

Christof Kocher, title of presentation: “Western settlers and Indian Chiefs; a German author and the rewriting of his Western tales” (Karl May, Winnetou)

In the summer semester 2007, I had the opportunity to write a research paper about one of the best known German authors: Karl May. I have chosen to write about the most popular of May's books called Winnetou. It is a typical Western story taking place in the U.S. around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first issue that one has to consider when working on Karl May is his sympathy towards the Native Indians in the US. Winnetou, a character of the book representing an Indian Chief of the Apache is described as a civilized and well educated young man. May published his book in 1893, a time when the U.S. government accomplished the relocation of several Indian tribes. The goal of my research paper was to proof that May did not have the intention to favor one person or one ethnical group in his descriptions. One could think of such a privilege since May was concerned with the Indian suffering. He could have had the idea to represent the Indians in an especially sympathetic way in order to ameliorate their image. Winnetou has been translated only three times so far. First is Marion A. Taggart's translation from 1898, then Michael Shaw's close translation in 1977, and finally David Koblick's very modern version from 1999. All three translators had their very own approach to May's best known book and every translator followed his own strategy. Taggart does not stay close to the source text; he leaves out whole paragraphs that only contain landscape descriptions. Moreover, he changes the content of some sentences when it suits his English version. Shaw stays extremely close to the source text. After looking closely at several specific scenes of the book, I am convinced that no translator can ever write a translation that is closer to the original. Koblick also leaves out some passages, and adds some others, but he is more careful than Taggart. We can see him in between Taggart and Shaw in terms of text authenticity. Koblick differs extremely in terms of style. I would see Winnetou and his translations as an example of how a text gets rewritten over the ages. There is a debate among Karl May enthusiasts between those who want to keep May's words in an untouched state and those who want to modernize the text. Taking my close examinations of Winnetou and its translations as a basis, I would argue that the text has an after-life and that it is legitimate to adjust the text to modern language patterns. We should not forget that Winnetou is being read mostly by teenagers.