

American Dime Novels on the German Market. The Role of Gatekeepers
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published in: Travelling Goods, Travelling Moods. Varieties of
Cultural Appropriation (1850-1950), ed. Christian Huck and Stefan
Bauernschmidt. Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2012, 105-124.

American Dime Novels on the German Market: the Role of Gatekeepers

Christian Huck

The following contribution deals with the adaptation of the American dime novel to the German market in the early years of the twentieth century. Dime novels had been an enormously successful genre, economically that is, on the American market since the mid-nineteenth century. By the turn of the century, such print products, now known by the German name *Groschenhefte*, entered the German market. Analyzing the forces that shaped this entry, I will focus on German publishers on the one hand, and cultural critics on the other, as what I call *gatekeepers* in the process of introducing a cultural product with a distinctively foreign provenance. While the publishers tried to open a market for the new product, the critics tried to keep the door shut. While the publishers *appropriated* the typically American genre to the German market, librarians, teachers and others campaigned against the proclaimed *inappropriateness* of such publications for the German reader.

My analysis will proceed in three steps: first, I will introduce the sociological model of gatekeeping and suggest why this theory could be useful in analyzing the transcultural appropriation of foreign goods; second, I will present the success story of the dime novel in the USA and show how German publishers adapted the genre as *Groschenhefte* to make it suitable to the German market; third, I will look at public utterances decrying the reading of dime novels, and the subsequent development of the product on the German market.

Gatekeeping and the Mobility of Goods

Gatekeepers, according to Gordon Marshall's *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, are "individuals or groups in crucial positions from which they can control access to goods, services, or information" (1994, 195). "In other words a gatekeeper in a social system decides which [...] commodity [...] may enter

the system.” (anon. 2010) The gatekeeping model was first applied to the study of news broadcasting; here, editors decide what news is disseminated to the audience, and in what form. In its classical version as developed by David Manning White (1964, 160–72), the process can be visualized as in fig. 1.

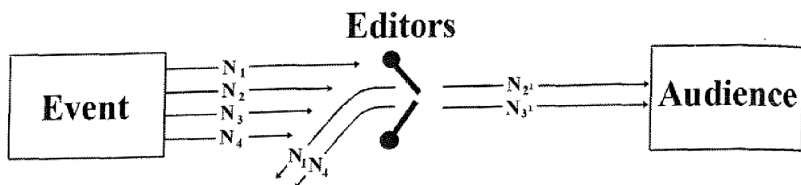


Fig. 1: The process of gatekeeping (N = news item) (cf. anon. 2010)

Of all available news items, some are discarded, while others are selected and forwarded to the audience. The model can, as I want to suggest, be applied to more general questions of cultural transfer as well (cf. Hirsch 1972, 639–59), and, as Takeshi Matsui (2009) has shown in his analysis of Japanese Manga comics in the USA, in particular to the introduction of foreign print products.

Matsui focuses on publishers' behavior as gatekeepers when a cultural product originally created in one culture is introduced into another (Peterson 1994, 163–89). The publishers *localize* the product, to use Matsui's term, by giving it a place within the value system of the new culture. This is accomplished by attributing meanings to the good that are relevant to the new culture. The publishers select and discard certain features of the good and sometimes create new features in order to make the transformed product appealing to the new audience. The publishers, however, I want to add, are not the only ones trying to control the introduction of foreign cultural products—they are not the only gatekeepers.

In a more or less free market, control over the dissemination of goods is a matter of controlling the value, monetary as well as social, of those goods. And the value of products is determined, although not exclusively, by what they mean to consumers. Grant McCracken's theory of how cultural meanings are attributed to goods distinguishes between two general forces.

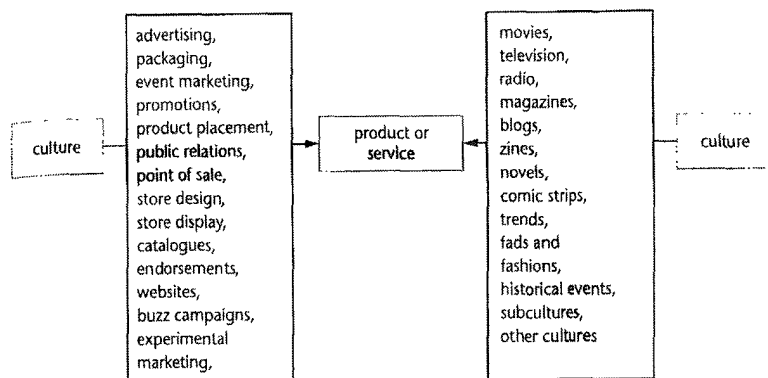


Fig. 2: *Transferring cultural meaning to products* (source: McCracken 2005, 178)

On the left (fig. 2), we find all those mechanisms and techniques available to the producers and distributors of a product, that is, in our case, the publishers. Via such marketing means as advertising or product design, they can try to attach specific values and meanings available within a certain culture to their good.

However, the publishers are not the only ones who contribute to the meaning of a good. On the right hand of McCracken's chart, we find a much less specific list of determinants enumerating all kinds of cultural forces that contribute to forming cultural values. However much they might try, the producers of consumer goods do not control all of these venues. The magazines, texts and audio-visual programs listed here report about goods and attach meanings to them by the way they report about them. Films and novels may feature specific cars or food products and thereby insert the good into a cultural map of meanings. Subcultures and celebrities may use certain products and add new meaning to these, or alter existing meanings (McCracken 1991, 79–83). Long before individual consumers appropriate goods to fit their household needs, a cultural appropriation has taken place; the consumers, however, are the ones who decide whether the process of appropriation will be a success.

The attribution of meaning is normally a constant, ongoing process, but it becomes especially salient when a new consumer good, having entered a culture, does not yet have a fixed place within the map of values and meanings that make up that culture. If the consumer good is a completely new invention, its cultural meanings have to be deduced from its practical functions,

its relation to other goods and the cultural capital of first adopters. If the consumer good is not really new, but has originated in another culture, as in our case, the meanings and values attached to the good in its culture of origin have to be adapted: they are selected, discarded, transformed and reimagined by the gatekeepers so as to fit the new culture. As an example of such a process of transcultural meaning making, I want to look at the transformation of dime novels into *Groschenhefte*.

As we will see in the following, however, information management is not the only work of the gatekeeper, and books do not consist only of meaning. *Groschenhefte*, as any other books, are media that use materiality to present meaning. While McCracken's chart (fig. 2) lists those forces involved in the attribution of meaning to consumer goods, other forces try, not to influence the meaning of a good, but to limit the access to the material medium itself—even in a liberal consumer market.

From the US Dime Novel to the German *Groschenheft*

The term 'dime novel' was introduced by the publishers Irwin and Erastus Beadle in 1860, when they began publishing their *Beadle's Dime Novel* series. While the Beadle brothers were not the first to offer "cheap, paper-covered, sensational literature" (Johannsen 1950, 3), they were the first to issue such reading material "in continuous series and at a fixed price of ten cents [i.e. a dime], instead of issuing them sporadically" (ibid.). Soon, the term 'dime novel' was attributed to publications of other publishing houses and sold at different prices. "Popularly," Albert Johannsen writes in his extensive study of the dime novel in nineteenth-century USA, "the term had little reference to the price at which the booklets were sold, but it was applied especially to any sensational detective or blood-and-thunder novel in pamphlet form." (ibid.)

The booklets were published in various material forms. "The original *Beadle's Dime Novels* [...] were small booklets [of] approximately 100 pages, with clear type and with orange wrappers upon which was printed a stirring woodcut in black." (ibid., 4) Later publications were published without a wrapper, and they were larger. They were "printed in small type, two or three columns to the quarto page [31 by 24 cm]" (ibid.), had a length of 16–32 pages, and a picture inserted on the front page. By the turn of the century, most booklets had brightly colored covers and were between 32

and 64 pages long. They were between 25 and 29 cm high, and 18 to 22 cm wide. By now, curiously enough, most dime novels sold for a nickel, i.e. five cents.



Fig. 3: Development of dime novel design

Between 1860 and 1880, most booklets told frontier and western stories, but some contained adventures at sea, either often infused with romance. Their success was immediate: a contemporary reviewer estimates that Beadle sold five million books in the first five years alone (Everett 1864, 303–9). After the American Civil War, the Reconstruction Era brought to the fore increased literacy levels and an interest in decidedly American topics. The new railway system made it possible to distribute the products of the new printing and papermaking machines, and a competitive publishing market filled the station bookstalls. In these early years, the culturally defining experience of frontier life was still current to some and a recent memory to most. When urbanity became the leading lifestyle towards the end of the century, urban crime became a central topic, and the detective replaced the cowboy.¹ All in all, the dime novels brought everyday topics, in a more or less sensationalized form, to a general reading public.

From the very beginning of the new genre, however, many commentators, most of them coming from a more refined background, feared that reading about *common*, meaning general or shared, topics would make readers *common*, meaning ordinary or lewd (cf. Webster 1876). As early as 1847 (May 22), the *Western Literary Messenger* writes: “Riding on the cars through Michigan today, we have been half amused and half pained to see with what avidity ‘yellow covered literature’ is here as elsewhere, devoured by travelers

[...]. Numbers of well dressed and sensible looking ladies and gentlemen, with foreheads of respectable dimensions, have busied themselves for hours today [...] in perusing, page by page, the contents of some shilling romance by [...] some [...] stale and insipid novelist.” (qtd. in Johannsen 1950, 3) Wasting time (and money) with reading entertainment was considered a serious problem. In 1864, the *North American Review* claims: “Why these works are so popular is a problem quite as much for the moralist and the student of national character as for the critic.” (Everett 1864, 308) Especially young readers were supposedly in danger of being adversely affected by what they read:

“The pernicious effect upon children of reading dime novels, and other literature of the yellow cover variety, has recently been illustrated by an occurrence in this city [Cleveland]. A number of young boys [...] have been in the habit of reading these trashy works, to an unusual extent. One of them has expended \$12 or \$16 in the purchase of dime novels during the past summer [...]. The boys of which we speak had gorged themselves with this class of literature so long, that they had contracted a morbid desire for adventure, which took a practical shape about two weeks ago. At this time five or six of them [...] organized themselves into a ‘band of robbers’ [...]. This would enable them to become practical Dick Turpins and Jack Shepards, about whom they had read in the dime novels.” (anon. 1866)

However, the endless repetitions of such claims had little influence on the dissemination of dime novels: in 1893, the *Morning Oregonian* estimated that 10 million copies were being published alone in New York every year, which it characterized as a “flood” of the country (anon. 1893).

The press, in texts like this and many others, began to stigmatize the dime novel as an unrespectable waste of time and an adverse influence on young readers. Publishers, consequently, had to engage in what the sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) has termed *stigma management* (cf. Matsui 2009). In order to counter the accusation of subliterary standards, for example, publisher Beadle repeatedly circulated these guidelines, apparently handed out to prospective writers in order to prevent their *common* topics from becoming all *too* common:

“So much is said, and justly, against a considerable number of papers and libraries now on the market, that we beg leave to repeat the following announcement and long standing instructions to all contributors:

Authors who write for our consideration will bear in mind that

We prohibit all things offensive to good taste in expression and incident—

We prohibit subjects of characters that carry an immoral *taint*—

We prohibit the repetition of any occurrence which, though true, is yet better untold—

We prohibit what cannot be read with satisfaction by every right-minded—old and young alike—

We require your best work—

We require unquestioned originality—

We require pronounced strength of plot and high dramatic interest of story—

We require grace and precision of narrative, and correctness in composition. [...]

Those who fail to reach the standard here indicated cannot write acceptably for our several Libraries, or for any of our publications.” (qtd. in Johannsen 1950, 4–5)

As in the USA, the forerunner of the dime novel in Germany was so-called railway fiction, a form of entertainment that was especially designed to counter the boredom encountered when travelling (Galle 2002, 29; cf. Haug 2007). The topics and forms of these publications were too diverse to be enumerated here. Similarly diverse were the subscription titles, which delivered long, meandering novels in short, weekly chunks. While most publications were still based on European traditions, by the end of the nineteenth century German publishers had begun to look to the USA for innovative formats.

One of the first to find these was Alwin Eichler, a young publisher who had done part of his apprenticeship in the USA. In 1903, he returned to Germany, but not without having acquired the copyright to such famous American dime novel series as *Buffalo Bill* and *Nick Carter* (Galle 1988, 53; Galle 2006, 44–52). In 1905, he began publishing German translations of these series, and translations into other European languages soon followed (LeBlanc 1991, 111–3). Because Eichler had also acquired the rights to the cover images, the German versions were very similar to the American ones, even in size (21.5cm x 27.5cm) and length (around 64 pages). Especially the *Nick Carter* series proved to be an immediate success, selling up to 80,000 copies a week.

As a paradigmatic example, let us stay for a moment with *Nick Carter*, who started investigating crimes in the late 1880s. In 1903, Street & Smith publishing house was already issuing No. 341 of the *Nick Carter Weekly* series, entitled *Nick Carter's Chemical Test, or, Animal Blood or Human*. The *Nick Carter Weekly* was already the second series featuring *Nick Carter*; the first series, the *Nick Carter Library*, had grown to some 282 issues since its inception in 1891; the *Library*-series, however, was of the black and white type described above. The Eichler publishing house in Dresden published the *Chemical Test*-story as No. 111 of their series *Nick Carter: Amerika's grösster Detektiv* with the title *Die künstliche Blutspur*.

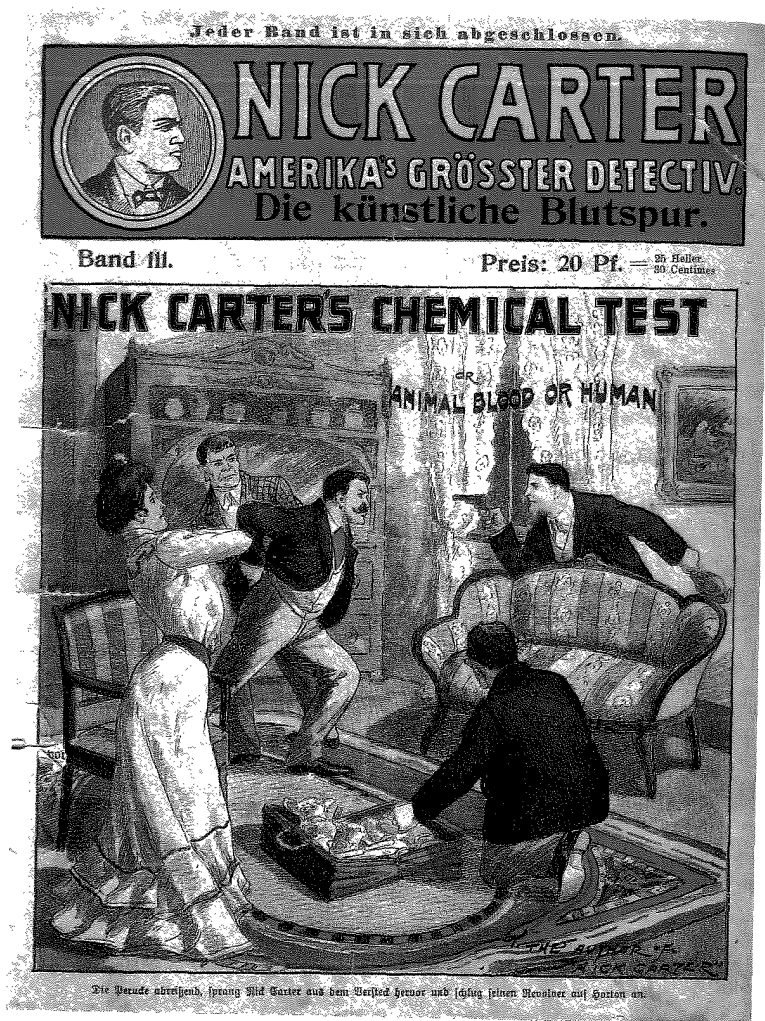


Fig. 4: Nick Carter, vol. 111: Die künstliche Blutspur

ll in all, Eichler published 375 issues of the 819 original stories—using, as 3. 4 shows, the original American covers with the English title still on it. he translations are often quite free, adapting the American narrative style of rrupt beginnings and uninterrupted dialogues into a somewhat more rscriptive form of narration; the storylines and figures remained largely untered, however. Indeed, Nick Carter seems to be an ideal candidate to trav-from the USA to Germany. He has proved, throughout many stories, that

he can investigate not only in all parts of the USA, but in virtually every corner of the world (cf. Huck *forthcoming*). On the back of the booklet Carter is introduced as 'America's Greatest Detective,' well-known and yet unknown: "There is no American that has never heard of Nick Carter—however, there seems not to be a single person in the United States who could claim to have seen the famous detective's face."² As such a ubiquitous, yet invisible figure—Nick Carter was the undisputed master of disguise—Nick Carter found its way into Germany.

In the wake of such successful translations, free adaptations of American and British originals spread; together these two forms dominated the market until WWI (Schmidtke 1981, 19–21). Nick Carter's success was quickly followed by a series on Nat Pinkerton, modeled after the real-life American detective Allan Pinkerton, and by some crude, newly invented adventures attributed to Sherlock Holmes. The next in line was Lord Lister, whose adventures were based on those of John C. Raffles, an invention of Arthur Conan Doyle's friend Ernest William Hornung. The German inventions of the time did not seem to be able to rival this success.

The situation changed after WWI. While the general anti-British and anti-American mood after the defeat was soon overcome, at least by the consumer population, the method of buying up copyrights, or simply appropriating existing characters, was not taken up again.³ Instead of copies of American and British originals, a large number of German publishing houses, especially in Dresden and Berlin, started publishing their own series. Although these were written in the German language by German authors in Germany, they nonetheless continued to give the impression that they were of American provenance. After translating and adapting came *reimagining*.

Detective series dominated the interwar period (Galle 2006, 170). A quantitative analysis⁴ of more than 9,000 crime-related titles published in interwar Germany reveals that actual translations of Edgar Wallace, Arthur Conan Doyle and others made up only about fifteen percent of the market, whereas titles that *pretended* to be American or British made up the majority of publications. (The statistics are based on the number of published titles and do not reflect the number of issues actually sold.) One series of 566 issues about the detective Tom Shark, for example, recounted adventures purportedly recorded by his sidekick Pitt Strong; in reality, they had been created by the German author Elisabeth von Aspern. Such pseudonyms were widespread: John Toward's real name is Eugen von Sass; Forest White is really Mathias Blank; Paul Oskar Ernst Erttmann assumes the pseudonym

Paul Pitt; and Peter Carr is known to his friends as Wilhelm Reinhard. Similarly, the protagonists were given an Anglo-American coloring (Marßolek 1996, 144–60): the most successful detectives on the *German* market of the interwar period were John Kling, Frank Allen, Harry Piel, Bill Cannon, Allan Scott, James Robertson, John Baxter, Ethel King, Allan Pinkerton, Ralph Garby, Fred Parker, Harry Hill, Hannibal Blunt, Harry Tyne, Will Morton, Jimmie Jackson, and, above all, Tom Shark. (And in rare cases where neither author nor hero claimed Anglo-American provenance, at least the setting of the story was either England or the USA.) Harald Harst is one of the few German detectives who works in Berlin and whose stories are openly written by a German author, Walter Kabel (Schmidtke 1981, 31); even here, however, many of the crime victims and the culprits have Anglo-American backgrounds. Wanda von Brannburg and Rolf Brand are other notable exceptions. Nonetheless: “Respectable Germans, at first at least, did not make for good business,” Otto Kreiner comments. “Be it because admiration for the elegant West was great in dowdy Germany, or because the Germans granted the Anglo-Saxons the copyright to detective stories and, as connoisseurs of the authentic, dismissed imitations. From early on, however, attempts were made to transplant the American-English brand of detective into a German milieu.” (Kreiner 1978, 267)⁵

Indeed, Tom Shark marks what seems to be the final step in the process of localizing an American genre, even though its provenance is still not completely obscured. The publisher proclaims on the back of one of the first issues that Tom Shark has turned his back on the North American lifestyle he experienced for most of his life and returned to the fold of his birthplace, Berlin. Here, he solves various crimes together with his friend Dr. Pitt Strong, who, mimicking the famous Dr. Watson of Sherlock Holmes, reports the adventures. He enjoys a German brandy called *Asbach Uralt*, but keeps his butler Bill, a ‘mulatto,’ as Dr. Strong lets us know. The stories are filled with references to local German geography, but Shark’s demeanor remains American. The product now manages to cater to German demands and at the same time succeeds in conjuring up the appeal of the foreign without actually being it. Others followed suit: “Another whose name alone suggests sporty Americanness is ‘Frank Allan, Avenger of the Dispossessed.’ Behind the name, much of German provenance was hidden.” (Kreiner 1978, 282)⁶

The *Schmutz-und-Schund* Campaign⁷

Like the dime novels in the USA, the *Groschenhefte* in Germany were not met with general acclaim. Like in the USA, literacy levels in Germany had risen tremendously throughout the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, probably as much as ninety percent of the population was able to read simple texts. And these newly literate masses wanted to read—albeit not what the traditional literate classes (the clergy, the civil servants and teachers) wanted them to (Kriek 1930, v–viii). Instead, mass producing publishers catered to these new desires. Just when Alwin Eichler began to publish his Nick Carter stories, a campaign against *Schmutz und Schund* (i.e. ‘filth and trash’) was launched by some who thought they had to protect readers against such impulses (Schenda 1976, 91). After a number of state edicts and moralist publications, a touring exhibition was organized. It traveled through Germany in 1910/11 and sought to educate young and/or working class Germans (Epstein 1930, 4) about ‘good,’ i.e. *appropriate* literature. Finally, with the outbreak of WWI, laws for the protection of young people were passed including a list of nearly two hundred series that were no longer to be published, among them Nick Carter (Schmidtke 1981, 11).

The campaign against *Schmutz und Schund* has been analysed in some detail in recent years by the cultural anthropologist Kaspar Maase (2002a) and others, revealing the manifold pedagogical, ideological and sometimes downright economic (Schenda 1976, 94) motives behind trying to suppress the publications of Eichler and others. What I want to concentrate on here is the importance of the foreign provenance of the dime novel genre when it came to condemning them.

Karl Brunner, for example, was a consultant to Berlin police forces on questions of protecting minors. His pamphlet *Unser Volk in Gefahr! Ein Kampfruf gegen die Schundliteratur* (‘A Danger to Our People! A Battle Cry against Trash Literature’) was published by the same publisher who published ostensibly ‘good’ literature in his *Volkstümliche Bücherei*. In order to warn his readers, he also published a blacklist of novels not to buy. He begins with detective stories, which he seems to see as paradigmatic; here we find: 1. Nat Pinkerton; 2. Fritz Staggart; 3. Sherlock Holmes; 4. Nick Carter; 5. Ethel King; 6. Wanda von Brannburg; 7. John Wilson; 8. Bill Canon; 9. Minx; 10. a German Sherlock Holmes (Brunner 1909, 5–6).

One of the most avid and important campaigners against *Schundliteratur* was Dr. Ernst Schultze, director of public libraries in Hamburg and founder

of the *Deutsche Dichter-Gedächtnis-Stiftung*. The aim of this 'Society for the Memory of German Writers' was to stop 'trash literature' and promote 'good literature,' which, as it seems, was primarily German literature. Members of the society, small-town public libraries and similar institutions, could subscribe to the house series for a small charge (Kostrá 1998, 42-3); many similar societies were making comparable offers (Schenda 1976, 92-4).

In his public manifesto *Die Schundliteratur: Ihr Vordringen, ihre Folgen, ihre Bekämpfung* ('Trash Literature: Its Advance, Its Consequences, and the Fight to Stop It'), published in 1909, with a second edition only two years later, Schultze rehearses well-known arguments against every form of new media: they are a threat to young people in particular, they lead to crime and suicide, and consequently they are a detriment to the national economy. Schultze lists various ways of stopping the advance of dime novels in Germany. Three distinct strategies are to be differentiated, a legal, an economic and a moral one: one can (a) try to regulate dime novels by law, (b) offer a better alternative or (c) stigmatize dime novels. Whereas the society Schultze founded campaigned for what is popularly known as a "Lex-Nick Carter" (Galle 2006, 26), and also offered cheap alternatives, his book is an attempt to manage public taste, to give a bad name to dime novels, and to attribute a specific, unappealing meaning to the product—in short, to make it appear *inappropriate*. These strategies reflect the whole spectrum of influence a gatekeeper can exert, as they seek either to control the meaning of the medium or to make sure that *Groschenhefte* do not find their way onto the bookshelves of shops and libraries in the first place.

Schultze devotes a whole chapter to Nick Carter, whose name he uses as a synonym for all kinds of detective literature (Schultze 1909, 14). Similarly, Nick Carter is symbolic of the lowest form of literature for the early twentieth century literary scholars Heinrich Keiter and Tony Kellen (1912, 190). For Schultze, trash literature is an international problem: "We can see this from the fact that our most popular new trash literature collections have American titles (*Nick Carter, Nat Pinkerton, Buffalo Bill*, etc.). This is because they came over to us from the United States. To obtain translation rights, the German publishers of trash literature pay large sums to their American colleagues." (1909, 55)⁸ The "cancer" (*ibid.*, 58), which is how Schulze identifies the dime novels, is alien to the German people and has to be driven out of the German culture—to consume inappropriate goods damages the *Volkskörper*, as right-wing thinkers liked to suggest. The argument gets repeated when pulp magazines, which succeeded dime novels on the American

market, eventually enter the German market: "It is telling that we have inherited these kinds of magazines from America," the secretary of another society is reported to have said in a talk on *Schund und Schmutz in ihren vielfachen Erscheinungsweisen* ("Trash and Filth in its Manifold Appearances") in 1926 (Galle 2006, 168).

After WWI, a more liberal climate made direct legal intervention more difficult. Most campaigners also realized that they had lost the economic battle against the publishing houses. Ernst Krieck, a right-wing educationist, comments: "Compared to the pedagogical antagonists of trash literature, the businessmen have no doubt emerged the stronger—maybe because their instinct or their experience gave them a better understanding of the primitive emotional desires of their customers." (1930, vi)⁹ However, public discussion of the *Groschenhefte* continued—now on a purportedly scientific level, albeit with moral undertones. When, in 1926, an exhibition put on by the Berlin police force wanted to document the influence of crime fiction on young delinquents, the force commissioned a study by two psychologists who asked approximately one thousand pupils from vocational schools to write down the most fascinating crime story they knew of. Most students simply retold the adventures of Frank Allan, Percy Stuart, Tom Mix, Harry Peel and the rest of the Anglo-German detectives. Of course, the psychologists found the students to have been adversely influenced by what they read (Kelchner and Lau 1928).

Most publishers were well aware of the moral stigma attached to dime novels. Many responded to the anticipated concerns with appeasement tactics (Thole 2000, 51; Galle 1988, 30). The publishing house Sarrasani, for example, published a special issue full of praise for their own publications, compiled from letters by some of the most avid critics of *Schmutz und Schund* (Schmidtke 1981, 13). At the station bookstalls, stationary shops and tobacconists who distributed the dime novels, advertisements appeared in the form of postcards and leaflets trying to paint a brighter picture of dime novels. Advertisements in magazines by the same publishers presented the booklets as respectable publications. The most important space for advertising, however, was the booklets themselves, with their brightly colored front covers and editors' notes on the back. The covers became a sort of calling card, beckoning to the prospective host, i.e. the reader.

Often, publishers and writers would directly acknowledge the stigma and counter it in an attempt to reopen the gates the campaigners were trying to close. Robby IX, later known as Robby King, is the protagonist of a dime novel series by the Dresden based publisher Freya (Kreiner 1978, 284–7). Robby, we

learn, is the *nom de guerre* of a certain Robert von ... (name not revealed); although of German origin, his operating area spans the whole globe: Paris, Chicago, New York, Yokohama. He is introduced in the very first issue as a "young man with good manners." The introduction of his character ends with a request to the reader to give this detective, who is obviously not as immoral as all the others, a chance: "Please, get to know him yourself! It will be rewarding, and he will surely not be an unpleasant companion!" The publishers seem to say: 'Please, open the gates and welcome him into your home.' And many readers did: a successful series would have had a circulation of up to 300,000 copies a week in the early 1930s (Schmidtke 1981, 49).

It was the Nazis who finally closed the door on the dime novel as we know it. In 1935, the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* placed many series on the index, and once the war began they forbade all Anglicized heroes (Galle 1988, 121): Jim Hoover (also known as Alaska-Jim) had to become Rolf Rauhaar; Patrick Button is turned into Hein Lemke; Tom Shark becomes Wolf Greif; his sidekick Pitt Strong becomes Peter Strunz; John Kling turns into Robert Ramm and is now assisted by Hans Kiekebusch (Galle 1988, 121; Schmidtke 1981, 36). But the publication even of these completely Germanized versions was halted in 1941, supposedly due to a shortage of paper (Schmidtke 1981, 16).

The Role of Gatekeepers in the Process of Appropriating Foreign Goods

The debate over dime novels was imported from the USA to Germany along with the genre. Even as the producers were advertising their material to a general audience, various types of cultural critics were denigrating the same material as being too trashy. In Germany, however, the distinction between popular and trivial became a nationally specific distinction: while German artists were producing folkloristic material deemed appropriate for the common people, American-style dime novels, deemed inappropriate, apparently made people *too* common.

Finally, the role of gatekeepers in the process of appropriating foreign goods seems to be twofold. On the one hand, publishers try to open the market for dime novels by transforming the good in such a way that it would appeal to a German audience. At the same time, cultural critics try to stop the dime novel from establishing itself in Germany by giving it a bad name, by offering cheaper

alternatives or by simply making it illegal. Both gatekeepers, of course, the critics and the publishers, could not succeed without the backing of different segments of society. On the one hand, juvenile readers support the efforts of publishers by buying, reading, collecting and sharing the publications; only if these individuals appropriate the books can cultural appropriation be successful. According to contemporary sources, second-hand trading and swapping made up a huge portion of the market (Kelchner and Lau 1928, 2). On the other hand, teachers, librarians and parents take up the cause of the contrarian campaigners by confiscating publications, eradicating them from their repertoire and penalizing their consumption. As the publishers and readers *appropriated* the good to their culture, its opponents tried to hinder this process by pronouncing the good morally *inappropriate*. Together, these diverse forces lead to an appropriating transformation of the dime novel which, however, never completely negates its American provenance.

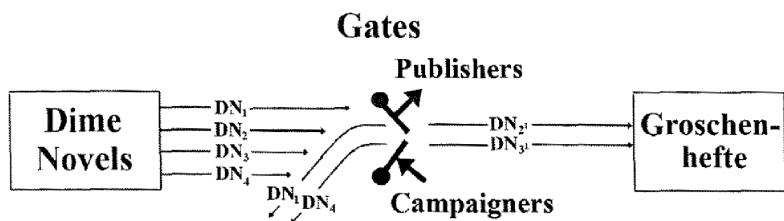


Fig. 5: Dime novels appropriated as Groschenhefte (DN = dime novel)

Notes

- 1 The development in Germany followed suit: "Während früher Indianer-, Seefahrer- und Goldgräbergeschichten von der Jugend verschlungen wurden, sind in neuester Zeit Räuber-, Kriminal- und Detektivgeschichten massenhaft unter die Jugend und das Volk gebracht worden. Ihre Helden sind die 'berühmten' Detektive Sherlock Holmes, Nick Carter, Pinkerton u. a." (Keiter and Kellen 1912, 190)
- 2 From the back cover of *Das Opfer des Giftmischers* (anon. n. d.): "Es gibt keinen Amerikaner, der nicht von Nick Carter gehört hätte—und trotzdem existiert in den Vereinigten Staaten wohl nicht ein Mann, der behaupten könnte, das Gesicht des berühmten Detektivs zu kennen"; my translation. (The issue at hand is probably a reprint from the 1930s.)
- 3 While there was a brief period dominated by reprints of pre-war successes, this ended when the publishing scene had gathered sufficient strength to publish their own creations.
- 4 The relevant data is extracted from Schädel (2006).
- 5 "Biedere Deutsche waren, wenigstens vorläufig, kein Geschäft. Sei es deshalb, weil die Bewunderung für den eleganten Westen im rauhen Deutschland groß war, sei es auch, daß man den Angelsachsen das Copyright für die Detektivgeschichte zugestand, und, als Genießer des Echten, Nachahmungen ablehnte. Immerhin begannen schon sehr früh Versuche, den amerikanisch-englischen Markenkriminalisten in das deutsche Milieu zu verpflanzen"; my translation.
- 6 "Sehr sportlich amerikanisch wirkte auch, schon vom Titel her, 'Frank Allan, der Rächer der Enterbten.' Unter dieser Äußerlichkeit verbarg sich viel Deutsches"; my translation.
- 7 Much of the following is based on Kaspar Maase's DFG-funded research on *Die soziale Konstruktion von Massenkultur: Die Auseinandersetzung um 'Schmutz und Schund' im deutschen Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (cf. Maase 2002b).
- 8 "Wir erkennen dies schon daran, dass unsere bekanntesten neuen Schundliteratur-Sammlungen (Nick Carter, Nat Pinkerton, Buffalo Bill usw.) amerikanische Titel tragen. Sie sind eben von den Vereinigten Staaten zu uns herübergekommen. Für die Übersetzungserlaubnis zahlen die deutschen Schundliteratur-Verleger an ihre amerikanischen Kollegen zum Teil sehr hohe Summen"; my translation.
- 9 "Gegenüber den pädagogischen Bekämpfern der Schundliteratur haben sich deren Unternehmer ohne Zweifel als die Stärkeren erwiesen—vielleicht, weil sie aus Instinkt oder aus Erfahrung eine bessere Kenntnis der primitiven seelischen Bedürfnisse ihrer Kundschaft besaßen"; my translation.

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