

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT OLD SHATTERHAND,
WINNETOU OR HALEF HADJI OMAR?

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Hans Zimmer

When it comes to German literature, the names which come to mind are Klopstock, Herder, and foremost, Goethe and Schiller. They are possibly and arguably the most important, widely known and read writers of the German language. I mention Klopstock because he could be considered to be the originator of modern German literature. I am biased to Herder because the Gymnasium I attended in Berlin was named after him. The above mentioned writers are arguably the best known and most important representatives of the German literature of the 18th and 19th century.

Hermann Hesse, Gerhard Hauptmann, and Thomas Mann are the outstanding writers at the beginning of the 20th century. They are followed by the immensely popular and important writers at the end of the 20th century, namely Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass. These men, through their work, were all honored by receiving the Nobel prize in literature. Though the editions of their writings is reaching several million copies, none of them can compare with Karl Friedrich May as far as being the most widely read German writer. His work, which is published in seventy-four volumes, has sold nearly one hundred million copies.

But who is - or was - Karl May? Well, in Germany one hardly can find a boy (or man) who is not very familiar with his books. He was born on February 25, 1842, in Hohenstein-Ernstthal, a little city in the state of Saxony in East Central Germany. He died on March 30, 1912, under somewhat mysterious circumstances in Radebeul, shortly after being treated as one of the first patients at the radium spa Joachimstal.

But before going into more details of his life, let me reminisce about my recollection of my first experience with the writings of Karl May. Naturally, when I was about 13 or 14 years of age, I knew about this writer. However, in school we were not permitted

to read books by him. He was an outcast and no decent young man should read such trash. As a matter of fact, I recall that one of my teachers discovered that a classmate of mine had a book by Karl May in his briefcase and as punishment, he had to remain in the class room for two hours after school was over.

It was my cousin, Irmgard, who gave me a birthday present, I think it was in 1935, a book by Karl May, titled "Der Oelprinz" (The Oil Prince). I started to read it and was fascinated by the heroes in the book. There was Old Shatterhand, a frontiersman of enormous strength. He had two rifles, a Henry "Stutzen" (one out of 25 which were made by a Mr. Henry of St. Louis), and the rifle named the "Baerentoeter" (bear killer). The Henry Stutzen was a 25 shot rifle, while the Baerentoeter was a 2 shot large caliber and very powerful rifle. An Apache chief of the tribe of Mescaleros, Winnetou, was a blood brother and friend of Old Shatterhand. These two men were joined by a rather comical trio of frontiersman, Sam Hawkins, riding a mule, Bill Parker, and Dick Stone. The theme of the book is rather simple. A crook convinces a group of immigrants that he knows of an oil well somewhere in the "Wild West", and that he would lead them to this place if they would give him all their money. To make a long story short (600 pages), the crook succeeded in making the immigrants believe that there really is an oil well by having some of his cronies emptying a barrel of oil into a spring a few miles ahead of the group. The immigrants became delirious when they smelled the oil, which was swimming on top of the little river. The crook got the money, disappeared, and shortly thereafter, the group discovered the oil well, namely the empty barrel. It was at this moment, Old Shatterhand, Winnetou and the comical trio met the now desperate immigrants. Needless to say, that Old Shatterhand's group immediately started to pursue the crook who eventually was captured, the money recovered and as one says "the end is good and everything else is good". I was hooked on Karl May; and incidentally, the "Oil Prince" is very typical for all of Karl May's writing. The good one always wins over the bad one.

From this time, every Christmas and birthday I received more books by this, at least to me, fascinating writer.

But, back to Karl May's youth and his way to become the most widely read German author. As I already stated, Karl May was born on February 25, 1842, as the fifth child of 14 brothers and sisters. His father was, as practically everyone in Ernstthal, a weaver and also, as nearly everyone in this little city, very poor. Nine of Karl's siblings died very young and Karl, due to poor health care, lost his eyesight shortly after his birth. He regained it, however, when he was five years of age. The cause of his early blindness was probably malnutrition. As one of his biographers writers, "from moldy rolls, weed soup and potato skin, one cannot expect a child to grow up healthy and strong. At the age of six years, Karl May entered the Rectoratsschule (about elementary plus school), which he leaves at the age of 16 years with excellent final grades. That he accomplished this is quite remarkable, since his father, who was an alcoholic, pestered the boy constantly with meaningless chores. Thus, once the boy had to copy, in his own handwriting, volumes of volumes of prayer books and out of date school books. If he did not, according to his father's opinion, copy enough pages, Karl was beaten mercilessly with a knotted rope.

After leaving the Rectoratsschule, Karl May wanted to study medicine. However, due to lack of money, he had to change his plans and instead went to another school, a Lehrer Seminar (similar to our colleges of education), which educated young men to become teachers. In the fall of 1856, he passed the entrance examination and started at the Waldenburg Seminar supported by an annual stipend of 15 Talers provided by the Count of Glauchau. Karl May, for the first time away from his alcoholic father, developed, though a good student, into a young man who once in a while skipped classes, causing his teachers to treat him somewhat like an outcast. Nevertheless, they put him in charge of illuminating the class rooms. This duty also included taking care of the supply of candles. Sometime at the end of November, 1859, he took 6 candles to his room and hid them in his closet. No

question, the missing candles were found in January, 1860, and he was dismissed from the Teacher Seminar as a thief.

Due to the support of the pastor of Karl Mary's church in Ernstthal, he is re-admitted and passes the final examination in August, 1861. He is now 19 years of age when, on October 5, 1861, he secures his first full time position as a teacher with an annual salary of 150 Talers plus money for rent. However, already after only 2 weeks in his rented room, his landlord accuses him of having approached his wife in an unseemly manner. This accusation leads to his dismissal from his new position. After a very short time, he finds another position as a teacher at a company school in Altchemnitz, also in Saxony. This position, due to his past, is one which is probationary only.

Unfortunately, about 6 weeks later, when Karl May was at home during the Christmas vacation, and when he was playing some pool, he was arrested for allegedly having stolen a watch and a cigar holder from his roommate in Altchemnitz. Both of these items had been found in his room. May denied the charges because he had taken them with the permission of his roommate. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to 6 weeks in prison.

The next 1½ years during which he stayed at the home of his parents, he suffered from very serious depression. It seems, however, that during this time he began to write. He stated in his autobiography, "Ich" (I) that he authored the "Erzgebirgische Dorfgeschichten" (Village Stories from the Erzgebirge) and that he had no difficulties finding a publisher - but this statement cannot be proven.

The next heavy blow comes in the year 1863, when on order of the Secretary of Interior of Saxony, Karl May's name is eliminated from the list of candidates for positions as public teachers. In addition, all of his diplomas are being canceled and declared void. This was due to his jail record.

Thus, there is now no possibility left for him to enter or re-enter the teaching profession. There is no

news about him or any sources which could give information about his life for the next year or so.

In July, 1864 appears an ophthalmologist by the name of Dr. Med. Heilig (Mr. Heilig, M.D.), in Penig, a small city about 20 miles away from Karl May's hometown. This Dr. Helig goes to a men's shop to get several suits, an overcoat and a hat. He disappears with these clothes, but - and this is a big but - without paying.

COULD IT HAVE BEEN KARL MAY???

After about 6 months later in Chemnitz at the hotel "Zum Anker" appears a teacher by the name of Mr. Lohse. He orders different fur articles with a value of more than 100 Talers. He tells the furrier that he wants to show the items to his sick superintendent, who is in bed in an adjoining room. But Mr. Lohse does not return to the waiting furrier, nor are the furs in the next room.

The next episode takes us to Leipzig in 1865. Under the name of Mr. Hermin he rented an apartment and started immediately the now familiar spiel. However, the landlord becomes suspicious and calls the police. Mr. Hermin gets arrested and it turns out that Mr. Hermin is the notorious Karl Friedrich May. On June 8, 1865 he is convicted for those crimes and gets the rather unusually severe penalty for these derelictions, namely a jail penalty of 4 years and 1 month. One week later he is number 171 among about a thousand prisoners in the penitentiary Schloss Oberstein in Zwickau.

After only three years in Zwickau, Karl May is set free in November, 1868, and returns to his parents' house in Ernstthal. May writes in his autobiography that during the next several months, an inner voice constantly urges him to take revenge on society by ignoring its laws.

Thus, after hardly 5 months of freedom he started the revenge as follows: On March 23, 1869, a police lieutenant, named von Wolframsdorf, appears at the shop of the merchant Kraemer in Wiederau, a village near Leipzig and tells him that he, Lt. von Wolframsdorf, is in charge of investigating the occurrence of

counterfeit money in this area. Therefore, he has to check all the merchant's money. A ten Taler note is all that the Merchant produces. Naturally, it is not genuine and it is confiscated, also confiscated is the golden watch of the merchant, because the lieutenant recognizes it as stolen. As a consequence, the Merchant is ordered to follow him to the next police station. As one can imagine, the lieutenant finds a way to disappear with the money and the golden watch.

The next episode is a much more serious one. He was encouraged through the last successful experience, namely how easy it is to take money from other people, if one pretends to be with the police. Therefore, only a few weeks later, a secret police officer appears at the rope maker Krause's establishment and orders Mr. Krause to show him all the money which is in his house. The rope maker produces quite a fair amount of bank notes and coins. The secret police officer confiscates the money and orders Mr. Krause to follow him to the next police station. No questions, on the way to the station, the officer pretends that he has to relieve himself and tries to disappear. However, Mr. Krause and a second man follow him but when they reach him, he pulls a pistol and threatens to shoot them if they continue to pursue him.

Well, May gets away but not people talk about a man who steals and threatens to kill his victims. Any way, after some more episodes, including a horse theft, he is caught and sentenced on May 3, 1870 to four years in the penitentiary in Waldheim as Prisoner Number 402. His release comes exactly after four years on May 2, 1874.

During these long years in Waldheim, Karl May undergoes a complete change of character. He generates for himself a dreamlike environment in which he now lives. Nothing remains from his old character and behavior of the "old" Karl May. There is no longer the idea of taking revenge of the society. May develops for himself an unrealistic dream world.

During his time in the penitentiary, May began to write. A Christmas poem is the result of his literary efforts, however, he must have written more pieces than

the Christmas poem, because, still doing his time in the Waldheim penitentiary, he got acquainted with H.G. Muenchmeyer, an owner of a small book company, who promised to see him later, when he is free again. After May's release from jail, he continued for the next 10 months or so to write at a furious pace. Most of his literary output of this period can only be classified as "Kitsch", as is evident from some of the titles, e.g. "A Venus Temple", or "A Book of Love", and "Black Book, a Criminal's Gallery". Nevertheless, when Mr. Muenchmeyer visited with him after these long months, he appointed May as an editor with an annual salary of 600 Talers. Two days after the appointment on March 3, 1875, Karl May moved to Dresden and rented an apartment. However, through his life now seems to be on a clear course towards success, his past catches up with him again.

Shortly before his release from the penitentiary in Waldheim, he was ordered by the authorities not to leave his hometown Ernstthal for two years. Well, through an informer, the authorities learned about his move to Dresden and ordered him to leave this city immediately and return to Ernstthal. Fortunately, after two petitions, he gets permission to return to Dresden, thus enabling him to continue his job as editor of Muenchmeyer's book company. Among the first results of his new position is the founding of two weekly magazines, "Schacht und Huette" (Mine and Foundry) and the "Germany Family Magazine". Both magazines mostly published "Kitsch".

However, Karl May also contributed a few good pieces for these magazines, among them "From the Briefcase of a Much Travelled Man", the first outlines of "Winnetou", an Apache Chief, whom he called Inn-in-who in this book, and "Old Firehand", a deadly shot and frontiersman. He also submitted some of his writings to other magazines. Thus, Peter Rosegger, a well known Austrian writer and editor, mentioned in a letter to a friend, that he obtained from Mr. May, editor in Dresden, a story "Die Rose von Kahira" (The Rose of Kahira), "an adventure story taking place in Egypt, for publication in his magazine. The story is very well written and exciting and leads me to assume that the

writer is a much travelled and well informed person, who must have lived for a long time in the Orient."

Here it might be necessary to interject that until this time, Karl May had only once left his home state Saxony for a short trip to Bremen and Amsterdam. As a matter of fact, it is only after a few decades later that he visits the Orient and the USA. It is not clear how and where he got the knowledge of all the countries he wrote about. Namely, the Orient and the USA.

On August 17, 1880, he married Emma Pollmer. During the following seven years, May works very hard, however he hardly earns a living and in addition, his wife is very fastidious and our poet is a very poor business man, and always out of money. To get out of his financial crisis he signs a contract with a second book company owned by a Mr. Pustet. To corroborate on May's lack of business acumen, the following might serve as an example. He writes for this company "Travels through the Ottoman Country", "Travel Adventures in Kurdistan" and the "Death Caravan", a total of 1469 pages. All of this he wrote from January 1881 to June 1882. For these 18 months of uninterrupted writing, he earns 1840 Marks (the currency had changed in 1871 from Taler to Mark). May also signs a new contract with Muenchmeyer and it seems that the writer may finally be able to get out of his financial woes. But a closer inspection reveals that this contract, by no means, will alleviate his precarious financial situation. The fact is that May has to deliver a multi-volume fiction with a total of 2400 pages within a short time. With an edition of 20,000 copies of this fiction, the book company will taken in 200,000 Marks and will pay the author 3,500 Marks, or 1.75%. May started immediately to write the requested fiction which was called the "Waldroeschen" (The Rose of the Forest). This fiction was published under a pseudonym. However, he still has to write for Mr. Pustet, and in doing so, May created a character which is considered by many experts, an outstanding figure of the world literature. This is Hadji Halef Omar Ben Jadji Abul Abbas Ibn Hadji Dawud Al Gossarah (a Hadji is a mohammedan who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca). In six volumes, each of which has more than 600 pages, Karl May describes in detail the Orient and

the Balkans, and their inhabitants. These books are written as if May himself is the hero of the adventures his little group experiences. The group consists of Karl May (the writer has adopted the name Kara Ben Nemsi during this journey), his servant Hadji Halef Omar (who is not a Hadji) and Omar who is pursuing the murderer of his father. The journey starts in what is now known as Algiers, at the big salt swamps, known as the Schotts. It proceeds through Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Greece and ends in Albania, where the group finally catches up with the murderer. He gets caught but before his capture he shoots Kara Ben Nemsi's black, very speedy horse, the incomparable Rih. The six books are entitled "Durch die Wueste" (Through the Desert), "Durchs wilde Kurdistan" (Through the Wild Kurdistan), "Von Bagdad nach stambul" (From Bagdad to Istanbul), "In den Schluchten des Balkans" (In the Ravines of the Balkans), "Durch das Land der Skipeturer" (Through the Land of the Skipertures), and "Der Schut" (The Schut). After some rewriting and additions, especially the chapter of the death of the horse Rih, these six volumes appear in final form in 1892 on the market. With these 6 books Karl May became recognized as a serious writer. In 1893, the first volume of "Winnetou" also hits the bookstores.

Winnetou is the chief of the Mescaleros Indians, a tribe of the Apaches, and he is a blood brother of Old Shatterhand. This is the name under which Karl May appears in all of his American Indian stories. He uses the Old Shatterhand name because he is able with one blow of his fist to render his opponents unconscious. In Winnetou, Karl May creates an ideal picture of the American Indians. It must be mentioned here that this Apache chief is the owner of a rifle, the silver gun. Karl May describes this weapon in detail. In volume III of "Winnetou", the Apache is killed and his famous gun - as Karl May writes - is put into the grave of this noble human being. Volumes II and III are unfortunately put together only by essays he wrote earlier. Thus, these volumes are more or less colportage.

Shortly after the three volumes of "Winnetou", Karl May writes 4 large travelogues. This time he describes adventures in South America. These books

really have noniveau. They are titled "Oranges and Dates", "At the Pacific Ocean", "At the Rio de la Plata", and "In the Cordilleres".

But back to May's life and his working. During the years 1883 to 1888 he writes five monstrous works of fiction, among them "Die Liebe der Ulanen" (The Love of the Lancers). This is one of the few Karl May books, though I have tried very hard, I was not able to obtain.

May continues to write constantly. He either writes fiction or reports of his travels (which he never made). Thus, in three volumes "In the Land of the Madhi" he reports on his adventures in Egypt during the Madhi revolution in the late 19th century against the Egyptian government.

Finally, Karl May's writings make him financially independent. He is able to buy in Radebeul near Dresden a house which he calls "Villa Shatterhand". This villa is adorned by many photographs of Old Shatterhand and mementos from his travels. Among them is Winnetou's "Silberbuechse", the silver gun, the very same - as he wrote in Winnetou Vol. III, which was buried alongside the slain Apache chief. It seems, May now hardly can distinguish between reality and his dream world. He calls himself now Dr. phil. Karl May. In 1898 he asked for inclusion of this title in the local address book. He writes "I do not have a document from a German University - but I obtained the degree from the University of Rouen in France". Upon being questioned, he states that he had been a long time in China and received the doctoral degree there. He also tells that he can speak and write in many languages, among them French, English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, 6 dialects of Arabic, 2 dialects of Kurdish, Chinese and many more. He also says he speaks the language of the Sioux, Apaches, Commanches, Snakes, Utes, and Kiowas besides a number of South American Indian dialects - all together he can converse in more than 40 languages.

In 1898, his fame reaches its high point, but at the same time, he loses almost completely the ability to distinguish between reality and the dream world he

created for himself. Some time, one might wonder whether he really lives in a dream world or whether he is a charlatan. A few examples might serve to corroborate on this statement. He has now a large number of almost fanatic readers of his writings, and to several of them, May sends strands of Winnetou's famous black hair. These genuine strands of Winnetou's hair were actually horse tail hair. Next example: when he was asked whether Winnetou received an emergency baptism when he was dying from the fatal wounds which were inflicted by his enemies, Karl May told that he actually performed the baptism, but did not mention it in his book because he was concerned that fanatic Protestant readers might attack him for this. Shortly after celebrating his 57th birthday, on March 4, 1899, May leaves Saxony and begins a long journey to the Orient. He now sees for the first time all the places where he - Kara Ben Nemsi - did all his heroics. After 16 months, he returns to his home town. But, during his absence - as Kara Ben Nemsi would say - "dark clouds appeared over his life".

In the year 1900, Karl May's work was banned from school libraries because his "fantasy is dangerous for school children". Shortly after this news, the feuilleton editor of the respected "Frankfurter Zeitung" - which today is still Germany's most respected newspaper - a Mr. Fedor Mamroth writes "The question whether all of Karl May's adventures are true has to be categorically denied, the remaining question whether the author actually saw the distant countries is true, well, there is only one answer, namely, he did not".

In addition, during this time, Adalbert Fischer reprinted without permission a number of May's books. Also, Karl May's private life is in shambles. After being married for 20 years to Emma, he divorces her on January 14, 1903, to marry Klara Ploehn on March 30 of the same year. In 1904, Rudolf Lebius, an editor of a social democratic newspaper "Der Vorwaerts" begins his attacks on Karl Kay's writings as well as on his personal life. Lebius had found out about May's turbulent youth, his extensive jail time and uses this knowledge to try to destroy May's work as well as the writer himself. Lebius publishes the most incredible

and mean "facts" of May's life, such as that May in his younger years had lived off the loot of break-ins, that he had been the leader of a group of bandits, which committed almost daily robberies in the dark forests of the Erzgebirge, and finally, that he had robbed jewelry stores, and that the government finally had to send troops to protect the citizens of this area from this bandit May. Lebius also published three pamphlets according to which Karl May had murdered the grandfather of his father-in-law, which continued undermining May's reputation. Thus, upon Lebius urging and prodding, a Mr. F.W. Kahl writes a brochure entitled "Karl Maya, the Ruiner of Germany's Youth".

It is now that Karl May files a suit against Lebius, Kahl and the book company Walter, which published this brochure. As a result of this suit, the sale of the brochure is stopped on court order. However, the damage to May's reputation has been done. Finally, possibly to get away from his enemies, May decides to travel to the USA. With his wife Klara, he leaves Europe on September 5, 1895 and after eleven days, on September 16, at 4 o'clock in the morning, the statue of liberty comes into view and while Klara takes pictures, May utters "Finally we are free of the German dust". He is overwhelmed by the reception by the many American readers of his books. The Mays stay for nearly two weeks in New York before they leave by steamer for Albany and then Buffalo. They visit the grave of the Seneca (Senentowana) chief Saogo-ye-wat (literally He Keeps Them Awake). This important Indian chief (he died in 1830) rather early recognized the superiority of the white man and tried to secure through tenacious negotiations, the survival of his tribe, but had no success. The chief becomes an alcoholic and dies as a bitter and lonesome old man. On the dais of the statue adorning his grave, Karl May is deeply moved by the engraved words of the chief's last speech to his people, "When I am gone and my warnings are no longer heeded, the craft and avarice of the white men will prevail. My heart fails me when I think of my people so soon to be scattered and forgotten".

Possibly, due to these words of the Chief, May abandoned his plans to visit the "real America" the

homeland of the Apaches, namely New Mexico and Arizona. May's next stop is New England. In Lawrence, Mass., he gives a talk entitled "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where do we go?" This event is a great success; Five Gesangvereine (choirs) sing "This is the day of the Lord"; the crowd which came to listen is so big that the traffic comes to a standstill. After a few days with newly found friends, the Mays return to Europe and arrive home during the first week in December 1895.

In the meantime, the process against Lebius, Kahl, and the book company has started and after dragging along for almost two years, comes to an end. Lebius is found guilty of libel and slander, and sentenced to twenty days in jail and the court costs.

On February 25, 1912, as Karl May celebrates his 70th birthday, he receives an invitation from the Austrian Society for Literature and Music to give a talk in Vienna. The talk, entitled "Upwards to the Land of the Noble Humans" takes place on the 23rd of March, and is given without a manuscript. He speaks about dying, of the hereafter, of God and Eternity - and not about his travel adventures. According to newspaper reports, in spite of the presence in Vienna on this day of the German Emperor, the King of Saxony, and the Prince of Monaco, the large Sophien Auditorium was filled to capacity by about 3,000 people who came to listen to him. Among the listeners, there were young and old people, in the front sat the very well known Bertha von Suttner and further back, Adolf Hitler had a seat. At the end of Karl May's talk, the crowd thanked him with almost unending thunderous applause.

When May arrives home in Saxony on the 27th of March, he suffers from a slight cold (it is speculated that these symptoms are the result of the treatment at the radium spa Joachimstal). On March 30, 1912, his 9th wedding anniversary, Karl May dies at 8:00 p.m.

Sources:

Karl May "Ich" and several of his books
Hans Wollschlaeger, "Karl May", Verlag Rowohlt 1965

Appendix:

Biannually from the middle of June to the end of August, a Karl May Festival takes place in Bad Segeberg in Northern Germany.

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MOTIVATION: WHY PEOPLE LEARN?

March 13, 2000

Edward S. Gleason

Edleff Schwaab grew up in a small town in Nazi Germany. In 1936, when his family gathered for the very first time around their large, mahogany table radio and turned it on, out came the voice of Adolph Hitler. Later, when the Fuehrer came to town, Edleff climbed a tree that grew right next to the parade route. Hitler stood in an open car; as he passed beneath Edleff's tree, he looked up. Their eyes met.

Conscripted into the infantry, just as his unit was to be dispatched to Stalingrad, Edleff's life was saved by orders sending him to officer's candidate school quite near Berlin. The war over, caught in the Russian sector of Germany, Edleff fled, alone, by night, across the border, and finally made his way to Boston University, where he undertook and completed his Ph.D. in clinical psychology. For twenty years, as professional colleagues and friends at two different independent schools, Edleff and I conferred weekly.

More than once Edleff would say to me, "Motivation, Ted, motivation, the ultimate question is motivation. Why do people learn? Figure it out. Bottle it. Market it. You will never have to work again."