

Buffalo Bill in Germany:
Gender, Heroism, and the American West in Imperial Germany

by
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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
“A true picture of the American frontier”	8
Heroes in the Wild West	16
Understanding Heroes in the Wild West	26
Animals and American Indians in the Wild West	42
Germans on the Animals and American Indians of the Wild West Show	66
Conclusions	84
Bibliography	87
Supplementary Material	93

Introduction

By the end of the nineteenth-century, millions of people had taken part in an experience that promised to transport them to the real American West.¹ Buffalo Bill's Wild West toured Europe and America extensively during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries.² Throughout its thirty-three year existence, this vibrant show blurred the lines separating entertainment spectacle and history, creating an experience that seemed to be "the real thing."³ The show was presided over by one of the best known Americans of the day and arguably the first modern international celebrity: Buffalo Bill.⁴ It was an eagerly attended show, and in the days before electronic media, a massively popular performance phenomenon. Numerous cultural and political luminaries saw it, such as: Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Pope Leo XIII, Karl May, as well as hundreds of thousands other spectators from all walks of life. It served as inspiration for Puccini's opera *La Fanciulla del West*, and numerous Western dime

¹ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 16.

² Buffalo Bill's Wild West was known by several names throughout its existence. First known as "Hon. W. F. Cody and Dr. W. F. Carver's Wild West, Rocky Mountain, and Prairie Exhibition," and later as "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of the Rough Riders of the World," or simply "The Wild West." Since this paper focuses on the company's tour through Germany in 1890-1891, it uses the name taken during this time, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West."

³ Sarah Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 126-129.

⁴ Joy Kasson convincingly makes this argument in her book, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. Kasson argues the only other American of this time period that appears to have been more widely known on both sides of the Atlantic was Mark Twain.

novels.⁵ In short, it aroused enthusiasm and passion on both sides of the Atlantic for over three decades, and helped mold a German understanding of the Western wilderness.

Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* asserts "the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product."⁶ Similarly, William Cronan argues in his article "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative" that historians should not study landscapes as empirically defined objects, but rather study the cultural discourses framing the human perceptions of and emotional attachments to these natural settings.⁷ Far from being neutral objects or the products of geologic evolution, natural landscapes are brought into existence by mankind's act of culturally defining them as distinct landscapes. Schama argues that every landscape and wilderness is imbued with an inherited set of cultural myths and meanings. These values and myths are inseparable from the way cultures conceive of the natural settings they recognize as wildernesses. Examining the mythologies surrounding landscapes can serve to illuminate the underlying beliefs and ideals of the culture viewing the landscape. For example, Schama sees in the romanticized German forests examples of inherited cultural mythologies and values held by Germans. The definition of landscape as a culturally constructed entity encoded with values and norms serves as a basic assumption of this paper.

⁵ Robin May and Joseph G. Rosa, *Buffalo Bill and his Wild West: A Pictorial Biography* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 16.

⁶ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1995; Vintage Books, 1995), 9.

⁷ William Cronan, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347-1376.

By many contemporary accounts, ranging from American newspaper correspondents to attendance figures to testimony the performers themselves, Buffalo Bill's Wild West appears to have aroused more excitement in Germany than anywhere else in Europe.⁸ Karl May's and Friedrich Geistäcker's best selling Western novels had already whetted German audiences' appetites for the Wild West, and German performances routinely sold out. Buffalo Bill's Wild West promised Germans the opportunity to meet and see the actual personalities and famous celebrities of the American frontier. According to Joy Kasson, "Cody . . . presented a living diorama that had temporal and spatial immediacy; viewers left his performances believing that they had seen the actual deeds for which he was famous."⁹ During the late nineteenth-century, through the work of Karl May and Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the Western frontier came to occupy an increasingly prominent place in German culture. Germans valued it as an example of a primitive wilderness, and began imbuing it with their own distinct cultural values. One can see in late nineteenth-century Germany the process of creation leading to what Schama calls "inherited landscape myths and memories" centered on the American West.¹⁰

Though the vast majority of Germans – including Karl May – would never visit the West, they nonetheless valued it as a distinctive landscape and felt an affinity toward it. This can be glimpsed in the popularity of the novels of Karl May, Friedrich Geistäcker, and Karl Sealsfield, as well as the excitement generated by the touring

⁸ May and Rosa, *Buffalo Bill and his Wild West*, 146.

⁹ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*, 5-6.

¹⁰ Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 15.

Western circuses. Germans encoded the Western landscape with their own gendered values and mythology, distinct from those presented in Buffalo Bill's Wild West 1890-1891 German tour. It uses the circus's performance and reception as a way to view German notions of gender identity. It grasps at these cultural notions through a semiotic and textual analysis of Buffalo Bill's performance and subsequent German audience reaction. This analysis centers on conceptions of the Western heroes – both male and female – and their assumed role in both the performance and the American West. German audiences substituted different gendered values than the ones intended by the performers. This substitution, and the form it took, offers valuable insights into larger German notions about gender. In addition to looking at representations of gender, this analysis also examines attitudes toward nature. The relationship between man and animal is central to a culture's notion of nature and a landscape. According to Harry Liebersohn, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans thought of Native Americans as belonging to nature.¹¹ Thus, to see how Germans conceived of the Western landscape, it is necessary to look at how they understood two aspects of the landscape that they directly linked to nature: Native Americans and western animals. Consequently, this theme touches on the topics of race and colonialism.

Material produced by the circus during the 1890-1891 season is helpful when looking at the intent of the performance; however, due to the limited availability of these sources, this paper also uses materials the circus produced in other years. This material,

¹¹ Harry Liebersohn, *Aristocratic Encounters: European Travelers and North American Indians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

though not showing specifically how Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented itself to German audiences, nonetheless illustrates how the Company presented itself to audiences in general. Posters, programs, interviews with cast members, and the few remaining film clips of the performance are especially useful when trying to show the performers' intentions. When looking at the audience reception of the performance, the scrapbooks kept by William F. Cody and Annie Oakley are useful. These scrapbooks offer a collection of hundreds of German reviews, commentaries, and descriptions of the show. Though the audience members writing these descriptions were most likely representatives of the middle class, they were nonetheless constituted by individuals from a variety of geographical regions and representing papers with different editorial slants. Moreover, though the reviewers are most often anonymous, the writers of at least several clippings claim to be female. Analyzing the language used by these audience members, this paper attempts to illuminate late nineteenth-century German gender codes by looking at implicit assumptions of masculinity and femininity held by the writers describing the inhabitants of the American West.

This work differs markedly from previous examinations of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Previous literature has painted Buffalo Bill's Wild West as a primarily American phenomenon, and has correspondingly downplayed or omitted the show's importance in Europe. Some notable exceptions to this tendency are Paul Reddin's *Wild West Shows*, Joy Kasson's *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, L.G. Moses' *Wild West Shows and Images of American Indians*, and Richard Slotkin's provocative essay "Buffalo Bill's Wild West"

and the Mythologization of the American Empire.”¹² When these works do examine the show abroad, they give primary attention to the 1887 British tour, and in comparison neglect the phenomenally successful 1890-1891 German run. Moreover, these articles – especially Slotkin’s – tend to portray the show as an instrument of spreading and legitimizing American culture abroad. In Slotkin’s words, the show became a type of “cultural embassy” whose primary importance was in disseminating American values abroad.¹³ Such arguments are ultimately unsatisfying. First and foremost, they treat culture as a homogenous item, which can be imported or exported like any other material good. These American-centered works also tend to treat European audiences as a faceless mass, and never offer compelling reasons why Europeans watched and enjoyed the show with such enthusiasm. European audiences are simply omitted from these works. Moreover, many of these works do not examine the issues of gender and nature in the show, but rather focus purely on the show’s political and business aspects. These one-sided analyses not only refuse to analyze the show, as a cultural achievement, but also refuse to study the elusive social codes and values interpolated in the performance itself. Previous literature on the show also emphasizes sources that by their nature downplay audience reception, such as Cody’s autobiography, business records, programs, and the performer’s personal correspondences. Kasson’s work stands as the

¹² Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Richard Slotkin, “Buffalo Bill’s ‘Wild West’ and the Mythologization of the American Empire,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹³ Slotkin, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and the Mythologization of the American Empire.”

exception to this trend.¹⁴ Her book focuses on the complex interaction between performer and audience, and stresses the ways in which the audience's historical memory was shaped by the performance. She also looks at the complex and underappreciated way in which the celebrity of the performers was a decisive factor in shaping how the audience thought of the performance.

There has long been a willingness in European historiography to connect a culture's perceptions of the landscape to encoded values, as well as to recognize of landscapes as culturally constructed entities. In particular, there has been a linkage between German notions of landscape and gender.¹⁵ Much historiographical attention related to these issues has centered on the *Wandervogel* movement created just five years after the show's German tour. Beginning with Howard Becker's *German Youth: Bond or Free*, German historians have suggested that the movement connected conceptions of the German landscape with maleness.¹⁶ George Mosse and Harry Oostenhuis have also connected romanticism's ideal of the German landscape to both homosocial and homosexual male relationships.¹⁷ More recently, Elizabeth Heineman has challenged

¹⁴ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*

¹⁵ See, Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (New York: Anchor, 1965); George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964); George Mosse, "The Mystical Origins of National Socialism," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 22, no 1 (January 1961), pp. 81-96.

¹⁶ Howard Becker, *German Youth: Bond or Free*, International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction Ed. Karl Mannheim. (Oxford University Press: New York, 1946).

¹⁷ George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*; George Mosse, "Friendship and Nationhood" *Journal of Contemporary History* vol 17, no 2 (April 1982), pp 351-67.; Harry Oostenhuis, "Medicine, Male Bonding, and Homosexuality in Germany" *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 32 no. 4 (April 1997) 187-205.

the essentially male nature of the *Wandervogel* by more carefully examining the role of women in the movement; however, she too stresses the centrality of gender in informing the way the German landscape is perceived and understood.¹⁸ This essay also concurs with these authors in suggesting that a deeper understanding of German gender values can be gained by studying Germans' relationship with a landscape to which they felt connected. Where this essay departs, however, is by studying Germany's conception of an explicitly non-German landscape. By studying an explicitly American landscape which is undergoing a constitutive process of being endowed with a uniquely German "landscape mythology," this essay seeks to uncover elusive gender values and relations of *Kaiserreich* Germany.

"A true picture of the American frontier"

It is easy for modern eyes to dismiss the notion that Buffalo Bill's Wild West accurately depicted life in the American west. Looking at the stereotypical battles between the Cavalry and Indians, the robbery of mail coaches, and the duel between Indian chief and U.S. Army scout; modern historians might rightly conclude that the scenes of Buffalo Bill's Wild West are more melodramatic fiction than history. To the majority of the Wild West's audience, however, this was not the case. William Frederic Cody – an actual scout who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for service on the Plains – claimed the performance accurately depicted the American West.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Heinemann, "Gender Identity in the Wandervogel Movement." *German Studies Review* XII (2, 1989): 249-70.

Throughout the show's existence, the Wild West presented itself, and was received by audiences, as an actual depiction of life on the frontier.¹⁹

German audiences often lent scientific authority to the show by referring to it as an ethnographical exhibit – as a relatively authentic portrayal of the American West.²⁰ German audiences viewed Buffalo Bill's Wild West as different from other contemporary stage performances, circuses, and sideshows. Many German reviewers felt as though the show caught the true essence of the American frontier. They described it as a combination performance, historical reenactment, circus, and educational opportunity. On seeing the performance, one reviewer noted "One feels nature – the wild, powerful, unbounded nature of the Prairie. That is something completely different from the most beautiful, impressive circus."²¹ Another reviewer stated "one gets a real living picture of the hunting- and Indian-life of the North American prairie."²² Another reviewer told his readers:

Buffalo Bill, whose visage has been seen on posters for a few days, can rightly serve as the prototype of the 'Selfmade Man' [English] of America's Wild West. If you would hold that Col. W.F. Cody is a loud charlatan, you are very mistaken. Mr. Cody is an actual Colonel and was given the job to guide General Sheridan and the 5th Cavalry regiment in the 1868 war against the Indians.²³

These are just a few representative examples of the point most reviewers seem to have accepted, that the performance they saw was a neutral, relatively realistic representation

¹⁹ Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*, 84-7.

²⁰ "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," *Gericht's Zeitung* (Leipzig), 14 June 1890.

²¹ "Wild West in Berlin," *Lokal Anzeiger* (Berlin), 24 July 1890.

²² "Buffalo Bills Wilder Westen," *Anzeiger* (Tharand and Wohorn), 3 June 1890.

²³ *Tageblatt* (Linden-Hannover), 1 July 1890.

of Western life. German audiences saw what they believed to be real historical personalities, real historical reenactments, real western animals, and real scenes of everyday western life. It was as though the pre-railroad American west had been transported to Berlin, Leipzig, Munich, and other German cities. The show became a type of virtual tourism, a way to 'travel' to the 'real' American west of an earlier time period – to a geographically and chronologically foreign scene. Joy Kasson asserts that audiences “thought they remembered the American Wild West because they had seen it, full of life and color, smoking guns and galloping horses.”²⁴

Buffalo Bill's Wild West purposely intended to blur the lines between fact and fiction, entertainment and education. The program of the show, as well as the literature it created and disseminated, testify to this point. The German program begins with a disclaimer directed to the reader stating:

We have only real personalities, only true, no false equipment [the performance] shows a great, romantic and nevertheless realistic picture of the time, that though now over, still lives in memory Here is no theater production, one sees here actual life, as it was in the west . . . a genuine, unadulterated [ungeschminkt] picture of the past – the fighters and wild riders of the prairie.”²⁵

In addition the program, like much the rest of the Company's printed material, stressed the show's educational nature. The program also presented itself as a type of textbook. It conveyed not only biographical information about the show's stars, but also the history and ecology of the west. By relaying factual information in the program,

²⁴ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Celebrity, Memory and Popular History*, 5.

²⁵ “An unsere Leser!” *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Journal*, no page numbers, 1890. In WFC Scrapbook.

alongside descriptions of the show's acts, the Company presented itself as a reliable authority on western life. For his own part, William Cody appears genuinely to have wanted a show that would give easterners a chance to experience western life.²⁶ John Burke, the show's publicist, drove at the same point by telling a French audience, "The object of the show was not to present a circus performance but to give a true picture of American frontier life."²⁷ German audiences, in particular, were told by the show's program "The Germans, who sent so many of their brothers to the far west, will find it especially interesting to learn about real life there."²⁸ Thus European audiences, many of whom would never set eyes on the American West, were promised the opportunity to participate in this landscape with which they held a special connection. German audiences seeing the Wild West show were told – and appear to have believed – that they were really experiencing with their own senses the American West.

The very nature of the show and its content further added to the authentic experience felt by audiences. The structure of the show was set up as a series of acts each demonstrating a mythologized aspect of the Western frontier such as the job of a Pony Express rider, life in a Native American village, gunfights, and horse skills. Between these scenes, an announcer spoke to the audience about the historical background of the scene they were about to see.²⁹ The production's props further added

²⁶ Sarah J. Blackstone, *The Business of Being Buffalo Bill: Selected Letters of William F. Cody* (Westport: Praeger, 1988), xviii.

²⁷ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Celebrity, Memory and Popular History*, 85.

²⁸ "An unsere Leser!" *Wild West Journal* (1890) no page numbers. In WFC Scrapbook.

²⁹ Joesph J. Arpad and Kenneth R. Lincoln *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Filter Press: Palmer Lake Colorado, 1971), 29.

to the perceived historical authenticity. The Company often used historical relics in their show. An example is the scene involving an attack on a coach. The show bought an actual coach that had once delivered mail between Deadwood and Cheyenne and used it when reenacting a stagecoach robbery. The program told the audience the Deadwood coach's colorful history and stressed that the performance was using the very same coach; thus, when it was robbed by bandits, the show intended to convey a feeling that one was seeing a thoroughly accurate historical reenactment. The show also introduced European audiences to exotic things that most had never actually seen: buffalo, broncos, Native Americans, and Mexicans. German audiences could freely roam around the Cowboy and Indian camps, which were presented as realistic approximations of real frontier camps. This led to numerous newspaper articles in which German reporters told of experiences they had while roaming around the camps.³⁰

Another aspect lending an air of authenticity to the performance was the presence of Native Americans. *Kaiserreich* Germany was noted for its wide interest in ethnology and anthropology.³¹ This blooming field of inquiry attracted popular as well as scientific attention. Within this cultural milieu, the *Völkerschauen* were massively popular and commercially lucrative endeavors that brought non-Europeans from around the world to Germany. Their stated goal was to show Germans how non-Europeans lived. Nigel

³⁰ See for example, *Zeitung* (Magdeburg), 25 June 1890. In WFC Scrapbook.

³¹ H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Rothfels offers an excellent analysis of these exhibitions in *Savages and Beasts*.³²

Looking at Carl Hagenbeck's life, Rothfels examines how German zoos displayed non-Europeans. Hagenbeck organized the first *Völkerschauen* while suffering financial difficulties. When he imported several reindeer from Greenland, his friend commented "it would certainly excite significant interest if the reindeer were accompanied by a family of Laplanders, who naturally would also bring their tents, weapons, sleds, and complete household along."³³ Seizing upon the idea, Hagenbeck set up an exhibit in the back of his Hamburg zoo in which real Laplanders tended reindeer. The success was immediate and profound. Hagenbeck emerged from bankruptcy, and his show toured with great success throughout Germany. Rothfels distinguishes Hagenbeck's displays from an older tradition of bringing 'savages' to Europe. "His exhibitions of *cultures* were not shows or performances in the traditional sense."³⁴

The popularity of this show inspired other *Völkerschauen*. Among the most famous were those of Nubians, Eskimos, Sudanese, Bella Coolas, and Sri Lankans. The academic community threw its credibility behind these displays and rushed to study the show's participants. University faculty in the fields of anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, and ancient history hailed these as accurate displays of foreign cultures. Professors took notes on the performances, devised lectures around them, and took

³² Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: the Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

³³ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88. (author's italics)

anatomical photographs of the show's participants.³⁵ According to Rothfels "as we look back, it is often difficult to grasp the earnestness with which these sorts of investigations were conducted in the nineteenth century."³⁶ Audiences watching the *Völkerschauen*, as well as the Wild West, knew that, to a degree, the academy's had bestowed its credibility on these shows. Science validated the Wild West's claims of authenticity and portrayal of cultures; numerous newspapers covering Buffalo Bill's Wild West interviewed university professors. German reactions to the Native Americans in the Wild West should be understood with respect to this tradition. The very presence of American Indians in the Wild West proved – in the eyes of many Germans – that the show was a relatively neutral and objective presentation of culture and life on the American frontier.

The unpredictable nature of the show's staging added to its perceived realness. One of the few surviving film clips of the performance shows the saddling of a horse. The horse was not saddled in a stall, as in modern rodeos, but was instead in the open. The result is that it took many tries for the rider to finally saddle it.³⁷ Thus, the nature of the roughly two and a half hour circus prevented it from proceeding according to an entirely set script and timetable. The show appeared as though it were as unpredictable as western life. Moreover, German newspapers published accounts of riders who were injured during the show.³⁸ The real injuries and the inability of the cowboy to quickly

³⁵ Ibid., 93-6. Many of the photographs taken by these anthropologists would later be incorporated into National Socialistic texts about racial types.

³⁶ Ibid., 96.

³⁷ *Seven Acts from the Wild West Show*. Prod. and col. Mike Koury, 45 min., the Old Army Press, 1987. Videocassette.

³⁸ *Reutsches Tageblatt* (Berlin), 8 August 1890.

mount the horse added to the show's perceived authenticity. The show also took place outdoors, in all weather conditions. This fact was especially noted by reporters who watched the show in inclement weather. In particular, Leipzig performances took place in exceptionally high temperatures and rain. The reviewers noted with admiration the show's practicality and willingness to go on.³⁹ Another reviewer praised the program "with the practical outlook of Americans – and what a beautiful outlook Buffalo Bill has in that regard – has allowed for all conditions . . . rain and sunshine."⁴⁰ Being subject to nature's unpredictable elements along with the fact that it was staged on real dirt under the real sky undoubtedly added an element of authenticity that would have been absent had the show been performed under a tent or indoors.

These elements combined to create a performance that blurred the lines between fact and melodrama. Part historical reenactment, rodeo, ethnographical exhibition, educational experience, and circus; Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented itself as and was received as capturing the essence of the American frontier. German audiences watching the show were invited to experience a living landscape. They were told, and appear to have believed, that Buffalo Bill's Wild West was an approximation of the Western experience. Germans began imbuing this genuine landscape with their own values and distinct myths. The meanings they attached to this new landscape strikingly differed from the values advanced by the Wild West show itself. Germans created a unique

³⁹ See for example, "Buffalo Bill bei Regenwetter," *Nachrichten* (Leipzig), no date given. "Buffalo Bills Wild West," *Intelligenzblatt* (Leipzig) 19 June 1890. "Eröffnungsvorstellung der Buffalo Bill Indianer-Truppe," *Leipziger Tageblatt und Anzeiger* (Leipzig) 18 June 1890.

⁴⁰ "Eine Antrittsvisite bei Buffalo Bill," *Das Klein Journal* (Berlin) 23 July 1890.

“landscape mythology” centered on the American Wild West based on the unique ways that they perceived nature and society.

Heroes in the Wild West

To both the Buffalo Bill's Company and German audiences, the western landscape had several key features characterizing the frontier experience. To understand the way that German conceived of these images, it is important to look at some of these constitutive aspects in depth. This section focuses on a key element of this landscape: the western hero. Buffalo Bill's Wild West promoted their celebrities as representative of the frontier's inhabitants. This paper will examine the way the western hero was portrayed by Buffalo Bill's company and examine the degree to which German audiences rejected or accepted these messages.

When looking at the portrayal of the western hero by the Wild West circus, it is important to keep in mind that to an extent the performers were what they claimed to be. That is to say, the performers were genuine cowboys and Native Americans. They were, in their own rights, accomplished shooters and riders long before deciding to go on tour. William F. Cody was, prior to forming the circus, a pathfinder for the U.S. Cavalry. He had distinguished himself as a civilian scout during war, was internationally known for his hunting abilities, and had earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. Annie Oakley and Johnnie Baker were champion shooters, winning shooting competitions on both sides of the Atlantic. The Indians in the troop were Native Americans, many of whom were actually respected chiefs and war leaders, and many participated in the shocking

victory over the American Cavalry at Little Bighorn. Their illustrious names include Sitting Bull, Black Elk, and Red Shirt. To be sure, all of the performers had stage personas; yet, their celebrity and fame were in large part due to the acclaim they had received before becoming performers.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented a picture of the western landscape as one dominated by crises: Indian attacks, stagecoach robberies, and buffalo hunts. This harsh landscape demanded heroes. People possessing certain qualities – the qualities needed to confront these challenges, such as courage, determination, survival skills, and animal sense – were hailed as the tapers of the frontier. The circus claimed to present those who excelled in frontier skills. Buffalo Bill's Wild West further suggested that these attributes could be possessed by both sexes. The western hero it presented was defined by the qualities he or she had and accomplishments he or she achieved; therefore, though most of its personalities were male, they were not by definition exclusively male. In fact many women participated in the show and were held up as western heroes. The western hero presented by Buffalo Bill's Wild West thus carried with it a strongly gender neutral message.

Women played a large role in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. They played an active part in the performance as well as receiving a significant amount of promotion. Some of the show's most famous celebrities, such as Annie Oakley and Lucille Mulhall, were women. While touring Germany, of the seventeen acts women actively participated in

nine.⁴¹ Women “were treated equally, in the show and in the posters, and they performed almost all the same feats of horsemanship and marksmanship demonstrated by their male counterparts.”⁴² For his own part, William Cody was an early supporter of women’s suffrage. When asked in 1899 whether he thought women should have the same liberties as men, he replied “Most assuredly I do. I’ve already said they should be allowed to vote. Why, of course, if a woman is out earning her living and keeps up with what is going on in the world, and she knows the best man to vote for.”⁴³ He often praised the idea of strong women to German newspapers. When describing his wife to the *Berliner Tageblatt*, he proudly described her as disagreeing with him on political issues from the very first time they met – she favored the Southern rebellion, while he was a scout for the Union Army. She told him “You have your principles and I have my opinion.” He concluded by unabashedly saying that she would remain a rebel until the end.⁴⁴ The circus he formed, as well as its accompanying promotional material, seems to have presented a strikingly gender equal picture for the late nineteenth-century.

The performance also proposed a portrait of gender equality. When describing what was essential in defining a western hero, the circus stressed the importance of personal qualities and accomplishments. The Wild West naturally presented its leader, William Cody, as the quintessential western hero. Many of the show’s acts were

⁴¹ *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. Vorstellung des amerikanischen Hiterwalderlebens*, 1890. Circus World Museum Library, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

⁴² Jack Rennert, *100 Posters of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* (New York: Darien House, 1976), commentary plate 85.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ “Der Wilde Westen in Berlin. Ein Interview mit Buffalo Bill,” *Berliner Tageblatt* (Berlin) 27 July 1890.

'recreations' of events from his life, such as his Duel with Yellow Hand, his buffalo hunts, and his saving of a border village. The circus disseminated more information about him than anyone else, and made him the beneficiary of a massive, international publicity campaign. He was held forward as epitomizing the highest virtues of the westerner.⁴⁵ Underscoring this point, the 1896 program states "Buffalo Bill *par excellence* is the exemplar of the strong and unique traits that characterize *a true American frontiersman*."⁴⁶ The program thus explicitly contends that a person's value on the frontier was determined by the qualities they possess. This was not a unique theme, and was repeated through the entire 33 year run of the show. The various programs of the show's run offers recommendations of generals under whom Cody served. This not only added authenticity to his stage persona, but also served to recount his accomplishments, qualities, and traits. The German program included commendations by many of these Generals, such as General Sheridan's "He is a very hard working man, coolheaded, brave" and General Car's "He was modest and unassuming . . . his personal strength and activity are very great and his temper and disposition are good . . . his eyesight is better than a good field glass . . . [he] seemed never to tire and always ready to go . . . never noisy, obstreperous, or excited."⁴⁷ For Buffalo Bill's Wild West one's ability to excel in the frontier was determined by the combinations of traits one possessed.

⁴⁵ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Celebrity, Memory and Popular History* 20-41.

⁴⁶ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Historical Sketches and Program* (1896) 7. Wisconsin State Historical Society, Pamphlet Collection, Madison Wisconsin

⁴⁷ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Journal German edition* (1891), no page numbers given.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West was preceded by a publicity blitz that covered a city with posters. Blackstone estimates that for a one day stand between 6,000 and 8,000 posters would be plastered throughout the town.⁴⁸ This number would naturally increase for a longer stay. When the Company's posters promoted Buffalo Bill as a western hero they also stressed his achievements. For example, the 1910 poster "From Prairie to Palace," [Fig. 1] celebrates Cody as a hero by visually showing scenes proving his worth on the frontier.⁴⁹ Flanking Cody's impressive portrait are scenes depicting his abilities. By shooting targets and buffalo from horseback, he demonstrates his riding and shooting ability. In addition he demonstrates the more subtle abilities of eyesight, timing, nerve, cunning, and any other trait the viewer may think necessary to hunting and shooting. To the top and bottom of Cody's picture are his accomplishments. The picture suggests that Cody is worthy of respect for having gone from a messenger to an audience with Queen Victoria – "From Prairie to Palace." This poster testifies to the importance the show placed on what their performers could do.

According to the circus, on the frontier, traits and accomplishments were the prerequisite for becoming a western hero. This rule applied to other men, women, and even animals. By praising things that both genders could achieve – such as bravery, industry, generosity and skills, among numerous others – the show made one's status as a western hero not synonymous with masculinity. When describing the cowboy Jim Larson, the 1885 program described his value on the frontier by saying that he was "a

⁴⁸ Blackstone, 50.

⁴⁹ Jack Rennert, *100 Posters*, 110.

rare combination of plain's lore, cow-sense, horsemanship, general western nerve, and knowledge that makes him the first class cowboy – so invaluable an aid to the capitalist, the herd owner, and the ranchman.”⁵⁰ Lawson's utility to others and his learned traits, not his inherent masculinity, made him valuable on the frontier and thus praiseworthy. Even the value of western horses was determined by their qualities and abilities. The 1885 program praises them as “animals excelling in the qualities of strength, speed, docility, courage, stamina, keen scent, delicacy of ear, quick of sight, sure footed, shrewd in perception, nobleness in character.”⁵¹ Old Charlie, Cody's personal horse, is likewise praised – “quick to sense danger . . . he cares not how much you load or put on his back . . . Old Charlie's great point is his wonderful intelligence.”⁵² The manner that even a horse earns its value on the frontier, according to the Company, was by the skills it possessed.

Annie Oakley, the most recognizable female in the show's existence, is also proven in the show's eyes by the traits she exhibits. In doing so, she earns an equal place beside the men of the show. The 1896 Program stresses her accomplishments, and never refers to her being an aberration of her gender or as somehow less qualified or different than men in the show. She earns her respect by her shooting ability, accomplishments, and frontier traits. Her description in the program begins by asserting, “Ever since a toddling child she has had an inherent love for fire-arms and hunting, and at the age of ten she, as often as the ammo was attainable, would smuggle her brother's

⁵⁰ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Journal* (1885) 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*

musket and steal into the woods where game at the time was plentiful. Naturally, she was a good shot.”⁵³ In this quotation, the circus flatly dismisses the notion that Oakley, as a woman, was inherently less adept at shooting than men. Additionally, the program directly addresses social conceptions about female marksmen. The program makes a point of saying that Oakley was forced to smuggle her brother’s gun and bullets. This could even suggest that as a female, having to overcome these obstacles and prejudices, her achievement is all the more significant. Moreover, the description of her predisposition to shooting is similar to the statement made in the same program about Buffalo Bill, “From a child [he was] used to shooting and riding.”⁵⁴ The program details Oakley’s numerous accomplishments: the shooting competitions she won, her world record shooting feats, and her repertoire of trick shots. The description of Oakley concludes by saying “MISS OAKLEY is also an accomplished equestrienne, and her success with the public has been greatly enhanced by the fact that in dress, style and execution she is as original as she is attractive.”⁵⁵ The mention of her attractiveness strikes the modern reader as inappropriately emphasizing Oakley’s feminine looks and subjecting her to the male gaze; however, this does not seem to be the intent of the Company. Instead both genders are described in terms of their physical appearance. For example, the same program says of Buffalo Bill that he is “sturdy and agile, a remarkable specimen of manly beauty.”⁵⁶ The emphasis of physical appearance seems

⁵³ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West, America's National Entertainment* (1886) 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22. [Capital letters in the original]

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

to connote more of a general healthiness, fitness, and strength. The program uses this glowing praise of Oakley's strength, execution, and originality as the final proof that Oakley deserves her place in the Wild West Company as a result of her talents and accomplishments.

The show's posters suggest that the circus visually portrayed Oakley as equal to her male peers, deserving a place in the troop, and name her a hero as a result of her qualities. Thus, by portraying Oakley as equal to men, the circus suggests that personal traits – not gender – are the determinate of one's use on the frontier. These posters further suggest that women can take an equal role to men in the traditionally male pursuits of shooting and riding. The 1898 life-size poster "Annie Oakley/Johnnie Baker" [Fig. 2] shows Annie Oakley face-to-face with the Cody's number one assistant and leader of the troop in Cody's absence.⁵⁷ Striking is that Oakley and Baker stand precisely the same height, with eyes locked. This is despite the fact that Oakley's accurate nickname 'Little Sure Shot' is written underneath her.⁵⁸ Both assume a similar profile pose. Though Baker's rifle stock is in front of Oakley's, she is standing slightly more in the foreground than he. Both are wearing the costumes they wore during the performance and hats that are almost identical. Proudly displayed in the center of the poster are the medals each is wearing. Oakley wears four, while Baker has only two.

⁵⁷ Jack Rennert, *100 Posters*, 83.

⁵⁸ The nickname was given to her by Sitting Bull before he was murdered. The two had a great friendship, and Sitting Bull eventually adopted her as a daughter. He honored her by bestowing this nickname on her as a testimony not only to her shooting ability, but also accounting for her diminutive stature. She was honored by this name and used it throughout her life both during and after her tenure in the show.

This could even suggest that Oakley is a better shot than Baker. Though Baker is holding two guns and Oakley only one, this is due to the nature of their respective acts. Oakley mainly used with the rifle in her acts, while Baker was adept in shooting with both the pistol and rifle. In the background is Annie Oakley's tent. Inside, it appears to be of spartan design. Notably absent are the rugs and pictures Oakley actually kept in her tent. Also absent are domestic items, such as a sewing machines or kitchen appliances that would reinforce Oakley's role as a female. Instead the tent only has in it a bed, table, chair, and bicycle. The bicycle, used in Oakley's performance, serves to remind the viewer of the incredible feats Oakley performs. This poster does not reduce Oakley to simply a good female shooter, but instead offers testimony to her skill as a shooter while positioning her as an equal to the show's second-in-command, Johnnie Baker.

The 1901 Poster "Annie Oakley" [Fig. 3] is strikingly similar to the aforementioned poster "From Prairie to Palace."⁵⁹ The essential style is identical – a picture of the subject surrounded by their accomplishments and abilities. In the center of the portrait is Oakley clad in numerous medals which seem to flow out of the picture's frame. Surrounding her are images demonstrating her accomplishments and feats. Her utility on the frontier is proven by the scenes of her hunting, shooting from horseback, and her ability to shoot in even a snowstorm. In addition to showing her famous trick shots, the poster shows her competing in the Grand American Handicap, a contest she ultimately won. Finally, absolutely no mention of her gender is made.

⁵⁹ Jack Rennert, *100 Posters*, 80.

Instead, the main caption of the poster simply reads, “The Peerless Wing and Rifle Shot.”

Annie Oakley was not an aberration in the show. In fact, women performers constituted a major presence of the show. In the 1890-1891 German tour, of the seventeen acts of the show women actively participated in seven. They were actively promoted by the show as talented and skilled riders and frontier inhabitants that earned – through their talent – their prominent place in the lineup. The 1898 poster “Girls Lassoing” [Fig. 4] clearly presents a picture of women as excellent riders and lassoers.⁶⁰ Controlling their wild bucking horses, these girls appear to possess extraordinary frontier skills. This poster indicates that Buffalo Bill’s Wild West presented women in a more equal light to men than was often the case in nineteenth-century circuses. In comparison to other shows that emphasized the masculine traits needed to tame horses, this poster clearly demonstrates an assumption that females can control and ride their horses with superior ability.⁶¹

Buffalo Bill’s Wild West portrayed frontier heroes as dependant on the traits they possessed. These traits, which made one valuable on the frontier, could be possessed by men, women, and even animals. Though, to be sure, fewer women participated in

⁶⁰ Jack Rennert, *100 Posters*, 85.

⁶¹ Marius Kwint, “The Circus and Nature in Late Georgian England,” in *Histories of Liesure*, ed. Rudy Koshar (New York: Berg, 2002), 45-60. See also: Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top*. (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 144-8; Tracy C. Davis. “Shotgun Wedlock: Annie Oakley’s Power Politics in the Wild West.” in *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*. ed. Laurence Senelick (Hanover: U. Press of New England, 1992), 141, 144-5.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West than men, they were nonetheless active participants in their own right. The femaleness or supposed feminine traits were not emphasized; instead they were allowed to participate in the show by their own right and according to their own skill. The Company presented a portrait of the west where heroes, both male and female, were justified and proven wholly by their abilities and achievements.

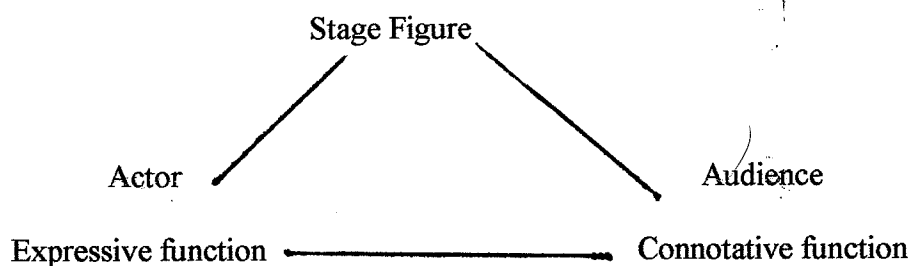
Understanding Heroes in the Wild West

If the Wild West portrayed itself in this way to German audiences, then how did German audiences respond to the picture with which they were presented? Given this cornucopia of primary source material present in the William F. Cody and Annie Oakley scrapbooks, it is nonetheless challenging to synthesize and make sense of the hundreds of articles by different writers who watched the same show. It is necessary to turn to the field of performance studies to get a theoretical model to come to terms with an audience's reaction and derive meaning from it.

Michael Quinn's "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting" argues that any performance or stage figure, by which he means "an image of the character that is created by the actor, costume designer, director, etc.," should be understood as arising from a negotiation between audience and actor/writer.⁶² He suggests that this relationship is best understood as such a triangle:⁶³

⁶² Michael Quinn "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting" in *New Theater Quarterly* May (1990): 155.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 156.



In such a triangle, the way an audience perceives stage figures, and the meaning it derives from them, not only relies on the creative contribution of the performers, but also on the audience's own contributions. "The beholder's share involves audience's connotative function . . . in every performance images of character are funded from the personal storehouse of experience that constitutes each viewer's competence.⁶⁴ The personal beliefs and assumptions that audience members hold inform what they derive from the performance. The values the audience brings to the performance shape the way that it thinks of and makes sense of the performance. Thus, the messages an audience derives from a performance can be radically different from what the performer intends. In determining the way audience reception differs from the intended message of the performers, an observer can detect the values and beliefs that shape the audience's "connotative function." One can easily hypothesize that the tension between the performer's intent and the audience's connotative function was all the more pronounced in audiences viewing Buffalo Bill's Wild West, because audiences thought of the performance as an authentic reflection of an actual life landscape. What the audience

⁶⁴ Ibid, 155.

derived from the performance thus became the meanings it saw in an objective depiction of a landscape.

It is hard to gain precise insights into how the audience viewed the show and the meanings they derived from it. The two reliable and consistently available sources are attendance figures and newspaper reviews. High attendance figures testify to the fact that Buffalo Bill's Wild West was widely attended in many different German cities, but do not suggest the underlying messages audience members derived from the show. In contrast, a review gives a qualitative description held by a single audience member, but speaks for only one viewer. Despite this limitation, the response of these individual audience members is valuable in shedding light on the meanings derived by a larger German audience. According to Thomas Postlewait, "a theater review, besides offering an evaluation of the production, may reveal clues about the cultural milieu in which the production occurred."⁶⁵ This is especially the case when one examines a large number of reviews by different authors on what was basically the same performance. Thus this paper attempts to gauge audience reaction by viewing the reactions, descriptions, and comments of different individuals about the same presentation. This study looks at common themes running throughout different descriptions by different people and their reflections on what they held to be an approximate representation of the Western landscape.

⁶⁵ Thomas Postlewait, "Historiography and the Theatrical Event: A Primer with Twelve Cruxes" in *Theatre Journal* 43 (1991): 167.

The commentators seeing the Wild West Show openly acknowledged that in the performance they saw more than just horses and frontier life. Instead, they assumed that they were seeing a code of values and an admirable norm of behavior. In the words of one reviewer, "Courage and determination, speed and agility – those are the assets which the collective performance showed, so that the actual effect of the performance is very hard to describe. One must see it with his own eyes to be convinced."⁶⁶ In effect, the writer concedes that the important things derived from the performance are not the actual acts of the show, but rather the values and norms that the show illustrates. This audience member did not so much value the taming of wild horses and gun shooting as seeing the demonstration of admirable virtues in the accomplishment of these acts. Another audience member concluded that "in the wild way of life in the prairie and backwoods you only have physical strength, skillfulness, and the qualities of spirit to help you meet the practical demands of every moment."⁶⁷ On watching this show, the reviewer concludes that these are the most necessary, basic qualities needed on the wild frontier. Thus the performance is valuable in demonstrating the most basic traits demanded by nature. Harsh practicality demands certain abilities, the reviewer suggests, and these are demonstrated in this performance.

The reviewers of most articles seem to have concurred with the Company's supposition that Buffalo Bill was representative of what it took to tame the frontier. What it took to succeed in the frontier, however, was different in the minds of German

⁶⁶ *Anzeiger und Tageblatt* (Pirna) 3 June 1890.

⁶⁷ "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," *Tageblatt* (Hannover) 29 June 1890.

audiences than what was presented by the show. Rather than conceiving of Buffalo Bill as representing qualities, accomplishments and attributes achieved by a western hero, he was perceived as representing the undeniably masculine abilities necessary for frontier life. One writer, after meeting Cody, said "Every line of his muscular physique overflowed from the usual sharpness of his suit – in this case dark brown. [He is] a portrayal of manliness, like it could be thought of in its perfection."⁶⁸ In a theme repeated by other writers, Cody epitomizes the essence of masculinity, and is seen as representative of the undeniably masculine men populating the American West.⁶⁹ This is an important distinction from the picture of the western hero presented by the Company itself. Rather than saying Cody possessed all the gender neutral qualities necessary for success in the Western landscape, he was made to represent perfected masculinity. He was described as personifying the explicitly manly virtues necessary for western life.

Cody was continually praised for his accomplishments, but many of these achievements were explicitly and inextricably linked to his maleness. Such is the case when a reviewer writes "Colonel Cody is a hero of the prairie, in his struggles against the Indians he had more adventures than Cooper's romantic heroes . . . he is a soldier who served his Fatherland in the American Civil War under General Sherman."⁷⁰ First

⁶⁸ "Ein Interview mit Buffalo Bill. Von einem deutsch-amerikanischen Journalisten," *Tageblatt und Anzeiger* (Leipzig) 26 June 1890.

⁶⁹ see for example, "Ein Besuch bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Privilegierte Preussische Zeitung* (Berlin) 19 July 1890. and "Der Wilde Westen in Berlin. Ein Interview mit Buffalo Bill." *Berliner Tageblatt* (Berlin) 26 July 1890.

⁷⁰ "Buffalo Bill's Wilder Westen," *Anzeiger* (Tharand und Wohorn) 3 June 1890.

and foremost, his struggles against Indians and service in the army were proof that Cody was a hero of the plains. The ultimate verification of his status as a prairie hero is thus his service in an exclusively male organization. Moreover, James Fennimore Cooper's heroes – who are all men – serve as this German's prototype of the frontier hero. The linkage of Cody to Cooper's heroes, as well as the centrality placed on his military service, was a theme often repeated by other reviewers. Another trait often praised by commentators was Cody's leadership and command. Describing the "Grand Entrance," which included female riders, a reviewer wrote "It was a splendid sight, the wild figures of the horses . . . every man an accomplished rider. With princely [fürstlichem] posture Colonel Cody commanded them all, the powerful figure sat in the saddle, strong and courageous." In addition to ignoring completely the female riders who took part in the scene, the reviewer praised Cody's posture with explicitly male imagery.

Nineteenth-century Germany saw a polarization of personality and role stereotypes based on gender. Scientific and cultural thought emphasized that certain traits and attributes were exclusively male, while others were female. Males were held to be more aggressive, self-reliant, and possessing leadership abilities; while women were thought to be spiritual, passive, and emotional.⁷¹ Thus, to nineteenth-century readers, the emphasis placed on Cody's strength and leadership abilities would evoke

⁷¹ See for example: Karin Hausen, "Die Polarisierung der 'Geschlechtcharaktere' – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben," in *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart, 1976); trans. by Cathleen Catt "Family and Role-Division: The Polarisation of Sexual Stereotypes in the Nineteenth Century – An Aspect of the Dissociation of Work and Family Life" in *The German Family*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W.R. Lee (New York, 1981), 55-6. Citations are from the English Version.

male stereotypes. German readers would thus see the qualities praised in Cody and thought to be necessary for his status as a western hero as attributes stereotypically coupled with males. Cody's status as a western hero would, therefore, become synonymous with his superior possession of stereotypically male traits.

If these critics saw Cody as representing the quintessential male, then they saw the western frontier as a landscape demanding male virtues. As a result, it became the sole dominion of men. According to one reviewer "The trapper life, like Cooper paints it, is exciting and attractive . . . many a shoot-out with hostile Indians, many exciting adventures in struggles with wild animals and the hostile elements falls on the life journey of a young trapper."⁷² One again sees the linkage of the western hero to Cooper's exclusively male view of the trapper life. Additionally, one sees the importance placed on battling animals and Indians to defining the life of a western hero. Reviewers tended to point out the same skills as being necessary on the Western frontier. Physical strength – which nineteenth-century science held to be biologically and exclusively male – was one of these characteristics. The earlier quotation in the Hannover *Tageblatt* clearly states the centrality of physical strength in defining the Western hero. When describing the male performers in the show, reviewers often referred to and praised their size and strength. The Native American Yellow Hair was described as "a big, strong fellow."⁷³ This is one of many off the cuff comments about

⁷² "Buffalo Bill," *Tageblatt* (Linden-Hannover) 1 July 1890.

⁷³ "Bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Börsen Courier* (Berlin) 23 July 1890.

the performers' strength or size. This had the effect of suggesting that males were more biologically fit to participate in this unpredictable, practical landscape than women.

Reviewers also emphasized two other qualities that Hausen contends were coupled with masculinity: aggression and self reliance.⁷⁴ Many writers stated the necessity of aggression on the frontier. A representative example is the Dresden writer who said that on the frontier one can only survive by "the free application of your weapons, the rifle, the lance, and the lasso."⁷⁵ Another paper writes that the Wild West accurately displays "the colorful, bloody, and manly history of America's youth."⁷⁶ While the Hannover *Tageblatt* writes "In the wild way of life in the prairie and backwoods you only have physical strength."⁷⁷ The importance commentators placed on the necessity of aggression can also be seen in that they repeatedly praised the men in the performance for their skills as fighters. This association between the western hero and the ability to fight is similar to the centrality placed on Cody's wartime experiences when proving his status as a western hero. Critics praise individuals of the troupe for their experiences on the battle field. In a glowing description of the Native American members of the troupe, a reviewer wrote "Black Heart, a chief of the Arrapahoes, is also the most respected fighter of his people, who though young in years is not poor in blood-red feathers that come from his victories."⁷⁸ Thus, Black Heart's respected status as a

⁷⁴ Hausen, "Polarisation," 55-6.

⁷⁵ *Sächsische Dorf Zeitung* (Dresden) 3 June 1890.

⁷⁶ "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" Unnamed Paper (Berlin *Reichsbole* ?), William F. Cody Scrapbook.

⁷⁷ *Tageblat* (Hanover) 29 June 1890.

⁷⁸ *Rossische Zeitung* (Berlin) 24 July 1890. In WFC Scrapbook.

hero of his people arises from and is proven by his fighting ability. The stress placed on the battlefield as a proving ground for the western hero naturally excluded women who were absent from the nineteenth-century battlefield. By not being able to participate in the exclusively male experience of war that the critics saw as the proving ground for western heroes, women's role as a frontier hero was minimized.

Reviewers emphasized the necessity of aggression even in activities not directly related to combat. For example, when reviewers spoke of training horses, they often spoke in metaphors relating battle and war. For example, according to one reviewer "the style with which these animals (steppe steeds) are caught with the Lasso, mounted, and ridden is such that a man summons all his strength and stamina and battles the animal for control. This offers a spectacle of high inspiration."⁷⁹ The author omitted any reference to the show's women who also lassoed and tamed horses, instead implying that only men took part in this activity. In addition, the reviewer compares horse riding to combat, stressing the power needed to tame the element. Thus, by making such a statement, the writer suggests that the frontier is a landscape in which those virtues associated with maleness are necessary for survival. By placing emphasis on aggression, they stressed an aspect that Hausen asserts was culturally held to be a primarily masculine aspect. Therefore, the landscape of the American West became one inhabited by those who succeeded based on their combative nature. To German audiences of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, aggression was so central to the Western landscape and maleness was

⁷⁹ "Buffalo Bills Wild West," *Heirte Nachrichten* (Hannover) 4 July 1890. In WFC Scrapbook.

so central to the ability to be violent that there appeared to be an essentially masculine quality about not only the show but also the American West. When one critic plainly stated that the show portrayed "the colorful, bloody and manly history of America's youth" it seemed wholly appropriate to associate bloody belligerence and manliness into an overall picture of the Western landscape and its history.⁸⁰

A similar tacit assumption is made when writers stressed the necessity of self-reliance on the frontier. In describing an archetypal Western hero, the Pony Express rider, a reviewer of the show emphasizes not only his physical strength but also the self-sufficiency of the western hero:

Relying only on himself and his steed, the Pony Express Rider rushed from one end of the prairie to the other bringing government messages. For him there is no rest, no protector. He must go fifty miles without stopping, and during that change horses at least five times without stopping. At each station a new animal is held; the rider jumps from his exhausted, sweaty horse with lightening speed onto another animal and goes again in a roaring gallop.⁸¹

The reviewer praised the rider for his ability to go without rest and his complete self-reliance. What makes this rider worthy of praise and a representative Western hero is, in addition to his physical strength, the ability to take care of himself. While it is common for newspapers to compliment male participants for their physical strength, aggression, and independence, none of the dozens of articles studied for this essay makes mention of female participants in the show possessing these centrally important male virtues. By doing this, the German reviewers emphasized the fundamentally male nature of the

⁸⁰ "Buffalo Bills Wild-West," *Nachrichten* (Leipzig) no date given.

⁸¹ "Unter Indianern und Cowboys, Die Vorführungen von Buffalo Bill's Wild West Compagnie," *General Anzeiger* (Leipzig) 22 June 1890.

American landscape. The wild frontier is portrayed as one requiring masculinity to tame, and a landscape in which its heroes prove themselves by application and possession of the very attributes that Hausen suggests were scientifically and culturally held to be inherently male.

Not only did these German audience members hold that certain attributes – culturally and scientifically identified with maleness – were essential in frontier life; they also held that women did not fit in on the frontier. This belief was communicated in several ways. Reviewers presented women as either distinctly unfemale, a curious aberration, or not belonging on the frontier. Moreover, when their virtues and abilities were praised by reviewers, they were praised for possessing distinctly different virtues than the men of the company. German reviewers also minimized the female role in the performance. In these ways, German reviewers preserved the Western landscape as a masculine landscape whose inhabitants became heroes by demonstrating their manliness.

German critics often painted female performers as distinctly unfeminine. Reviewers conceded that females were indeed in the performance, yet they were not normal, respectable women. In two typical examples of this attitude, one audience member referred to “Miss Oakley” as “a hot blooded little lady [Dämchen]”⁸² Another reviewer writing about the company’s three best women riders wrote, “We will today spend more attention of the women on the Wild West ... the sisters Della and Bessie Ferrell and Georgie Duffy, the lovable Amazons who are excellent riders and who have

⁸² “Bei Buffalo Bill,” *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

gained the admiration of audiences.”⁸³ While this writer acknowledged that they were in fact excellent riders, he nevertheless found it necessary to dismiss their femininity. Rather than being normal women who happened to be excellent riders, they were condescendingly diminutivized and suffered a dismissal of their gender when the reviewer referred to them as ‘lovable Amazons.’ The German reviews contained in both the William F. Cody and Annie Oakley scrapbooks often repeatedly refer to the women performers as Amazons.

If women were not openly called Amazons, then they were written off as either “those women living on the border” or more commonly “backwoods-women.”⁸⁴ In these ways, the women in the show were made out to be aberrations from respectable women. In emphasizing where these women came from, the assumption seems to have been, these are women from the frontier – entirely unlike commendable, upright bourgeois women from more civilized places. By referring to these obviously skilled women as masculine and wild, the reviewers maintained their image of the American West as a masculine landscape requiring masculine virtues.

In addition to dismissing the femininity of the women performers, reviewers also suggested that the achievements of the women were not quite as impressive or as necessary as the men. Women were presented as extraneous outsiders to the uniquely male landscape. One author, after visiting the camp, noted that the “men of the plains”

⁸³ “Buffalo Bills Wild West,” *Tageblatt* (Dresden) 6 June 1890.

⁸⁴ Respectively, “Unter Indianern und Cowboys,” *General Anzeiger* (Leipzig) 22 June 1890. and *Anzeiger und Tageblatt* (Pirna) 3 June 1890.

camp was "primitive," while the women's camp was made "with great comfort."⁸⁵ This is a strikingly different portrayal than the one presented by the "Annie Oakley/Johnnie Baker" poster which depicted Oakley's spartan tent as filled only with a bed, table, and props from her performance. By making this assertion, the author seems to set up a dichotomized contrast between Mr. Breadwinner and Mrs. Consumer.⁸⁶ The apparent message of the writer is that even on the harsh Western landscape women need domestic comforts while men need only practical necessities. Thus, men are presented as more suited for the demands of frontier life. Curiously, though, several writers referred to the lavish women's tents; In fact, Cody's tent was the largest and one of the most lavishly decorated of the Company, including satin and velvet upholstered furniture, mounted animals, a portrait of him by Rosa Bonheur, and various valuable gifts given to him by royalty and other visitors.⁸⁷

In addition to describing female tents as extravagant, reviewers dismissed the acts performed by the women as inconsequential. One of most promoted acts in the show was the performance of Virginia Reel on horseback. It was a dangerous act intended to demonstrate the skill and control that riders exercised over horses. The "Danse des Cowboys à Cheval" [Fig. 5] portrays the act as one in which men and

⁸⁵ "Buffalo Bills Wild West," *Der Reichsbole* (Berlin) 4 July 1890.

⁸⁶ Victoria DeGrazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 3. DeGrazia's book and the essays contained in it suggest that to large segments of nineteenth-century European culture women were criticized as inherent consumers, while the modest consumer habits of males were praised as virtuous.

⁸⁷ Exhibited displays at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody Wyoming. These eclectic gifts included silver and gold jewel encrusted guns, statues, canes, jewelry, rugs, paintings, and lapel pins.

women seemingly mix and flawlessly perform the complex choreography while on the back of horses.⁸⁸ The poster presents this as a test of riding that indiscriminately challenges both men and women. The German reviewers when seeing the performance, however, did not see it as a demonstration of riding skills but rather as a trivial performance by the women. "With complete certainty [the Ferrell sisters and Georgie Duffy] unite grace and boldness on the horse . . . the women, in conjunction with Miss Oakley and the cowboys perform the full chic dance of the Virginia Reel on horseback."⁸⁹ The women's demonstration of horseback riding skills is minimized to an unnecessary triviality in the frontier. Reviewers also trivialized horseback races run by women; further downplaying western female achievement. The show included many races, one of which was a race between the Ferrell sisters. In comparison to the men's race, the race between the sisters was given less attention and described as significantly less important. An article from a Magdeburg paper offers an example of this tendency. On describing the male race the author writes, "the actual presentation begins with a horse race between a cowboy, a Mexican, and an Indian; on the signal of Buffalo Bill, the three spur their horses and race around the track. Here the Mexican had the misfortune that his horse turned a complete flip, but happily in such a way that neither man nor horse was damaged." In comparison, the female race is described: "Then bold riders [Reiterinnen] present themselves as a race is run between two backwoods-women. As well, two Indian boys do the same on unsaddled horses, which is much like bronze

⁸⁸ Jack Rennert, *100 Posters*, 46.

⁸⁹ Buffalo Bills Wild West," *Tageblatt* (Dresden) 6 June 1890.

figures holding onto horses.”⁹⁰ The men’s race is presented as being more dangerous and exciting. The race between women is described with a one sentence dry presentation of fact. Furthermore, the author says their race is basically the same as the one done by children, with the exception that the boys have the added hardship of racing without saddles. By trivializing the achievements of women in comparison with those of men, the authors undermine the place of women on the western landscape. Since the women’s accomplishments are trivial or second-rate, their place on the uniquely male landscape was seen as not entirely appropriate.

In addition, reviewers do not praise women for having many of the male qualities mentioned earlier in the paper. None of the reviews used as source material by this paper singled out women as leaders or praised for their leadership ability, physical strength, aggression, or self-reliance. Similarly, none of the women were ever described as “riding high in the saddle” or being “powerful” figures. These phrases and descriptions which are constantly used to describe Buffalo Bill, Johnnie Baker, and the various Indian Chiefs are not applied to women. Thus it appears that the reviewers tended to think of women as lacking these very qualities, which were held as essential to the essence of the western hero. The values that women were praised for were completely different than these. As seen in earlier quotations, women were often credited for their grace and boldness. Additionally, they were applauded for their

⁹⁰ “Aus der Provinz,” *Zeitung* (Magdeburg) 26 June 1890.

elegance and beauty on horseback.⁹¹ When writers met women in person, they presented them as demonstrating friendliness, and domesticity. One of the best examples of this was the visit of a German writer to the tent of Georgie Williams and her husband:

Ms. Georgie Williams, the red-haired piquant rider of the company was there, and noticed a faulty patch on her husband's jacket, and excused herself apologizing that all in the camp was not orderly and alright. Mr. Georgie Williams, a lean gentleman, smiled 'I apologize, Madam, for the Wild West appears to us to not be in very good shape.' In the corner stood a sewing machine allowing one to guess that the bold Amazon is actually a very good, industrious housewife.⁹²

The writer then says that the Georgie Williams described how she met and fell in love with her husband. In such a way, the writer suggests that in the end she is not the rough and tumble western hero depicted in the show, but rather an industrious housewife who dutifully concurs to the wishes of her husband and values her family above all else. Far from presenting a picture of Williams as a self-reliant western hero, she is labeled as a housewife who worries over a small tear in her husband's suit. The reviewer thus seems to believe that even the most rough and tumble women in the show were qualitatively different from the men. Unlike the real cowboys in the show, this "red-haired piquant" was concerned about domestic issues. In the end, she turns out to be just a Hausfrau. She is not at all a western hero from the masculine landscape of the American West, but just another domestic wife.

⁹¹ See, *General Anzeiger* (Leipzig) 22 June 1890. and "60 Stunden im Sattel," *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

⁹² "Eine Nacht bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (Berlin) 2 August 1890.

This paper contends that German audiences saw the western frontier as an exclusively male domain in which women were either unwelcome or unable to cope. Moreover, the reviewers watching the show tended to conceive of certain traits and skills as inextricably tied to gender. German commentators often stripped women who dared go outside their domestic role of their femininity. Thus domesticity was not simply a social sphere confining women; but instead reviewers presented the act of living a harsh life, away from civilization, was seen as diametrically opposed to an essential female essence. Striking is the unanimity among the reviewers watching the show. Whereas the performers aimed to present a gender-neutral portrait of frontier life, none of the reviewers surveyed in this paper appear to have derived this meaning. Rather, they stood so firmly opposed to cultural norms that none suggested it even when presented with a performance that came down strongly on the side of gender equality and denied contemporarily held characterizations about the sexes. They saw the performance as a relatively accurate picture of the western landscape, and unanimously ignored the egalitarian picture of gender shown in the show. It is not that they openly acknowledged that women were successful and active on the American frontier but disagreed with this fact for ideological reasons; rather, it seems as though, as a result of their deeply held gendered norms, they could not even conceive of women inhabiting the western frontier.

Animals and American Indians in the Wild West

Looking at a culture's treatment of a wilderness helps shows how it views its relationship with the natural world. The American West – where nineteenth-century

Germans perceived death as always a moment away – was a place where the significance of man's interaction with nature was perceived as of absolute importance, and to spectators watching the show this relationship was immediately visible. Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented its own account of mankind's relationship with nature, but once again Germans dismissed the portrait with which they were presented in favor of a their own view of the interaction between man and nature. Without actually living in the West, or seeing it with their own eyes; Germans nonetheless developed their own discourses about the ambiguous relationship between man and animal that were markedly different from the Wild West's portrayal of these relationships. Two symbols that highlighted how Germans and the show understood humanity's connection with nature were Native Americans and the taming of horses.

Marius Kwint points to the importance of studying the man/animal relationship in "Circus and Nature in Late Georgian England." According to Kwint, "statements about the differences *between* species actually reflect our perceptions of differences *within* our own, and our evaluations of them."⁹³ Kwint suggests that this relationship offers an excellent historical tool for understanding deeper, ambiguous values held by a culture. He further suggests that these "ideological elements of belief and practice" change over time.⁹⁴ This essay assumes that in addition to change occurring over time, the ideological superstructure that informs a culture's conception of nature also differs across cultural boundaries. This paper attempts to highlight differences in the way the

⁹³ Marius Kwint, "The Circus and Nature in Late Georgian England," in *Histories of Leisure*, ed. Rudy Koshar (New York: Berg, 2002), 47.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

man/nature relationship was understood in Germany and how it was represented by the Wild West.

Animal acts had a central place throughout the show's existence. When coming to Europe the Company brought 200 broncos, not to mention numerous buffalo and cattle.⁹⁵ Animals were so central to the performance that many of the circus's celebrities were animals. Chief among these was Cody's battle-worn horse "Old Charlie." Programs pontificated on its natural abilities, as well as Cody's other horses. They even singled out his dead horse "Old Buckskin Joe" for praise. In addition to the prominence of animals in the programs, they also held a central role in the show itself. Man and animal combined to create numerous acts in the show. Whether the Indian attack on the Deadwood coach, lassoing, racing, or hunting buffalo; the relationship between man and animal was always on visible display.

Kwint's study of the hippodrome in Georgian England focuses on the way circuses promoted and advertised their horse tamers. His examination suggests that hippodromes presented horse taming as an undeniably masculine act. "The essential horse required the quintessential man: in the early years circus horsemanship was headlined as 'manly'."⁹⁶ Though there was an initial willingness to portray women as successful equestrians, as the nineteenth-century dawned, displays of horsemanship by women were downplayed in order to delineate extraordinary equestrianism as a decidedly male activity. Moreover, Kwint suggests that taming horses took on the form

⁹⁵ William Lightfoot Visscher, *Buffalo Bill's Own Story of his Life and Deeds*, (New York: Stanton, 1917), 330.

⁹⁶ Kwint, 53.

of a pitched battle between man and nature that mankind would invariably win. "As living proof of the power of nurture over nature, of reason over passion, the horseman . . . served as an emblem of conquest and indeed of civilization itself."⁹⁷ This struggle took the form of a gladiatorial conquest, in which the horse was controlled and tamed thus proving the ability of man to overcome his natural foes. Much scholarship on the Anglo-American history of beast taming emphasizes these two themes. In *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top*, Janet Davis highlights these currents noting that "trainers took pride in their 'mastery' over beasts. As models of disciplined manliness, animal trainers emphasized that sobriety was an essential part of their craft."⁹⁸ Though both Kwint and Davis stress the portrayal of gender roles and battle between man-animal, they ignore the audience reception of these messages. They fail to look at audience reception, but their studies nonetheless suggest the existence of several themes in nineteenth-century Anglo-American circuses. However, these themes should not be thought of as an inherent part of the promotion of all animal trainers.

Studying German animal tamers in Hagenbeck's zoos, Nigel Rothfels writes:

To be sure, Hagenbeck's trainers were also frequently characterized as pitting their lives against potentially violent beasts. Nevertheless, when we consider the Hagenbeck performances . . . it is clear that the ideas advanced by Hagenbeck's performances represent a very new way of imagining animal-animal and animal-human interaction. Instead of a gladiator beating the beasts into submission, here we see a former

⁹⁷ Kwint, 49.

⁹⁸ Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top*, (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 160.

Hamburg business man, Heinrich Mehrmann, as he stands respectfully in evening wear beside his calm far-from-roaring charges.⁹⁹

In addition, to the clash of wills between man and beast not being universal in animal taming acts, the masculine gender roles attached to trainers was not always present in nineteenth-century circuses. This paper now looks at how Buffalo Bill's Wild West Circus presented man-animal interaction, and then compares this portrayal to the reception of these meanings by German audiences. In doing so, it hopes to highlight the uniqueness of both the Wild West's presentation of the man-animal relationship as well as the way Germans discussed this bond. Recognizing these differences allows one to gain a better understanding of how Germans constructed their cultural conception of the American west landscape, as well as offering broader insights into how Germans thought of their own relationship with animals, nature, and 'uncivilized' people.

The Wild West's treatment of animals remained constant throughout the show's history. Though complete programs from the show's German tour were unavailable for this paper, given the high degree of correlation between the programs from the show's different American tours before and after the 1890-1 season, one can get a general idea of how the show presented the taming of horses. These programs used quotations, stories, anecdotes, and narratives to communicate their understandings of animals. Although the show emphasized horses' positive abilities, it portrayed them as ultimately subject to domination by a strong-willed and powerful person. The 1885 program relates the story of how Cody received the title of Chief of Scouts by riding 355 miles

⁹⁹ Nigel Rothfels *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 2002), 160-1.

through hostile country in 58 hours.¹⁰⁰ The story tells that Cody kept volunteering to deliver messages to different forts when nobody else would. The narrative superficially tells about Cody riding several horses across this incredible distance. When telling this story, the program continually emphasizes Cody's stamina and selflessness. Even when the animal is not willing to go or wants to rest, Cody's will propels it forward with spurs and his force of character. Thus the program presents human will and strength as necessary attributes for getting the most out of horses. A typical example in this narrative is when Cody is being pursued by Native Americans:

the Indians, who were mounted on excellent ponies, dashed after him as though they were impelled by a promise of all the whisky and bacon in the Big Father's commissary for his scalp. Bill was trying to save his hair and the Indians were equally anxious to secure it, so that the ride prompted by these diametrically opposed motives was as furious as Tam O'Shanter's. After running over about three miles of ground Bill turned his head only to be horrified by the sight of his pursuers gaining rapidly on him. He now sank the spurs a little deeper into his mule, let out another inch of his reins and succeeded in increasing the speed of his animal, which appeared to be sailing under a second wind.¹⁰¹

In this particular segment, even though the pursuers are riding "excellent ponies" and Cody is riding only a "mule" Bill outruns them. He conjures a second wind out of his mount not only as a result of his physical mastery (with spur and reign), but also because of his nobler motivations. Cody and the Indians had two "diametrically opposed motives" that clashed. Their race became a physical manifestation of their different motivations. Cody was trying to do his duty and save himself, while his would-be captors chased him as though propelled forward by the promise of whisky. Thus in

¹⁰⁰ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Journal* (1885) 28.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 28.

addition to horsemanship having to do with physical control over the horse, it also has a moral dimension. The only way for Cody to save his life was to assert his domination over the horse, while simultaneously having a stronger will and better character than the Native Americans.

Many other programs also stress the importance of physical mastery over animals. For example, the 1898 program speaks on many different occasions about the complete control exercised by the show's equestrians over their horses. Describing the show's diverse riders the programs present an array of powerful figures dominating their steeds: "the Bedouins of the Great Desert, on their cat-like Arabian horses, which seem intelligent enough to anticipate their rider's wishes; the Gauchos . . . who appear to have been born in the saddle; the Mexican Vaquero who has learned complete mastery of the animal his Aztec forefathers fled from in superstitious dread."¹⁰² All these riders enjoy complete power over their steeds. In the Bedouin's case, so complete is this domination that his mount knows a command before he can even give it. Additionally, the same program speaks about the U.S. Artillery drills by emphasizing the physical control exercised over their horses: "with its six horses at full gallop, a cannon is successfully piloted between two slight posts, so planted as to leave but a margin of two inches on either side. You could scarcely steer your bicycle more accurately."¹⁰³ The program also emphasizes the physical mastery over animals necessary to drive another vehicle – a

¹⁰² *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World*, (1898), 6.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 7.

Cuban Volante – by saying “the horse is hitched so far from the dashboard that a telephone seems necessary to command it.”¹⁰⁴

Though the show contends that humanity can dominate nature and exercise control over animals, the Wild West was quick to point out that this was not an easy feat. The battle between man and animal was real, it did not always go well, and the consequences for not subordinating nature were drastic. In a particularly colorful and amusing account is included in the 1899 program. A journalist writes about his attempt to ride what appeared to be a calm mustang:

I regret to say that I tried the experiment . . . I was fluently propelled upward; a tornado caught me – whirled me around eleven times. As I came down a pile-driver drove me in the stomach . . . I saw whole milky ways of constellations that never before existed. I realized for the first time the dense solidity of the earth and made the astonishing discovery that under certain circumstances our planet, instead of revolving on its own axis once in twenty-four hours can rush at the rate of at least one hundred revolutions a minute. There are not in the whole range of languages, ancient, modern, or profane, terms sufficiently expressive to describe the state of my feelings, the amount of mud on my person, or the chaotic condition of my brain. . . . There are times that try men’s souls. . . . Such to me was the trying moment when I gathered my bruised remains together, and looking around saw the festive [horse] quietly eating grass.¹⁰⁵

The skill required to successfully tame a horse, and by metaphoric extension to conquer the western landscape, is tremendous and cannot be done by just luck. As the author of this segment discovered, the consequences for failure are in the very least painful and can be dangerous. Here, the program presents the horse and man as enemies – one of which must inevitably be dominated. The show’s program personalizes the struggle

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West: Historical Sketches and Program*, (1899), 30-1.

between man and the western landscape by using an amusing anecdote written by a greenhorn desperately trying not to be conquered.

Several promotional posters visually give form to the struggle for domination between man and nature. "A Bucking Bronco" [Fig. 6] captures the moment of struggle between man and a wild horse.¹⁰⁶ The poster immediately draws the viewer's attention to the contorted body of the horse, complete with arched back and flailing legs. The horse's wildness is all the more noticeable when contrasted to the rider's upright posture. The rider sits in a rigid, upright position holding the horse's reins and brandishing spurs. Concentrating so hard that he appears not even to notice as his hat flies off, the rider summons all the determination and will he can muster to conquer the horse. In comparison, the horse wears a pained look as his head points straight down. This poster vividly sets up a dichotomy between civilized man and wild beast; between a conquered, saddled bronco and a determined rider. The poster presents a clash between man and horse as a pitched battle between two adversaries vying for mastery.

This antagonistic relationship between man and nature is made all the more visible in "Saddling a Bucker." [Fig. 8]¹⁰⁷ The separation between the people and the horse is striking. None of the men even touch the horse. The two cowboys control the horse with rope and leather, and are – by saddling it – subjecting it to physical domination. The horse is obviously trying to break loose, but can only move its back legs. The men appear to be using all their strength to control the horse's movement.

¹⁰⁶ Rennert, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Rennert, 19.

The title of the poster leaves little doubt of the ultimate outcome of the struggle. A final display of mastery over animal is the 1905 poster of a Cossack. [Fig. 9]¹⁰⁸ The posters consist of four scenes showing the Cossack wielding absolute power over the horse. The primary scene shows the Cossack standing high on the horse's back waving a whip and pulling the reins so tight that the horse is forced to look sideways. Other scenes show him wearing spurs and holding onto the saddle's horn. By utilizing these tools, he completely controls the horse. The horse has no freedom, but is instead subject to the rider's physical domination.

These are just a few of many such examples. The Wild West portrayed its horses as physically dominated by their riders. It also stressed, however, that physical control was not the only thing required to control a horse. The rider's will, his moral make-up, largely determined the success he would enjoy in taming and succeeding on his horse. To control and tame a horse – and thus nature – required strong will and physical mastery. Only those who could achieve both of these feats could become great equestrians and were thus allowed in the show. Kwint and Davis both suggest that two common themes in the Anglo-American animal acts were gendered commentary on the essentially masculine nature of animal taming and the battle between human and beast. Though Buffalo Bill's Wild West sidestepped the first theme by presenting a vision of the American West as demanding practical attributes and accomplishments that could be achieved by either gender; they firmly showed the latter theme. The Wild West emphasized the battle between man and beast as representing the human-nature

¹⁰⁸ Rennert, 42.

relationship in the American West. People either dominated the natural landscape physically and morally, or were inadequate. The show presented an antagonistic relationship between humanity and nature. The show presented horses as a wild, untamed representative of nature. In the performance's eyes, horses were a foe that epitomized the savageness and dangerousness of the West. They were an enemy good enough for the show's heroes of American civilization to fight.

When thinking about man's relationship with the western landscape, Germans and the Wild West utilized two symbols: horses and Native Americans. This thesis argues that there is a fundamental similarity between the way Buffalo Bill's Wild West, as well as German audiences, conceived of horses and Native Americans. Both symbols were invested with similar meanings. Europeans had long thought of Native Americans as representing the "natural condition of man."¹⁰⁹ American Indians were either idealized or cursed as embodying man's natural state. Native Americans were so closely identified with nature that zoos placed them next to animals to display each in their 'natural' environment. Attempting to mask "the fundamentally and overwhelmingly human nature of the place," zoos used indigenous people to make artificial displays of nature seem real.¹¹⁰ This betrays an underlying European assumption that Native people and animals bore a basic, uncanny similarity. In a time of increasing interest in ethnography and touring circuses, Germans saw the Native Americans with which they were presented as indicative of the western environment and natural order. The way

¹⁰⁹ Harry Liebersohn, *Aristocratic Encounters: European Travelers and North American Indians* (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1998), 10.

¹¹⁰ Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*, 7.

both Germans and the circus conceived of Indians' place in the American West conveys how they conceived of civilization's appropriate relationship with the natural world.

Much work has been done since the 1910's examining the effect of 'Wild Westing' on Native Americans. Stedman, Bataille, and Silet have all taken negative views of the shows, accusing them of objectifying Native Americans and subjecting Indian performers to humiliating ethnic humor.¹¹¹ Moreover, since the early twentieth-century, contemporaries of the shows have accused them of maltreatment of Native Americans.¹¹² L.G. Moses has recently brought these once nearly universal historiographical assumptions under fire in his *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians* by writing that "it would be wrong therefore to see the Show Indians as simply dupes, or pawns, or even victims. It would be better to approach them as persons who earned a fairly good living between the era of the Dawes act and the Indian New Deal playing themselves, re-creating a very small portion of their histories, and enjoying it."¹¹³ However, this debate is not the central focus of the present essay. Instead of looking at the actual experience of Native Americans in the show, this paper examines the representations of American Indians in the show, and the manner in which

¹¹¹ Raymond William Stedman, *Shadows of the Indians: Stereotypes in American Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982). Gretchen M. Bataille and Charles L.P. Silet, eds., *The Pretended Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980).

¹¹² Robe, Chauncey Y. "The Menace of the Wild West Show." *The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*. (July, 1914): 224-226; and Gohl, E. H. "The Effect of Wild Westing." *The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*. (July, 1914): 226-229.

¹¹³ L. G. *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: U. of New Mexico Press, 1996), 279.

audiences watching the show dismissed the performer's authority and supplanted their own understanding of Native Americans on the show.

It would likewise be tempting to look at the numerous 'accounts' of Native Americans who toured Europe. Many books and newspaper articles were published that purported to recount what Indian visitors to Europe thought of the Old World.¹¹⁴ It is impossible, however, to assume these sources accurately capture the voices of Native Americans. These accounts often amount to mere satire, as an 'uncivilized savage' is uniquely qualified to see the underlying problems of 'modern civilization.' Commenting on such diverse topics as fox hunting, industrialization, and local mayoral politics, the authors of these satires present Native Americans as "naïve and enlightened observers of the curiosities of the European scene."¹¹⁵ The only account of a Native American's impression of Europe collected with any degree of rigor and accuracy is *Black Elk Speaks*; however, since Black Elk never went to Germany the source is inappropriate for this paper.

Work on the show's representations of Native Americans has almost exclusively focused on a colonizer – colonized dichotomy.¹¹⁶ As a result, Native American performers become symbols against which to pit the heroic push of European

¹¹⁴ Rita G Napier "Across the Big Water: American Indians' perceptions of Europe and Europeans, 1887-1906" in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Aachen: Raeder, 1987) 383-402.

¹¹⁵ Christopher Mulvey "Among the Sag-A-Noshes: Ojibwa and Iowa Indians with George Catlin in Europe, 1843-48" in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Aachen: Raeder, 1987): 253-276. Mulvey offers an excellent account of how one of these authors used Native American voices as a forum for satirical commentary.

¹¹⁶ See, Blackstone, 88. and Kasson, 161.

civilization. In such a narrative, the performance justifies colonial expansion and is interested in presenting Native Americans only as an inferior 'Other' against whom Europeans must battle. The purpose of this paper is to move away from a purely colonial narrative, and instead situate the show's Native Americans in larger discursive patterns about nature and landscape. Native Americans were not merely representatives of an uncivilized culture that should be colonized, but rather represented as a part of the ecology of a hostile environment. The western landscape was culturally imagined to be a hostile place where death was always near. When trying to understand mankind's place in this hostile environment, the show dramatized the danger by pointing to two visible and instantly recognizable symbols of the western landscape: wild broncos and Native Americans. There was a fundamental similarity in the way that these two symbols were understood. Both were prominent elements of the western landscape, and consequently the way both were treated reveals how the culture looking at them and the Wild West understood the relationship between man and nature in this unique landscape.

When looking at how Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented Native Americans, it is important to keep in mind that they were not the only ethnic group in the circus. The show featured performers from many different countries and ethnicities. In addition to Native Americans and American Cowboys, the show employed: Ukrainian Cossacks, French Zouaves, Argentinean gauchos, Syrian nomads, Mexican vaqueros, as well as military units from Germany and Great Britain. However, Indians occupied a singularly important role. They were constantly advertised, present in a majority of acts, emphasized in programs, and newspapers lavished the most attention on them. Buffalo

Bill's Wild West painted American Indians as the *Volk* of the American West. Native Americans were an essential part of the landscape and had a special connection to the landscape that allowed them to understand it better than anyone else.

Physically, Native Americans were conceived of throughout the program literature as representative of a racial group distinct from whites. The program physically set them apart from whites by negatively emphasizing their stereotypical physical appearance:

Their paint and feathers, their hook noses, serpent-like lips, cold, glittering black eyes and haughty port mark them as the genuine thing and members of the Four Hundred of their race . . . They are painted from head to foot – yellow, red, green and blue, legs, arms, bodies and faces, plain and in designs. They wear enormous head-dresses, and great fans of eagle feathers stick out from their backs. Their war dances are enough to make one have bad dreams – the bowing, mowing figures; grinning gibbering faces, the gaudy, bird-like dresses – inhuman and uncanny.¹¹⁷

The program's racist description leaves no doubt in the minds of its readers that the show's Indians are physiologically different from whites. They are described as ugly and serpent-like. This description serves not only to identify Native Americans as a normatively different racial group, but also to contrast them to the show's description of white heroes who – like Buffalo Bill's label of "a remarkable specimen of manly beauty" – are glowingly described as attractive.¹¹⁸

The 1900 Program says "The bow is the natural weapon of the wild tribes of the West . . . the weapon supreme of every savage's outfit – in fact, his principal

¹¹⁷ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (1898), p. 23.

¹¹⁸ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (1886), p. 7.

dependence, backed by personal skill in its use for sustenance for himself and his papposes [sic]. . . It still retains its favor as it is not always safe to rely on the whiteman's mechanism, as in case of lack of ammunition, or deranged lock or trigger, time and location prevent its being 'mended.'"¹¹⁹ The program points to how, in the hands of a skillful archer, the bow is more practical than the 'whiteman's mechanism.' As evidenced by the very tools each race uses in the West, Native Americans reliance on a simple and effective weapon demonstrates that Native American technology – and by extension culture – is more fitting on the frontier than that imported by whites. Moreover, the program emphasizes the Native Americans place as a part of nature by stating that archery is necessary for his "sustenance" and that of his offspring. The language implies that Native Americans only care about the creation and the survival of progeny, thus solidly placing them as existing in the same motivational category as animals. The program returns to this theme when it speaks about buffalo. According to the program, "primitive man in America found this animal his principal means of subsistence, while to pioneers, hunters, emigrants, settlers, and railroad builders this fast disappearing monarch of the plains was invaluable."¹²⁰ While Indians only rely on it to eat, the harbingers of civilization found it invaluable for reasons that remain unmentioned. Moreover, the whites are credited with bringing about the extinction of the buffalo, while Native Americans had never overhunted the species into extinction. American Indians are therefore presented as living in balance with the western landscape

¹¹⁹ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World* (1900), 14-5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

in a way that whites do not. American Indians are in harmony with nature, they are recognized part of nature; while Europeans are invasive people who are causing the “monarch of the plains” to disappear.

The visual representation of Native Americans as the *Volk* of the western landscape is most pronounced in the 1881 poster “He-Nu-Kaw. (The First born).” [Fig. 9]¹²¹ A beautiful Native American woman stands dressed in elaborate Native American clothing. She holds the practical instrument for survival, the bow. In the background is a Native American village that further serves to link her to the Native American race as a whole. Her connection to nature is visually driven home by the feathers she wears in her hair as well as the flowers and rocks with which she shares the foreground. However, the most striking link the poster makes to her connection with the environment is the very title of the poster. The artist calls her “the first born.” She represents a culture at its most primitive and natural state. Without the trappings of civilization, the artist suggests, American Indians have an intimate relationship with nature. They are as all mankind once was, “the first born.” She serves to represent the deep link to the natural world that European civilization has lost, but which Native Americans still have.

In painting Native Americans as the *Volk* of the West, they are also depicted as dangerous and savage as the landscape they inhabit. Like broncos, they are painted as wild symbols of nature on the frontier. Like the horses, Native Americans are savage (wild), war-like (dangerous), a worthy foe, and ultimately able to be tamed by European civilization (spurs and reins) and one with a strong will. The 1886 program contains a

¹²¹ Rennert, 78.

letter by Cody to the New York Herald in which he writes about a possible war with the American Indians saying "it is a war with a most wily and savage people, yet the whites are restricted by a humane and peaceful desire to prevent bloodshed, and save a people from themselves. It is like cooling and calming a volcano. Ordinary warfare shows no parallel."¹²² The shows program thus paints Indians as a dangerous enemy, unbound by the rules of civilization and decency that Europeans are compelled to obey. He compares waging a war against Native Americans to cooling and calming a volcano. American Indians are filled with the passion and wildness of the western landscape, savageness fundamentally similar to mustangs. Cody urges America to attempt to tame this savage passion in a war led out of a desire to 'save a people from themselves.' Thus it is Native Americans' wildness that makes them a dangerous foe, but like the bucking broncos they can, and should, be tamed and controlled by benevolent whites.

Another program emphasizes Native American 'recklessness' in battle, and says it is caused by their religion. According to the program, Indian believe that if they are scalped then their soul is destroyed. "Reckless charges are made and desperate chances taken to carry off unscalped the body of a loved chief, a relative, or friend. Numerous instances have occurred where many were killed in vain efforts to recover and carry off the unscalped body of slain warriors."¹²³ In addition, the account suggests that Native American religion has no abstract understanding of good and evil. Without this basic morality, Native Americans behave in whatever way that suits them the most whether it

¹²² *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (1886), 50.

¹²³ 1885, 19.

is "to steal a horse of the wife of a friend, to kill another Indian or raid a settlement."¹²⁴

The program thus seems to suggest that Indians are so enmeshed in nature that they have no form of morality, and only act according to the dictates of present desire. In this way, their morality is like animals', unaltered by any abstract principles. The lack of civilization's most basic rules presents itself in the way Indians conceive of the spiritual cosmos and causes them to be unpredictable and hostile. At the same time, their superstitious belief about scalps causes them to be reckless and fearless in war. Indian religion, the program argues, is as savage and unpredictable as the natural landscape with which Indians have a special bond. Thus, the very closeness of Indians to nature caused their unpredictable nature, recklessness, dangerous battle tactics, and puts them in natural struggle with whites who cling to a sense of morality. According to this program, nature dictates their morality as well as defines their savage outlook on life. As a result of their savageness and their nature-dictated amorality, Native Americans inevitably war with whites on the prairie.

It is therefore necessary for Cody and others to tame Indians in the same way that they would tame a bronco or more broadly his natural surroundings. In overcoming Native Americans, they are not only conquering an inferior colonized people, but also conquering the western landscape. The show presents the mankind-nature battle as a struggle for mastery, and Cody's battles with Native Americans are part of his larger struggle with the dangerous western landscape.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

The 1899 program includes an account of a battle against Indians in which Cody and Wild Bill fought together. "WILD BILL gave chase to Black Kettle, head chief of the Cheyennes, overtook and engaged the fleeing red warrior, stabbing him to death." He was immediately surrounded by "fully fifty Indians" who intended on killing him. Buffalo Bill rode in to save him. "the two daring and intrepid scouts plunged furiously into the midst of the Indians, each with a revolver in either hand, and literally carved their way through the surging mass of redskins, leaving a furrow of dead Indians in their wake."¹²⁵ This stunning passage recounts how, by demonstration of selflessness and courage – two supposed hallmarks of European civilization – Cody and Wild Bill achieve victory over their Native American foes. The program brings Cody's and Wild Bill's adherence to the moral principles of courage, sacrifice, and loyalty into even more relief by contrasting them to their Native American enemy. Though the leader of his people, the "red warrior" fled from the battlefield in an attempt to save himself.

However, perhaps the most interesting language surrounds the hostilities after Cody and Hickock kill Black Kettle. They are immediately encircled by a "surging mass of redskins." The narrative then compares the scouts to a plow carving through virgin land. The program describes this bloody scene to agricultural cultivation and making untitled land usable. The Indians themselves become an anonymous surging mass, while the two scouts leave in their wake a furrow of dead bodies. Apart from dehumanizing the Native Americans, this section demonstrates the degree to which taming/killing Native people was identified with shaping the natural environment and taming a wild

¹²⁵ 1899, 16.

landscape and the contrast between heroic and selfless European morality and Native ethics in which simple survival is so important that even chiefs and leaders run in battle.

All the show's material dramatizes battles against Native Americans, and some even offer a tacit approval of genocide. In order to control American Indians, the programs urged any means necessary, even if it meant eliminating the very presence of Indians in the West.¹²⁶ Apart from the previous quotation in which Cody's courage was proven by his wholesale slaughter of Native Americans, the show also gave nods to genocidal violence directed against non-combatants. Following the Battle of Little Bighorn, Cody asked for volunteers to avenge Custer's death. One of the respondents, "Texas" Jack Crawford, wrote a poem to Cody agreeing to fight with him. This poem found a prominent place in the 1885 program:

Send five thousand men towards Reno,
 And soon we won't leave a red.
 It'll save Uncle Sam lots of money;
 In fortresses we need not invest;
 Jest [sic] wollup the devils this summer
 And the miners will do all the rest.

....
 They talk of peace with these demons
 By feeding and clothing them well;
 I'd sooner think an angel from Heaven

¹²⁶ It is important to separate the programs and the shows' written material from Cody. Though Cody definitely approved of the wars waged against Indians, participated in them, took part in attacks on Native American villages, and favored keeping Native Americans on reservations; it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that he favored the mass murder of Native Americans. He sometimes intervened at the behest of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to resolve conflicts between the governments and Native Americans. His mediation was successful on many occasions in avoiding open war. He was even accused by several generals and directors of giving up too much to Native Americans. However, despite these personal accomplishments, his show often glorified violence against Indians.

Would reign with contentment in H-I.
 And one day those Quakers will answer
 Before the great judge of us all,
 For the death of daring young Custer
 And the boys who round him did fall

Perhaps I am judging them harshly,
 But I mean what I'm telling ye, pard;
 I'm letting them down mighty easy,
 Perhaps they may think it is hard,
 But I tell you the day is approaching –
 The boys are beginning to muster –
 That day of the great retribution,
 The day of revenge for our Custer.¹²⁷

The program favors killing all the “reds” between Montana and Reno to save the government money. Instead of wasting resources on defensive forts, the program suggests that the “demons” should simply be “wollupped.” To tame the frontier, Native Americans must be reduced. To be sure, this suggested war would be done for retribution; however, the program betrays an assumption that it is impossible to make peace with Indians or even to trust them. It goes on to say that God will judge Quakers – and by logical extension other pacifists opposed to this method of subjugating Indians – for their inaction. This effectively suggests that God favors controlling Indians through this bloody method. Jack continues to use apocalyptic language by vaguely mentioning that soon the “day of great retribution” will come against the Native Americans. By publishing this poem in its entirety, with no explanation or apology, the program reveals the show’s deep underlying bias against Native Americans.

¹²⁷ 1886, 16.

Also noticeable is that even when attempting to present Native Americans in a positive light, the only authorities the programs acknowledge as understanding Native culture well enough to praise it are whites in positions of authority.¹²⁸ All the programs surveyed in this paper point to “renowned Indian fighters” as those most qualified to comment on Native American culture and character.¹²⁹ Moreover, in one place the show’s material cites missionaries as experts on their character.¹³⁰ It is striking that when American Indians receive praise, it is given by those who are actively engaged in taming them. Examples from the show’s material that link killing Native Americans to cultivating the frontier are too numerous to recount within this short essay. It is helpful, however, to again turn to a poster used to advertise the show’s arrival to a town. Central to the 1893 poster “On the Stage Coach” [Fig. 10] is the coach – an instantly recognizable symbol of civilization on the frontier.¹³¹ It is the stage coach that is used to bring whites to the west, and invaluable in linking frontier towns to one another. In comparison to the whites’ brandishing of pistols and rifles, the Native Americans use bows and arrows, the archetypal primitive weapon. The contrast between firearm and

¹²⁸ Even when attempting to portray Native Americans in a better way than just an amoral and inferior race, Native Americans are unsurprisingly presented in a stereotypical and condescending way. For example, the 1898 program writes “Bad whiskey makes the bad Indian, and the bad white man makes the bad whiskey.” (10) Though the message of the epigram is that Native Americans are not bad by nature, they are nonetheless demeaned as a race by brandishing them as drunkards and implying that at the root all nineteenth-century Indian uprisings is alcohol. Another example is provided by Bishop Whipple who says of them “The North American Indian is the noblest type of a heathen man on earth.” (11) Though praising them as noble, he is quick to distinguish them from Christians who are implicitly more noble.

¹²⁹ 1898, 11. See also 1893, 50.

¹³⁰ 1898, 11.

¹³¹ Rennert, 55.

bow instantly draws comparisons between nature and civilization. To further make the point that the American Indians are the wild, untamed western landscape incarnate, they are all bare-chested, clad only in leather, feather, and muscles. In comparison, the Whites are all fully clothed, with only the flesh their head and hands showing. Moreover, whereas the whites are using the implements of civilization – saddles, whips, harnesses, and blinders – to control their horses, the Native Americans are riding bareback with only primitive reigns. In the distance one can immediately recognize Cody riding a white horse to beat off the unfair attack on the stage coach by the Native Americans. By doing so, he beats off the attack on civilization by the wild, unruly forces of the western landscape.

In Buffalo Bill's Wild West, both Native Americans and wild horses became symbols of the western landscape. The show dramatized colonization as a battle against nature, and presented it as an attempt at subjugation of the dangerous landscape. The Wild West used two visible features of this landscape to personalize the colonizing struggle and allow heroes to overcome their natural surroundings. Cody and his troop presented nature and civilization as in direct opposition to one another. American Indians and horses were wild antagonists to European bringers of civilization and order. Selflessness and courage defined the heroes of civilization who attempted to conquer the landscape; passion, wildness, and amorality were the attributes of their foes. In overcoming these two symbols, the heroes of the show were presented as breaking the western landscape. The colonizers that the show praised transcended the American West in part by taming horses and Native Americans. Therefore, this paper argues, a useful

way to study the colonial experience is not only to look at the racial, economic, and political motivations held by colonizers, but also appreciate the colonizers' outlook on important aspects of the natural and cultural landscape. The desire to impose civilization on nature is, of course, not the singular aspect of the colonization; however, it is a central part of the portrait of conquest that Buffalo Bill's Wild West painted.

Germans on the Animals and American Indians of the Wild West Show

After watching the Wild West, the reviewer for the *Berliner Zeitung* wrote "it is really nothing new that we saw there, we have already seen it – not with our living eyes, but rather only in the dreams of our childhood Nothing arouses the imaginations of children to the same measure as stories of the Indians, of pathfinders and backwoodsmen."¹³² This admission once again offers striking proof that German audiences approached the show with preconceptions about the scenes they were shown. It is natural that Germans substituted their own idealized version of the West on the show that they were watching. These preconceptions allowed them to substitute their own images of Native Americans, the western landscape, and nature for the ones that the show tried to convey. This paper continues its earlier line of inquiry by looking at how German audiences rejected the Wild West troupe's authority, and attached their own understandings of the show that they believed to be a relatively authentic reenactment of the American west.

¹³² "Bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Zeitung* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

Naturally, different individuals watching the same show took different meanings from the portrait they were presented; however, when looking at the German reviews as a whole several themes become immediately noticeable which seem to suggest that Germans saw both race relations in the West and the interaction between man and animal very differently than the show's performers. This section of the paper looks at how Germans viewed the interaction between man and nature by looking at their conceptions of the show's Native Americans and how they depicted man-animal relationships in the West.

Much has been published on the exhibition of Native Americans in Europe. Often this literature is written in a purely English context. In addition to the previously discussed material written about Buffalo Bill's Wild West, many examinations about American Indians in Europe focus on the Native Americans that George Catlin brought to Great Britain in the mid nineteenth century. These studies overwhelmingly present these exhibitions in a purely colonial light. When historians study the Native Americans who came to Europe, it is often presented as a two way contact: American Indians are exposed to a civilized world that is vastly different from their own, while they are simultaneously subjected to the colonial gaze of Europeans. As a result of strict adherence to this analytical schema, authors simplify European responses to Native Americans. First and foremost, Europeans are essentialized.¹³³ Reactions to Indian

¹³³ Historians have often failed to heed Glenn Penny's warning that "we cannot simply transpose the British experiences that inform so much of our understanding . . . onto German history." Differences between European countries, cultures, and the constituent groups of their societies are eliminated in order to present a monolithic homogeneous

exhibitions are presented as being fundamentally shaped by racial tropes.¹³⁴

Consequently, good historians often ignore or downplay the complexities of European thought about Native Americans that go beyond the simplistic relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Historians looking at the European tours of Buffalo Bill's Wild West often refuse to study the attention lavished on Native Americans by German audiences. Indeed, Daniele Fiorentino writes that before the media hysteria created by accusations that the show's Indians were mistreated in Hamburg, "Germans had . . . almost ignored the presence of Indians in the show."¹³⁵ Although even a cursory examination of the newspapers collected in William F. Cody's European scrapbook proves this statement wrong, her assertion nonetheless indicates the degree to which German audiences' fascination by the show's Native Americans has been overlooked by scholars. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, as Glenn Penny posits, "the majority of scholars who have examined this period have focused . . . on locating the antecedents to the racial and biological theories promoted by German anthropologists during Weimar and Nazi periods."¹³⁶

portrait of Europeans as simply colonizers. The voices of individual audience members are substituted with theory.

¹³⁴ See for example, Kasson, 162., Danielle Fiorentino "Those Red-Brick Faces: European Press Reactions to the Indians of Buffalo Bill's Wild West" in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Aachen: Raeder, 1987): 403-414, 403, and Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business*, 112.

¹³⁵ Fiorentino, 408.

¹³⁶ Penny, 3.

Although a poster publicity blitz trumpeted to German cities that the Wild West was coming, the circus's parade was the most visible sign that the show was entering a town. As Janet Davis vividly notes, parades were a huge event in the nineteenth-century that overwhelmed both small and large cities.¹³⁷ It is therefore not surprising that many German newspapers began their coverage of Buffalo Bill's Wild West by sending reporters to the parade. The parade's magnitude and exoticness must have awed the people who lined the streets to watch. One obviously impressed correspondent wrote, "89 tents for the 200 Indians, cowboys, musicians and shooters, their 21 buffalo and well over 200 horses and all their accoutrements. Chipka how!"¹³⁸ Indians, cowboys, vaqueros, horses, and buffalo marched with colorful banners and outfits down the street. When describing the procession's beginning, a correspondent for the Braunschweig *Tageblatt* wrote, "High on a steed, 'the King of the Cowboys' Buck Taylor accompanied by mounted cowboys and vaqueros who ride in the middle of the stately buffalo herd. The powerful figure of Buck Taylor, with his wild looks under a mighty sombrero, makes a magnificent impression."¹³⁹ It was choreographed in such a way that the

¹³⁷ Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2-4.

¹³⁸ "Eine Antrittsvisite bei Buffalo Bill," *Das Kleine Journal* (Berlin) 23 July 1890. This journalist was not the only one amazed by the circus's ability to load and unload so many things from trains at such lightening speed. While touring through Germany, the German army sent observers to take minute notes of how the troupe accomplished this logistical feat. The logistical and practical knowledge they gained from the troupe was implemented by the army, and practiced in order to effectively load and unload supplies from rail. Eventually German soldiers used the lessons learned by these military attaches to mobilize during the First World War.

¹³⁹ *Anzeiger* (Magdeburg) 25 June 1890. also same quote in *Tagblatt* (Braunschweig) 15 July 1890

show's various racial and gendered groups filed by in distinct groups.¹⁴⁰ However, as the correspondent describes it, Mexican Vaqueros and American Cowboys mix seamlessly and are surrounded by the mighty buffalo. Though the correspondent concedes that Native Americans are all together, he describes them in a way very similar to his description of the group of cowboys. The reporter emphasizes that they too are surrounded by magnificent animals (in their case horses) and are being lead by their powerful chiefs. The language employed by this journalist is primarily concerned with painting Indians as a romantic and beautiful scene from the West, and does not make mention of their racial characteristics, savagery, or primitiveness. He instead presents as fundamentally similar to the cowboys who preceded them. Both are equally component parts of the Western landscape, and the reviewer makes no distinction between the two. He does not attempt to paint one group as better or worse than the other, but rather points to similarities.

Another correspondent, describing the same part of the parade mentioned "an inconspicuous feathered herder and rider" who carried a sign reading "performances during all weather."¹⁴¹ His comment that the rider is feathered designates the herder as an Indian, but by saying that the rider is inconspicuous, the journalist lumps him with the jumble of other westerners who had taken over the streets. The Indian was not a villain to be despised, but rather a person – who along with the white Cowboys – is a natural part of the landscape. Both Cowboys and Indians are integral parts of the West. Unlike

¹⁴⁰ *Seven Acts of the Wild West Show*.

¹⁴¹ *Leipziger Nachrichten* (Leipzig) June 17, 1890 (43)

the show, that presented its whites as triumphantly conquering the natural landscape, this German journalist conceived of both Indians and Cowboys as defining the Western landscape. Furthermore, the writer writes of the person as simply a rider, rather than mentioning that he is showing the difficult task of mastering a horse and by extension mastering nature. By describing the person as a rider he turns two objects, a horse and a man, into one hybridized unit. Like his feather, the horse simply becomes a part of the Indian's outfit.

After the parade finished, and the camp was constructed, the first show was held. At the performance's start, a narrator introduced the cast of the Wild West, they all came out in rows, then on Buffalo Bill's order they saluted the audience and rode away in an intricately planned drill. This segment of the program was known as the "Grand Entrance," and a few film clips from this act survive today.¹⁴² By introducing the different tribes and nationalities individually, the narrator differentiated the groups. However, many German journalists describe the scene in ways that minimize racial differences. According to one, "the whole Wild West troop: Indians, Cowboys, and Vaqueros are a colorful mixture. They take to a trot and mix themselves into wild chaos – a gloriously colorful picture – steed and rider disappears into a whirling dusty cloud."¹⁴³ Though the show introduced each racial group individually, this journalist revels in the way that the races mix together and create a living, colorful picture of the

¹⁴² *Seven Acts of the Wild West*

¹⁴³ "Ein Nachmittag bei Buffalo Bill's Wild West" *Rheinische Merker* (Cologne) 20 September 1890.

landscape's diversity. In this reporter's description, whites, Mexicans, and Indians lose their racial distinctiveness.

This theme is again visited by another review looking at the Grand Entrance who describes the shows participants:

Arapaho, Bruce, Cut-off, Sioux, and Cheyenne Indians and their chiefs like 'Schwarzes Herz' and 'Tapfer Bär' and so on; the cowboys of the prairie with their tanned colleagues of the Mexican steppes named Vaqueros; the specialty of the whole troop is shooting and riding. Finally after all arrange themselves in a long salutary line, on a beautiful snow white horse appears the most important person himself: Col. W.F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) the chief pathfinder of the United States Army.¹⁴⁴

This reviewer mentions Indians, Mexicans, and whites all in the same sentence, and even refers to them as colleagues. Furthermore, all line up to salute "the most important person of all," Buffalo Bill. The author assumes a commonness of purpose among all the performers. Far from being an antagonistic relationship, the reporter depicts a degree of unity among all the performers. The reviewer also does not point to the racial features or the savage nature of Native Americans that the program uses to distinguish them from the civilized whites, but instead presents them as men standing shoulder to shoulder with white cowboys. Moreover, the author compliments Cody's horse as snow white and beautiful. Describing the horse in this way effectively minimizes the skill and danger associated with riding a mustang that the Wild West constantly states. Instead, the horse becomes a part of Cody's handsome outfit. Cody and his horse are not portrayed as antagonistic, but simply as naturally belonging together. The *Hannover Tageblatt* uses

¹⁴⁴ *Tageblatt* (Braunschweig) 16 July 1890.. When translating quotations that contain Native American names, this paper uses English when the author provides a translation, and the German names when they are used.

very similar language to describe the Grand Entrance by writing, "It was a splendid sight, the wild figures of the horses . . . every man an accomplished rider. With princely posture Col. Cody commanded them all, the powerful figure sat in the saddle, strong and courageous."¹⁴⁵ This quotation takes the lack of racial identification even further by not recognizing the different racial groups present, and saying that all the men (both Native and White) were accomplished riders, and were equally united behind Cody's powerful leadership. Though the horses are wild, there is not necessarily an antagonistic relationship between man and beast. The horses are not tamed to obey the will of man, but rather the riders and horses combine to create a splendid sight.

This broad examination of journalists' immediate impressions of the Wild West has to begin illuminating several discourses that stand in contrast to the show's presentation of the man/animal and European/non-white relationships. I will now expand on these themes by offering an in-depth examination of how individual critics in German audiences thought of the horse and Native Americans. I will begin by looking at the mustang.

To be sure, some journalists writing about the taming of horses framed their discussion in a very similar way to how Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented it, as a dangerous battle in which man asserts his mastery over animals. One reporter writes that after cowboys lasso the horse "comes the hard part of the job. With danger to their lives, the cowboys near the animal, throw on the bridle and lay on the heavy Mexican saddle. The horse then immediately feels the 'unacceptable touch,' as the rider immediately

¹⁴⁵ "Bei den Indianern auf der Radfahrer-Rennbahn" *Tageblatt* (Hannover) 3 July 1890.

springs on the saddle.”¹⁴⁶ Another says “at the same time as the capture of wild horses with lassos was the highly interesting and dangerous riding of bucking horses, which up until then remained untamed and very unruly. A thousand different styles were shown to us as to how the cowboy captures the bucking horse and brandishes the saddle.”¹⁴⁷

Finally, and perhaps most forcefully, one reviewer posits “The style with which these animals are caught with the lasso, mounted and ridden is such that the man summons all his strength and stamina and battles the animal for control. This offers a spectacle of high inspiration, excitement, and always universal applause.”¹⁴⁸

These journalists all paint a picture of the horse taming event that would undoubtedly please the show’s publicists. They all present the horse riding acts as a battle between man and beast for control that is of great danger to the lives of *both* participants. These writers paint men and animals as enemies. Horses try to shake off the cowboy, while man tames and conquers the wild beast. The event ends, as all these writers notice, with the brandishing of the saddle and the subjugation of nature to the tools of civilization. It is natural that some writer’s reviews were heavily influenced by the show’s written and visual material, and that their article’s underlying messages about the man/animal relationship were similar to the ones intended by the show. Though indeed some members of the audience dismissed the performer’s authority, not all would. Some happily accept the words of the program and the narrator as accurately

¹⁴⁶ “Unter Indianern und Cowboys,” *General Anzeiger* (Leipzig) 22 June 1890.

¹⁴⁷ “Ein Nachmittag bei Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” *Rheinische Merker* (Cologne) 20 September 1890.

¹⁴⁸ “Buffalo Bills Wild West *Hierste Nachrichten* (Hannover) 4 July, 1890.

relaying the underlying meanings of the show's images. Were one to read only these reviews, one would think that the act brought German audiences to the edge of their seat with tension and anxiety, fearing the injury or even death of the performers. These reviews imply that audiences held their breath in the same way they would if watching a tightrope walker or trapeze; however, this seems to not have always been true.

According to one provocative account, "The riding of the bucking broncos constitutes one of the most interesting parts of the performance and evokes much resounding laughter as the animals rear and kick forward and back trying to shake the rider off, and creates a delightful scene if steed and rider fall."¹⁴⁹ According to this account, the great majority of the German audience did not see this event as dangerous and life-threatening – as the show intended – but rather as a type of slapstick comedy that caused the entire audience to erupt in laughter when riders were thrown from their bucking horse. Thus, perhaps the tense scenes depicted by the earlier reviewers were not as widespread and universal among German audiences as the reporters would have their readers believe and as the Wild West would have wanted.

In addition to the discourse among individual journalists that more or less fell in line with the show's intention by presenting horses and humanity as enemies engaged in battle for mastery, others reached strikingly different conclusions than those intended by the show. In descriptions of the parade and Grand Entrance, there was often less emphasis placed on man controlling and taming a wild opponent in favor of steed and man becoming one. Horses are simply part of a true Westerner. Germans thought of the

¹⁴⁹ "Buffalo Bill's Wild West-Truppe," *Anzeigblatt* (Hannover) 4 July 1890.

western mustang and the western man as a team. Rather than seeing rider and horse as antagonists fundamentally opposed and engaged in battle, they were conceived of as existing as a single hybridized being in the western landscape. Defining one as master and the other as slave is less important than seeing both as naturally existing together, and inextricably bound. In the wild Western landscape, Germans thought it was simply the natural order that man and animal be together as partners and not as vanquished beast and triumphant man.

The programs continually describe how Buffalo Bill was able to push his horses to their limit through his physical mastery and moral qualities; however, the correspondent for the *Berliner Börsen Courier* presents a very different picture. "Under a great awning lie the horses, the tough and overall nimble Mexican mustangs. 'Old Charlie,' who has for a long time been out of his prime, ate. The horse on which Buffalo Bill made his famous duration ride neighs no more joyfully than when his master approaches."¹⁵⁰ This picture presents the horse as loving Buffalo Bill rather than fearing him as a powerful master. The relationship between Cody and the mustang is shown as a tender relationship between two friends. Bill continues visiting him, even though Old Charlie is old, while the animal still harbors great, genuine affection for the person whom he had long carried.

This discursive pattern is continued in the Leipzig *Intelligenzblatt*, which writes "A race radiantly shows you the stamina of the horse and the courage of the rider."¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ "Bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Börsen Courier* (Berlin) 23 July 1890.

¹⁵¹ "Buffalo Bills Wild West," *Intelligenzblatt* (Leipzig) 19 June 1890.

When engaged in a competition, this review points to the qualities of both the horse and the rider. This imagery directly contrasts the program's description of how Cody outran Indian pursuers. The program only emphasized the rider's qualities (comparing Buffalo Bill's motivation and morality to the Native Americans) and suggests that the one thing motivating Cody's horse to run faster was reign and spur. In contrast to the program's one-sided praise of the rider's qualities and the importance it places on physical mastery, the German reviewer is much quicker to recognize the equal contributions of both rider and horse in achieving speed. However, this discourse can most fully be seen when a reviewer states, "To the Indians and cowboys naturally belong their horses, when they ride them, they appear to be Centaurs. These horses, particularly the small bucking mustangs are unbridled and wild."¹⁵² Another reviewer writes that during the show "man and steed appear to be one essence [Wesen]."¹⁵³ Here horse and man become of one spirit. Physically and spiritually man and animal seem to become the same. This language is far different than what was written by the show. Rather than emphasizing physical mastery and man's ability to conquer nature, these reviewers paint the relationship between man and animal as more equal. The animals retain their own abilities and personalities and shape the rider as much as they are shaped by him. This way of viewing the man/animal relationship is a prominent feature of German reviews talking about the riding and taming of horses that is absent from the show's promotional material.

¹⁵² "Buffalo Bills Wilder Westen," *Anzeiger* (Tharand und Wohorn) 3 June 1890.

¹⁵³ *Deutsche Volkszeitung* (Hannover) 6 July 1890.

Another discursive feature about horses in the Wild West present in German reviews and absent in material produced by the show is the suggestion that the show's animals are never completely tamed. When describing the show's act that involves the capturing of wild horses a Leipzig paper writes, "of interest was . . . the attempts to tame the bucking horses, which never become completely tame."¹⁵⁴ Even buffalo – whose only purpose in the circus was to appear shot and captured – were portrayed as wild beasts from the prairie by a reviewer who writes that their "quiet herd, which is simply magnificent, will be made very wild during the hunt."¹⁵⁵ The presentation of animals as maintaining a wild element is completely at odds with the performers' intentions. The show tried to present its celebrities as heroes who overcome the Western landscape by vanquishing the ferocity of their animal foes, not to present horses and buffalo as keeping – despite the best efforts of their would-be tamers – a portion of their wild nature.

Thus the discursive pattern created by German audience members about the relationship between man and nature in the Western landscape varied greatly from the one created by performers. Whereas the show presented its heroes as engaging in a dangerous battle with animals for mastery, German audiences saw the man/animal relationship as more a partnership of equals. Animals maintained their will and to an extent their wildness. Animals and man were so intertwined that they became one essence, devoted to living in the hostile Western landscape and overcoming together the

¹⁵⁴ *Anzeiger und Tageblatt* (Pirna) 3 June 1890.

¹⁵⁵ "Buffalo Bill in Berlin" *Das Kleine Journal* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

challenges posed to them by the landscape. To be sure, some reviewers saw the man and animal in a similar light as the show, but some German reviewers espoused ideas about the interactions between man and the Western animals that stood at odds to the show's messages. The divergence from the performance's message is much more emphatic when German audiences wrote about the Indians they saw in the show.

Historiography seems to show that Europeans – including Germans – conceived of Native Americans as being 'of nature.' Germans traveling to America, as well as those writing about America, often presented American Indians as being the natural state of man.¹⁵⁶ In addition to the Wild West adherence to this basic understanding, it seems as though German audiences watching the show did as well. There is no portrayal in any of the newspapers reviewed by this paper of Native Americans being in any other light. They are not called charlatans, portrayed as enjoying the arrival of European civilization, or depicted as living at odds with nature. Like the program, reviews praise the practicality of Native American customs as necessary for survival. Though whites on the frontier adapt to life in the wilderness, German reporters write descriptions such as "especially practical is the Native American."¹⁵⁷ Native Americans are praised for their houses, their weapons, even their riding ability. Critics seem to suggest that Native Americans, as a result of an underlying closeness to nature, have evolved a culture and lifestyle perfectly suited to survival on the plains. Moreover, Native Americans were

¹⁵⁶ Harry Liebersohn, *Aristocratic Encounters*.

¹⁵⁷ "Der Wilde Westen," *Börsen Courier Zeitung* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

often linked to nature in metaphorical description. For example, one reporter described Yellow Hair's black hair as "horse mane-like."¹⁵⁸

Native Americans are also depicted as having an especially close relationship with the Western frontier; even being compared to buffalo. Both are parts of the Western landscape that are receding in front of the westward push of civilization. One article states that by 1930 there would be no more Native Americans.¹⁵⁹ A different paper stressed the absolute reliance of Native Americans on buffalo for survival, then launches into a description of how the buffalo herds are disappearing. The article blames the railroad for killing 85% of the herds, says the horns and bones that litter the plains, and concludes that only limited numbers survive in wildlife refuges.¹⁶⁰ By commenting on the reliance of Native Americans to buffalo and saying that the railroad is making buffalo go extinct the article logically leads its readers to conclude that the westward push of civilization causes Native American cultures to vanish. German papers seem to agree with the great nineteenth century German ethnologist Adolf Bastian who wrote "the Indians of North America vanish . . . like snow before the rising sun of civilization."¹⁶¹ Native Americans are inextricably linked to nature and the Western landscape, and civilization's nature-ordained advance into this pristine landscape necessarily means the disappearance of Native cultures. This paper assumes that German audiences, in keeping with a long tradition of philosophy and anthropology,

¹⁵⁸ "Bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Börsen Courier* (Berlin) 23 July 1890.

¹⁵⁹ "Ein Indianerkrieg in Sicht," *Anzeiger und Tageblatt* (Freiberg) 1 June 1890.

¹⁶⁰ "Die Reste des nordamerikanischen Bisons," *Journal* (Dresden) 11 June 1890.

¹⁶¹ Penny, 33.

saw Native Americans as an inherent part of their environment. Though they were indeed men, they nonetheless represented a natural aspect of the Western landscape. As a result, when German reviewers write about the Native Americans in the show they are not only writing about a culture and a race, but also about the western landscape.

American Indians become the personification of nature, and thus white interactions with them can help elucidate ideas toward the natural world and American wilderness.

The German ethnological tradition was very different than Anglo-American traditions. It largely dismissed the idea that certain races were biologically inferior to others and that some cultures were normatively inferior to others.¹⁶² Moreover, Germans had no contact with Native Americans, did not govern the West, and were late to gain colonies. It is therefore unsurprising that reviewers thought of the Indians they saw differently than the white troupe members. German audiences often perceived Native Americans as less antagonistic than the show portrayed them. Rather than seeing Indians as an element of nature that must – like the Western landscape as a whole – be tamed, German reviews saw American Indians sympathetically. While Indians were part of this broader landscape, they were also fellow humans who should be understood, valued, and appreciated. This can be observed in how Germans behaved toward to their Native American visitors in addition to the reviews written about the show. When unsubstantiated rumors surfaced that the Wild West was starving and treating the Indians

¹⁶² Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind* (New York: Queensland University Press, 1983); Annemarie Fiedermutz-Laun *Der Kulturhistorische Gedanke bei Adolf Bastian* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970); Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture*.

badly, German public opinion rose in outrage. So strong were the howls of protest that the German government formed a commission to look at the treatment of the show's Native American performers. Moreover, numerous German articles are preserved in the scrapbooks that give very sympathetic accounts of the plight of Indians in the west. These reviews criticize American policies toward Native Americans, and reservations, and cast much blame for the Indian conflicts away from the Indians.¹⁶³ The arrival of the show to towns and the interest in Native American affairs it caused among the paper's readers led to articles about Native Americans that were progressive by nineteenth century standards.

When describing their meetings with Native Americans, the German press often did not present them as antagonistic to whites. On the contrary, they were usually portrayed as friendly and affable.¹⁶⁴ German reporters when meeting Native Americans were often shocked with not only their friendliness, but also their majesty. According to a reporter for the *Rossische Zeitung*, Red Bear is "an immensely powerful man of the Sioux, chief and Magician (medicine man) all in one."¹⁶⁵ He then continues by describing Black Heart and Eagle Horn as charismatic, powerful figures. This is a strikingly different picture than the one painted by the programs. Rather than describing them as physically ugly or wanting only whisky and bacon, the writers comment on how

¹⁶³ See for example, *National Staatsbürger Zeitung* (Berlin) 27 July 1890; "Ein Indianerkrieg in Sicht," *Anzeiger und Tageblatt* (Freiberg) 1 June 1890.

¹⁶⁴ See for example: *Rossische Zeitung* (Berlin) 24 July 1890; "Eine Antrittsvisite bei Buffalo Bill," *Das Kleine Journal* (Berlin) 23 July 1890; "Bei Buffalo Bill" *Berliner Börsen Courier* (Berlin) 23 July 1890.

¹⁶⁵ *Rossische Zeitung* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

awe-inspiring the Native American's physical presence is. Though to German journalists, firefights between whites and Indians were an essential component for an accurate picture of the West, and they even concede that participation in these battles defines a hero, there is a bittersweet quality to these fights. The reviewers call these fights unnecessary and tragic. Indeed, one reviewer compares the battles between whites and Indians to the drama of *Romeo and Juliet*.¹⁶⁶

When watching the opening scene of the show German critics were struck by the kaleidoscopic beauty of the mixing of races. Whites, Mexicans, Indians, and horses spun together in beautiful chaos. All were united for one purpose, and were under the command of Buffalo Bill. This picture struck the German reviewers with its splendor. By drawing attention to this gorgeous mixing of colors and men and horses, the reviewers suggest a willingness to see whites and Natives as fundamentally similar. Apart from praising Native Americans in this context, German commentators focused attention on Native Americans' physical beauty. German journalists wrote that the show's Indians were not only majestic and powerful, but also physically attractive. As opposed to the program's description of the Indian's paint as "uncanny and inhuman," the *Berliner Zeitung* praises it as colorful and cosmetic-like.¹⁶⁷

The Germans did not view the Western landscape's archetypes – the horse and the Native American – as antagonistic. Rather than seeing the Western landscape as something to be tamed and conquered by the forces of European civilization, they saw it

¹⁶⁶ *Freisinger Zeitung* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

¹⁶⁷ "Bei Buffalo Bill" *Berliner Zeitung Presse* (Berlin) 24 July 1890.

as something to be embraced. Though they most definitely thought of the American West as being a masculine, harsh and unforgiving landscape, it was a place to not fight and conquer, but to understand and appreciate. Critics presented horses as loving their master and contributing to a partnership. Germans depicted Indians as mixing seamlessly with whites, united by a common purpose and under a strong leader. This was a marked difference from the way Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented the West landscape. In the show's eyes, the West was a place to be tamed by a strong-willed individual. Indians and horses, two archetypes of this landscape, were consequently to be conquered. A hero had to impose his will on nature, and thus on these two agents.

Conclusions

A commonly told story tells of an anthropologist who collected stories from an indigenous tribe. After months of sharing their stories, the tribe asked the anthropologist to tell a story of her own. She told them the story of *Hamlet*. Her audience could not understand why Hamlet and his father's ghost were mad at the uncle. They felt he did the honorable thing by accepting responsibility for the widow, giving her a home, and maintaining family control of the realm. If Michael Quinn is right, and the message an audience derives from a performance or artist is reliant on the beliefs and attitudes with which the audience views a performance, then what does this paper suggest about the connotative contributions of the German audiences watching the show? The Wild West show was, in the eyes of many German audience members, a relatively neutral depiction of an actual landscape. They saw this landscape through the window of their own

cultural and social codes. As a result, when they saw the performance they derived a wholly different meaning from the one intended by the Wild West Company.

To Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the Western landscape was the ultimate testing grounds for the qualities and attributes that described a strong person. It was an area of life or death. It was a place of melodrama and excitement. One stunning account by the correspondent for *Berliner Privilegirte Preussische Zeitung* writes about a trip to the west when he met Cody. He wrote:

On the far outside of the American prairie, some 2000 miles west of New York, I found myself on January 9 of the previous year . . . it was bright but it was a bitter winter day, the entire width of the Missouri River was frozen. All through the state of Nebraska the harsh, wild wind had spread an uncomfortable temperature. Our trip took us through this land: sparse, covered with snow, brown bushes and prairie grass . . . we could see the tracks of buffalo and Indians . . . wolves howled . . . Thousands of Prairie dogs in their hole houses enjoyed their freedom.¹⁶⁸

In this harsh landscape, filled with wolves, Indians, and harsh elements the lowly prairie dog enjoyed its freedom. Another reviewer wrote "America . . . is obviously and forever under its own influence, and it appears to have a special purpose."¹⁶⁹ This reviewer goes on to write that Europe is old, and America is new. He says that the special American purpose is freedom and "this new purpose has found a king – Buffalo Bill."¹⁷⁰ Germans saw the West as embodying ultimate and natural freedom. They attached onto it their hopes for a new order, one built on masculine honor and an embrace of the wildness of nature.

¹⁶⁸ "Ein Besuch bei Buffalo Bill," *Berliner Privilegirte Preussische Zeitung* (Berlin) 19 July 1890.

¹⁶⁹ "Ueber Buffalo Bill's Wild West," *Nachrichten* (Leipzig) 23 June 1890.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

A continued study of German perceptions of the Western landscape would no doubt offer a valuable glimpse into German cultural and social codes. Two directions would be particularly useful. First, much could be gleaned from studying the German literature created about the American West, and asking whether these understandings of the landscape present themselves in widely read popular fiction. Second, one could look at other essential components of the Western landscape: Buffalos, guns, Railroads, western outfits, codes of behavior, and the panoramic natural vistas, questioning how these motifs present themselves in literature, plays, film, and graphical representations. An in depth examination of these various aspects of the western experience could serve as a lens that would allow one to study how Germans culturally understood such disparate notions as ethnicity, nature, colonization, progress, and gender roles. This paper hopes to serve as a portion of such an examination of the archetypal Western landscape. When expanded to include other cultural works, it would be one piece of a larger collection that looks at how Germans saw the various features of the American West.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

- BBHC Harold McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming
- WSHS Wisconsin State Historical Society, Pamphlet Collection, Madison, Wisconsin
- CWM Circus World Museum Library, Circus World, Baraboo, Wisconsin

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Figure 1



Figure 2

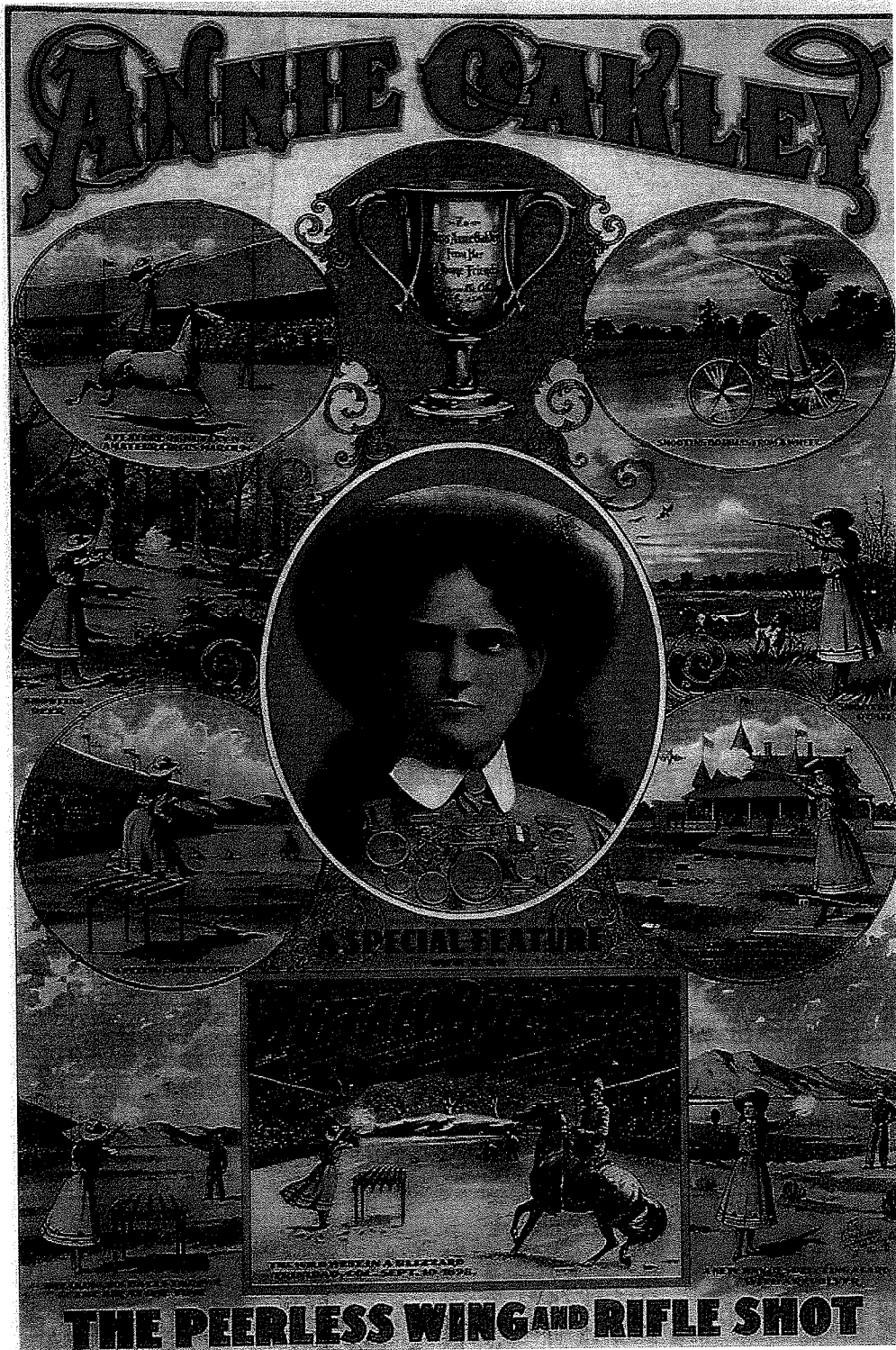


Figure 3



Figure 4

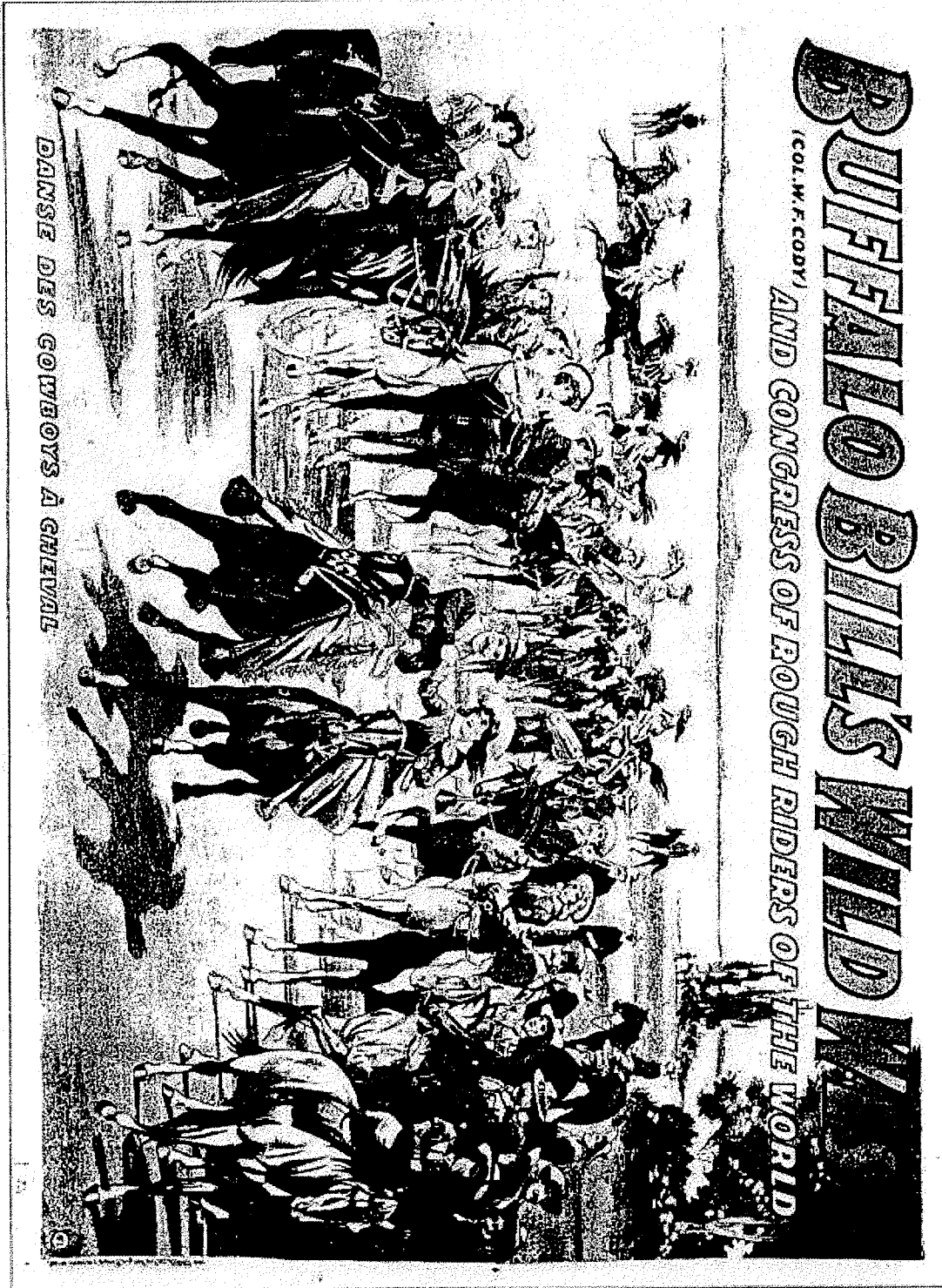


Figure 5



Figure 6

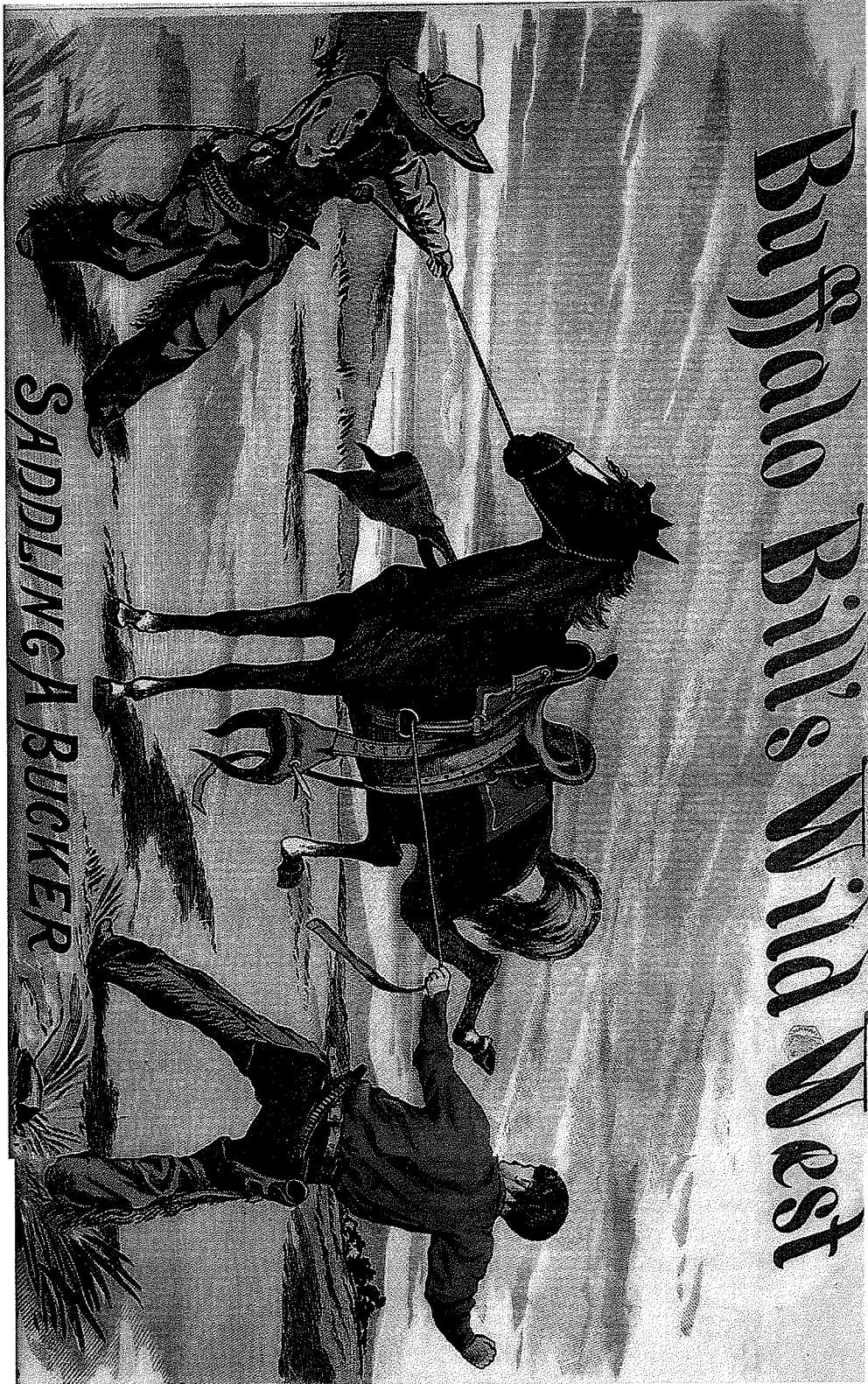


Figure 7

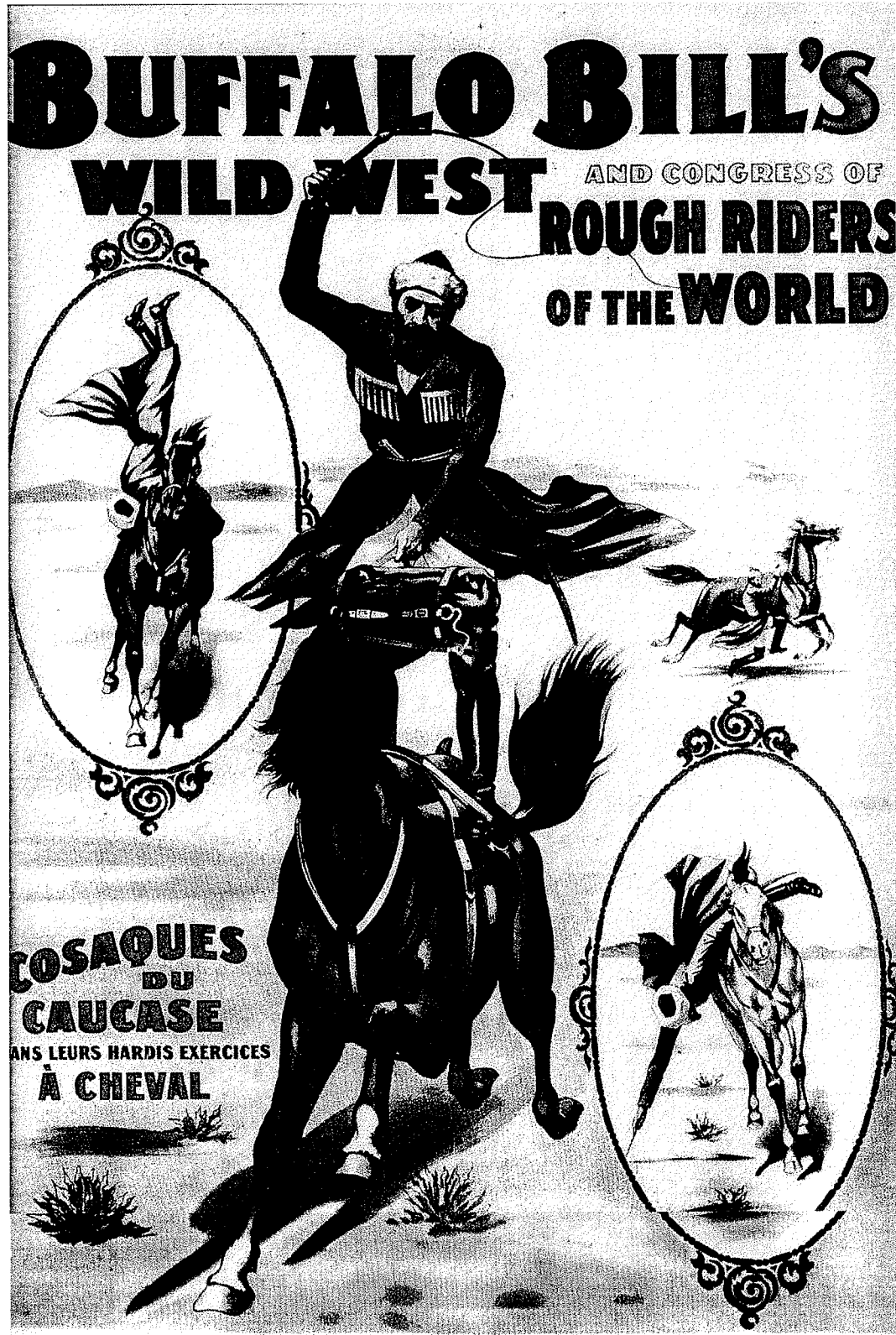
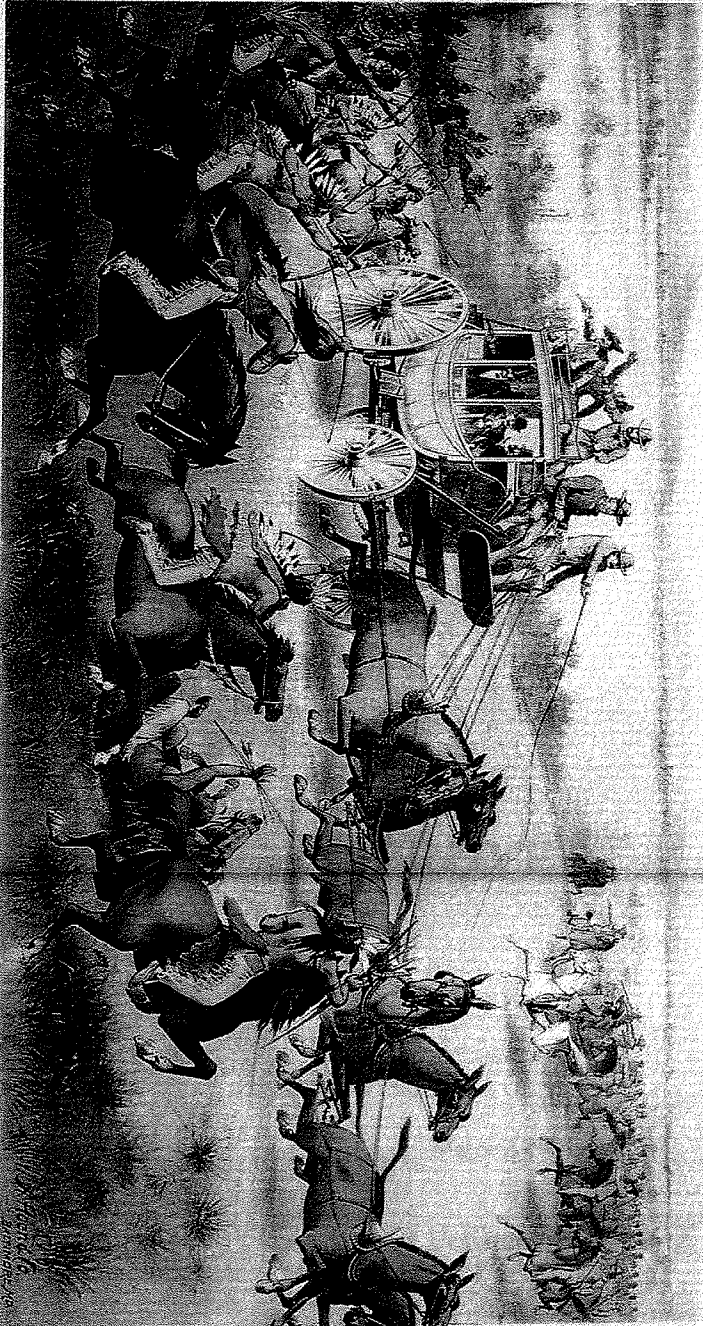


Figure 8



Figure 9

**BUFFALO BILLS' WILD WEST
AND CONGRESS OF
ROUGH RIDERS
OF THE WORLD.**



ON THE STAGE COACH · THE ORIGINAL DEADWOOD COACH · MOST FAMOUS VEHICLE IN HISTORY.

Figure 10

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