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Review Article

Hidden Behind Racism: Anti-Racism in Twentieth-Century German Literature. The Case of the Bestseller Author A. E. Johann and His Novella "Der Mann der sein Wort gab"

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Abstract

The phenomenon of racism continues to be a serious problem in contemporary society, and this not only in the Western world. While countless studies have already addressed this issue, the present paper examines a highly popular German novella from 1950 which is situated in the Northern Territory of Australia where a white sheriff, who is in charge of maintaining law and order for his authorities, begins to realize fundamental problems with the racist ideology within his world. A. E. Johann's "Der Mann der sein Wort gab" portrays this protagonist first as someone clearly marked by western, racist concepts regarding the Indigenous population. In the course of time, however, he realizes fundamental conflicts and wrongdoings by the white authorities and eventually disappears from view as a protest against the dominant racist culture he himself used to fight for. The Romantic notion of the 'noble savage' certainly matters here, but it undermines our common understanding of the implied racism in modern adventure narratives.

Keywords: Modern racism; Australia within the literary context; A. E. Johann; the noble savage; clash of cultures.

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Introduction

In our current day and age, the critical discourse is deeply focused on issues pertaining to anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism. The more we examine those issues, the more we discover not only the problematic situation within our contemporary culture, but also in previous times. Of course, our current awareness is much more sensitized and sharpened regarding inequalities, repression, marginalization, injustice, prejudice, unfairness, and the continued desire of a majority group to dominate the minority, or to preserve the hegemonic power structure from the old days.

At current times, massive migration movements across the world have created huge rifts between the newcomers and those who sometimes welcome them, but often also reject them. We face here almost painful issues regarding cultural identity, economic interests, political conditions, and linguistic and especially religious conflicts. Two extreme examples from current affairs might highlight this phenomenon most dramatically. Syrian refugees in Turkey have become an essential work force there because they are willing to accept below-minimum wages. Without their contributions, Turkish agriculture could not be properly maintained. The same applies to the millions of immigrants from Central and South America to the United States or Canada. As much as they regularly face huge opposition, if not aggression, much of the hospitality industry, agriculture, and other service areas could not operate sufficiently without them. When a government tries to provide essential support and help, such as in Germany or France, certain sections of the population tend to protest vehemently and at times go so far as to fight the migrants who seemingly threaten to take over

public spaces, public culture, the social support system, and the economic benefits. The greatest victim in all those situations has always been Humanity by itself because this form of racism divides people and causes infinite harm to both sides of the divide.

It is easy and almost fashionable again to protest against migrants and to try to push them out because they represent 'the others' and a strangely perceived danger to one's own identity and culture, but it is very difficult – intellectually, above all – to make a serious effort to learn about the causes and conditions of migration, which is often triggered by domestic problems, military conflicts, economic emergency, climate change, or religious tensions. Overall, we can easily identify, as one of the key aspects behind the fight against immigrants, a power struggle between those on the inside and those coming from the outside. No country in the western world, and hardly any country in other continents is exempt from experiencing such conflicts, and there is currently no constructive solution in sight, universally because we are all too much victims of the notion of nationhood as it had emerged in the nineteenth century (Orgad and Koopmans, ed., 2022; Carmichael, D'Auria, and Roshwald, ed. 2023) and which continues to haunt us until today.

Stating these facts might amount to a form of banality, but they are deeply affecting us all and will not go away over the next decades and longer. Neither economists nor political scientists have been able to offer concrete and practical solutions, not to speak of the various governments that mostly face those situations rather helplessly and struggle in vain to come to terms with migration in a satisfactory manner for both sides, especially because migration has become one of the most central issues for the entire world since at least the 1950 (see, for instance, Faist, ed., 2020; Scholten, ed., 2022; Triandafyllidou, ed., 2024).

The Western world is, as we all know, the heir of a long history of colonialism, which allowed the colonizers to profit tremendously from the resources in their colonies and deprived the Indigenous people of their land, their livelihood, and their natural income. By the same token, the former colonial countries now have to deal with immigration from the previous colonies and thus suddenly face severe conflicts over economic and cultural conflicts. But migration has moved far beyond this fairly binary relationship since floods of migrants seek out help and asylum in the western world because their economic or political plight at home is often so miserable or critical that they can barely survive back home. Development aids over the last decades have proven to be effective only to some extent, and we increasingly realize that cultural differences, lack of communication, selfishness and greed, fear, insecurity, and other factors are simply not going away unless both sides make a decisive effort, embrace toleration and especially tolerance, and criticize the political and economic frameworks, which include also military perspectives, of their own systems (Allen 1994; Allen 1995).

All these tasks are most arduous and thorny, which explains why we currently witness the rise of racist, nationalistic, and neo-colonialist attitudes and hence political parties in many western countries and elsewhere. We could argue that these proto-fascist developments are often the result of a lack of empathy, information, cooperation, and communication (see, for instance, Elias 2024; Peterson and Riley, III 2022; Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021). Binary worldviews tend to appeal to the masses because of their simplicity, whereas complex and diversified perspectives appear to be too intellectual and elitist, as we currently experience with the MAGA movement in the USA (Nacos, Bloch-Elkon, and Shapiro 2024) and the AfD party in Germany (Feagin 2009; Kienholz 2024).

The struggle against migrants or the entire wave of migration has many roots, one of which is certainly racism, and the purpose of this paper is to reflect upon that issue further through a close reading of a highly popular text from the middle of the twentieth century illustrating both white male patriarchy in the Australian bush and the very opposite at the same time. Racism is here viewed through the reverse perspective since the protagonist is an immigrant from Switzerland and has to learn to the suffering of the Indigenous people, a suffering he himself is partially responsible for.

Anti-Racism within a Racist Context

This paper represents an attempt to draw from literary material for a further examination of popular culture in face of the conflict between the 'colonialist' powers and the Indigenous populations. In the Humanities, one of our central tasks is to develop critical perspectives and to empower students through a close examination of literary and other texts and objects from throughout time to understand the deeper meanings and to draw relevant conclusions, translating older narratives, for instance, into our present while not losing our understanding of the cultural and historical context (Wohlgemut 2007).

Crude, even violent forms of racism raise their heads within the country where migrants arrive. At the same time, racism finds vivid expression in many texts portraying white adventurers, colonizers, missionaries, officers, diplomats, and others in colonized territories or in worlds where the Indigenous people still hold control over the lands (Klotz 1979; Pleticha and August 1999; Grill and Obermayr, ed., 2020).

The challenge that I have posed for myself consists of investigating the transformation of the protagonist in a highly popular story about a white man from Switzerland serving as a sergeant in the Never Never of the Australian bush (the Northern Territory) from being at first firmly situated in his own privileged position to a person who

begins to question that racist perspective dominating his entire social context and who ultimately turns his back to that colonialist culture in Australia and disappears. As I will argue, at a close reading, we can discover, within a text strongly determined by a racist orientation and a highly patriarchal hegemonic worldview, surprising elements of anti-racism, if that might be even possible from a Western angle.

Since "The Man Who Gave His Word" enjoyed huge popularity, it can serve us well as a literary platform for further reflections on the internal struggle by Western writers about their attitude toward non-white culture. I would grant that my own approach might extend or even proliferate racism even further because the protagonist takes on such an affable and hence paternalistic attitude toward the Indigenous people of northern Australia that we as readers are supposed to embrace. However, this paper is not about racism as such, certainly a highly important topic by itself, but about the impact of Romanticized attitudes by individual whites toward the 'noble savage,' perhaps as an indirect criticism of European culture without any real understanding or acknowledgment of the Indigenous culture (Ellingson 2001; Usbeck 2013).

When we focus on a modern narrative composed by a white European addressing a people and culture in a different context, it might be rather difficult or even impossible to acknowledge that the author might have gained authentic experiences or acquired a truly in-depth understanding of the Indigenous world. But such a cultural criticism does not make it unnecessary to study such texts because they mirror, after all, profoundly what the common concepts about non-white peoples might have been, especially when we deal with a bestseller such as the novella "The Man Who Gave His Word."

A. E. Johann

Even though literary scholars have entirely ignored A. E. Johann as a fictional writer (1901–1996; his original or full name was Alfred Ernst Johann Wollschläger), his works enjoyed a tremendous mass appeal (Classen 2024). They commonly deal with exotic countries, adventures in the wilderness, heroic accomplishments, and simply the travel experience. Especially "Der Mann der sein Wort gab" was extremely successful. It appeared first in a volume of his short stories, *Zwischen den Ufern*, 1950; and then as an independent volume, Gütersloh 1951; The Person/Man Who Had Given His Pledge). It was republished almost once every year since then: in 1952, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1966, and 2018 [e-book]). Thus, this narrative deeply influenced the public culture and reflected it as well, although the narrative account is situated in the northern territory of Australia, so far removed from Europe (for a good biographical sketch, see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_E._Johann; last accessed on July 19, 2024).

In many of his other works, often partially journalistic or essayistic, partly imaginary, Johann dealt with northern Canada, parts of Africa, and Asia, and thus allowed his audience to roam the world in their minds and to reflect on the exotic as an ideal alternative to their own mundane existence back in Germany. Rudi Zülch has recently published a biography of this author, which allows us to refer to his work and to turn our attention immediately to the specific text under review (Zülch 2021).

Johann did not simply invent his adventure stories; instead, he himself traveled globally throughout his life and wrote reports about his experiences. So, his texts represent a unique combination of autobiography and fictionality, of geographical and anthropological narratives and cultural and spiritual reflections. As noted above, literary scholarship has basically ignored him altogether, especially because in many of his texts he demonstrated a strongly nationalistic, Germanophile, and patriarchal attitude, but within our context, particularly this one story about the events in the Northern Territory proves to be relevant and meaningful in many different perspectives. It proves to be especially relevant for us because, perhaps in works, Johann re-examined the discourse on racism addressing it here in a unique way, appealing to the audience to reflect once again about the true nature of the category of race as it applied to the conditions in Australia with its conflict and tensions between the whites and the Indigenous population. In many cases, we might be even entitled to call Johann's works something like post-Romantic kitsch, sentimental in its glorification of the Canadian wilderness and the heroic Germans the protagonist encounters in the remote lands in the West. However, there appears to be something special about the one novella, "Der Mann der sein Wort gab," which was one of the most popular short stories published in Germany since 1950 until the recent past.

First, Racism

A. E. Johann does not leave any doubt about his supremacist white ideology in this and other stories, which obviously appealed to his white European/German audience, presenting glorified protagonists who prove to be highly superior to the Indigenous population, either in present-day Namibia ("Wurzeln in fremder Erde," 1950; Roots in Foreign Soil; also in Johann 1990, *Zwischen den* Ufern), or in Canada. The story "Der Mensch der sein Wort gab" is contained within a narrative framework predicated on the author's travel experience in Australia where the Sergeant of the Mounted Royal-Australian Police Force, Schiller, relates to him the remarkable story of the Swiss Jakob Kanderer from Appenzell, one of his colleagues in the Northern Territory, the Never Never. Many rumors had spread about that man, in practice a ruler over a vast region sparsely populated, and the author here presents the results of his investigations, so the account mixes journalistic reporting with a travelogue.

From early on, the narrator reveals the predominant attitude toward the Indigenous population, when he describes Schiller's black aides who are left behind while the author takes the sergeant with him in his car: "stumm, häßlich, klug und unverständlich, seltsame Kinder eines seltsamen Erdteils" (162; mute, ugly, intelligent und incomprehensible; strange children of a strange continent).

The combination of adjectives speaks volumes about the author's general attitude, conveying a sense of contempt (ugly children) and admiration, but the lack of understanding dominates altogether. The various sergeants who control huge territories operate in a very hostile environment in which they have the greatest difficulty to handle the loneliness and the Indigenous population. They cannot do their work without their native trackers, and the protagonist, as Schiller reports, enjoyed a particularly good relationship with his own men whom he treated like his own children, himself having taken on the position of a patriarch, greatly admired and feared at the same time, especially because he never gave up tracking down anyone identified as guilty of some crime.

The job of the sergeants was to control the vast deserts and steppes of the North and Northwest of Australia and to ensure the safety of the white men who could seemingly do whatever they liked. As the narrator comments, for him, the Indigenous people are 'primitive' and difficult to handle (165) because they still live in the world of the stone age and reject anything that might smack of modernity, and who feel threatened – rightly so – by the lone white men who arrive looking for gold and ranch land. The conditions for outright colonialism are just rife, and the narrator does not appear to object to those individuals who want to utilize the opportunities for the exploration of new regions, irrespective of the Indigenous population.

The story within the story sets in with the Swiss sergeant receiving an order to investigate the whereabouts of a group of new settlers who are identified as wealthy and influential having come from western Australia where the native population has already been well subdued and acculturated (166). The official messenger who had delivered the news had managed to cover the distance of 300 kilometers from the last train station to the sergeant's post in four days, which Kanderer finally acknowledges, offering him as a reward a rich meal and a gift of used pants. Most importantly, he knows the native language which the Indigenous people acknowledge with great respect (167), although it remains unclear how well he truly speaks it.

The narrator then drops another racist remark comparing the natives with the whites. While the latter stand out with their intelligence and power, the former shine through their physical endurance, a typical European perspective we also find in many other texts from earlier times, such as by the Jesuit missionaries in the New World (Classen 2013). Both here and throughout the story, the Swiss sergeant treats his subordinates with strict discipline but also with friendliness and generosity, all depending on the specific circumstances, and whether they obeyed him or not. He is consistently identified as the absolute master of his subjects and the various tribes living in his district.

But the narrator also indicates that Kanderer had not been happy with the four white men looking for grassland to set up a large cow farm in the Northern Territory. They had come from the Australian west coast where the whites had already subjugated the natives to such an extent that those had turned into more or less willing slaves. In contrast, in Kanderer's district, they were still following the 'laws of the wilderness' (169), disregarded the fake 'advantages' of western civilization, and fought with great force against any intruders who provoked their hostility (170).

A Brief Plot Summary

It is very tempting to dive into all the details of this novel because A. E. Johann demonstrates a considerable narrative skill presenting the events of his story in a most lively and direct fashion as if we as the audience were directly listening to him while sitting at a campfire. Hence, before I continue with the critical examination of the essential points that shed important light on the discourse of racism and anti-racism, let us get a quick understanding of the events as they evolve in front of our eyes.

Kanderer embarks on his investigation, accompanied by two of his best trackers. This takes him on a long pursuit because he first discovers that the grass seekers had operated brutally as colonialists, had disrupted a crucial ritual in a tribe, and that they were eventually all killed in revenge. The sergeant further learns who had been the killer, a young man with the name Yelkerrie, who then escapes and runs away trying to disappear in the wilderness. But Kanderer's stubbornness and toughness together with the skill and endurance of his two trackers ultimately make it possible for him to apprehend the 'culprit,' but this at a great cost. The older and more experienced tracker is killed by one of the horses, and the younger immediately leaves to assist his tribe in the funeral rituals. Thus, Kanderer is alone with his captive and tries to get back to the train track to deliver him to the authorities. The black man suffers from a bad wound from a gun shot issued by the sergeant during the hot pursuit, and he faces certain death if the bullet is not removed from his body. With primitive tools, Kanderers succeeds in the operation, and after a few days, the captive is recovering well. Most importantly, Kanderer promises him to protect him at the courts because he has learned to understand the reason for the killing of the four white men: "Ich werde dir vor Gericht helfen, Mann! Du darfst nicht bestraft werden!" (215; I will help you at court, man! You must not be punished!).

Malaria is raging in the sergeant's body, and in the last moment, just before he collapses, he quickly manages to

unlock Yelkerrie's chain and to free him because he must rely on him to take him back to the train station. Of course, Yelkerrie could then simply abandon him and thus let him die, but he transports his 'master' loyally believing in his words and trusting this man who had hunted him down, who had then saved his life, and who has promised him to save him a second time. As the narrator emphasizes, he appears like a 'father' to him (211), and in his infinite trust he had delivered him to the authorities and thus himself as their captive.

Once Kanderer has recovered from his malaria attacks, he faces increasing pressure by the government to deliver the 'culprit' so that he can be brought to trial. But the sergeant has experienced a profound transformation, having understood fully the events with the four grassland seekers and the terrible impact of their brutal enslaving method that subsequently led to their death at the hand of Yelkerrie. Reflecting for a long time on the fundamental "clash of cultures," as the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington had formulated it first in a lecture in 1992 (Huntington 1993; cf. now Sacks 2002; Toft 2003; Tusicisny 2004; Engler 2007), the Swiss official changes his mind, distances himself from the entire white power structure, and since he realizes that the black man would certainly not receive any justice by the administration in Darwin, he escapes with Yelkerrie and disappears into the Never Never, never to be seen again. After all, he had given his promise, and he holds that promise even at the cost of himself having to turn his back to the entire white culture.

We are left with a deep sense of awe about this heroic figure who at first carries out his official task to track down the murderer with all his energy and resources and who succeeds in his goal. But Kanderer then proves to be much more humane and noble than all the other white men who do not understand or empathize with the Indigenous culture. In essence, the sergeant's actions result in development informed by a strong criticism of racism, of white European colonialism, and Western nationalism. A. E. Johann produced a highly successful novella which is predicated on the ideal of the 'noble savage' and a strong disapproval of white colonialist power structures.

Does the Racist Truly Turn into an Anti-Racist?

Because of the oncoming sickness, the sergeant commands a supernatural sensitivity and perceptivity and is thus able to comprehend better than ever before what had truly happened with the four white settlers and the reasons why they had to die. The malaria, in a way, undermines his traditionally European sense of authority and forces him to listen carefully and sensibly to Yelkerrie's words about his suffering. The settlers had violently encroached upon the induction ceremony organized for the young men in that tribe to accept them as fully matured adults. This ceremony takes place only once every three years, which made the disruption by the outsider to an even worse crime. The white settlers treated the young men as their slaves and thus ruined their entire lives: "sie konnten nicht auf die uralt heilige Weise als vollgültige Männer in den Stammesverband aufgenommen werden" (214; they could not be inducted into the tribal community as full male adults through the ancient and holy ceremony).

Upon the consultation of the old men in the tribe, the decision had been reached that only the death of those four men could achieve a cleansing of the unheard-of disruption of the "Mysterium" (214; mysterious ceremony). Yelkerrie had been chosen to carry out the revenge, and he was proud about his accomplishment: "Keiner entging mir. Die Welt ist wieder in Ordnung!" (214; No one escaped me. The world is in good order again!). In his fever visions, Kanderer suddenly realizes that Yelkerrie was right and that the settlers had been wrong. Of course, the narrator makes him think that the black man was 'primitive' who only followed the ancient rules of his tribe. This primitiveness, however, emerges as an ideal alternative to the corruption of the Western culture. As to the tribal elders, it dawns upon him: "Waren nicht die Alten freizusprechen, denn die Weißen hatten ein furchtbares Sakrileg begangen, das nur durch Blut zu sühnen war, und auf keine andere Weise" (114; Were not the elders to be declared free of guilt because the whites had committed a terrible sacrilege that could be redeemed only through blood, and through no other way).

In fact, Kanderer, almost outside of himself because of malaria, begins to question his own legitimacy as a sergeant and his justification to keep the black man as his captive. He asks himself, for instance:

> Haben nicht wir selbst zu verantworten, daß er an uns schuldig wurde? Ist er überhaupt schuldig? Sind nicht wir, die wir die Voraussetzungen seines Verbrechens schufen, nicht ebenso schuldig, ja schuldiger als er, denn er ist ja nur ein unwissender Sohn der Einöde? (215)
>
> [Are we not responsible ourselves for the fact that he became guilty? Is he guilty in the first place? Are we, who created the pre-condition for his crime, not as much guilty, if not even more guilty than he is because he is only the ignorant son of this lonely world?]

Undoubtedly, the narrator never abandons his Western worldview; he maintains the hegemonic perspective, even though he pays increasing respect to the Indigenous man who had performed such a heroic act to redeem his own disgrace committed by the settlers. The notion of the 'noble savage' is never abandoned, but Kanderer is increasingly filled with doubts about his own position as a sergeant in Australia, about the legitimacy of the colonization, and he even wonders about justice itself: "ob und wie Macht Recht setzen darf, ist eine uralte Frage, an der sich die größten Geister vergeblich erproben" (215; whether and how might establishes right is an ancient question which the greatest intellectuals tried to answer in vein).

However, the consequences of this new insight are quite remarkable because he suddenly doubts the validity of the entire legal system set up by the whites and believes that the Indigenous peoples would deserve their own sovereignty. Moreover, there appears a profound new bond between the former captive and Kanderer who senses, although he has fallen into a long-term coma, that he can trust and relie on Yelkerrie: "der Schwarze tat alles, was überhaupt getan werden konnte" (217; the black man did everything that could even be done).

Somehow, the two manage to get to the station of Katherine where the sergeant finally wakes up again, and to his great surprise, Yelkerrie is still there and waits for him, laughing happily when he discovers that Kanderer had opened his eyes again. This is the more surprising for him because no one at the station would have thought of Yelkerrie anything else but that he was the sergeant's loyal servant whom they would have allowed to return to his tribe at any time without any questions. But Yelkerrie had stayed and had waited for his recovery. The narrator compares him with a loyal dog (218), and he emphasizes that the black man had an absolutely firm faith in the sergeant's promise to protect him and to preserve his freedom.

It remains unclear why Kanderer identifies Yelkerrie as the actual culprit of the murder of the four white men. But the authorities demanded that the case be resolved and closed, and the sergeant could do nothing else but to insist that he would have to present the criminal case at the court for Indigenous affairs himself (218). He has learned his lesson, which the narrator calls the "für recht Erkannte" (218; that what he had grasped to be the right thing). Then the unimaginable happened. Kanderer learns from a report that the authorities had sent a strong punitory force against the tribe which was by then identified as riotous and deserving of the worst possible punishment. Those men who had tried to resist where quickly shot and killed. Others were taken to Port Darwin as prisoners and received as a penalty imprisonment for life or at least for many years. As the narrator comments brutally: "der Alligator-Stamm als solcher [hatte] aufgehört zu bestehen" (219; the Alligator tribe had stopped to exist).

Kanderer realizes that there is no hope for Yelkerrie. Even if he were to receive a lesser punishment because he had saved the sergeant's life, imprisonment would be a death penalty for him in reality: "für die schweifenden Kinder der Wildnis ein Schicksal, schlimmer als der Tod" (219; for the freely roaming children of the wilderness a destiny worse than death). However, here again we recognize the ambivalent attitude hidden behind this statement. On the one hand, the author expresses considerable empathy for the terrible suffering of the Indigenous tribes in the Northern Territory of Australia; on the other, he regards them as children who would be in need of paternal protection. Indeed, that's exactly the term he uses for the black man, his "Schützling" (219; one under his care or protection). Once Kanderer has decided to leave the station and to disappear with the 'culprit,' he gives him some instructions to prepare their departure, and Yelkerrie obeys him without any hesitations, "Er gehorchte, ohne zu fragen" (220; He obeyed without raising any questions).

We are left with a mysterious outcome, especially since it seems rather problematic to assume that the two men could have survived for long in the wilderness without any supplies from the white culture. Yelkerrie's tribe was eliminated, and Kanderer had lost all hope for his own legal system to offer justice even for the Indigenous people. His deep sense of justice revolted against the authoritarian system, and for him, it was more important to keep his own word than to keep his job as a sergeant. Kanderer is loosely identified as a descendent of one of the Swiss guards who used to be famous for their loyalty to their respective lord and who were rather willing to be hacked to pieces than to break their oath (164–65) (see, for instance, Royal 2006; for an excellent survey with the relevant visual documents and references, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swiss_Guard; last accessed on July 19, 2024). The story itself thus proves to be a literary paean on a man's loyalty and honor. For Kanderer, his own word given to the captive that he would protect him proves to be of supreme value, and for that reason he sacrifices his life for the black man and disappears together with him, never to return to the white culture.

At the same time, the author formulates typical, that is, rather ambivalent, if not hypocritical sentiments about the relationship between the white Europeans in Australia and the Indigenous population. Similar as Karl May and other authors of adventure stories (Pleticha and August 1999), A. E. Johann admired the profound strength and cultural character of the native trackers and then of Yelkerrie. He realizes the deeply flawed colonial structure dominating Australia, but he also knows that he does not have any real chance of protecting his captive. Even if he were to defend him at court, referring to the grass seeker's own responsibility in that matter and their brutal imperialist approaches toward the natives deep in the Never Never, the likelihood that the court would grant the 'culprit' some grace and possibly let him off of some of the charges, they would never acknowledge the native culture or, on the other hand, the settlers' guilt in breaking the taboo, their attempt to enslave those people, and their readiness to occupy any land that would have been convenient for them.

Anti-Racism within the Framework of Racism

All this now forces us to question more in detail what insights the protagonist developed and what the author intended to convey, or, what might be even more important, to understand what messages regarding racism are contained in the text, whether deliberately placed there by Johann or indirectly developed even against his own intentions.

Throughout the entire story, the patriarchal, hegemonic worldview dominates. Kanderer, as much as he eventually distances himself from the white power structure out of protest and even disgust, feeling deeply hurt in his sense of justice, never abandons his attitude of the master over the black Indigenous people. Both his trackers and the tribal elders, both Yerkerrie and one of the messengers are completely subjugated and carry out their duties following the sergeant's commands. The author, through the protagonist's eyes, perceived the native people as lower in rank because they still belong to an earlier stage of human development. Johann did not move away at all from the traditional Eurocentric perspective of identifying the whites as superior, more intelligent, and more powerful than the Indigenous people. He acknowledges them in their physical abilities, but he never allows them any independence or leadership roles.

As an adventure novel, "Der Mann der sein Wort gab" obviously appealed to those white readers who were deeply interested in the exotic, the foreign worlds, and in the heroism of individuals who were immigrants to the colonies consistently able to withstand and then overcome the resistance and opposition by the Indigenous people. The European culture and nature have to supersede those of other continents. However, in the end, Kanderer still turns away from that ideology and leaves together with his black companion whom he no longer treats as a criminal or as a slave. Johann argues, of course, from a perspective not determined by European perspectives because Germany had lost all its colonies after World War One. Yet, this narrative still mirrors the traditional colonialist position, as much as the sergeant begins to turn away from it and joins, as far as we can tell, the native culture. There is no doubt that the narrator belittled the Indigenous people, identifying them somewhat like children in need of European support, education, and protection.

This then leads over to the final question why we would even engage with this narrative at a time when anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and anti-nationalism are gaining such a strong foothold in the present critical discourse. There is no doubt that "Der Mann der sein Wort gab" proves to be an excellently written novella, filled with drama, contradictions, conflicts, and surprising solutions. As in a 'classical' adventure novel, crime story, or drama, the unquestioned and idealized protagonist pursues his goal to track down the criminal with all his energy, resources, and abilities. Although at the end of his strength, he manages to catch the fugitive, but then the situation changes radically, and the hunter Kanderer turns into a protector of the hunted, although in his last function he is not able to live up to his own promise.

Most significantly, particularly because of his honor principles, this Swiss sergeant cannot live within a political system that turns out to be colonialist, racist, and imperialist. His honor values contradict the administrative values, so he is forced to withdraw from that world and to join, possibly, the other one, although he himself had identified it as correlated to the stone age. There is no good solution, no innovative perspective; instead, there is only a deep sense of frustration over the imperialist system dominating Australia that never hesitates to subjugate the native population in absolute and resolute fashion. By contrast, Kanderer subscribes deeply to the ideals of honor, loyalty, and dignity, and he cannot tolerate the idea of seeing an innocent black Indigenous individual who had only defended his own cultural principles and values against the imperialist strategies by the political and economic representatives of the grass seekers' society.

As our discussion has demonstrated, Johann's novella can certainly be appreciated from a purely literary perspective, being well argued and structured, in an elegant language and drawing from most powerful images of the conflict between the white and the Indigenous culture. The former emerges as corrupt, ruthless, and selfish; the latter appears as victimized and in danger of losing its own status. Although the Swiss sergeant attempts to pay respect to his captive and his tribe, the officials in the distant capital city of Port Darwin enforce their authority, which leaves Kandere no option but to flee the Western world and to disappear in the desert and bush world of the Never Never.

The outcome appears as highly illusionary and unrealistic, but it constitutes a tremendous appeal to the individual's ethical ideals and honor principles. The power differential between the blacks and whites is never overcome, although Kanderer operates by the ideals of honesty, justice, and fairness, as long as his own superior position is not questioned. All this might be the expression of a kitsch culture in the middle and second half of the twentieth century, which was obviously widely colported supporting if not even cementing the traditional concept of race relations, and this also well into the post-colonial age. In the name of male heroism and adventure, conservative racism experiences its uncanny rebirth, and yet, at least within the context of Johannes's short story, also its profound criticism, or at least questioning.

Kanderer is not the kind of protagonist who would normally know how to view white society for which he serves in an important position in the Northern Territory through a critical perspective. But he senses, almost by instinct, that injustice is committed and that the white authorities abuse their powers without ever asking themselves about the consequences of their actions. The sergeant knows only one practical solution, and that is, to disappear into the bush and to remove himself from Western society never to be seen again, certainly a post-Romantic position informed by the eighteenth-century myth of the 'noble savage.'

Considering that "Der Mann der sein Wort gab" achieved the status of a bestseller, we can certainly accept it as a

meaningful mirror of popular culture in German-speaking lands, offering exoticism, a sense of adventure, the ideal of masculinity, honor, and principles. In that process, Johann can be credited with developing a unique, though still fragmentary concept of anti-racism within his narrative framework clearly determined by racism. The reading public responded with great enthusiasm to his text, which invites us to reflect further on general attitudes in the West toward Indigenous people already since the middle of the twentieth century. To repeat the implied question in the title of this paper, can we even imagine anti-racism within a literary work of this caliber as an adventure story in the Never Never where the white culture clashes with the Indigenous culture? I venture to answer with a tentative 'yes,' and this despite many other problems that certainly exist in this intriguing text.

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