska Owl, which will give itself away as a willing bride (i.e., cease its independence as a free territory) to the Bald Eagle in order to rule in the Capitol. Third, the Bleeding Pelican, the state bird of Louisiana, which mourns the victims of the yellow fever epidemic. The passage culminates in an urgent demand to the readers to revive the values of the American Revolution: “Where is your high-flying now, Eagle?”, Hiram laments:

Do you no longer recall the deeds of your forefathers? Don't you think any more of Bunker Hill – of the fathers of your republic? Bald Eagle, you have become a filthy predator, stuffing your belly with the flesh of the children of another climate, whom you have dragged into your country to be manacled and beaten. (Reizenstein 2002: 418)

The novel finally imagines a symbolic battle between the natural elements: black fists reaching out of a dark cloud and attacking the remaining white clouds over the possession of fifteen stars, or slave states, illuminating the sky. While the white clouds survive this encounter, it is clear that this was only the opening skirmish of an imminent, and much more violent, war to come.

Von Reizenstein confronts his German American readers in his attack, implicating them as part of a network of political critique and agitation. He faults them for ignoring their obligation to oppose slavery – a particularly powerful accusation after the failed revolution against oppressive rule in the homeland – and for collaborating with an inhuman system of enforced servitude. He voices this critique implicitly through the German immigrant Karl, a “traveling salesman in wholly-heads” (38). Karl explains:

So far as my present occupation goes, everything but the travel repels me, and I would exchange it for another in a minute if I could get the same money. We are, after all, in America, [...] and money is not at all unimportant. Besides, [...] I do not love money for its own sake, but only in order to guarantee me a free existence in the future. (39)

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<sup>18</sup> For further analysis, see Stein 2014; on German views of the Haitian revolution, see Schüller 1992.

This hypocritical excuse invites a biting comment from the narrator:

[C]onsidering that he took this position at a time when he was in great financial need, it should not cast any shadow on his character. After the material discomfort had been somewhat relieved, one would hardly expect him to leave the agency right away and place himself in distress once more just to yield to childish scruples. In fact, he was often rather pleased with himself over what he himself described as a wildly romantic career. (38)

Here, von Reizenstein acts as both political agitator and literary commentator, lambasting complicity in slavery as a means of alleviating material discomfort and faulting German immigrants for projecting romantic fantasies of American frontier life onto a nation that practices systematic racial subjugation.

#### 4 Serial Politics and the Genre of 48

Börnstein, Klauprecht, and von Reizenstein wrote newspaper mysteries to entertain, educate, and politicize their readers. Their political interests and literary ambitions were integral to the objectives of the newspaper business: to win and retain new readers, and to connect individual readers into a community network. Significantly, their novels spread the action beyond their respective regions in a literary move that mirrored – and perhaps also aided – the project of national expansion: from the South into the Midwest in von Reizenstein, from the Midwest into the South (as far as Mexico) in Klauprecht, and from the Midwest to the West (California) in Börnstein. What was traveling across the Atlantic and across the American continent in the middle of the nineteenth century were not just concepts, as the title of Mieke Bal's *Travelling Concepts* (2002) loosely suggests, but actual people and actual serial practices: increasingly popular German intellectuals and newspaper writers with literary ambitions who established themselves as influential public figures in an expanding multicultural and multilingual nation. Finding a budding print culture, a growing infrastructure, and a reading audience hungry for serial entertainment, they carried the model of Sue's *roman feuilleton* to America.<sup>19</sup> They adapted the format of the serial newspaper novel to their specific needs, dramatizing conflicts such as slavery and imperial expansion, and conjuring up scenarios of worldwide Jesuit subversion that transported the anti-Catholicism of the European left into a new-world environment. In this context, republican-spirited

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<sup>19</sup> On antebellum reading practices, see also Stewart 2011.

Germans must oppose an uncultured and overly materialistic American culture.

Yet simply reaffirming the self-fashioning of these authors as public intellectuals misses the larger point of their literary and political activities. Patricia Herminghouse (1985) rightly argues that, “[f]or authors such as Börnstein and Klauprecht, literature was not a social weapon in itself but a means subordinate to the higher end of their journalistic enterprise.” She concludes that these authors “learn[ed] to play the political game by American rules for American prizes: financial security, local influence, and political, military, and diplomatic offices” (318, 319). The city mystery genre – and newspaper serialization more generally – exerted political agency by moving these writers and their readers to change the ways in which Americans thought and felt about themselves as citizens of a nation on the brink of destruction. To be a citizen in antebellum America – whether native born or immigrant – meant tuning in to the politics of the day, and one way of doing so was by following a newspaper serial that dramatized these politics and turned the very act of continued reading into a model for democratic participation in a capitalist economy. If readers wanted to learn about political events and their potential repercussions for the local community and the nation alike, they had to purchase the newspaper on a daily basis. If they wanted to achieve a sense of personal and communal investment with the ongoing story, they had to engage with an allegorically charged narrative universe that called on them to weigh opposing political positions and sanction the struggle of virtuous heroes and heroines against charismatic villains.

The city mystery genre constituted a literary network as well as a peculiar “revolution in novel writing” (Herminghouse 1985: 310). Not only would serial storytelling dominate popular entertainment by the second half of the nineteenth century, but it also provided a blueprint for conflicting assessments of American modernity as both a productive promise and destructive curse. In the age of commercial mass production, a popular serial novel could spread like an epidemic, as von Reizenstein remarks at one point in his narrative (37). But reading the city mystery genre as a literary epidemic and a revolution in novel writing – as “the genre of 48” (Denning) that took an active part in shaping “the American 48” (Rogin) – means associating it with the “specter of communism” that Marx and Engels evoked in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848). The tension between capitalism and communism manifests itself in the serial form of these novels. Seriality enables continuing political agitation against the powerful, but it also banks on the commercial affordances of capitalist production, including cheap printing technology, advertising, and scandal-mongering. Moreover, it thrives on the productive interplay of delayed closure and its incentive to continue consumption.

German American *Geheimnisromane* provided few political solutions but nonetheless delivered the reassuring solace of commercial serial storytelling. They created a sense of an imagined ethnic immigrant community within the larger imagined American republic (in Benedict Anderson's sense) and offered a sense of participation for citizen-readers. If German American intellectuals "fear[ed] [...] the futility of emigration" (Sollors 1986: 46) and saw emigration as a risky business that threatened to swallow German culture instead of facilitating transatlantic transfer, then serial novel writing and reading were practices with their very own agency, performing a stabilizing function at a time of heightened social and political flux.

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## Preface

In recent decades, academic focus in the humanities has shifted from the history of ideas and ‘dead white male’ public intellectuals to pluralistic views of literatures and cultures. As a consequence of this shift in focus, nineteenth-century genteel thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic have been pushed to the margins of critical discourse. Leslie Butler’s groundbreaking study *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (2007) is an exception. Examining how a group of leading American authors and social critics philosophically engaged with a group of British thinkers, Butler argues that “Critical Americans” (Butler 2007: 6) helped to shape a specifically “American version of liberalism” in the second half of nineteenth-century America (9). Extending Butler’s study of nineteenth-century political and social reformers, this volume examines the ways in which nineteenth-century intellectuals, a group including women as well as men, negotiate cultural traditions across the Atlantic Ocean. Special attention is paid to a small group of concepts, such as ‘realism,’ ‘pragmatism,’ ‘feminism,’ ‘hero,’ the ‘picturesque’ and ‘imagination.’ Although embedded in specific cultural and artistic traditions, these concepts ‘travel’ from one culture to another and are transformed along their transatlantic journeys in a process described by Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal’s *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002).

Even though Bal focuses on concepts that travel from one discipline to another, her ideas about concepts, the metaphor of traveling, and tradition have served as a catalyst for the analyses of the diverse transatlantic travel routes of concepts from specific cultural and aesthetic traditions. Regarding a “concept-based methodology” as crucial for the interdisciplinary analysis of culture (Bal 2002: 5), Bal argues that the concept of “concept” itself is ‘elastic,’ a metaphor that highlights two qualities of concepts, “an unbreakable stability and a near-unlimited extendibility” (14). Concepts, she claims, are primarily “tools of intersubjectivity” that “facilitate discussion on the basis of a common language” and “offer miniature theories” (22). They are also highly mobile: “They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities” (24). As concepts travel back and forth in time, space, and discourse, the ways in which they construct and describe objects also change. In fact it is the “travelling nature of concepts” (23) that destabilizes their embedding in firmly defined particular contexts and renders them changeable. Yet they still remain related to specific contexts or traditions and, like works of art, should not be perceived as completely isolated entities without any link to a respective context (cf. 216). Referring to Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger’s highly influ-

ential work, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which, as she puts it, contends that “traditions are inventions, fictions of continuity necessary for a conception of history as development and progress” (Bal 218), Bal cautions against an easy dismissal of traditions simply because they are ‘invented,’ especially when “marginalized groups in danger of cultural dispersal” use traditions “to promote social cohesion” (218). Instead, she advocates the difficult endeavor of recovering “the interests underlying the invention or its agents” (219) and thus favors a head-on critical engagement with the concept of tradition.

Following the footsteps of Bal’s concept-based methodology for an interdisciplinary study of culture, the goal of this volume, then, is to explore the roles of “travelling concepts” and their traditions as they take at times surprising paths within ever-widening transnational networks. For this purpose, the editor has asked a small group of distinguished experts in transatlantic American Studies to focus on the journeys of such traveling concepts and on mapping ever-growing networks of internationally oriented thinkers in the second half of the nineteenth century. While indebted to Butler’s work on such figures as Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, John Stuart Mill, Charles Eliot Norton, and John Ruskin, the volume broadens the range of intellectual exchanges to include other important nodes of dialogue.

As a result, this collection of essays covers a broad spectrum of concepts and transatlantic networks that have been grouped into four parts. Part One, “The American Renaissance Revisited,” renews the interest in ‘transatlantic literary networks’ (Jonathan Arac), ‘realism’ (Winfried Fluck) and ‘pragmatism’ (Ellen Redling) while Part Two, “Cultural Authority and Transatlantic Aesthetics,” investigates ‘reform movements’ (Leslie Butler), ‘literary authority’ (Julia Straub) and the traveling concept of ‘hero’ (Günter Leypoldt, Erik Redling). Part Three, “Broadening the Genteel Circle: Race and Gender,” extends the networks of primarily white male intellectuals to include African American and women thinkers: the transatlantic imagination of Frederick Douglass (John Stauffer), traveling concepts and traditions within African-American circles (Werner Nell), exchanges over feminism (Sabine Sielke), and transatlantic literary constructions of identity by Southern women (Julia Nitz). Part Four, “The Medium is the Message: Transatlantic Media Networks,” deals with different types of media and explores the concept of the ‘picturesque’ in stereoscopy (Rachel Teukolsky), ‘simultaneity’ and telegraphy (Chris Hanlon), the concept of the ‘Yankee’ (Stefanie Schäfer) in the novel, and serial popular literature (city mysteries) and the role of German American immigrants as public intellectuals (Daniel Stein).

The list of traveling concepts and transatlantic intellectual networks is by no means complete, and the journeys could be extended to other concepts and

additional nineteenth-century thinkers or networks. However, my hope is that the essays demonstrate the importance of focusing on traveling concepts from the vantage of cultural and aesthetic traditions, for this perspective highlights hitherto neglected relations and networks in nineteenth-century American Studies. The essays collected in this volume will hopefully inspire further investigations within or beyond the transatlantic domain.

The volume on hand is the material outcome of the international conference “Traveling Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Negotiations of Cultural Concepts in Transatlantic Intellectual Networks” that took place at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in mid-April 2014. My special thanks go to the American Studies Team at the MLU Halle-Wittenberg, that is, Anke Hildebrandt-Mirtschink, Martin Meyer, Julia Nitz, Christin Reimann, and Kathrin Schulze-Riewald, who each helped to organize and carry out the conference, Joe Fruscione and Lisa Munro, who proofread all essays, Jason Stevens for sharing his expertise with me, and to Merle Willenberg, who provided valuable assistance in editing the essays of this volume. I also want to thank the sponsors of the conference, especially the U.S. Embassy, the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), whose support made the conference possible in the first place. Last but not least, I want to thank the general editors for including this volume in the ANGLIA Book Series and the editorial team at De Gruyter, Ulrike Krauss and Katja Lehming, for their help and cooperation in so many ways.

Erik Redling (Halle)

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Daniel Stein

## 15 Transatlantic Politics as Serial Networks in the German-American City Mystery Novel, 1850–1855

In *Subversive Genealogies: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (1979), Michael Rogin coined the phrase “the American 48” (103) in order to connect the literature of the American antebellum era with the revolutionary transformations that reshaped Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. While Rogin focused on one of the authors whom F. O. Matthiessen had included in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) and who also loomed large in David Reynolds’s *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (1988), this essay turns to much lesser known authors whose writings constitute a crucial nexus between “the American 48” and the popular print media of the time.<sup>1</sup> I examine a body of texts that Michael Denning calls “the genre of 1848” (86) in *Mechanical Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (1987): so-called city mystery novels, mysteries of the cities, or urban mysteries. These sensationalist novels about urban vice and crime appeared in cheap newspapers in the wake of Eugene Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris*, a feuilleton novel serialized in the daily *Journal des Débats* in 1842 and 1843. Depicting the plight of the urban poor vis-à-vis the corrupt aristocracy, the novel was translated and serialized in many European countries, as well as in the U. S., and it inspired adaptations set in cities such as London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Marseilles, and St. Petersburg.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, George Lippard’s *Quaker City, Or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1844–1845), Ned Buntline’s *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1847–1848), and George Thompson’s *City Crimes, or, Life in New York and Boston* (1849) were among the most popular city mysteries of the decade.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On antebellum print media culture, see Lehuu 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See Siepe 2008 for more information on translations of *Les Mystères de Paris*.

<sup>3</sup> For analysis of the *roman feuilleton*, see Bachleitner 2012; Hülk 1985; Neuschäfer, Fritz-El Ahmad, and Walter 1986; on American city mysteries, see Erikson 2003 and 2005; Knight 2012; Looby 1993; Zboray and Zboray 2000. This essay stems from my research project “Serial Politization: On the Cultural Work of American City Mysteries, 1844–1860,” which is part of the DFG-Research Unit “Popular Seriality – Aesthetics and Practice.” For further analysis, see Stein 2014 and 2015.

Within the city mystery genre, a specific subset of serial novels existed: *Geheimnisromane* by German American authors published in German-language newspapers in the U. S. in the early 1850s.<sup>4</sup> I situate my approach to these texts and the literary practices they embody within the field of transatlantic (specifically German-American) studies and understand it as part of the continuing refocusing of American literary history as multilingual project that critics such as Werner Sollors (1998) have advocated.<sup>5</sup> I conceive these texts as actors within the realm of popular serial literature that significantly shaped American culture. Instead of assuming that technological innovations and new infrastructural capabilities simply enabled the increasing production and reception of popular literature in the antebellum era or suggesting that commercial incentives and personal interests alone initiated these changes, I see these developments as mutually reinforcing within a larger network of practices that came to bear on, and existed through, the agencies of human and non-human actors.<sup>6</sup> This includes material carrier media, such as the printed mass-circulation newspaper, and genre formations like the city mysteries, as well as the serial fiction writer as a popular intellectual and the antebellum reader as a serial consumer. My analysis extends Leslie Butler's (2007) study of nineteenth-century Victorian intellectuals and their role in transatlantic liberal reform. However, I focus on popular serial literature and how it enabled German American immigrants to perform lucrative and powerful roles as public intellectuals.

This essay turns to three *Geheimnisromane*: Heinrich Börnstein's (1805–1892) *Geheimnisse von St. Louis (Mysteries of St. Louis)*, serialized in the *Anzeiger des Westens* in 1851, Emil Klauprecht's (1815–1896) *Cincinnati, oder Die Geheimnisse des Westens (Cincinnati, or the The Mysteries of the West)*, which appeared in 1854 (details of its serialization remain uncertain), and Ludwig von Reizenstein's (1826–1885) *Geheimnisse von New-Orleans (Mysteries of New Orleans)*, serialized in the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* between 1854 and 1855. I argue that these novels constituted a periodical network, unfolding their cultural work in the medium of the serialized newspaper novel and through the particular genre of the city mystery novel at a specific moment in time – the “American 48” – which they reflected as well as helped shape.

<sup>4</sup> On these *Geheimnisromane*, see Herminghouse 1985 and 2004; Klotz 2012; Merrill 1988; Rowan 2002; Schuchalter 2011; Shore 2002; Sollors 1986; Stein 2014; Williams 2005.

<sup>5</sup> For more on German-American literature and culture, see Fluck and Sollors 2002; Lang 1988; Trommler and McVeigh 1985; Tatlock and Erlin 2005; Trommler and Shore 2001.

<sup>6</sup> This approach is based on Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (1993; 2005).

## 1 Intellectual Networks

Klauprecht, Börnstein, and von Reizenstein were popular transatlantic intellectuals within their ethnic communities, whose understanding of the new world had been shaped by their experiences in Germany. Börnstein had left Germany in the early 1840s for Paris, where he published the journal *Vorwärts! Pariser Signale aus Kunst, Wissenschaft, Theater, Musik und geselligem Leben* (Forward: Parisian Signals from the Arts, Science, Theater, Music, and Social Life) and had been part of a politically active German émigré community that included Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Ludwig Börne, Karl Ruge, and Heinrich Heine. He left France in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution and soon became the owner and publisher of the *Anzeiger des Westens*. The newspaper's Forty-Eighter platform included an anti-slavery, anti-Temperance, anti-Catholic, pro-labor and pro-homesteading stance that was part of a local and transregional network of periodicals, including the *Missouri Republican*, the Whig *Deutsche Tribüne*, and the Catholic *St. Louis Tagesschau*, as well as the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* and similar publications in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, New York, and Boston. These newspapers participated in a transnational exchange of news reporting. Börnstein had been the Paris correspondent for the German *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Deutsche Schnellpost of New York*, and *Vorwärts!* had featured excerpts from the German American press, including the *Anzeiger des Westens*.<sup>7</sup>

As a Thirtyer (*Dreißiger*), Emil Klauprecht belonged to a generation of immigrants who had left their home country before the revolution and were less radical than the Forty-Eighters. He had fled from political repression in the wake of the Hambacher Fest in 1832 and settled down in Cincinnati in 1837. In the late 1840s, he became the editor of the Whig daily *Der Republikaner*, and Don Heinrich Tolzmann (1996) describes him as “political polemicist” (xvii), as well as an “active ethnic individual” (xx) in Cincinnati's German American community. Ludwig von Reizenstein, a member of the Bavarian aristocracy, was a refugee of his own sexual revolution; he had engaged in homosexual activities in his youth, much to the distress of his father, who sent him to America as a disciplinary measure. He was politically less active than Börnstein and Klauprecht but also used the city mystery genre to negotiate the German presence in America. All three immigrants were newspaper editors, novelists, and figures of local public life, intellectuals with an interest in promoting German culture in the U.S. They “were the opinion makers” of their time, as

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<sup>7</sup> On Börnstein, see also Herminghouse 1985; Rowan 1990; Williams 2005.

Steven Rowan suggests, and they embodied the role of the German American intellectual as “author, entrepreneur, and political broker” (1990: vii).

## 2 City Mysteries as Genre Network: Paratextual Analysis

If we want to understand how these transatlantic intellectuals inscribed their *Geheimnisromane* into the network of the city mystery genre in order to pursue a political agenda that was simultaneously local, national, and transnational, we must study how they used paratexts – especially prefaces – to discuss the transatlantic scope of the genre and the political purposes of their own contributions.<sup>8</sup>

Klauprecht’s Foreword begins with a negative characterization of the genre that anticipates the reader’s reaction to the text:

Yet another contribution to the *Mysteries* literature! Yet another wrung-out sensational title serving up second-hand speculation for idle curiosity, marketing the hidden, ominous, horrible and terrifying encounters between the different levels of society!” This is no doubt what is being said by many of my contemporaries taking this book in hand only to put it aside after the first glance [...]. (Klauprecht 1996: 3)<sup>9</sup>

Popularity can be a burden; an affiliation with a bestselling genre like the city mysteries may result in “wrung-out” and “second-hand” story formulas and an adherence to a sensationalist hype of the past (it had been more than a decade since Sue’s *Mystères de Paris*). To become a legitimate participant in the genre, Klauprecht sought to establish narrative authority by promoting the series as a pioneering work beyond the well-trodden paths of previous publications: “It was the goal of this collection in novelistic form to call the attention of German writers to rich trans-Atlantic material whose mines remain unworked, despite the fact that the stream which spills on its shores is our own, the German emigration” (Klauprecht 1996: 3). By presenting his novel as a genuine contribution to German literature, Klauprecht grounds the story in a locale of interest to his readers, who find their hopes and frustrations dramatized in a narrative authored by one of their own.

<sup>8</sup> On the significance of paratextual analysis in nineteenth-century serial fiction, see Looby 2004; for a broader approach, see Okker 2003.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of convenience, all German sources in this essay are cited from their English translations.

Klauprecht suggests that German literature about America had been beholden to an outdated fascination with the Western American frontier. Recalling Sue, who cast *Mystères de Paris* as an urban reformulation of James Fenimore Cooper's novels, Klauprecht maintains that the American city challenges the German literary imagination:

The few German novelists who have made America's West the theater of their poetry have consciously followed the paths of Cooper, Sealsfield and other pioneers of new literature [...]. They seldom or never exchange their blanket in a log cabin or wigwam for the comfortable bed of an urban hotel. Certainly American towns lack those perennial sources of the imagination provided by the ruins of a romantic past [...]. What charm could these towns, which are nothing more than rows of shops, of warehouses for bacon and flour, where dickered Yankees breathlessly pursue the almighty dollar and a European proletariat struggles for a new home with the sweat of its brow, provide to European readers? (Klauprecht 1996: 3–4)

This is a self-confident call to competition between the *Amerikaliteratur* produced in the homeland and German literature created in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Klauprecht reverses the understanding of nation as center and colony as periphery by making the transnational scope of his work explicit. This reversal identifies his novel as a modern synthesis of American and German fictions of the new world. Curiously, it presents itself as less the result of Klauprecht's literary imagination than as a response to decidedly non-romantic American realities. The Foreword speaks of the "life of the towns of the West [as] producing continuously novel and strange events like a kaleidoscope, animated with the nationalities of two continents" (4). This focus on the agency of kaleidoscopic diversity is comparative, as well as competitive: money-driven Yankees clash with hard-working European immigrants, and the resulting "strange events" add a distinctive new-world flavor to the city mystery genre.

If Klauprecht positioned his novel *vis-à-vis* Cooper and German *Amerikaliteratur*, von Reizenstein's "Memoranda for the Sympathetic Reader" casts Sue's virtuous protagonist as a metaphor for the genre:

Ever since Eugène Sue's delicate Fleur-de-Marie resisted the enticement of the "wedding night" with a prince, preferring to end her young life in a cloister, Fleurs-de-Marie have lost their charm, and since they are what blooms in the garden of mysteries, mysteries

<sup>10</sup> Examples of such *Amerikaliteratur* are Charles Sealsfield's (Carl Anton Postl) *Die deutsch-amerikanischen Wahlverwandschaften* (1839/1840) as well as Friedrich Gerstäcker's *Streif- und Jagdzüge durch die Vereinigten Staaten Nord-Amerikas* (1844) and *Nach Amerika!* (1855). German views of the United States were strongly influenced by these and similar publications as well as by newspaper coverage from foreign correspondents. See also Wagner 1985.

have ceased to be fashionable. It is a decade too late to sow Fleurs-de-Marie [...] because, as every lover of flowers knows, they can only produce seeds for two years. (von Reizenstein 2002: 1)

The city mystery genre appears as a garden here: individual novels are flowers, and genre evolution is part of a natural process of seasonal renewal within a textual network naturalized as an ecosystem. Von Reizenstein endorses a notion of genre continuity; the “Memoranda” reads like the beginning of a sequel to *Mystères de Paris*, with which the intended reader is supposed to be familiar. Nevertheless, it also emphasizes the ephemerality of individual texts: Sue’s novel only blossomed for two years, so readers must make the most of their daily encounters with this text. They must purchase the newspaper now and react immediately to its political demands; they must become active in order to secure the serial continuation of this politically charged narrative.<sup>11</sup>

Like Klauprecht, von Reizenstein (2002: 1) is aware of the problem of genre competition: “The disreputable novelist Ned Buntline launched the literature of mysteries on American soil and thereby utterly killed all their enchantment as well as any interest in them.” This dismissal could have been motivated by Buntline’s involvement with the nativist movement, which German Americans generally opposed. Buntline also had published a city mystery novel set in New Orleans only a few years before von Reizenstein, which compelled the latter to stake a discursive claim on the genre and setting by refuting the former’s work. In *The Mysteries of New Orleans* (1851), Buntline supported the policy of expansionism and advocated the annexation of Cuba, while von Reizenstein strongly opposed Cuban annexation and created a literary scenario in which the expansion of slavery would destroy the American Republic.

Underscoring the network among local German American newspaper communities,<sup>12</sup> von Reizenstein wrote:

[Börnstein’s] “Mysteries of St. Louis” flowed from a German-American pen and is of importance only insofar as its appearance coincides with the struggle of Germans at that time against the attacks of Jesuitism. [Emil Klauprecht’s] “Mysteries of Cincinnati” are a pale reflection of the *Mysteries of Berlin* or *New York*, and they unfortunately contain too much that is familiar for a well-read man. (von Reizenstein 2002: 1)

Von Reizenstein dismisses preceding novels as dated and repetitive, while promoting his own work as a timely and original addition to a popular literary

<sup>11</sup> For a longer version of this argument, see Stein 2014.

<sup>12</sup> On the German-American press of New Orleans around the middle of the nineteenth century, see also Keil 1999.

genre. This statement is inherently ironic because von Reizenstein's self-promotion is obviously indebted to the serial nature of popular genre narratives and to the necessity of competing against other genre narratives in a capitalist economy, where variations of existing products are habitually hailed as innovations.

Heinrich Börnstein's "Dedication to Thomas Hart Benton" legitimizes the narrative by crafting a political origin story: by promoting German Americans as an integral element of a national network of "immigrants from all nations." Börnstein recalls his friendship with the former Democratic U.S. Senator (1820–1850) and candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives: "to that evening I owe my first idea of this book" (xvi), he states, and then offers a tribute to Benton that naturalizes the Germans of St. Louis:

You were raised here in Missouri, which has been populated chiefly by immigrants from all nations, among native and adopted citizens – and, although American in heart and soul, you have ever been the sincere and warm friend of the adopted citizens – you worked for their true interests, and did your utmost to carry out their wishes and feelings. (xvi)

Börnstein addresses his novel to these "free German adopted fellow citizens," who constitute the base for his activities as a public intellectual.

### 3 City Mysteries as Genre Network: Textual Analysis

Once these German American *Geheimnisromane* have staked their literary claims and declared their political aims, they launch serially unfolding sensational stories set in the urban contexts their readers inhabited. Börnstein's *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, for instance, proposes a powerful combination of anti-Catholicism and anti-slavery advocacy that culminates in a clandestine meeting of American Jesuits on an island on the Mississippi River. "All is silent," and "dark objects take their direction to the 'bloody isle,'" while the city's "citizens are asleep" and "know not what is passing on the river" (1990: 158). These "dark objects" pledge their allegiance to the Catholic Church; they are "laborers in the great work" (159) of subduing the American Republic. Their leader exclaims: "the day of decision is drawing near [...], and with the aid of heaven we shall reconquer this land for the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church" (159). Börnstein uses the precarious nature of serial storytelling to express heightened political urgency. The reference to "the day of decision"

functions as both a political and a narrative threat. If Catholic rule is established, Börnstein's novel will be over. The political goal of foiling Catholic take-over and the readers' potential wish to continue the pleasurable consumption of suspenseful fiction go together, establishing a nexus of serialization and politicization that achieved great popularity in the decades before the American Civil War.<sup>13</sup>

Börnstein taps into the social, political, and religious uncertainties of many antebellum Americans, a seedbed for politicized serial narratives, when the Catholic leader states:

[O]ur exertions have succeeded as to bring the struggle between the Roman Catholics and the Anglo-German Protestants to a decision. This America, discovered and conquered by the Most Catholic Rulers of Spain, paid for and watered with Catholic blood – this providence and inheritance of the Roman Church has fallen into the hands of heretics and infidels – into the power of the Anglo-Saxons, the Germans, the followers of Luther; they have invaded the patrimony of the Holy Church, and Providence is punishing them for it. (1990: 160)

The assertion that the first Spanish settlements in America had established Catholic rule before the emergence of the nation attacks the founding myths of the Republic. In the leader's account, legal rights based on the initial discovery of the new world reinforce a claim to ownership through the expense of human sacrifice in warfare, while Protestants appear as "invade[rs]." Börnstein presents his novel as a counter-narrative to such fraudulent claims and appeals to his audience – the maligned "Germans" and "followers of Luther" – to stem the Jesuit tide and prevent the destruction of the American Republic. His readers must save the "proud Union" and "asylum of all revolutionaries and unbelievers," as the Catholic leader defines America, recalling the rhetoric of Thomas Paine's political pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776). They must become "active audiences" (Jennifer Hayward's term) in order to prevent national secession in the wake of the slavery crisis:

The South is rising against the North, they will dilacerate each other, and the downfall of the republic will be the consequence. We have thrown the slave question between them, and fanned the flame. The brethren are busy, mingling with the abolitionists of the North and laboring among the agitators of the South. Congress can no more heal the breach dividing the North and the South [...]. There is no remedy; the South will be cut loose; then we shall be the victors. Already we have adherents and friends in all places; in the administration, in Congress, faithful lay brothers are at work. (160)

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13 On Catholicism in nineteenth-century America, see Gjerde 2012.

This scenario not only enables Börnstein to reveal an alleged Jesuit scheme but also connects the novel with Sue's *Mystères de Paris* and his later *Le Juif errant* (1844–1845), which provided a thematic template for Börnstein that included an anti-Jesuitism bent on blaming the Catholic Church for supporting feudal rulers in Europe. Börnstein adapted leftist European ideologies to an American context, promoting the *Anzeiger des Westens* (as well as Börnstein himself) against newspapers like the Catholic *St. Louis Tagesschau* and deflecting nativist doubts about German immigrants onto the Catholic Irish.

Jesuit villains are never merely literary fantasies but always also actors in the author's "sensationalist designs" (Jane Tompkins's concept) on his readers. We realize this when the Catholic leader in Börnstein's novel finishes his prophesy:

The old parties are being broken up; after the next session of Congress there will be no more Whigs and Democrats, but merely our friends or our adversaries, for or against the Union, and the Union will be overthrown. [...] The South [...] cannot have a separate existence, and it must fly to our arms, by our mediation to gain protection of European Catholic powers. It is to enter into a league with Catholic Mexico [...]. The next presidential election in Mexico will give us the victory. Mexico will become a monarchy. It is we that will give a king to that monarchy, and it will be a Catholic prince of old royal blood. Monarchy, however, having once taken root in the South, the republic at the North is at an end, too, and the Anglo-German element must give way to the Roman. (1990: 160–161)

These words address German readers throughout the U.S., as references to the "Anglo-German element" and "Protestant Anglo-Germans" indicate. Buzz phrases such as "monarchy," "king," and a "Catholic prince of old royal blood" must have resonated with German immigrants who had left their home country in disillusion after the failed uprising against feudalism. Yet even in America, they are subject to European power politics; British aristocrats and the high Church of England call for Catholic protection against "the rising torrent of democracy." The effectiveness of Börnstein's novel depends on his abilities as a literary spin doctor who uses actual events to prod readers toward reexamining their understanding of American politics and relies on the narrative affordances of the serialized newspaper novel to promote his political demands.

Klauprecht's *Cincinnati, oder Die Geheimnisse des Westens* offers a variation on Börnstein's anti-Catholicism, a typical move in popular serial storytelling. Klauprecht's Jesuit arch-villain is Signore Viteschelli, whose schemes remind readers of the high stakes in antebellum America: "No legislature receives its political contour, no governor, no president, is elected in the Union against our will" (1996: 208), Viteschelli notes, announcing that "the day [will] come when the thunder of the Vatican will sound from the heights of the Capitol" (208). In Klauprecht's analysis (voiced through Viteschelli), American soci-

ety is vulnerable because of “the childish naiveté of a people which knows neither us [i.e., the Jesuits] nor our history, the freedom of instruction, the rottenness of the party leaders, the corruption of statesmen, the sectarianism, the armies of European voters at our command” (208). Viteschelli’s vision of the United States is represented on a map in his office on which “the borders of the states and the territories have vanished. The entire vast region of the Union has been divided into nine brightly-colored sections” (204–205): into dioceses and vicariates. Klauprecht’s readers must organize a vocal (and perhaps also violent) opposition against American Catholics in order to prevent this map from becoming a reality.

If Börnstein merely identified the national controversy over slavery as the cause for the downfall of the American Republic, Klauprecht devotes much of his novel to slavery, offering a German American perspective on this issue that contextualizes Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sentimental bestseller *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851/1852).<sup>14</sup> Among his central characters are the virtuous Creole Isabelle Beaufort, her husband and slave owner Blanchard Beaufort, and his mulatto step-sister Zenobia. While Isabelle embodies an idealized European-American synthesis, Blanchard and Zenobia represent the decadence and cruelty of the Southern planter aristocracy. Blanchard owns “vast stretches of land [...] equal to the value of a European kingdom”; he has “millions in the bank [and] command[s] an army of Negroes in the cotton fields and sugar plantations” (Klauprecht 1996: 70). He and his step-sister wield absolute power over their slaves. Zenobia boasts:

[T]here is not a court which would dare to entertain a case against the house of Beaufort over a Negro body. Do you know that my brother disposes of a horde of voters which would bring any court official to heel. The house of Beaufort is as absolute as the Czar of Russia. It can roast a Negro on a spit, hang him by the legs and whip him to death, or feed him to the hogs [...]. No policeman would concern himself, even if some abolitionist would be so crazy as to make a charge. (Klauprecht 1996: 111)

The abusive Southern slave owner appears as the American version of the tyrannical European monarch in this passage, as a quasi-Russian Czar who holds the fate of his subjects in his hands and abuses his power at whim.<sup>15</sup>

In a later passage, Blanchard and Zenobia even advocate the annexation of Cuba and the re-enslavement of free Cuban blacks: “They’ll be auctioned off to the [U. S. American] plantation owners. They are slaves by God and the law

<sup>14</sup> See also Bergquist 1989.

<sup>15</sup> I cannot go into detail here about the complicated treatment of race and slavery in the city mystery genre. For further analysis, see Helwig 2006; Ostrowski 2006; Stein 2014.

anyway” (120), Blanchard argues. Representing Klauprecht’s opposing convictions, Isabelle’s lover Alphonse Gonzales responds:

If we assume that the Congress would sanction such a peculiar proposal from the South, – do you really believe that this army of free persons, consisting not just of Africans but of Cuban Negroes, among whom you will find many a well-cultured man, would let itself be sold into servitude so lightly? The emancipation proclamation of the French Convention precipitated dreadful scenes on San Domingo; [...] returning these emancipated colored people to slavery [...] would conjure up a blood-bath, delivering the land to the Negroes and granting autonomy to a second Haiti. (120)

Zenobia’s melodramatic and evil reply exposes the slave-owner mentality that makes possible such a statement as well as insults the political analysis of a (self-proclaimed) German American intellectual like Klauprecht and the sentiments of his core readers: “[w]e would whip it out of them” and that “we’d purge the island of such Douglasses” (120).

The discussion between the Southerners then turns to the role of the North in supporting slavery. Zenobia accuses the North of hypocrisy by alleging that it treats white wage laborers above the Mason-Dixon line as inferior to wealthy whites whereas the South elevates white workers above the status of the slaves:

Don’t you find more poverty and misery in all of its [i.e., the North’s] cities than in the South? Isn’t the white man there degraded under the yoke of daily hard labor, doesn’t the rich man look down on him as if he were of a lower caste? While with us the white color bonds poor and rich together as a being superior to the black. (121–122)

Comparisons of the slave system to the treatment of workers in the North were nothing new in the 1850s, even though Zenobia’s stance is peculiar in that it ignores the myth of Southern paternalism, instead concentrating (somewhat ironically) on slavery as a means of overcoming class divisions between wealthy slave owners and poor white workers.<sup>16</sup>

If the goal of many German-American intellectuals was to orchestrate a voter shift from the pro-slavery Democrats to what would soon become the Republican Party, then they had to present slavery as an evil that implicated the North. Alphonse thus complains about a “cheap sort of philanthropy” in the North:

If even one of these states had set us the noble example of emancipation, they would seem a bit purer in motive. But abolitionism began blustering in the North only after it

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<sup>16</sup> Only a few years later, George Fitzhugh would propose comparable ideas in his book *Cannibals All!, or Slaves Without Masters* (1857).

had sold the South almost all its own slaves. The “*smart Yankee*” has the money in his pocket, so now he demands that the Negroes be set free, in his lovely phrase, “on the basis of human rights.” Just let the North put its preachings to work on its own little Delaware! That state has only a few score slaves, so that with the sum of twenty thousand dollars it could become a free state [...] But when it is a matter of money, the Pharisees close their eyes. (122)

Commerce trumps the promise of freedom here, and abolitionism is only an outlet for Northern reform fantasies. Klauprecht’s Midwestern doubts about Northern abolitionism reinforce the duty of German Americans to fight slavery’s financial incentive with a republican insistence on universal freedom. Yet they also register the city mystery genre’s generally dismal view of abolitionism as a religiously driven middle-class reform movement that ignores the plight of the urban poor in the North.<sup>17</sup>

While *Cincinnati, oder Die Geheimnisse des Westens* is anchored in Klauprecht’s adopted Midwestern home city, von Reizenstein’s *Geheimnisse von New Orleans* centers on New Orleans. Using the yellow fever epidemic that had ravaged New Orleans shortly before its serialization, the novel connects the peculiar body politics of this city with a national body politic that will ultimately falter through a violent slave revolution. The novel voices an inside critique of the American South rare in its explicit condemnation of the Southern social order and also in its focus on the failed immigration of a German aristocratic family (cf. Rowan 2002: xxviii). Most of the European aristocrats succumb to American hedonism as they become criminals or abandon their wives in search of sexual gratification with the city’s mulatta women. For these misdeeds, a superhuman avenger – the freemason Uriah Hiram – sends a yellow fever epidemic into New Orleans that wipes out the German aristocrats. This plot undermines the hopes of many Germans to fulfill their political objectives in the U.S. Even virtuous German émigrés cannot survive in an uncultured and money-driven American society, a plutocracy that cares little about slavery’s human toll.

*Geheimnisse von New-Orleans* imagines a revolutionary threat to the United States issuing from Haiti. Haiti had become an independent nation in 1804, and the bloody revolt against the French colonial government preceding independence had spread fears of slave revolts throughout the American South. The novel transposes the German fascination with Haiti as a case of successful national revolution to an American context when it reifies Southern fears of slave revolt by prophesizing the coming of a “yellow savior,” a second Toussaint Louverture, the bastard child of a mulatto woman and a German aristo-

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<sup>17</sup> See also see Helwig 2006; Ostrowski 2006.

crat. The new *Louverture* will grow up to be the leader of a slave revolt that will destroy the United States in 1871. This scenario reformulates Manifest Destiny as the threat of Manifest Demise. It calls on readers to prevent the expansion of slavery and work towards its abolition in the South.<sup>18</sup>

The novel seeks to stop this expansion, as a passage about the Kansas-Nebraska-Act of 1854 indicates. The passage envisions a “triad of moments” in which three birds symbolize the failures of American politics: first, the “Bald eagle, *our eagle*,” which represents the federal government. Its “favorite dish is the flesh of black people,” and it seeks to extend its “hunting region” beyond “the area of fifteen states” (i.e., beyond the Southern slave states). Second, the Nebraska Owl, which will give itself away as a willing bride (i.e., cease its independence as a free territory) to the Bald Eagle in order to rule in the Capitol. Third, the Bleeding Pelican, the state bird of Louisiana, which mourns the victims of the yellow fever epidemic. The passage culminates in an urgent demand to the readers to revive the values of the American Revolution: “Where is your high-flying now, Eagle?”, Hiram laments:

Do you no longer recall the deeds of your forefathers? Don't you think any more of Bunker Hill – of the fathers of your republic? Bald Eagle, you have become a filthy predator, stuffing your belly with the flesh of the children of another climate, whom you have dragged into your country to be manacled and beaten. (Reizenstein 2002: 418)

The novel finally imagines a symbolic battle between the natural elements: black fists reaching out of a dark cloud and attacking the remaining white clouds over the possession of fifteen stars, or slave states, illuminating the sky. While the white clouds survive this encounter, it is clear that this was only the opening skirmish of an imminent, and much more violent, war to come.

Von Reizenstein confronts his German American readers in his attack, implicating them as part of a network of political critique and agitation. He faults them for ignoring their obligation to oppose slavery – a particularly powerful accusation after the failed revolution against oppressive rule in the homeland – and for collaborating with an inhuman system of enforced servitude. He voices this critique implicitly through the German immigrant Karl, a “traveling salesman in wholly-heads” (38). Karl explains:

So far as my present occupation goes, everything but the travel repels me, and I would exchange it for another in a minute if I could get the same money. We are, after all, in America, [...] and money is not at all unimportant. Besides, [...] I do not love money for its own sake, but only in order to guarantee me a free existence in the future. (39)

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<sup>18</sup> For further analysis, see Stein 2014; on German views of the Haitian revolution, see Schüller 1992.

This hypocritical excuse invites a biting comment from the narrator:

[C]onsidering that he took this position at a time when he was in great financial need, it should not cast any shadow on his character. After the material discomfort had been somewhat relieved, one would hardly expect him to leave the agency right away and place himself in distress once more just to yield to childish scruples. In fact, he was often rather pleased with himself over what he himself described as a wildly romantic career. (38)

Here, von Reizenstein acts as both political agitator and literary commentator, lambasting complicity in slavery as a means of alleviating material discomfort and faulting German immigrants for projecting romantic fantasies of American frontier life onto a nation that practices systematic racial subjugation.

#### 4 Serial Politics and the Genre of 48

Börnstein, Klauprecht, and von Reizenstein wrote newspaper mysteries to entertain, educate, and politicize their readers. Their political interests and literary ambitions were integral to the objectives of the newspaper business: to win and retain new readers, and to connect individual readers into a community network. Significantly, their novels spread the action beyond their respective regions in a literary move that mirrored – and perhaps also aided – the project of national expansion: from the South into the Midwest in von Reizenstein, from the Midwest into the South (as far as Mexico) in Klauprecht, and from the Midwest to the West (California) in Börnstein. What was traveling across the Atlantic and across the American continent in the middle of the nineteenth century were not just concepts, as the title of Mieke Bal's *Travelling Concepts* (2002) loosely suggests, but actual people and actual serial practices: increasingly popular German intellectuals and newspaper writers with literary ambitions who established themselves as influential public figures in an expanding multicultural and multilingual nation. Finding a budding print culture, a growing infrastructure, and a reading audience hungry for serial entertainment, they carried the model of Sue's *roman feuilleton* to America.<sup>19</sup> They adapted the format of the serial newspaper novel to their specific needs, dramatizing conflicts such as slavery and imperial expansion, and conjuring up scenarios of worldwide Jesuit subversion that transported the anti-Catholicism of the European left into a new-world environment. In this context, republican-spirited

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<sup>19</sup> On antebellum reading practices, see also Stewart 2011.

Germans must oppose an uncultured and overly materialistic American culture.

Yet simply reaffirming the self-fashioning of these authors as public intellectuals misses the larger point of their literary and political activities. Patricia Herminghouse (1985) rightly argues that, “[f]or authors such as Börnstein and Klauprecht, literature was not a social weapon in itself but a means subordinate to the higher end of their journalistic enterprise.” She concludes that these authors “learn[ed] to play the political game by American rules for American prizes: financial security, local influence, and political, military, and diplomatic offices” (318, 319). The city mystery genre – and newspaper serialization more generally – exerted political agency by moving these writers and their readers to change the ways in which Americans thought and felt about themselves as citizens of a nation on the brink of destruction. To be a citizen in antebellum America – whether native born or immigrant – meant tuning in to the politics of the day, and one way of doing so was by following a newspaper serial that dramatized these politics and turned the very act of continued reading into a model for democratic participation in a capitalist economy. If readers wanted to learn about political events and their potential repercussions for the local community and the nation alike, they had to purchase the newspaper on a daily basis. If they wanted to achieve a sense of personal and communal investment with the ongoing story, they had to engage with an allegorically charged narrative universe that called on them to weigh opposing political positions and sanction the struggle of virtuous heroes and heroines against charismatic villains.

The city mystery genre constituted a literary network as well as a peculiar “revolution in novel writing” (Herminghouse 1985: 310). Not only would serial storytelling dominate popular entertainment by the second half of the nineteenth century, but it also provided a blueprint for conflicting assessments of American modernity as both a productive promise and destructive curse. In the age of commercial mass production, a popular serial novel could spread like an epidemic, as von Reizenstein remarks at one point in his narrative (37). But reading the city mystery genre as a literary epidemic and a revolution in novel writing – as “the genre of 48” (Denning) that took an active part in shaping “the American 48” (Rogin) – means associating it with the “specter of communism” that Marx and Engels evoked in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848). The tension between capitalism and communism manifests itself in the serial form of these novels. Seriality enables continuing political agitation against the powerful, but it also banks on the commercial affordances of capitalist production, including cheap printing technology, advertising, and scandal-mongering. Moreover, it thrives on the productive interplay of delayed closure and its incentive to continue consumption.

German American *Geheimnisromane* provided few political solutions but nonetheless delivered the reassuring solace of commercial serial storytelling. They created a sense of an imagined ethnic immigrant community within the larger imagined American republic (in Benedict Anderson's sense) and offered a sense of participation for citizen-readers. If German American intellectuals "fear[ed] [...] the futility of emigration" (Sollors 1986: 46) and saw emigration as a risky business that threatened to swallow German culture instead of facilitating transatlantic transfer, then serial novel writing and reading were practices with their very own agency, performing a stabilizing function at a time of heightened social and political flux.

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