

Fact or Fiction? What a multidirectional analysis of Heinrich
Börnstein's novel *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* (*Mysteries
of St. Louis*) tells us about the German immigrant experience
in the mid-nineteenth century

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

FACT OR FICTION? - WHAT A MULTIDIRECTIONAL APPROACH OF
HEINRICH BÖRNSTEIN'S NOVEL *DIE GEHEIMNISSE VON ST. LOUIS* TELLS
US ABOUT THE GERMAN IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE IN THE MID-
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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- Für meine Familie.

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ABSTRACT

The utilization of various supporting materials to reconstruct the context of mid-nineteenth century St. Louis, shows that Börnstein's novel crystalizes German Immigration experiences. The purpose of this study is to encourage the investigation of nineteenth-century German-language literature, including periodicals, by stressing its necessity for a better understanding of America's history and culture. The novel itself, even though it serves as the foundation of this work, cannot be approached from one perspective alone without considering all aspects that shaped German immigration experiences. Religion, education, time, politics, gender, age, financial means, and "push and pull" factors driving immigration all need to be considered in order to be able to show how or if *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* represents reality for most German immigrants in the 1850s, keeping in mind that no experience is always collective.

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Introduction

There is a large number of original, not translated, and unedited German-American print sources in the archives of Historical Societies and university libraries across the United States waiting to be investigated. Many are serialized novels printed in German language newspapers in St. Louis, which were once thriving. However, not many scholars have paid attention to their importance as valuable sources for the investigation of St. Louis German immigrant experiences of the mid-nineteenth century.

One of the novels that has been neglected for quite some time is Heinrich Börnstein's serialized popular novel *Geheimnisse von St. Louis (Mysteries of St. Louis)*. Despite its popularity in the time of its publication and even some years later it took scholars more than a century to consider it a source for the investigation of German immigration experiences. Even though, the novel was translated into English shortly after its publication, it took well over a century before American literary scholars dealt with this once-successful novel for the first time. It was only in the 1990's when Elizabeth Sims from the University of Missouri, St. Louis's English department edited the English edition as a special project, and together with the historian Steven Rowan, they created the version that has been used primarily in this study. Since then, only a limited number of scholars have attempted to draw conclusions about German immigrant experiences through it. Just as of recently, the German Research Foundation funded the project (2021–2024), "Serial Circulation: The German-American

Mystery Novel And The Beginnings of Transatlantic Modernity (1850-1855)” at the University Siegen, in which the works of August Gläser, Heinrich Börnstein, Emil Klauprecht, Rudolph Lexow and Ludwig von Reizenstein are examined.

Just as German-American fictional work had mostly been neglected in the past by many disciplines, it seems that German-language periodicals in Missouri have been equally neglected. This is particularly evident through the lack of high-quality, digital preservation of German newspapers. The Missouri Historical Society in Columbia provides a collection of many German-language newspapers on microfilm. The *Anzeiger des Westens*, in which *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* was first serialized is one of them. However, due to the condition of the original material and the complicated operation of the microfilm machine/reader, its digitized form used during this research process was difficult and time consuming. To provide an example of the issues with readability, I included Image 1. The Missouri Historical Society converted already bound original paper issues to microfilm around the mid-twentieth century. During this process, the inner part of the bound collection is often too dark, or completely black, and therefore not readable. Even enlarging or adjusting the brightness and contrast could not lead to a clearer picture on some pages. This seems to be less of an issue with microfilms derived from loose original newspaper collections, such as those of the weekly editions.



(Image 1. Anzeiger des Westens, daily edition, February, 2nd, 1850, front page)

One would have to locate existing original editions or investigate other microfilms from different Historical Societies or archives, or request access to the original collection. For this study, I used only the microfilms provided at the Missouri Historical Society in Columbia. A qualitative and complete digitalized archive of the *Anzeiger des Westens*, and other German-language periodicals, if

made accessible online, would allow for easier navigation through the material. Further, available English translations of such would especially encourage more public investigation.

Another advantage or requirement for the utilization and accurate interpretation of German-American print sources is the collaboration with other disciplines such as History, Digital Humanities, and other fields of Social Studies. In order to better understand Missouri's German history and culture, German-American novels, including supporting materials, like newspapers, letters, poems, travel and official government reports need to be accessible and approached through interdisciplinary investigations. Such an approach broadens the scope of each academic field and places German-American print sources in multiple departments. Non-German-speaking scholars who deal with social and cultural elements of human behavior would then be able to incorporate them in their works and hence, provide an overall more accurate understanding of the German element in the U.S. In her book about literary transnationalism, which includes not just German-language texts. Patricia Okker, an English-Literature scholar provides a good example of how such a cooperation would look like.¹ She relies on translations provided by other scholars and is then able to offer her expert input. Equally, (and especially) desirable during a multidirectional research, is the knowledge and expertise of scholars from other fields such as American literature, history, criminology, sociology, journalism, and religious

¹¹ Patricia Okker, *Transnationalism and American Serial Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

studies. This study will show that a collaboration with other academic disciplines would yield a more accurate picture of the immigrant experience.

For the purpose of showing that fictional serialized novels should be used as sources for the study of German immigration experiences of mid-nineteenth century St. Louis, *Die Geheimnisse des Westens* required the same multidirectional approach, in terms of interdisciplinary knowledge to investigate various aspects of human life. The utilization of various supporting materials to reconstruct the context of mid-nineteenth century St. Louis, shows that Börnstein's novel crystalizes German Immigration experiences. In addition, the purpose of this study is to encourage the investigation of nineteenth-century German-language literature, including periodicals, by stressing its necessity for a better understanding of America's history and culture. The novel itself, even though it serves as the foundation of this work, cannot be approached from one perspective alone without considering all aspects that shaped German immigration experiences. Religion, education, time, politics, gender, age, financial means, and "push and pull" factors driving immigration all need to be considered in order to be able to show how or if *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* represents reality for most German immigrants in the 1850s, keeping in mind that no experience is always collective. For my purpose, a multidirectional analysis consists not only of investigating key themes and their narrative representation in the novel, but also using other primary sources as references to show how the novel's messages or stances lines up with the overall attitude of the public during mid-nineteenth century St. Louis. Throughout, I attempt to avoid drawing general

conclusions from Börnstein's own individual experiences reflected in the novel, as well as my subjective reading of it.

In this study, I will start in chapter one with an investigation of how scholars have approached German-American texts so far. In the second part of the first chapter, I will consider, how scholars have dealt with *Die Geheimnisse des Westens* and explain, how my approach differs. In Chapter 2, I will provide information about the *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, its author Heinrich Börnstein, and about its form and means of publication, as well as the role of the German press in St. Louis. Finally, in Chapter three, I will address the format of the Feuilleton and the overlap of fact and fiction, in period representations of immigration, showing how the push and pull factors, the Gold Rush, steamboat and riverboat voyages, and the city of St. Louis itself were rendered. Chapter four will deal with the two disastrous events of St. Louis in 1849: the Cholera outbreak and the Great St. Louis fire. In Chapter 5, I will address topics in the novel that further play major roles in a person's life, whether immigrant or not, and compare them with other sources to examine factual and fictional overlap.

Here, I would like to offer definitions of my key terms, which include:

multidirectional approach: A multidirectional approach for this study means:

- 1) analyzing different aspects of human life and experiences of German immigrants in mid-nineteenth century, as well as
- 2) utilizing a variety of literary texts to support or disprove claims, and

3) drawing knowledge from different disciplines, such as American and German Studies and Literature, German-American Studies, History, Humanities, Journalism, and Social Sciences, by expanding the scope of these academic fields. This will ensure an overall more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the human experience.

contextual reading: Reading and analyzing a text while keeping social and historical circumstances at the time of creation in mind and considering its context of publication. It includes consideration of the author's personal convictions and biography, as well as the reaction and response of its readers to a particular literary work.

immigration: Moving to another country with the intention of living there permanently.

emigration: The process of leaving one's own country to live in another.

push and pull factors: The reasons, circumstances, and opportunities that motivate emigration or immigration.

assimilation: The process of adapting to the culture of the country of immigration.

transnationalism: cultural exchange between one or more locations that goes beyond borders.

culture: A set of beliefs, customs, and behavior that is ascribed to a society or an organization.

Americanization: This term has been applied differently at separate times in history. One refers to the process of “becoming American” in national ideological terms, while the other describes the state of a non-uniform American culture which is comprised of adopted foreign cultures. Both concepts will be explained in detail in chapter one.

Chapter 1: Scholarly approach to German-American Literature and *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*

A. Scholarly approach to German-language literature published in the United States throughout the years

Though encompassing many works in a variety of genres, German-American literature published in America during the nineteenth century has been at times greatly neglected, and at other times revived by politically significant events and important socio-political questions in different periods of history. Despite the existence of a vast number of such works, there are only a handful of novels that the German literary canon paid attention to, and many texts still remain untouched. The debate about what is considered German-American plays a role in this as well.

The detection of “Americanization” in German-American novels or other print sources for instance, was the main scholarly focus during anti-German sentiments in the first half of the twentieth century related to the events of the world wars. With the influx of German scholars, like Arendt and Gay to name a few, in the latter half of the same century to the United States, the attention started to shift to exile literature or Jewish-German literature. Towards the end of the twentieth century scholars began investigating German-American works for a different Americanization; one that does not show a process of assimilation, but rather a contribution or adaptation of German culture by American society. In recent decades, a reinvention of the field of German-American studies has and is continuing to take place, as evident in its broadened material consideration, as

well as in the multidisciplinary approach and collaboration efforts with other departments. The importance of this nineteenth century writing in German, not just as works of American literature, but as valuable sources for history is being recognized by most scholars. Untouched and forgotten works are now being rediscovered, translated, published, and therefore made available for further investigations. One example of this is provided by Cora Lee Kluge's anthology, which includes some never before published works.²

With each new Generation descending from German immigrants, the German language itself started to disappear in American society, and with it the already meager interest in German-American literary works. In Kluge's words, the history and fate of German-American literature 'are parallel to the history and fate of the German language in America'³, German-language literary sources published in the United States in the nineteenth century numbered in the thousands, popular and enjoyed a large readership. Especially mystery novels, of which, Börnstein's *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* is one example, went through multiple editions, and authors like him, gained, more than a literary following, as is evident in his successful political efforts to motivate the German public in American political affairs. Sometimes, these German language novels were even translated for the English-speaking population. *Mysteries of St. Louis*, itself was first translated by Friedrich Münch in 1852, a year after its publication in the *Anzeiger*. However, it took well over a century before Steven Rowan and

² Cora Lee Kluge, *Other Witnesses: An Anthology of Literature of the German Americans, 1850–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

³ Kluge, *Other Witnesses*, xi.

Elizabeth Sims provided a modern edition of it, which proves that in the twentieth century, even those nineteenth-century works that had been popular in their day did not enjoy much attention despite their availability in the English language. Scholarly interest in such works was primarily limited to the fields of linguistics and cultural history. In the late nineteenth century, German literary criticism, hardly paid attention to them, considering them of mediocre quality at best, hardly mentioning their existence. Some libraries did not even put in the effort to preserve these “untouched and forgotten” works as Cora Lee Kluge and Mark L. Louder mention.⁴ There are thousands of published and many more unpublished texts and other materials, such as plays, letters, newspaper articles, and diaries that have been left undiscussed. In Frank Trommler’s rendering, despite major individual efforts to preserve German Americana at various libraries and Historical Societies, the undertaking “was not more than an exercise in antiquarianism, a gesture toward the bygone days of German America”.⁵ He further argues, that prior to around twenty years ago, such projects were only funded because of their “academic usefulness” to a presumably limited audience. However, since Trommler’s and his colleague Elliott Shore’s restoration project, which began in 1994, the Library of the German Society of Pennsylvania for instance, houses now over 50,000 books, of which more than 37,500 are in the

⁴ Cora Lee Kluge and Mark L. Loudon, “German-American Studies: An Expansive – and Expanding – Field,” in *Crossing Paths – Essays in German-American Studies* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2009), 2.

⁵ Frank Trommler, “Literary Scholarship and Ethnic Studies: A Reevaluation,” in *German? American? Literature? New Directions in German-American Studies*, eds. Winfried Fluck und Werner Sollors (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 25.

German language.⁶ Within nearly three decades the collection of German books has clearly grown tremendously, and much work needs to be done to provide non-German speaking scholars of American history, culture, and literature with usable material.

B. Early twentieth-century:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, general acceptance of only English-written works as being representative of American Literature mirrored the prevailing place of Anglo-Saxonism in society. On the other hand, works written in the German language, regardless of where they were written, were understood to be German works. America's national character was defined as stemming from an Anglo-Saxon heritage. German-American writers would have to write in English if they wanted to be recognized and secure a place in American literature.

What it meant to be American was redefined in the later first half of the twentieth century, allowing the acknowledgement of America's multi-cultural past and the acceptance of non-English works into the space of American Literature. A new American identity was being constructed with the aim of uniting the American people and promoting a general distinct Identity. The process of transformation and its outcome was defined as "Americanization". Some scholars

⁶ German Society of Pennsylvania.org, "History and Overview", accessed February 16, 2022, www.germansociety.org/library/.

have tried to get non-English language writings accepted as part of American literature, according with the understanding of “America as melting pot,” containing a unique cultural blend, emerged from the fusion of different cultures. It is easier to understand when keeping “e pluribus unum”⁷ in mind, which in sociological terms refer to a new culture, that is made up from the fusion or blending together of many different. Robert Lawson-Peebles, an Americanist, explains that,

American critics now handled their literature with a greater sense of ease and self-confidence, which also came from the awareness that the Second World War had been largely won by American military might. But, more than this, American literature had become an ideological standard-bearer. In the Preface the editors had asserted that ‘the communicable fire of Thomas Paine’ was “the antithesis of Hitler in the history of human liberty”.⁸

Germanist Sander L. Gilman also confirms, that from the 1930s to the 1950s, German American texts were commonly analyzed for any Americanization processes not only to place them within the space of American literature but to also remove them from the space of German literature. Attempts were made to promote “Americanness” as a unique, distinguished trait or quality and the process of transformation that entails it. Gilman states that it was not by coincidence that the canon chose texts that were written by anti-authoritarian

⁷ Latin, “out of many one” or “one out of many”

⁸ Robert Lawson-Peebles, *American Literature Before 1880* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 19.

German-Americans like Charles Sealsfield⁹. Charles Sealsfield had changed his name from Karl Anton Postl soon after he arrived in the U.S., wrote mostly in English, and his work included topics of the frontiers, wild untouched lands, and politics. Considering this fact, we can see that the agenda was to promote the idea, that American's distinguished character was through to be marked by a combined love of freedom, independence, and democracy – and by a shared stake in settler-colonial visions of continental expansion. As mentioned, in a time of anti-German sentiment, attempts were made to attribute these characteristics to Americans with a German heritage as well.

3. Impacts of the World Wars

Because works in the German language were still widely viewed as having “remained pure even under the threat of acculturation,”¹⁰ attempts were made to emphasize the “Americanness” of such text without denying the contribution of Germans as being part of America. Considering the contribution of Texas-born English professor Henry A. Pochman, who provided a large variety of non-English American writings to be published in the American literary reference-book *Literary History of the United States* in 1948 to bring awareness to America's diverse past. One also needs to consider the anti-German sentiment that prevailed during that time in history brought about by the events of the World

⁹ Sander Gilman, “German? American? Literature? – Some Thoughts on the Problem of Question Marks and Hyphens,” in *German? American? Literature? New Directions in German-American Studies*, eds. Winfried Fluck und Werner Sollors (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), .

¹⁰ Gilman, “German? American? Literature?,” 7.

Wars. Examining and pointing out distinctive American traits of these works also served the purpose of dismissing or diminishing cultural concepts tied to race theory, helping to eradicate the anti-German sentiment that had emerged in America during WWII. However, even though Pochman published multiple scholarly works on the significance of German-American literature of the previous century, popular and scholarly interest in German-American works was very limited. Once anti-German sentiment decreased, the already meager interest in works written by German-Americans seemed to have been further pushed into oblivion.

4. Approaches to German-American literature from the Sixties to the Eighties

It was in the 1960s that, “the notion of anti-canon evolved in German studies” emerged and motivated scholars to investigate not just other neglected German-American texts from the nineteenth century, but also non-literary texts, such as letters and diaries. Non-literary materials did not just serve as sources for the investigation of German immigrant day to day experiences by historians anymore; now, literary experts started to include them in their research on cultural, identity and other topics.¹¹ Bringing historians’ and social scientist’s work into dialogue with literary practice in American universities, with a broader pivot toward interdisciplinary research becoming visible between 1960 and 1980. Trommler describes scholars who “elevated the use of documentation and

¹¹ Gilman, “German? American? Literature?,” 8.

original source material to an art, creating new audiences with their involvement in the everyday life of immigrants” whereas traditional literary scholarship was stuck in “old filiopietistic boosterism.”¹² Up until then scholars of German studies had been neglecting to analyze the “relationship between literature and German American cultural practices.”¹³

The 1960’s were also a time when interest in Jewish-German literature, especially that written in exile from fascism, became more and more central to the field’s work, replacing interest in German culture of the former century. Newly arriving Jewish and non-Jewish left-oriented academics arriving from Germany added much to the canon, including autobiographies and diaries that described experiences during the second World War. In fact, Gilman even points out that Jewish exile literature was increasingly understood as distinct from German literature, even when Jewish writers identified as German themselves.

6. The latest focus in German-American literature:

In the past twenty years, scholars have been approaching and analyzing German-American texts of the nineteenth century works with a different definition of Americanization, which focuses on cultural exchange rather than assimilation and to illuminate cultural transfer. The interest now lies more on “the processes by which Americans took up, responded to, and adapted German cultural

¹² Trommler, “Literary Scholarship and Ethnic Studies,” 37.

¹³ Trommler, “Literary Scholarship and Ethnic Studies,” 39.

material for their own purpose.”¹⁴ Lynn Tatlock and Matt Erlin analyze the historical emergence of a discourse of “Americanization” that is opposite of the Americanization approach of the early to mid-twentieth century. Instead of identifying or investigating processes of change or the loss of the German culture or language in texts, the scholarly focus has shifted in recent years towards the analysis of elements in the constructed American culture that mirrors German ideas and materials.¹⁵ To visualize this approach, one can think of America as a non-uniform Mosaic, in which different cultures, values, and ideas are visible or recognizable. Tatlock and Erlin also attribute a shift in this approach to the general call of reframing different academic disciplines, especially to Trommler’s “insistence on the need to situate German-American studies within the broader framework of inquiries into multi-lingual and multi-ethnic America.”¹⁶ Scholars like Keel were already criticizing a decade earlier, that just writing about Germans in America is not adding much to the understanding of their significance or contributions to American Studies. He was suggesting that the field of German-American Studies had to free itself “from its umbilical ties to departments of traditional German studies or Germanistic”, and this would require a stronger focus on Americanization and simultaneously, on de-Germanization in research.¹⁷ Gilman also advocates for a multi-directional approach to German-American Literature, in which different experiences, whether good or bad, are

¹⁴ Lynn Tatlock and Matt Erlin, *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Reception, Adaptation, Transformation* (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), xi.

¹⁵ Tatlock and Erlin, *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, vii-xii.

¹⁶ Tatlock and Erlin, *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, xiv.

¹⁷ William Keel, “German-American Studies: The Need to Americanize the Field,” in *Monatshefte*, Vol. 86.

considered and one-directional representations that are often linked with a personal agenda can be avoided. Scholars must “avoid the desire for homogenization of a German experience” as he warns.¹⁸ With Gilman’s thought in mind, I will provide in the next section an overview of the scholarship on Heinrich Börnstein’s novel *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*.

B. Scholarly approach to Henry Börnstein’s *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*

Enjoying great popularity in the time of its publication and even some years later, Heinrich Börnstein’s serialized novel *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, which was translated into English shortly after its publication. Though seemingly forgotten by the 1880, and little discussed for a century, interest in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* has increased in the last forty years or so and the focus was predominantly on German and American national identity and German immigrant experiences. The scholars whose approach to Börnstein’s novel I investigated for this study, are provided in chronological order of publication in this section.

1. Barbara Lang

In 1988, Barbara Lang examined *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* to investigate Börnstein’s perceived national identity and then compared it to several other German-American authors of nineteenth-century novels, focusing on works written between 1850 and 1900. She analyzes immigration “through its

¹⁸ Gilman, “German? American? Literature?,” 15.

reflections in literature written by American immigrant authors themselves rather than through historiographical material.”¹⁹ Lang focused on what Börnstein’s narration about immigration says about his ideas and convictions. She treats *Geheimnisse von St. Louis* as solely a mystery novel and draws conclusion about Börnstein’s feelings towards America and successful immigration based only from the novel’s content. Lang concludes in her research that the earlier works of German-American literature written in the form of mystery novels despite the negative experiences of the protagonists demonstrated enthusiasm for America by praising the opportunities they offered to immigrants seeking freedom. She also advocates for the use of fictional literature as source for the investigation of German immigration experiences.

2. Steven Rowan

As a historian and the translator/editor of the *Mysteries of St. Louis*, Rowan investigated the novel from different perspectives and collaborated with other scholars and experts. When it comes to style or genre, scholars who deal with Börnstein’s novel refer to Eugene Sue’s *Les Mysteres de Paris*. However, Rowan states that it was not patterned on this particular work and that, “if it resembled anything by Sue closely, it was *The Wandering Jew*, with its image of virtually universal corruption.” Considering, *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*’s intended name, *Die Raben des Westens* and the California journey in the

¹⁹ Barbara Lang, *The Process of Immigration in German-American Literature from 1850 to 1900: A Change in Ethnic Self-Definition* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1988), 3.

narration, he believes that it is “rather a prototype of the German Western in the Karl May tradition.”²⁰

Rowan also investigates factual and fictional content and concludes that references to real events and people were not completely realistic, but that Börnstein’s own life experiences, obsessions, and convictions are reflected in the characters and the omniscient narration. As the translator of Börnstein’s *Memoirs*, which he published around seven years after he edited *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, he has great knowledge of the author’s personal life and can in retrospect make a good judgment about Börnstein’s intent and reason to create the different plots and characters.

3. Gerhild Scholz Williams

Gerhild Scholz Williams reads the novel by focusing on cultural transfer, addressing different aspects of the novel’s construction and using other primary sources to draw conclusions about immigration experiences. Additionally, she takes Börnstein’s personal life into consideration, and concludes that the novel’s “experiential immediacy”²¹, drawn from his life, creates a connection to the reader. She concludes that “much can be learned about German immigrant experience and culture in St. Louis” because the author, even though he brings

²⁰ Steven Rowan, *The Return of Henry Boernstein*, in “*The Mysteries of St. Louis*”, ed. Steven Rowan and Elizabeth Sims, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1990), ix.

²¹ Gerhild Scholz Williams, “New Country, Old Secrets: Heinrich Börnstein’s *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* (1851),” in *German Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Reception, Adaptation, Transformation*, eds. Lynne Tatlock and Matt Erlin (New York: Camden House, 2005), 253.

in his own convictions, is able to write his observation of other immigrants around him.²²

4. Annette Bühler-Dietrich

Annette Bühler-Dietrich examines Heinrich Börnstein's *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* from the standpoint of the mystery novel genre, emphasizing the subject of identity as it "has become a central topic in postcolonial criticism."²³ She argues that the author deploys the genre of mystery and educational novel to help German immigrants orient themselves in American society and eventually adopt a new German-American identity. Therefore, she argues *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* should not be seen as an expository writing about what it means to be a German or American in the United States, but rather as a piece of work which shows how characters find their new identities. To support her argument, she points out that, upon their arrival in the New World, the characters are met with challenges in an unknown world and need to orient themselves in this environment. This phase of orientation, she states, is actually a process of identity transformation that eventually leads to the creation of a new identity, the possible, or maybe even preferable German-American identity. Bühler-Dietrich's reading of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* focuses on the struggles of the protagonists "acquisition of a place in American society"²⁴, but it is not only the German immigrant who encounters hardship in the novel. The American Tom

²²Scholz Williams, "New Country, Old Secrets," 269.

²³ Annette Bühler-Dietrich, "German-American Identity in the Novels of Heinrich Börnstein and Otto Ruppis," in *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, (September 2006), 2.

²⁴ Bühler-Dietrich, "German-American Identity," 9.

and Pepita from California endured hardship as well. In a time of expansion, uncertainty, social and political debates and unrest, isn't in fact, every person trying to find a place in American society? What about Bob, who is American and had to endure life-long struggles and found his place not in St. Louis, but "in the midst of the Kickapoo Indians"²⁵ far away from his new-found family?

5. Matthias Göritz

The most recently, Matthias Göritz focuses on how the novel, through its realistic and relatable elements led to the formation of a new identity of a politically active German in the United States. He approaches the novel from a political perspective to explain national identity-formation. The novel's portrayal of active participation in politics by Germans living in America, along with their economic advancement over the course of its narrative, is supposed to show that Germans contributed to the creation of an American identity and are part of this newly created identity. Börnstein, then, imagined a nation in which Germans had a significant part in its formation.

6. My approach:

I will be focusing on Börnstein's depiction of the immigrant experience and comparing it to the actual socio-historical events and circumstances. While *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* serves as the foundation of this work, it cannot be approached from one perspective alone without considering all aspects that

²⁵ Henry Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, ed. Steven Rowen, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1990), 302.

contribute to German immigration experiences. Religion, education, time, politics, gender, individual characters, age, financial means, and other push and pull factors all need to be considered in order to be able to draw a clearer picture of the German population and how or if *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* represents reality of that time for most. In this work, my approach is similar to Gerhild Scholz Williams' multidirectional investigation, because it does not only consist of the investigation of various themes and content related perspectives in the novel, but it uses other primary sources as references to support or disprove the novel's messages or stances with the overall attitude of the public during mid-nineteenth century St. Louis. My goal is to avoid drawing general conclusions from Börnstein's own individual experiences reflected in the novel, as well as my subjective reading of it. This investigation is guided by the ideas of new scholarly approach to German-American works, which takes into consideration the diverse make up of American literature and culture, but also acknowledges diversity within a specific group of immigrants and circumstances as part of their lives.

Scholars have mainly focused on the experience of the Böttcher family's immigration or re-immigration to draw general conclusions about the German immigrants' experiences. The Böttchers are central characters in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, but they are not the only ones whose journey is described, and therefore, analyzing just their experience alone won't yield accurate understanding of St. Louis culture of 1850.

Chapter 2: What is *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, who wrote it, where was it published, and who was Börnstein? What was the role of periodicals? Why is a multidirectional approach necessary to properly understand the contextualized significance of the novel?

A. What is *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* when and where was it published?

Written in St. Louis and published in the Anzeiger des Westens from February to June 1851, Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis is a German-language serialized popular fiction belonged to the city-mystery genre. It was not the first German-language city-mystery novel published in the United States. In the year prior to Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis, Die Geheimnisse von Philadelphia: Eine Tendenznovelle und zugleich ein Beitrag zur Sitten- und Cultur-Geschichte des Amerikanischen Volkes had appeared in the Volksvertreter in Philadelphia. Its author is anonymous and according to Lang, only its first volume survived.²⁶ City-mystery novels already had been popular in the United States for a few years already before Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis was published. Georg Lippard's English-language The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk-Hall, written in 1844/1845 had already received great success and is often referred to America's first bestseller. Shortly before that, Eugene Sue's Mysteries of Paris was published and is credited as the forerunner of other city-mystery novels that appeared throughout Europe and then America. In fact, Börnstein experienced

²⁶Lang, *The Process of Immigration*, 41-42.

the hype of Sue's novel and the effect it had on the public because he resided in Paris at the time of its publication.

The city-mystery novel is characterized by a sensational style of writing and the inclusion of multiple plots which describe various topics that ought to illuminate power struggles between the poor and the elite citizens. Topics such as sex, violence, criminal activities, and secrecy are an important part of city-mystery novels. Die *Geheimnisse von St. Louis* includes several plots with similar descriptions as well, but it brings the immigration experience to the forefront and includes locations outside St. Louis. Börnstein takes readers on a journey to California and a convent in Indiana in this novel. In his memoirs, Börnstein writes that the initial name he chose for the novel was *Die Raben des Westens* (*The Ravens of the West*), but due to the competing newspaper, the *Deutsche Tribüne* (*German Tribune*), who had planned to publish a novel with the title *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, his publisher decided to beat the competition by giving it the same title.²⁷ The novel enjoyed great success and was even translated and published in other non-German-language newspapers as well. The book version went through six editions. Börnstein states that many other German-language newspapers reprinted the novel and that even a Czech translation in a Bohemian newspaper in St. Louis and a French one in a New Orleans paper had published his work. Its English translation began to be

²⁷ Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody, – The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical 1849 – 1866*, transl. and ed. Steven Rowan, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 127.

serialized in the *The German American* approximately a year after²⁸ with the title *The Mysteries of St. Louis, Or, The Jesuits on the Prairie des Noyers, A Western Tale*.

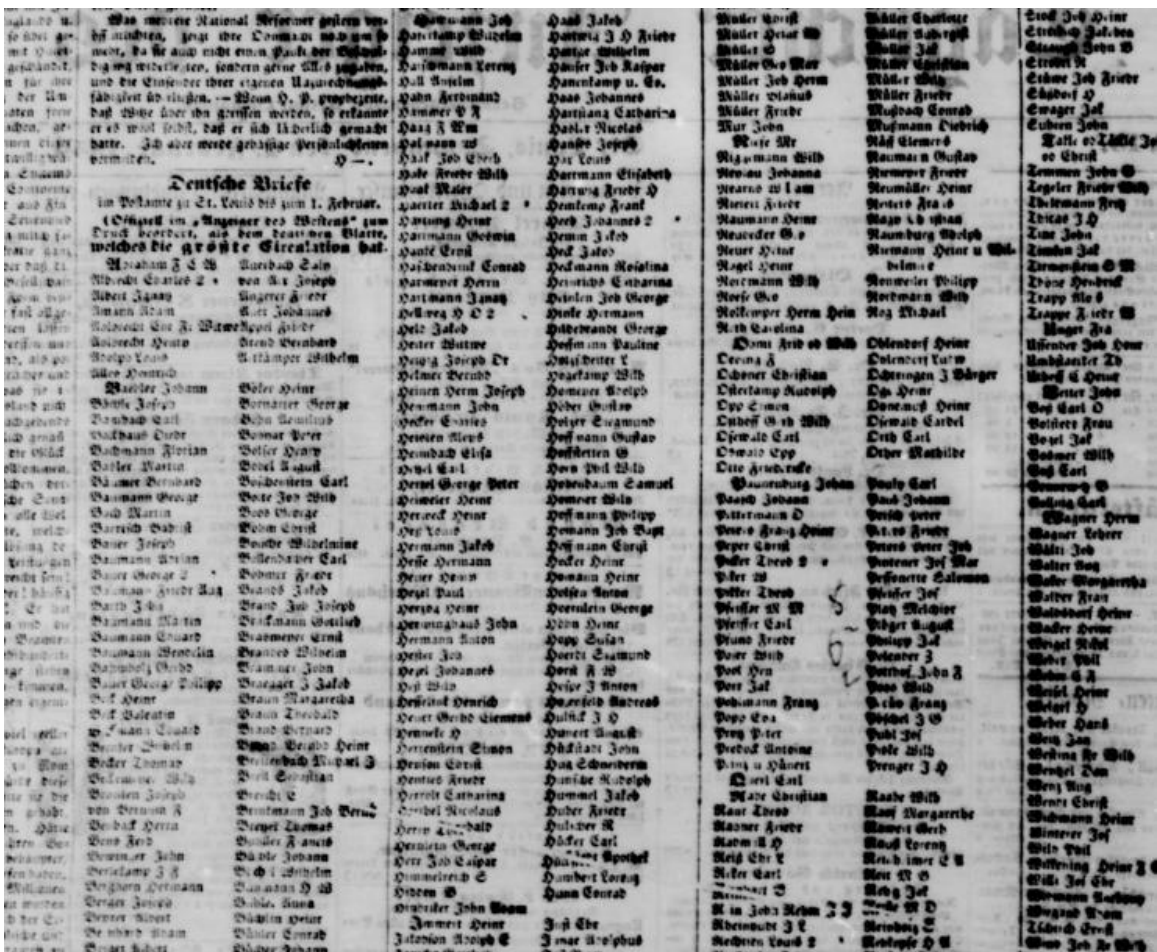
B. What was the general role of periodicals and what did the *Anzeiger des Westens* provide its readers? What functions did it serve?

Before providing a synopsis of the novel, I will discuss the role of the newspaper in general and explain the specific function of the *Anzeiger des Westens* as one of several German-language newspapers and the surrounding area and, with the first installment coming out in 1835, the oldest one serving the German-speaking population. Additionally, I will discuss the serialization of novels in newspapers and the impact this form had on the readers, as well as the publishing industry.

Not only the content of a newspaper that should be investigated, but also the structure and form of the periodical. It is not just important what was written but also how it was formatted, where it was located, and how often specific content was repeated. This brings us to the miscellaneity and seriality of a periodical. The former refers not just to all the different elements that make up a newspaper, but also to the seemingly random placement of such in each issue. Seriality refers to the recurring elements found in each edition.

²⁸ Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 127. In the footnote, Rowan doubts whether the English version in *The German American* was able to publish the complete parts before the newspaper was closed down.

Newspapers in the nineteenth century had multiple important functions that cannot be guessed at from the diminishing importance and use printed newspapers of our time. Periodicals were very important for the public in the nineteenth century because they were not just the main source for learning about local or European events, but they also served as a mean for communication and entertainment. The public was able to read about events locally and in Europe but could also find important information about steamboat arrivals and departures or learn about whether the post office held letters for them which could be picked up.



(Image 2: Anzeiger des Westens, February 2nd, 1850)

This newspaper extract from the *Anzeiger des Westens* from February 2nd, 1850, lets the customers know if the post office was holding any letters for them. Under the headline “Deutsche Briefe” (German Letters), the postmaster informs where and till when the letters can be picked up and lists the names of the addressees in alphabetic order. This mean of communication is mirrored in one scene in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* when Anton Böttcher learns about letters that are kept by the post office.

Examining the structure and form of the *Anzeiger des Westens* can give us clues about its focus and target audience. The daily edition of the paper consisted of four pages, which could be purchased for \$5 for a yearly subscription. In contrast to contemporary newspapers, where topical and scandalous headlines are ought to influence the buyer to pick up an issue, the first page of the daily installments of the *Anzeiger des Westens* always consisted exclusively of commissioned business advertisements. Considering this fact, we can assume that the paper was already enjoying a broad readership. It could also mean that the publisher and editors focused on the support and strengthening of the German community as a priority. It not only provided, newly arrived German-speaking immigrants with the opportunity to find services, but also allowed entrepreneurs to build their business.

Additionally, immigrants could find information about land for sale on the market or prices for everyday essential food items at a particular store in the newspaper as well. With the opportunity to commission a text advertisement, entrepreneurs were able to advertise for their business, like medical and law

practices, shops, restaurants and other establishments for entertainment. A sample is provided with Image 3, that shows the front page of the *Anzeiger des Westens* from the daily edition of March 8th, 1850.



(Image 3: Anzeiger des Westens, daily edition, August 3, 1850

The front page is solely composed of advertisements after the print information in the left upper corner of the page. The ads are placed under their corresponding category. In this case, those are “Geschäftsarten, Advocate & Notare, Uhrmacher, Ärzte, Brauereien & Wirtshäuser, Manufactur & Handlungen, Gemischtes” (Business types, attorneys & notaries, clockmakers, physicians, breweries & inns, manufactory & trades, miscellaneous). However, throughout the paper’s four pages, multiple other sections are reserved for advertisements and are not always visibly separated or placed into categories.

Readers could always be certain to find advertisements on the first and the last page of the paper. However, the ads were not always located with similar advertisements or under their descriptive categories. Business advertisements were not just limited to the first page of the paper. Advertisements for insurance companies always seem to have had a place reserved on the last page, so did other ads that offered various goods, services, and employment. Throughout the four pages one could see such inconsistently placed and not always visibly separated advertisements either standing on their own or in clusters.

Interestingly, a masthead containing information about the paper itself, which is usually located right in the upper left corner on the first page, was not always present in the daily installments. This shows that the editors adopted to different demands on a day-to-day basis. Addressing miscellaneity and seriality, one can see that while most of the time, content was grouped together under specific categories, it was not always the case.

From a political perspective, the newspapers served as a “Sprachrohr”²⁹, meaning a tool with which a writer’s message could be heard, not just by a large audience, but also a distant one. They especially became a popular medium for the forty-eighters, who found refuge in America after the failed revolution of 1848 in German-speaking Europe because it gave them the opportunity to convey non-censored messages to a larger and far-reaching audience. Newspapers were usually affiliated with certain political ideologies and a particular party. However, they could change their political stances depending on who was running the paper at a particular time. This is especially visible with the *Anzeiger des Westens*, which started out as a Democratic paper, then attempted briefly to be neutral, and then turned into a Republican paper.

According to Wagner, a large number of the so-called forty-eighters were indeed involved in newspaper editorial work in “the hope of keeping the spirit of the revolution alive.”³⁰ I would add that even if the forty-eighters were not directly involved in writing articles for the papers, one can still see their activities when looking through the ads themselves. As shown in image 3, the daily installments of the *Anzeiger des Westens* were full of ads by doctors, surgeons, and lawyers. Many sources state the forty-eighters were in general, university-educated men. Therefore, it stands to reason that there were also “forty-eighters” among them. It would require more research to confirm this assumption. The names of every person who commissioned an advertisement for his goods or services would

²⁹ In English, megaphone

³⁰ Wagner, Maria. “Mathilde Anneke’s Stories of Slavery in the German-American Press.” *MELUS* 6, no. 4 (1979): 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/467052>.

need to be examined for any involvement in the revolution to draw any a general conclusion.

Because the *Anzeiger des Westens* reached a wide range of audiences, it automatically aided in the identity formation as well as in the motivation for political engagement of its readership. English professor James Mussell states, that newspapers “were the way most readers learned of the world around them and realized their own place within it.”³¹ He says that the circulation of the newspaper within a group of people strengthened their identities. I would also argue that it consolidated their unity and feeling of belonging because they read the same stories in it, which gives them a shared knowledge. For instance, the avid readers of a particular religious periodical are provided with statements and information that are specifically written for a certain community, in a language they might also have encountered in church on Sundays or used in the home as part of their daily practice of faith. Belonging to this community therefore, will influence a reader’s encounter with a text, whose familiarity of address will in turn reinforce their sense of shared community identity.

Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis targeted a specific audience as well. It was written for the German-speaking audience able to identify with the characters and events in the novel. The next section includes information about the publication of the novel and a short synopsis.

³¹ James Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xiv.

C. What is *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* about?

Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis is a serialized sensational fiction novel falling under genre of city-mystery novel and was written by the German immigrant Heinrich Börnstein during the months of February to June of 1851. The first installment appeared in the daily edition of the *Anzeiger des Westens* on February 16th, and the last on June 20th of 1851. It simultaneously appeared in the weekly editions of the newspaper and was translated into French, English, and Czech. In his memoirs, Börnstein states that *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* helped raise the number of subscriptions to well over a thousand within a few months and that the book version went through six editions of about 1500 and 2000 copies, and because of popular demand, was even reprinted again a couple of years later.³² In the English translation by Mönch from 1852, it carries the title, *Mysteries of St. Louis: The Jesuits on the Prairie de Noyes*. The novel consists of 342 pages in the original German-language book form. For this study, I used both the German-language text in book form and the English-language translation from 1997 by Rowan and Simms, edited by Rowan.

Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis, tells the story of the German Böttcher family and the various characters they encounter during 1849 and 1850 in America. The father (Anton Böttcher) and the grandmother of the Böttcher family were both born in St. Louis. Anton Böttcher's parents left with him for Europe in

³² Steven Rowan's 1997 translation of Börnstein's *Fünfundsiebzig Jahre in der alten und der neuen Welt. Memoiren eines Unbedeutenden* [Seventy-five years in the Old and the New World. Memoirs of a Nobody] was used for this study. Börnstein's autobiography has been serialized in 'German-language American newspapers and in book form in Leipzig 1881' (xv). He began writing his memoirs in 1875, when he was 70 years old and appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Illinois Staatszeitung* in Chicago.(29)

the beginning of the nineteenth century. After his father's death several decades later, his mother insists that both, together with Anton's wife and four children (re)immigrate to the United States, specifically to St. Louis. Little do they know that they have been on the radar of the Jesuit order. A mysterious gang leader, who seems to be involved in this secret, orders a man by the name of "Big Bob" to spy on them. The family plans to purchase a farm upon arrival and ends up buying one from the wealthy Anglo-American land speculator, Jeremiah Smartborn, who is involved in criminal activity and together with the Jesuits causes a great deal of suffering to various characters in the novel. There are several subplots within the novel. It addresses immigration, the religious beliefs and observation, the Gold-Rush, crime, sex, religion, and other historical events like the Great St. Louis Fire and the Cholera outbreak. In the end "Big Bob", who develops a special fondness to the Böttchers, turns out to be the older brother of Anton, long presumed dead and the family, including the friends they gained during their journey, end up making it personally and financially in St. Louis in part due to what are presented as their typically German virtues. Smartborn and his criminal acquaintances end up dying and the Jesuits continue to harbor a plan for world domination. A sequel to *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* was planned but was never realized.

D. Who wrote the Novel? What is known about Heinrich Börnstein?

1. The author of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*

The German immigrant Heinrich Börnstein, born in 1805 in Hannover, wrote the novel approximately two years after his arrival to the U.S. in an attempt to increase subscriptions for the premiere German-language St. Louis periodical, the *Anzeiger des Westens*. Besides his activity as journalist, Börnstein is also known to have been politically active and influential in the German population. As a new immigrant to the United States, he was familiar with the uncertainty and struggles of the German newcomers. Incorporating his own experiences and observations into *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, he was able to capture the attention of the German immigrant population right away. Even though there are some inconsistencies in the characters' ages and names, Börnstein's journalistic expertise is evident in his novel through his inclusion of multiple, then-current events, and additionally through the incorporation of Saint Louis' early history into the novel's many plots, which according to the author, "always held greatest interest" to him.³³ Other events in the novel were drawn from his own personal experiences and encounters and will be discussed throughout this paper.

2. Life before and after immigration:

Heinrich Börnstein, was born to a Protestant mother and a Catholic father. He was a man with many talents and equally many different jobs. Before he emigrated in April 1849, Börnstein had lived all over Europe and practiced several professions, but his main occupation was in journalism and theater work.

³³ Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 98.

In fact, he ran the weekly newspaper *Vorwärts!*³⁴ in Paris and had already been writing articles for some American newspapers for a couple of years before his departure from France.

His intention to purchase a farm after his arrival did not bear fruit, and he ended up successfully practicing medicine in Highland, Illinois for approximately one year. In his memoirs he admits that he “was only imperfectly acquainted with the English language” and that he did not know much about American politics³⁵ but devoted himself to the study of it, even though he announced his retirement from journalism and politics in the *Anzeiger des Westens* shortly after his arrival in St. Louis. Because of his friend's request, the owner of the *Anzeiger*, Arthur Olshausen, he left his medical practice, moved to St. Louis and began his work as an editor in St. Louis in February of 1850. To increase subscribers for the paper, he wrote *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, which he initially wanted to name *Die Raben des Westens*. He states that through his work as the editor of the *Anzeiger*, but especially because of the popularity of his *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, he became “the leader of the Germans, at first in Missouri, then in the entire upper Mississippi valley.”³⁶ He became a well-known political activist and served as a military commander for a short time in 1861, after which he was appointed United States Consular in Bremen. Börnstein spent in total around

³⁴ Full name: *Vorwärts! Pariser Signale aus Kunst, Wissenschaft, Theater, Musik und geselligem Leben* (English translation: Forward! Paris Signals from Art, Science, Theater, Music, and Social Life)

³⁵ Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 122.

³⁶ Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 127.

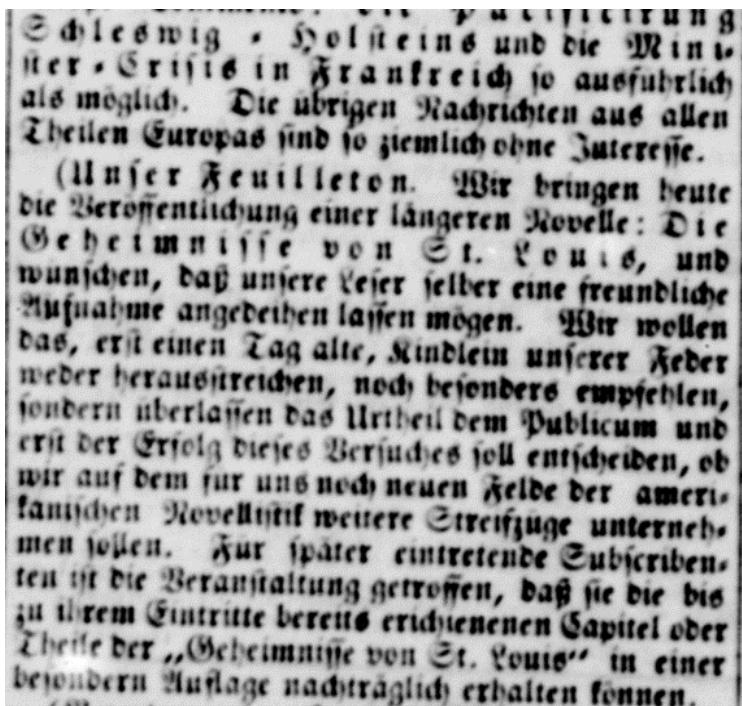
twelve years in the United States, only returning once for a short period of time in 1862.

E. Making sense of the novel's content through the publication context

Investigating the newspaper through the course of the publication timespan of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* allows us to gain insight into the general Zeitgeist of that time in German community of St. Louis and its surrounding areas. By investigating the paper's content, its general purpose, and the author's motives, one can find the answers to why the novel was written and the plots chosen, how many readers it reached, who they were, and what the reader reaction to the novel must have looked like at a given moment in time.

The first chapter of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* was published in the *Anzeiger des Westens* on February 16, 1851. The newspaper dedicated one and a half columns on its feuilleton page to the first part of the novel in its daily publication. A larger portion was included in the paper's weekly edition. The introduction to the novel is printed under its "St. Louis" news reports, which in contrast to the spaces dedicated to the reports of national and international cities is considerably short if the ads are excluded. The introduction itself is not written in a sensational tone as one would assume. However, it offers Börnstein's thoughts about his own work and a general opinion about its literary category. It reads,

(Unser Feuilleton.) Wir bringen heute die Veröffentlichung einer längeren Novelle: Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis, und wünschen, daß unsere Leser selber eine freundliche Aufnahme angedeihen lassen mögen. Wir wollen das, erst einen Tag alte, Kindlein unserer Feder weder herausstreichen noch besonders empfehlen, sondern überlassen das Urtheil dem Publicum und erst der Erfolg dieses Versuches soll entscheiden, ob wir auf dem für uns noch neuen Felde der amerikanischen Novellstil weitere Streifzüge unternehmen sollen. Für später eintretende Subscribenten ist die Veranstaltung getroffen, daß sie die bis zu ihrem Eintritte bereits erschienenen Kapitel oder Theile der „Geheimnisse von St. Louis“ in einer besondern Auflage nachträglich erhalten können.³⁷



(Image 4. Anzeiger des Westens, February 16, 1851, page3)

³⁷ Börnstein, "Unter Feuilleton", *Anzeiger des Westens*, February 16, 1851.

The articles loose English translation:

(Our Feuilleton.) Today, we bring a publication of a longer novel: The Mysteries of St. Louis and wish, that our readers will give it a friendly reception. We neither want to leave out or necessarily recommend our one-day-old creation but leave judgment to our audience and only the success of this experiment will decide if we will stay on this new excursion into the American novella style. Late subscribers, you will have the opportunity to receive already previously published chapters or parts as a special supplement later on.

Knowing about the novel's future popularity, it is surprising to read the editor's quite humble, even careful announcement. Instead of the writer spectacularly announcing his work as a masterpiece and introducing it as a must-read novel, he suggests that the readers make their own judgment about its quality.

Börnstein lets the reader know that this project is not well prepared, nor is he sure if he will receive positive feedback from his readership about it. In my interpretation of the announcement, Börnstein is saying that he does not want to just yet give up on this project, but neither is he quite convinced about a positive resonance. Considering that he needs to come up with an attention-grabbing story every day and write it before the daily installment is ready for the press, his doubt seems justified and at the same time it speaks of his great imaginative talent. He presents the whole serialized novel-writing idea as an experimental endeavor, but from his memoirs, it is known that he had a financial agenda.

In this introduction of the novel, Börnstein refers to his work as being written in an “amerikanischer Novellstil.” But what exactly did he mean by that? One would have to determine what Börnstein himself understood as this writing style to be. Considering the circumstances under which *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* was written, meaning that each published part of the novel had to be written in a short amount of time each day, he could have very well defined the “American style” as hastily writing. In every novel there are experiences that require the protagonists to go through a process and/or adaptation to certain unfamiliar situations or changes, therefore Börnstein could have also referred to its content, meaning the inclusion of topics such as frontier, expansion, immigration, or ethnic diversity, which were pressing issues of St. Louis in 1851. He could have also associated “America” with freedom and referred to the form of writing as not binding to a specific form.

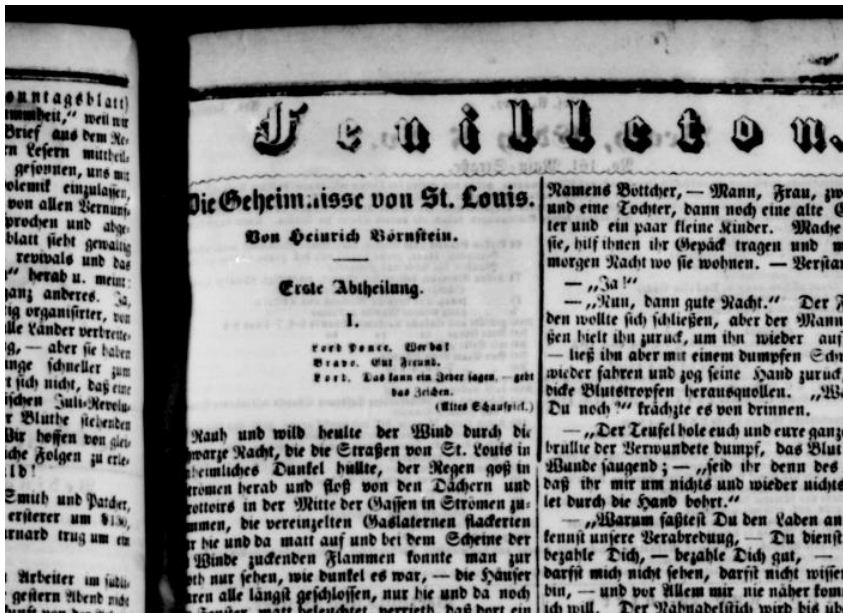
Chapter 3: The overlap of fact and fiction and how it blurs the Feuilleton line

In this chapter, topics within *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* that are directly related to the process of Immigration will be addressed and compared to historical events. These include the push and pull factors and the steamboat journey to St. Louis. Before addressing the topics of the immigration process, I will be explaining the significance of the overlap between factual events and fictional content of the novel and how these affect the reader audience, as well as provide information about the feuilleton line.

A. The Feuilleton

Besides containing factual reports, newspapers had always included literary prose as well. By the mid-nineteenth century every issue contained serialized novels. The factual reports and the fictional part were separated by the, so called “Feuilleton” line. Stein and Wiele argue that this line was often blurred because the fictional part included texts that simultaneously addressed current socio-political issues.³⁸ Further, they state that fictional novels helped with identity-building in a time of confusion, uncertainty, and unrest. If the characters are placed in situations and surroundings that are familiar, readers can identify themselves with the protagonists and even imagine how they would

³⁸ Daniel Stein and Lisanne Wiele, *Nineteenth-Century Serial Narrative in Transnational Perspective, 1830s-1860s: Popular Culture-Serial Culture* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2019).



(Image 5, *Anzeiger des Westens*, 16. February, 1851, page 3

themselves deal in certain situations. Serialized novels provided this to the readers by not deviating too much from reality and the audiences' own experiences.

Therefore, the

readers were able to easily recognize themselves in the stories. It should also be mentioned that almost all the authors of serialized novels in the nineteenth century were affiliated with the newspaper themselves, either as journalists or editors. It was their job to know what was happening locally or in the world. Naturally, their fictional stories were influenced by current events and therefore, the serialized novels in the feuilleton section of the paper were overlapping with factual stories, making the feuilleton lined indeed blurred.

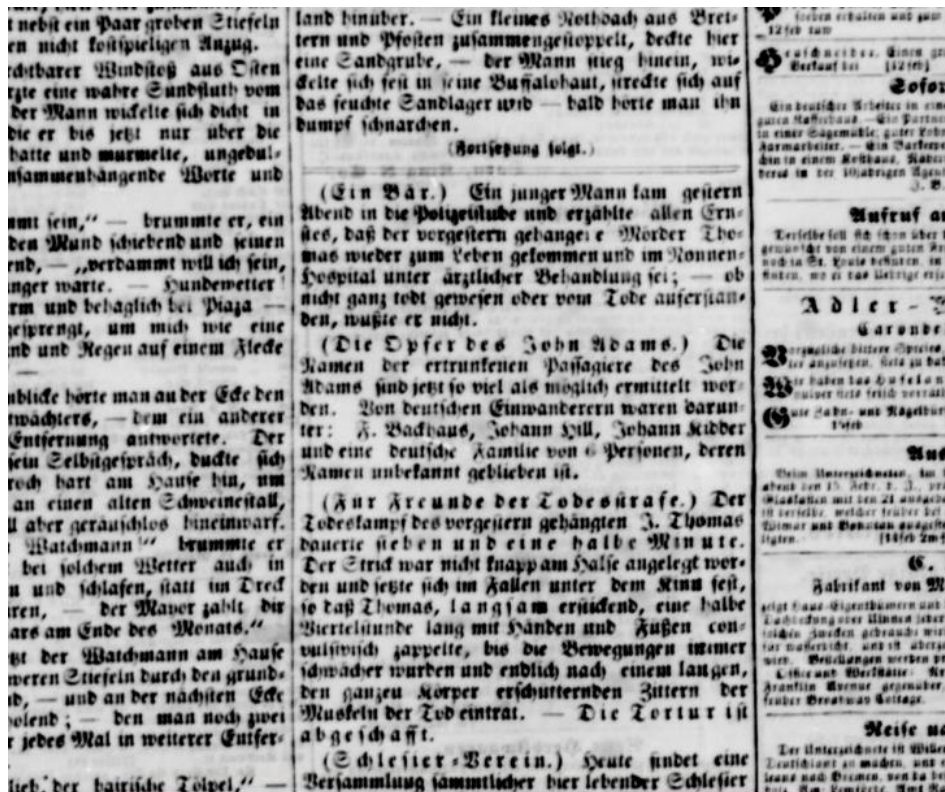
Börnstein added the feuilleton section to the newspaper approximately a year after he began working there. Before, the feuilleton line was neither existent nor did fictional contributions have a clearly assigned spot in the paper.

Serialized novels would often be placed on the second page of the daily editions, somewhere between St. Louis news reports and ads without a clear separation from factual content. In the daily edition of June 2nd, 1850, Börnstein assigned a

set spot to fictional work. Parts of his novel were sometimes the only things that were printed under the feuilleton category. It was also embedded between factual reports. The novel's first chapter was first published on February 16, 1851, as the first and only fictional writing under the category. It is followed right away by factual news, which are not clearly separated as one would expect. However, the first news line report following the series contains some elements of mockery but given the seriousness of the second report right below it, which is also not distinctively separated from the previous writings, it is unclear if the report is part of the Feuilleton or the factual news. (Image 6) It deals with a young man who went to the police station the previous to report that murderer, by the name of Thomas, who was hung two days prior, came back to live and is said to be in the nun-run hospital under medical care. Its headline is "Ein Bär", which literally means "a Bear". However, the editor could have chosen this title in reference to the idiomatic German phrase, "jemandem einen Bär aufbinden," which can be translated as "telling a lie." In this case, the title of that report "Ein Bär" could be translated to English as "a hoax". Its last sentence, which translates reads, "whether not completely dead or resurrected from death, he could not say," clearly points to mockery. Regardless of this report's intention, the following report with the headline "Die Opfer des John Adams" announces that nine Germans died in a steamboat accident and lists three of their names. (Image 6) This event is factual, as even the *Des Moines Courier* reported about the sinking of the steamboat John Adams near Cairo on the 30th of January 1851.³⁹ A total of

³⁹ The Library of Congress, [Des Moines courier. \(\[Ottumwa\] Iowa\), 1851-02-07, \[p.\]. \(loc.gov\)](#), 3/6/2022

120 people lost their lives due to this accident, therefore it is inappropriate to put this report right below a mockery, if the later was really intended to be one. However, this is an example of how the position of the Feuilleton part of the paper affects the reader. By leading or guiding its audience from factual news, through fiction, then providing a factually ambiguous report, and almost instantaneously bringing it back to factual events, the Feuilleton line becomes blurred.



(Image 6, Anzeiger des Westens, 16. February 1851.)

At one point Börnstein even titled the fictional part of the paper "Zeitung für Sachlustige" and added the short rhyme "Wer nicht lebet, liebt und lacht für den bin ich nicht gemacht." (I am not made for the one who doesn't live, love, and laugh). (Image 6) A week later, the word Feuilleton was permanently assigned to this spot.



(Image 7, Anzeiger des Westens, daily edition, June 2nd, 1850, 3rd page)

B: push and pull factors addressed in *Geheimnisse von St. Louis* and the *Anzeiger des Westens*.

When comparing newspaper reports with the novel's content, one can see that there are many events in the novel that align with real current or past events concerning the immigration process itself. This leads to a blurring of the feuilleton line because its content includes real events that are addressed in the non-fiction parts of the newspaper. Therefore, many readers were able to identify with characters and events in the novel, as they have been exposed to certain issues and experiences. However, it cannot be assumed that the general German immigrant population shared the same views or experiences, because push and pull factors varied according to individual circumstances. As a whole, making general conclusions about the German immigrant experience would be erroneous. An investigation of the following immigration-related topics, such as push and pull factors, the Gold Rush, the means to get to their new homes, and St. Louis as the destination itself, and a comparison of their rendering in the novel versus historical facts will show how the feuilleton line was blurred. Further, it will show if Börnstein's own personal experiences or if the experiences of the general German immigrant population are mirrored in the novel.

1. Pull and push factors

A common area of reality and fiction is provided with the pull factors of immigration in both realms. The main pull factor of many German immigrants was available cheap land in the Midwest of North America and with it, the hope of becoming a self-sufficient landowner. This motivated many German immigrants

to leave their old homeland behind and take on the life-changing journey to Missouri. *The Anzeiger des Westens* included many different ads in which cheap land was offered for sale. It was also not uncommon for the state to announce auctions, or trustee sales which were however, published in the English-language.

In the case of the Böttcher family, the push factor for emigration, or relocation was Grandmother Böttcher's insisting to return to their old birth land. Her, her husband, and both of their sons were born in Missouri before it even became a state. Their ancestors came from Alsace and had been living in America since the eighteenth century. Grandma Böttcher and her husband grew up in St. Louis when it was just a little French settlement belonging to the Louisiana Territory. The family's history differs in this regard from the overwhelming majority of other German families who immigrated to the area after 1815, the end of the Napoleonic Wars. However, the rest of the Böttcher family never experienced life in the new continent and therefore they represent the majority of new German immigrants from Europe. Old Böttcher himself was gone far too long, (forty-seven years to be exact) to remember much of his past and St. Louis. What the Böttchers and other immigrant families do have in common is the pursuit of becoming landowners and operating their own farm. The ultimate goal was to be able to provide a comfortable life and an opportunity to a brighter future for their children. Grandma Böttcher, unbeknownst to the rest of the family, was driven by knowledge of the existence of a buried treasure chest. She learned about it from a farewell letter from her husband which he left her after his

death. In the letter, her husband had explained the situation of why they suddenly had to leave St. Louis to Europe. The reason was that the Jesuit priest of their settlement had not only been blackmailing women to have sex with him but was also responsible for their oldest son's drowning. When the Jesuit priest asked him one night to help him bury a chest in the woods, which presumably held important texts belonging to the church, his lies came to light and Anton's father, together with a family friend pushed him into the hole where the chest was placed and buried him alive. She hoped that once she found the chest, it would provide her son Anton and her grandchildren financial stability.

Buying land and working it was not her pull factor, it was the treasure that she was after. Anton Böttcher's only plan on the other hand, was to acquire and work on a farm to provide for his family. He did not emigrate from Germany to open a shop, or to pursue a political career. He was content with being able to work on a farm and be self-sufficient. Many German families also thought of acquiring workable farmland to be the means of personal financial success. According to Kathleen Neils Conzen, a leading historian on nineteenth century American history, states that, many Germans assumed that America had acres and acres of cheap or unclaimed empty lands that was just "waiting to be baptized in German sweat."⁴⁰ Even university educated men, like Börnstein, who himself had plans to collectively buy land with his entourage, dreamed of becoming self-sufficient farmers. The many early emigration societies had similar

⁴⁰ Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Phantom Landscapes of Colonization," in *The German-American Encounter, Conflict and Cooperation between Two Cultures 1800-2000*, eds. Frank Trommler and Elliott Shore (United States: Berghahn Books, 2001), 11.

plans. In addition, they saw large acquisition of land by Germans to be the necessary steps for creating a German state in America. This undertaking did fail, when many “Latin Farmers”, as they were called due to their ability to read Latin but lack of experience in farming, gave up on the idea even before or shortly after attempting to work as farmers.

Even though many reports and books on the condition of the lands in the Midwest or South were published between 1815 and 1848,⁴¹ it was mainly the lengthy romanticized report of Duden that captivated or encouraged Germans to purchase land in Missouri. Duden himself had purchased 260 acres of land 80 miles north of St. Louis. He did not work on the farm itself but had the financial means to pay others to work it for him. Burnett and Luebbering agree that his reports were very popular with the Germans back in Europe, but they argue that personal experiences of family members, who wrote back encouraging letters were the decisive factor for many in the final decision to emigrate to America. Relatives who had previously emigrated to America provided a link between their new home country and their old German homeland. In fact, the migration of Germans to the US following the pathway of earlier immigrants is known as “chain migration”. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, a prominent scholar of German history, states that chain migration “was the rule rather than the exception.”⁴² Because later arrivals were not really “uprooted”, but rather “transplanted” to their

⁴¹ Burnett and Luebbering report that there were some 50 books published during that time. Robyn Burnett and Ken Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri: New Land, Old Ways* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 7.

⁴² Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German-American Experience* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 142.

new home, they were able to remain in a familiar setting with people that shared many of their familiar values and ideas. This on the other hand, allowed the preservation of their heritage. In *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, Grandmother Böttcher could be seen as the link between America and Europe. She herself serves as a tie to Nord America in the same way that previously emigrated relatives served as a connection to many other new immigrant families. Grandmother Böttcher and her son, even though St. Louis was their birthplace, did not have any known living relatives in Missouri. However, they did have friends they knew from their German homeland who supported them. One of them is the boardinghouse owner Ziemer. He knew the Böttchers from the old country but had left himself about ten years earlier. He provided the family with a safe place to stay upon arrival and while Maria, the teenage daughter of the Böttcher family was caring for her ill grandmother during the Cholera outbreak and the Great Fire.

Another person, who definitely provided security by watching over the family, even though initially it was unbeknownst to everyone in the narrative and the reader themselves, was "Big Bob", the long-lost child of Grandmother Böttcher and brother of Anton Böttcher. He was thought to have lost his life through drowning and as a young child when the family still lived in the area shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century. After this tragic event, Grandmother and Grandfather Böttcher emigrated to Europe with their one-year younger son, Anton Böttcher in the novel. They remained there until they return to St. Louis in 1849. Bob is the true family link, who feels a special bond and

responsibility for the family right from the start of their arrival and vows to aid and protect them in the future. He represents a safety net for the Böttchers, even if they do not know it in the beginning. He represents, even if in a not so visible way, what some previously emigrated relatives meant to many of the readers of *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*; Insider know how, support, and security.

Placing the Böttcher family's origin to the eighteenth-century could have several reasons. One reason why Börnstein chose Grandmother Böttcher and his sons to be American-born and their past to reach far back in history, even before Americans declared independence, could be his desire to credit Germans with having contributed to the city's foundation in 1764 by Pierre Laclede and Auguste Chouteau. The first wave of German immigrants came to St. Louis in the 1830s, meaning quite some time after the first settlement. As mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph, Börnstein wanted to elevate the status of Germans and strengthen the feeling of belonging or pride in his readers. Börnstein was just probably one of the "determined fact finders" as Stadler calls them. He describes them as being "prepared to go through the most ingenious intellectual contortions to make the already historical established facts fit their idea of what the facts should be."⁴³ Another reason why Börnstein chose this route, could be related to the idea of German superiority, in which he might just wanted to show that Germans beat the Anglo-Americans in terms of time. It might very well be true that some of the earlier families of St. Louis settlers, who came from the East had

⁴³ Ernst Stadler, The German Settlement of St. Louis, *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (Mid-America American Studies Association, 1965): 16 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40640533>.

in fact German roots, but as mentioned before the first large influx of Germans came in the 1830s when St. Louis already had several thousand inhabitants. Nevertheless, he might have been successful in instilling a sense of pride in his readers by having other Germans be involved in the history of St. Louis. While researching St. Louis' history for *Die Geheimnisse St. Louis*, he was able to receive valuable first-hand information from an old Saint Louis citizen, Madame Elizabeth Ortes, who was brought to St. Louis in 1768 at the age of four.⁴⁴ He might also have been motivated by his interviewees' experiences. However, no clear conclusions can be drawn from this assumption as the information is limited.

One other possibility of the Böttchers being placed into the eighteenth century could have something to do with Börnstein's anti-Catholic convictions. As an ardent anticleric, he had to choose a time and place where Catholicism was more present than reformed Christian Religions in the area. The Jesuit order send out its members to remote areas in the New World already in the late sixteenth century and Jesuit priests were among the settlers in Missouri. He could only be able to convince his reading audience of the hypocrisies of the Jesuit order as something deeply rooted in time by placing the Jesuits as far back as he historically could.

⁴⁴ Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 98.

2. The Gold Rush

Börnstein takes the reader outside of the familiar landscape of Missouri throughout the novel as well. However, he makes sure that the fictional narration is still linked with factual events, places, and/or figures. This ensures that the reader is not taken too far out of one's familiar zone and can still relate or see oneself being in the same situation as the protagonists. One place far away from St. Louis which plays a significant role in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* is California. The California Gold Rush started in 1848 and reached its peak in 1952, which accurately falls in the time frame of the narration of the novel. The *Anzeiger des Westens* reported regularly on California and ads for either goldmining equipment or the sale of California goods are to be found in the paper.

The fictional character of *Die Geheimnisse St. Louis*, Joseph, the Böttcher's second eldest child is also being told by his new American neighbor that the former owners of the newly acquired Boettcher's farm had sold everything and left to try his luck in goldmining in California. He later ends up in the story finding the badly hurt, and already earlier mentioned fire fighter Tom on the side of the road and takes him to his farm where he is nursed back to health. One day when they are trying to save a man from being assaulted, Joseph knocks down the perpetrator, believing that he has killed the man. The only 16-year-old Joseph and Tom, run away together, to avoid what they speculate to be a possible 10-year prison sentence. They decide to go to California, "Like so

many thousand others,"⁴⁵ supporting the fact that people were aware of the California Gold Rush and its attraction of thousands of people. Joseph and Tom are not just mere fictional characters who leave St. Louis. They are already familiar figures that the readers are able to identify with. Even though they are going to a part of the continent that the readers might not have personally experienced, but certainly have heard about on a daily basis or met travelers who have passed the "Gateway to the West" on their journey to California. Therefore, the readers, especially the ones that have seriously considered to take on the exact journey and try their luck of returning rich, are provided by Börnstein with a part that is highly relatable.

3. The steam and riverboat voyage

Though not the only means to reach St. Louis, most Immigrants did take the journey up the Missouri River on steamboats and experienced the many accidents on them. Almost all of the first and second wave German immigrants, who ended up in or passed through St. Louis could identify with the Böttcher family's experienced on the Missouri river in a steam or riverboat. Even though some German immigrants came from the Eastern settlements of the United States on land with wagons, most of the new arrival from Germany had to take on a second journey on water up to St. Louis after an initial stay in New Orleans to reach the city.

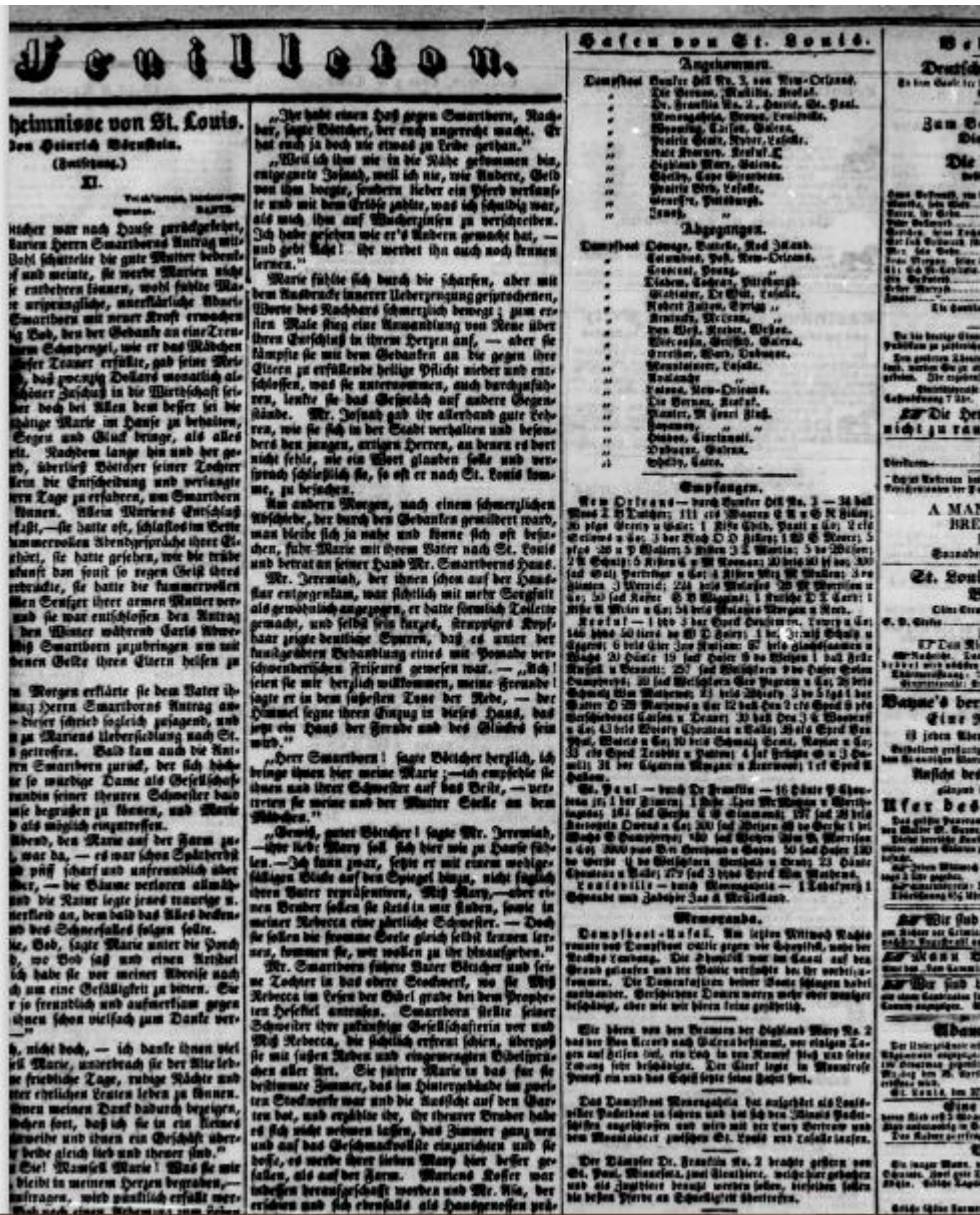
⁴⁵ Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 82.

The Anzeiger des Westens published arrival and departure of boats. In fact, during the time of the serialization of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, this information could be found right next to the Feuilleton section as shown in image 8. In earlier editions, planned arrival and departure times were announced on the second page of the paper.

Right below the ship arrival and departure information, the reader was able to see a summary of goods that were imported. Below this information, the Anzeiger reports on this day four different ship accidents. According to Burnett and Luebbering, this second journey could take several weeks on a riverboat or a little shorter on a steamboat and was equally dangerous if not even more than the cross-Atlantic voyage.⁴⁶ The sinking of the steamboat John Adams in 1851 was already mentioned earlier. It was one of many accidents on the Missouri River. In their book, *German Settlement in Missouri: New Land, Old Ways* they also report that steamboat explosions were very common. They mention the “*Edna*”, who ended fifty-five German immigrants’ lives in 1842. A year later the explosion of the “Big Hatchee” was responsible for the death of around seventy, mostly German immigrants.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Burnett and Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri*, 18-19.

⁴⁷ Burnett and Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri*, 19.



(Image 8)

Tim O'Neil from the *St. Louis Dispatch*, reported that between the years of 1834 and 1870 alone, "at least 100 (riverboats) were destroyed on the rivers by boiler explosions, killing at least 4,000 passengers and crew."⁴⁸ Börnstein,

⁴⁸ Tim O'Neil, "Jan.3, 1844 – Steamboat wreck kills as many as 70 on the Mississippi at St. Louis," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Jan 3, 2022, https://www.stltoday.com/news/archives/jan-3-1844-steamboat-wreck-kills-as-many-as-70-on-the-mississippi-at-st/article_fc71a7c5-a22c-586f-a28f-9847f6e4be12.html.

himself had to take the journey up the Missouri river himself and was aware of its dangers. Subsequently, he incorporated the possibility of such into his novel as well. Charles, one of the main characters in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* has a quick conversation with another character, who describes the tragedy of a steamboat the “Liberty,” that he was on himself but survived. The uncertainty of fate of the water-bound Missouri travel is also elevated by Charles’ question to his companion, “But, if no accident should happen, (...) do you think we shall reach St. Louis today?”⁴⁹ Readers could most likely identify with the Boettcher’s journey to St. Louis as many of them had to take on the same route to reach their destination. The day the Böttcher’s arrived was April 15, 1849, which marked around the time of Börnstein’s own arrival in St. Louis. The family Böttcher traveled on the steamboat “Sarah”. It is the same boat that the author himself traveled on⁵⁰, and when he writes,

Zwei Monate lang waren sie in dem dumpfigen betheerten Zwischendecke eines Kauffahrers, wie aufgestapelte Waren, nicht wie Menschen, auf dem atlantischen Ocean herübergeschwommen und nach einem Tage der Rast in New-Orleans führten Sie jetzt schon wieder acht Tage lang das unerfreuliche, an Entbehrungen und Unannehmlichkeiten so reiche, Schiffsleben im Decke eines Mississippi-Dampfboots. Kein Wunder, wenn die wackeren an Thätigkeit und Arbeit, an freie Luft und Bewegung gewohnten Leute, den harten Zwieback und das zähe Salzfleisch, den

⁴⁹ Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 6.

⁵⁰ Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 74.

Kohlen- und Theergeruch, das dumpfige, luftlose Zusammenleben in beengtem Raume und vor Allem den, Geist und Körper abspannenden, Müßiggang und die Langeweile des Schiffslebens herzlich satt hatten und sich nach ihrem Bestimmungsorte, nach Arbeit und Thätigkeit, nach frischer Luft und einem freieren Raume sehnten.⁵¹

English translation,

“Two long protracted months had they been incarcerated in the damp, tarry steerage of a merchant ship, showed away like goods, not human beings. In this condition they had crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and after one short day’s rest at New Orleans had continued the same disagreeable life on the deck of a Mississippi steamer, a life so full of care and peril, so free of comfort. No wonder, then if the adventurous immigrants, accustomed to work and activity, to fresh air and motion, at last got heartily tired of the hard crackers and touch salt meat, the smell of coal and tar, the damp airless crowding together in a small space, and before and above all, the mind- and body-debilitating idleness and tediousness of a life on shipboard, and that they longed for their place of destination-for work and activity-for fresh air and elbow room.”⁵²

he does not only recollect his own experience and feelings of his journey to St. Louis, but also describes the general attitude of the ship’s passengers. His journey up from New Orleans to St. Louis was one that many thousand other

⁵¹ Heinrich Börnstein, *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* (Kassel: Gotop Verlag, 1851), 12.

⁵² Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 5.

immigrants had recently experienced themselves, as the mid-nineteenth century was marked by the second wave of German immigration to Missouri. St. Louis' population rose "from 5,825 residents in 1830 ... to 77,680 by 1850."⁵³

Considering that many of those new residents came by the same means of travel, Börnstein's description of the journey was still a current event that many identified with. One can only imagine the many hissing steamboats lined up daily on the riverfront in St. Louis loaded with cargo and hundreds of passengers. In the novel, Börnstein also addresses non-explosion related incidents on the steamboats that added to the uncertainty of the passengers' fates. He describes the accident of the youngest member of the Böttcher family, a small boy, who falls into the river and rings with his life. Luckily, he is saved by the earlier mentioned character Charles, who selflessly jumps after the drowning boy. This event just reminds the reader of the unpredictability of their own journey and that anything can happen in life. For some this occurrence of almost drowning might have very well been reality as well in their own journey, creating another incident in which their reality was mirrored in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*.

4. Description of St. Louis

Not only does Börnstein describe real places in St. Louis and its fast expansion, but he captivated the reader with *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* by appealing to their familiarity with the area. This unique way of narration creates

⁵³ Tim O'Neil, "Jan.3, 1844 – Steamboat wreck kills."

an instant connection to the story. An example of this style is given in the opening paragraph of chapter four in the first part of the novel. He writes,

Many of our readers may, perhaps, have visited that southern part of St. Louis which, on the left of the Gravois Road, is stretched out to the hills near McHose and English's Cave, consisting of a hilly ground full of sink holes and rugged pieces of land. The streets are already laid out on all maps and numbered; but the houses are only yet single and scattered, and perhaps ten years more may elapse ere they are built compactly together, as in the city. At the commencement of the year 1849, when our narrative begins, the number of those houses was still much smaller, and some of them were situated in such solitary, out-of-the-way spots that they might have been taken rather for small farms than for houses in streets within the city limits.⁵⁴

Börnstein appeals directly to the reader's familiarity with the area, involving him instantaneously with the story on a personal level. The readers not just feel but know, that the author acknowledges and values their experiences. An instant notion of collectiveness or unity is created between the reader and the author because the latter is seen as one of them, someone from their midst. Secondly, the author predicts activities in their shared future as residents of the area, strengthening the bond between himself and his reader audience. As if he is saying, "this city is ours now; she is what we will all experience or contribute

⁵⁴ Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 13.

to.” Börnstein reminds the reader of what was and where they are heading together. Mentioning factual buildings and street names is what greatly blurs the feuilleton line in the first place. The readers who are familiar with those streets and businesses feel like reading about a true story because they are in fact real. The factual places are described throughout the novel, providing the reader with an opportunity to place himself into the story of the novel which on the other hand is necessary in the first place to be able to relate with the fictional characters in it.

Additionally, he strengthens the notion that, as now Americans, they have the duty and support to rely on each other and build each other up to create a better nation. I believe that by “Americans” he does not refer to people who acquired or were born with American citizenship, but rather everyone who has chosen the United States as their new home. Different States had different citizenship laws. For instance, States like Wisconsin issued citizenship upon arrival, but Missouri had a five-year residency requirement, which he had not fulfilled yet at the time of writing *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*.

By mentioning how fast things got back to normal, he is also highlighting that collaboration and working together is what determines success. Readers who witnessed the operations during and the time after the fire knew what the author was referring to. Being reminded and given the chance to reflect on their personal progress, a sense of pride, accomplishment, strength is created on a deeper emotional level through the author’s choice of words. *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* resorts back on real issues and emotions that accompany a significant move from one country to another. Feelings of uncertainty, hope, guilt,

doubt, and personal loss are not only addressed in the novel; Börnstein provides simultaneously a relieve and a promise of a brighter future for immigrants who need encouragement. The Böttchers must endure misfortune, mistreatment, violence, and injustice, but in the end, they emerge as happy and victorious because they take charge and show endurance, the same virtues that Börnstein is attempting to evoke in his readers. Even Grandma Böttcher, despite succumbing to Cholera, gets her last wish fulfilled by being buried in her birth country land. Her long-lost son, Anton Böttcher's older brother does not continue to stay with his family, but he is content and knows he can be with them whenever he wishes. The relatability of the readers to the fictional characters who are placed in situations and places of the real world of the mid-nineteenth century, in combination with the author's ability to draw his readers into the realm of fictional reality is a major reason that led success of *Geheimnisse von St. Louis's*.

It is not only the new generation of German immigrants who could identify with the characters in *Die Geheimnisse von Saint Louis*. As mentioned before, Börnstein describes the beginnings of St. Louis and the first settlers' journeys as well and therefore, providing older audiences with a flashback to their own youth and their experiences. He describes all the changes in landscape that came with the extraordinary rise of the once small French settlement, which was named in honor of the French King Louis IX.

The Böttcher family's ancestors came to the North American continent in the late seventeenth century, accompanying the French explorer Pierre Laclède

on an expedition up the Mississippi from New Orleans. When Grandma Böttcher is taken to her old childhood area, she cannot recognize anything anymore. It has been almost fifty years since she promptly left St. Louis, and everything has changed. Older readers who came to the area in the first half of the nineteenth century could relate to the fast and visible changes in landscape as they had witnessed them themselves. They surely must have felt the same as Grandma Böttcher as they were reminded of the St. Louis of their youth compared to the current state of the city. Börnstein describes St. Louis's beginnings in detail, providing his readers with a little history lesson, which they might have not been familiar with in the first place. Nevertheless, he combines factual events with a captivating fictional story. The factual part here might not directly cause newer immigrants to relate with past events, but it is something the older Immigrants could. This might especially be true for the ones who came here from the Alsace like the Böttcher's ancestors and still remembered a time when French influences were more present.

Chapter 4: The Cholera outbreak and the Great St. Louis fire of 1849

Two historical events that affected not only the German population of St. Louis in 1849 are also portrayed in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*. These events are the Cholera outbreak and the Great Fire of St. Louis

1. Cholera Outbreak: New and older immigrants had experienced the Cholera outbreaks and death dealt with in the novel. Immigrants arriving after the 1849 outbreak most likely had experienced Cholera in either European cities, other American cities, on the ships, or at least the aftermath of it through reports of relatives

Another factual event that most readers of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* who lived in Missouri anytime between the 1830s and 1850s were reminded of, was the occurrence of the worst Cholera outbreak of 1849. It affected Börnstein himself profoundly because he had lost his dear brother Arnold Börnstein to this disease. Arnold, who was just a year younger than Heinrich Börnstein and who accompanied him to America, fell violently ill shortly after they had arrived in St. Louis. The Cholera outbreak in 1849 was not the first one in Saint Louis. The then town of around 7,000 inhabitants experienced its first outbreak in 1832. It was brought by European immigrants and lasted about a month. It appeared for a short time, claiming a few deaths in the end of 1848, then coming back with a vengeance just around the time Börnstein arrived in St. Louis in April of 1849. This time the outbreak lasted a whole four months, killing close to a tenth of the

then 65,000 large population.⁵⁵ The author's devastating personal experience with the loss of a loved one is also worked into *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*. The character who ends up falling victim to this disease caused by contaminated water, is Grandma Böttcher. When 6,000 individuals in a city of around 65,000 die, it is fair to assume that every citizen knew one, or more victims personally. The Cholera outbreak and with it the devastating and heartbreaking personal loss it caused some newly arrived immigrants, was unfortunately not uncommon. It is especially hard to fathom, when one considers that individuals or families gave up everything and took on the long and stressful journey on ship in the hopes of being able to live free and provide a better life for themselves and their dependents. By the time of the publication of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, which was just around a year after the deadliest Cholera outbreak, the sad memories of this dark event in history were still fresh in the readers' minds. But it was not just the immigrants of the second wave of German immigration to Missouri who could identify with a sad blow of fate caused by Cholera. Some earlier Immigrants who arrived in St. Louis in the beginning of the thirties had experienced the death of loved ones due to this bacterium already once before. In their book *German Settlements in Missouri*, Burnett and Luebbering draw attention to ⁵⁶ They also provide several examples of families, who had lost multiple family members due to disease in a short period of time. One such unfortunate man they mention is a teacher by the name of Friedrich Steines, who experienced the Cholera outbreak in St. Louis in the early 1830s. He lost his wife

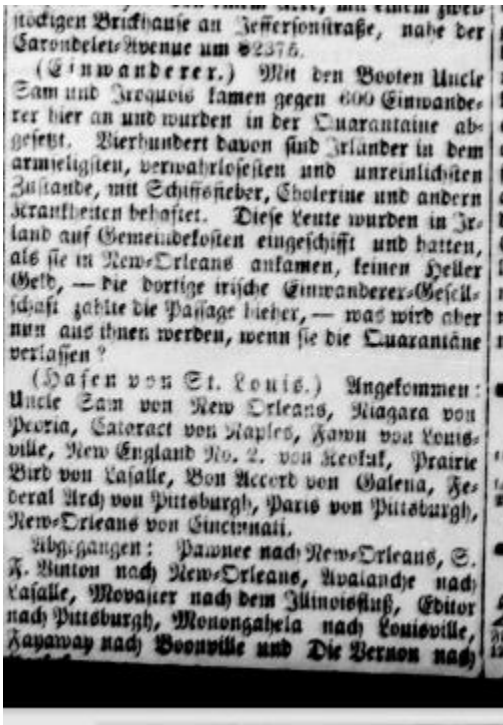
⁵⁵ Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 99.

⁵⁶ Burnett and Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri*, 35.

and four of his children within less than a month after setting foot in the city⁵⁷. The death of the beloved Grandma Böttcher in Börnstein's novel caused all immigrants who lived through such horrible times to relive their own pain and feel sympathetic with the new immigrant family in the novel. The Cholera outbreak was not just some disease in a faraway country that did not concern them; it was their reality not so long ago, a reality that was mirrored in the feuilleton novel in the form of fictional reality.

Even a year after the cholera outbreak, the *Anzeiger des Westens* reported about this topic. Alone in the daily edition of April 26th of 1851 six articles are published about this topic. Their titles range from "Emigration, to Port of St. Louis, and Quarantine," and each addresses the arrival of boats and Cholera cases.

⁵⁷ Burnett and Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri*, 20.



(Image 9. April 26, 1851)



(Image 10. April 26, 1851)

2. The Great Fire of St. Louis

One other real event, that occurred during the same time of the Cholera outbreak and was incorporated in Börnstein's novel's narrative, was the Great Fire of Saint Louis of 1849. This scaring and unfortunate event was a time of fear, uncertainty, and helplessness. Börnstein does not only acknowledge the

⁵⁸ Anzeiger des Westens, St. Louis, 04/26/1851.

nerve wrecking and fearful state of the affected of this event. He also provides a sense of relieve to his readers by producing a happy ending for the young Maria, who at the time of the fire was caring for Grandma Böttcher in a St. Louis Inn, while the rest of the family was settling into their newly purchased farm outside of the city. Grandma Böttcher's death reminds the readers of their own loss caused by Cholera, but her and Maria were unharmed by the Great Fire of St. Louis and the young girl's reunification with her family despite the chaos and uncertainty caused by it served as a reminder that not all is lost. In the novel, Börnstein describes St. Louis as "lying in ruins and ashes" just as some of his readers who witnessed the city after this event must have described it themselves. But he also uses this event after the Fire to validate the rightness or justness of their decision to have left Europe, which some of them might have questioned following this horrific sight. He writes,

...the wrecks of the of the burnt steamers stood forth out of the river, along the levee; immense quantities of goods, furniture and merchandise of all kinds were lying on the streets, carefully guarded by the volunteer companies! Hundreds and hundreds had no abode; and yet, notwithstanding to wailing or despondency was heard! No faintheartedness or despair!

The manly and vigorous elasticity of the American character, the unremitting, indefatigable go-ahead actions of our fellow-citizens, here show forth in their true splendor and brilliancy.

Had such a misfortune happened in any part of Europe, in Germany for example, where the people are treated as children, or rather as slaves or brutes, and where all the people, perhaps six months after such calamity, would have stood over the ruins, wringing their hands and lamenting, “O what a misfortune! What a misery! Who would have looked for such state of things!”

But not so here. Here people do not waste their time in lamenting over losses, but endeavor, by renewed exertions for the future, to make up their losses. Three days only had elapsed since the fire ere all the papers were full of business advertisements ... and we behold our noble country with well-merited confidence and pride, believing that we can do anything that we set seriously about!⁵⁹

Börnstein’s reference to how circumstances would have been back in the homeland gives the reader validation of having made the right choice to leave the old ‘Heimat’ behind. He shows not only empathy with the people who took great losses caused by the fire, but he also conveys a sense of pride and accomplishment, which is most likely what some readers needed to hear after a blow of fate or endurance of misfortune since their arrival. Encouragement that better days will come and motivation to take charge of one’s own livelihood and success is what this passage is about and what some readers hoped to find in the novel. The many insurance ads displayed in the *Anzeiger des Westens* after

⁵⁹ Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 84.

the fire also contributed to letting go of worries about an uncertain future. However, one can tell by the vast number of insurances ads that people, even one year after the Great Fire of St. Louis had not forgotten the disastrous event. In fact, the day the novel began to be serialized, there were seven ads commissioned by insurance companies in one installment alone, proving that the part in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*' narrative that deals with Fire is indeed one that moves along the Feuilleton line.

Börnstein's novel contains even more similar aspects to the real events of the Great St. Louis fire, like its cause and references to a real person. The actual fire started on the steamboat "White Cloud" and quickly spread to other nearby steamboats in reality. The fire in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* that caused such distress to Maria and her grandmother also began on a steamboat and spread in the same fashion. In it, Börnstein also introduces the reader to a passionate young fire fighter by the name of Tom Quick. He is rushing with his unit to put a fire out on a burning house. Once there, he climbs on the roof of the burning house, but shortly after, the house explodes. His unit discovers two charred bodies once the white cloud caused by the explosion disappears. It is assumed that he and the homeowner were the victims. In the real event of the great fire of 1849, the first firefighter in the history of America who died in the line of duty was Captain Thomas Bushfield Targee.⁶⁰ Even though Tom Quick is introduced in the novel before the actual event of the Great St. Louis fire, there are still significant

⁶⁰Carla Friedman, "May 17 1849 The St. Louis Great Fire," World History Project, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://worldhistoryproject.org/1849/5/17/the-st-louis-great-fire/>.

similarities between him and the hero of the real occurrence. In *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, firefighter Tom is only presumed dead, but just as Captain Targee, he was caught by an unexpected explosion, who caused his death. By giving his fictional character the same name Tom, Börnstein is intentionally overlapping his fictional character with real people. Describing multiple other explosions during this fictional event in the novel, the author draws on the real events. In the Great Fire of 1849 multiple controlled explosions of some buildings were set to create a fire break in an attempt to stop its spread.⁶¹ This action to control the fire was mirrored exactly in the report that the *Anzeiger* published on April 19th, 1849. In fact, this report states that at least three people died, among them Targee, and further reports, "Überbleibsel von ihren Körpern an verschiedenen Stellen an der 2nd und Walnutstraße" ⁶² (Remnants of their bodies at different locations in 2nd and walnutstreet). Through these examples, one can see how the fictional narrative is overlapping with the real events of 1849.

⁶¹ "Ruins of the Great St. Louis Fire – 1849," Showmemo, Accessed April 26, 2022, <https://showmemo.org/collection/ruins-of-the-st-louis-fire-1849/>.

⁶² „Die Feuersbrunst,“ *Anzeiger des Westens*, weekly edition, April 19, 1848.

Chapter 5: Additional topics that play a role in a person's life and how Börnstein addressed them in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*.

There are several other topics that Börnstein addressed in the novel, which play an important factor in every person's life and influences our beliefs and identity formation. In this last chapter, I will be addressing some of the major topics. These are Religion, Gender, Nationality, Ethnicity, and Racial thinking.

1. Anti-Catholic/Jesuits and Religion

When approaching *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* from a religious perspective, it's message of anti-Catholicism, to be exact, anti-Jesuitism is clearly visible with the main reason of the Böttcher's return to Europe, the inclusion of the Kneipe family, Cecile's captivity in the Convent, and the secret meeting of Jesuit priests.

The Anti-Catholic notion depicted in the novel was not just a new phenomenon in the US; it was something already existing in American society and also experienced as a push factor in Europe. Americans viewed Catholicism as not compatible with Americanism because they believed that the Catholic religion prohibits self-determination.

The Ancestors of the Böttchers were members of the catholic faith because Anton Böttcher's Father writes in his letter that Father Antonio, a Jesuit priest had been assigned to the settlement and he himself was following his orders. We learn that the priest was blackmailing a family friend's wife-to-be into

performing sexual acts. She reluctantly engaged in these acts to protect him from being punished. She was so distraught by this event, that she took her own life.

Further, it is revealed that the same Jesuit priest was responsible for Old Böttcher's older brother's disappearance. It was assumed that the boy drowned in the river and his body was never recovered. Both men lost a loved and it was the Jesuit who was responsible for their death. They avenged their death by burying him alive.

The family friend and Anton Böttcher's father, together with his wife and son then immediately left St. Louis and settled in Europe. Börnstein intentionally created this plot to show his conviction of unholy and hypocritic actions of the Jesuits is indeed what harmed people. He could have made up limitless other reasons for the departure of the Böttcher family. By basing the plot back into the beginnings of St. Louis's history, he tried to make a point of that the Jesuits had a hand in the game since a very long time. He wanted to convince his readers, or perhaps reinforce their already existing aversion to the catholic church, by emphasizing its deep-rooted influence on people.

To stress his personal conviction about the Catholic institution's brainwashing tactics and their greed for money, Börnstein incorporates the plot of Kneipe family, as well as that of Cecile. The Kneipes are German Catholic family with a teenage daughter by the name of Caroline, who nursed a wounded young man back to health in their home. The Church's threats of damnation and the insistence to make a nun out of Caroline repeatedly causes arguments in the house.

“And I tell you, wife,” cried Master Tobias Kneipe, seriously, beating the time with his hammer, “I tell you I am the master of my house, and the reverend priest has no command here.”

“And I tell you, Toby,” cried Mrs. Kneipe, highly irritated, “I am the mistress of the house, and as a mother responsible for the spiritual welfare of my daughter, and will no longer have her live under the same roof with a heretic, a Protestant. While we were ignorant who he was, there was no blame in it; but now knowing that he is a Protestant, and himself having obdurately put off all attempts of the most reverend father at restoring him to the fold of the only true and beatifying church, now he must not any longer profane our house by his heretical presence; otherwise, the reverend father says, we would all partake of his sins, and forfeit our eternal salvation.”

“Nonsense – sheer nonsense!” growled Mrs. Kneipe. “It sounds like a Bible sentence, and yet is nonsense. Why should I turn out a poor young man, hardly recovered from a severe sickness, for no other reason but his belonging to a different confession? Surely such was not our Savior’s will.”

“But the reverend father says so!” cried Mrs. Kneipe, still more vehemently.

“And the father is a learned man, and must know better what God’s word and will is, than we simple folks. In short, I will this time achieve my design, and if you be an indolent and careless father and husband, I will be a watchful mother, and save you and our child. The young man must leave the house and Caroline take the vow. “

“Wife!” cried Mr. Kneipe, now still more enraged. “Don’t carry matters to the extreme! You had been a good wife and loving mother up to the day when the priest first entered our house and turned your head, and now you stay in church day and night. Take care, Betsy, I am a mild and peaceable man, and have for the sake of domestic peace many a time let five be even; but my Caroline won’t become a nun, though you and your reverend father should make the utmost efforts- and that’s all.”

...

Mrs. Kneipe scornfully looked after him and said, “Declaim as much as you please it will be done” the reverend father and I are ten times smarter than you!”⁶³

Börnstein depicts Mr. Kneipe as an honest man, who despite being a Catholic himself, views the Church’s influence on his wife as concerning and bothersome. Mr. Kneipe pinpoints the beginning of all the arguments between his wife and him when the reverent was successful in his brainwashing and inflicting fear in his wife. Here, just as in the case of the Böttcher family, a Catholic priest is responsible in dividing a family. This passage also illustrates Börnstein’s attempts to convince his readers that it is the Church who intentionally works against a peaceful cohabitation of a diverse people. Instead of promoting a peaceful and tolerant environment, in which German immigrants from all over the different states can stick and thrive together, the Catholic church, according to

⁶³ Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 139.

him seems to desire to kindle hatred between the Germans, even far away from their old homeland, when so many immigrants need support and solace.

Investigating other sources shows that Börnstein's anti-Catholicism attitude was neither just a personal affair, nor something that started in America. The following German song from 1844, *Brüder lasst uns froh (Hier am Mississippi)* by August Heinrich Hoffman von Fallersleben proves that similar notions of anti-Catholicism existed/prevailed in Europe.

Brüder, laßt uns froh jetzt das Glas erheben,
denn wir können frei nur im Ausland leben:
Können ohne Paß überall spazieren,
ohne Polizei, täglich kommersieren.

Hier am Mississippi

Freies Denken gilt so wie freies Sprechen
nirgend, nirgend hier für ein Staatsverbrechen.
Hier macht kein Gendarm jemals uns Bedrängnis,
und kein Bettelvogt führt uns ins Gefängnis.

Hier am Mississippi.

Adel, Ordenskram, Titl, Rang und Stände
und solch dummes Zeug hat allhie ein Ende.
Hier darf nie ein Pfaff mit der Höll uns plagen,
nie ein Jesuit uns die Ruh verjagen

Hier am Mississippi.

Früher lebten wir gleichsam nur zur Strafe,
und man schor auch uns eben wie die Schafe.
Brüder, laßt uns drum singen, trinken, tanzen !
Keiner darf und kann hier uns je kuranzen,
hier am Mississippi.

Michel, baue nicht ferner deine Saaten
fürs Beamtenheer und die Herrn Soldaten !
Michel, faß ein Herz, endlich aszuwandern:
Hier gehörst du dir, dort nur stets den andern,
Hier am Mississippi.⁶⁴

The English translation of this song is as followed,

Brothers, let us merrily lift our glasses,
for we can live now freely in this foreign Land:
Can walk without a passport,
without the police, engage daily in commerce.
Here at the Mississippi
Free thinking is equivalent to free speech
and nowhere here is this a crime.
Here, the Gendarmery does not ever give us tribulations

⁶⁴ August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, „*Brüder lasst uns froh (hier am Mississippi)*,“
Volksliederarchiv, accessed 3/12/2022, <https://volksliederarchiv/brueder-lasst-uns-froh-hier-am-mississippi/>.

and no begging bailiff can cause us to be jailed

Here at the Mississippi.

Nobility, medals, title, rank, and class,

and such nonsense ends here.

Here, no cleric can pester us with damnation,

never can a Jesuit scare away our peace of mind

Here at the Mississippi.

Bevor, we all lived as it was a punishment,

and we were sheared like sheep.

Brothers, let us therefore sing, drink, and dance!

No one is allowed, and neither can ever mistreat us here,

here at the Mississippi.

Michel, don't sow your seeds anymore

for all state workers and the soldiers.

Michel, be brave and finally emigrate:

Here you work for yourself, there you will always serve them.

Here at the Mississippi.

That some Germans felt that the Jesuit priests were pestering them in Germany is clearly to be understood as another push-factor out of their native lands as well.

Rowan writes that the novel, once translated and printed into English, did not enjoy as much popularity with the Anglo-American audience. He states that

the anti-cleric message was too much for their taste. This statement can be disputed, if he refers to anti-Catholicism because this notion was not solely a German thing. John Evelev, states that this notion was present across the English-speaking United States, visible in its literature as well as the society. Ritter argues as well that many felt that Catholicism could not be compatible with American ideas, which stood for liberty and self-determination, whereas Catholics were seen as passive and relying on the Church's representatives to make decisions for them. Börnstein goes even a step further in his anti-Catholic hatred, by presenting the Jesuit order in particular, as a secret danger to societies all around the world. This is most evident in

Börnstein does attack Catholicism, Lutheranism, and other protestant religions, but he does not write about Judaism even though it was present in St. Louis within the German-speaking population. Lou Charnon-Deutsch states that there was a shift from antisemitism to anti-Catholicism during the nineteenth-century in literary narrations at least. Even though, there are exceptions, she says the views of the wanderer turned from revulsion or admiration to "pity". Despite the titles of some works carrying the tales name, the Jew's role started to diminish and instead 'controversies surrounding the role of the Catholic Church, the abuses of ecclesiastical power, and the greed of monastic dynasties' became the focus.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Lou Charnon-Deutsch, "Of Jews and Jesuits in the nineteenth-century French and Spanish feuilleton", (Penn State University Press: 2009), Vol. 46, No. 4, 589-590.

Most native-born Americans were Protestant Christians and according to Ritter, around 95% of Irish Immigrants and more than 30% of Germans arriving after 1840 were Catholics.⁶⁶

Stewan Rowan writes that he had a “deep and abiding hostility to the institutions of Christianity,”⁶⁷ which does not just target the Catholic church, as evident in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, in which the main villain, Mr. Smartborn is a Methodist. He also disliked the Lutheran Church in real life. It is important to emphasize that his hatred did not target the different believes themselves, but specifically the authorial power of the churches especially when they tried to take advantage of their followers or tried to put any restriction on their freedom. Even though, Börnstein’s other threat in his novel is the Jesuit order, he writes that the main characters used to be in fact Catholics themselves. We know that Old Böttcher is a free thinker, but we are not told of his mother’s beliefs. He also refers to Böttcher’s daughter Maria repeatedly as a saint or an angel. He writes, “... her pure, heavenly features were bathed in the light of the evening crimson, her beautiful eyes were shining with a glorious luster – she was the image of an angel descended from heaven.”⁶⁸ Even though the name, Maria is very common, together with the attributions given her, Börnstein could very well make a reference to Maria, the mother of Jesus, which on the other hand could be an argument against his hostility towards religion per se. Throughout

⁶⁶ Luke Ritter, *Inventing America’s First Immigration Crisis: Political Nativism in the Antbellum West*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 2, <https://doi.org/10.5422/SHMP/1688>.

⁶⁷ Steven Rowan, “Introducing Henry Boernstein, a.k.a. Heinrich Börnstein,” in *Memoirs of a Nobody: The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical, 1849-1866*, ed. Steven Rowan, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 4.

⁶⁸ Henry Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 157.

the novel, she is described as patient, loyal, good hearted, being a virgin, and honest. She, like her father, represents the ideas and values of the free thinkers⁶⁹, which Börnstein identified himself as. He was even a cofounder of the 'Society of Free Men' in Saint Louis. To bring his spiritual ideas to the reader, by letting Anton Böttcher explain to Smartborn that he does not belong to a domination. Old Boettcher says, "We worship God by beholding with admiration the wonderful works of the universe; we pray to him by raising our thoughts to him and practice his religion by sincerely loving one another and all men."⁷⁰ The Böttchers, and Maria serves as the personification of a typical Free Thinker. On the other hand, Cecile, the Countess might be the personification of the Catholic church. She is introduced as a seducer. A hypocrite, who preaches morals and prays to idols and minutes later lays in bed with men to have intercourse. In the attempted robbery scene, she has the power to save an innocent man from going to jail but chooses not to. Cecily is rich but does not know what hard work is. She preys on the confused and innocent (wants to seduce Karl, who is in a state of grieve and distraught, thinking that Maria died of cholera). She also likes to play mind games and is in one word, a sinner. Börnstein describes the Jesuits in this fashion as well. The juxtaposition of Maria and Cecile is intentionally used by him to strengthen his point of view between the two constitutions. (Free Thinkers vs. Jesuits). The female personification of the Anglo-American is not as strong in the novel, but still given present through the character of Rebecca Smartborn. She

⁶⁹ 'A non-dogmatic theistic or atheistic ethical-culture movement' Rowan, *Mysteries of Saint Louis*, footnote, 124.

⁷⁰ Boernstein, *Mysteries of St. Louis*, 124.

was a devote Protestant (south Methodist), owned slaves, went to church twice a day, knew the bible by heart (an allusion that she actually reads and interprets the bible herself, while catholic clergy discourage individual interpretations of the bible).

The Anzeiger des Westens printed a report in the daily edition of April 26th of 1851, in which the author of the article with the initials R.J.D complains about the scholarship in schools. The title's name is "Jesuitismus und Schule" (Jesuitism and School), however he addresses the school system in general using catholic-run schools as an example.

... Solche Individuen kennen keine andere Pflicht, keinen anderen Wirkungskreis, als ihren Zöglingen die mechanische Schulprüfung ordentlich herleiern und herplappern, und der würdige Lehrer ein paar fade Komplimente über den guten Zustand seiner Schule erhält, so ist die Sache zur Zufriedenheit aller Beteiligten abgemacht, und nach dem eigentlichen – dem innern – Sustande wird gar nicht gefragt. In den Pfaffenschulen sieht es jedoch noch viel schlimmer aus. ... in den Jesuitenschulen bildet die Lehre über die Erbsünde, die sieben Sakramente, die vier Todsünden, die Sünden wider den heiligen Geist und die zehn Gebote einen wichtigeren Zunft, als die Elementargegenstände, und jeder Schneider und Schuster, der kaum selbst lesen kann, aber ein ergebener Sohn der Kirche ist, und von Pädagogik so viel versteht, als ein Jagdhund von der Astronomie, wird für fähig gehalten, den Präceptorstuhl zu besteigen, und von den Pfaffen wirklich auf denselben gesetzt. Hier

wird Finsterniß und Dummheit gleich der Muttermilch eingeseget, und statt Moralität, Immoralität, Niesbeträchtigkeit und der Begriff und die Erkenntniß des Pastors befördert....

Aber selbst in solchen Schulen, wo dieser schändliche, verderbliche Unfug nicht stattfindet, wird noch das alte Jesuiten-Lehrsystem beibehalten, durch mechanische Gedächnißübungen die Kinder nach einem Glisten bilden zu wollen, ...Gleich einer östreichischen Soldaten-Compagnie werden alle gleichmäßig erectirt, und je eracter sie nach dem Commando sich bewegen, desto besser ist die Schule. Gleich Papageien werden die Kinder abgerichtet, das Vorgesagte wieder nachzuplaudern ...⁷¹

The author further describes how the catholic church teaches that only their religion can promise salvation, and that the “beängstigte”. His solution is that the public elect teachers, because “so lange ihr sie nach dem Jesuitensysteme bildet, macht ihr sie zu Affen, und die Jesuiten u. Die Pfaffen aller Sorten werden sie ohne Mühe zu Heuchlern und Schurken bilden” (as long as you teach them in the system of the Jesuits, you will contribute to them being turned into apes, and the Jesuits and clerics of all kind, won’t have any trouble training them to become hypocrites and scoundrels.)⁷²

⁷¹“Jesuitismus und Schule.“ Anzeiger des Westens, April 26, 1851.

⁷²“Jesuitismus und Schule.“

2. Crime

By looking at the current news at the time of the novel's publication one can gain some insight into moral expectations and frequency of criminal activities to compare any overlapping of fiction and reality. A proper analysis of this is especially beneficial by just relying on the novel, one might arrive at the erroneous conclusion that German immigrants were saints compared to the Anglo-Americans, the French, and Irish population of St. Louis.

In the *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, Smartborn attempts to rape the virgin Maria Böttcher. On the website of the State Penitentiary one can also find several records in which (attempted) rape was reported. A news article in the *Anzeiger* reports that a man was obsessed with a nun who nursed him back to health at the hospital. He then started stalking her and breaking into the nun's quarters at night. This incident seems to be similar to Smartborn's obsession with Maria, combining real and fictional elements in the novel.

3. Gender roles depicted in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* and mid-nineteenth-century

Women in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* did not usually participate in work outside of the home, which corresponds with reality. The *Anzeiger* sheds some light onto the no-female employment outside of the home attitude during the time the novel was serialized. In the novel this attitude is clearly visible. Maria, the teenage daughter of the Böttcher family was eventually hired by

Smartborn to keep his visiting sister company during her stay at his estate. Maria only had reluctantly agreed to take on this job. Considering what the majority of people understand of 'work' it could not actually be described as such. It was more like a paid extended visit. However, when Smartborn meets Maria for the first time while she accompanies her father to inquire about the price of the apple farm he liked, he does suggest that she stay in the city to work because of her ability to speak English well. She replies that she wants to stay with and support her family in the country, where she belongs. The female characters in Börnstein's novel have no careers nor are they expressing the desire to receive any education to be successful in the workforce. The author only assigns women with household chores, taking care of others, or contributing to a family business. For instance, Caroline's mother only sees her daughter making it in the world joining the Catholic order as a nun. Anton Böttcher's wife on the other hand, does not even attempt to learn the English language, as she is content raising her children and running the household. Pepita, who was sold to Mr. Hawkes is aiding him with his shady business. One cannot draw conclusions about women's employment attitudes or social expectations about female employment by the content of one novel alone. However, the ads in the *Anzeiger des Westens* seem to support the fact that women were not active in the workforce outside of the home. All business ads, with a few exceptions, list male names. One of the few ads that point to possible women's jobs are given by "Hebammen" (Doulas). In another ad, commissioned by a school principal, he lets the reader know that his wife will be instructing their homemaking course for

young girls, where they are taught to sew and other skills. That women's presence in the workforce was unusual, but at the same time supported by some, is given by a very interesting news report about a sixteen-year-old girl in image 11.

A black and white photograph of a newspaper clipping from 1851. The text is in German and discusses a young woman carrying a newspaper. The text is: '(Ein weiblicher Zeitungsträger.) Unter dieser Ueberschrift bringt der Intelligencer folgendes: „Wir sahen gestern zum ersten Male, — was wir nie zu erleben geglaubt hätten, — einen weiblichen Zeitungsträger. Trotz Regen und Noth gab ein hübsches, blühendes Mädchen von süßen 16 Jahren das Blatt: Unsere Zeit an die achtbaren Subscribenten aus. Wir begreifen, daß jetzt, wo ein zartes, weibliches Wesen Zeitungen austragen muß, während ein starker, rustiger Mann Bänder abmisst, den letzten Rest von Galanterie und Ritterlichkeit, auf den wir noch Anspruch machten, vertilgen muß. Das junge Mädchen scheint übrigens stolz auf ihr Geschick und dürfte sich, ohne Zweifel, in dieser Carriere noch Auszeichnung erwerben.“ — Wieder ein Schritt mehr zur Emancipation der Frauen!'

(Image 11. Anzeiger des Westens, February 16, 1851)

It reads,

„(Ein weiblicher Zeitungsträger)

Unter dieser Ueberschrift bringt der Intelligencer folgendes; „Wir sahen gestern zum ersten Male, - was wir nie zu erleben geglaubt hätten, - einen weiblichen Zeitungsträger. Trotz Regen und Noth gab ein hübsches, blühendes Mädchen von süßen 16 Jahren das Blatt: Unsere Zeit an die achtbaren Subscribenten aus. Wir begreifen, daß jetzt, wo ein zartes,

weibliches Wesen Zeitungen austragen muss, während ein starker, rüstiger Mann sauber abmißt, den letzten Rest von Galanterie und Ritterlichkeit, auf den wir noch Anspruch machten, vertilgen muß. Das junge Mädchen scheint übrigens stolz auf ihr Geschäft und dürfte sich, ohne Zweifel, in dieser Karriere noch Auszeichnung erwerben“, - Wieder ein Schritt mehr zur Emancipation der Frauen!“⁷³

Translated this ad says,

(A female newspaper carrier)

Under this title the Intelligencer reports following: “For the first time ever, we saw, -something we never thought possible. – a female newspaper carrier. Despite rain and distress, a pretty, blooming girl of sweet 16 years delivered the paper to our respected subscribers. We came to the realization, that when a delicate, feminine creature, has to deliver the newspaper, while a strong, stocky man, the last remnant of gallantry and chivalry, which we still claimed, has been gone. By the way, the young girl seems to be proud of her business and could without doubt, claim an award for her carrier.” – Another step forward to the emancipation of women!

Considering the novels representation of women and the ad combined, one can assume that during the nineteenth century, the employment of females in jobs outside the home was generally an exception in the United States, or specifically in the Midwest. Because it is not clear which Intelligencer is in

⁷³ “Ein weiblicher Zeitungsträger.“ Anzeiger des Westens, February 16, 1851.

question, we can only assume that this refers to the German community.

Because Maria does ultimately work for a short time in the novel, Börnstein could have been inspired by the news from the *Intelligencer*. This on the other hand could also be positively viewed by young female readers, who identified with the character of Maria, strengthening their liking of the novel itself and hence explaining to some degree its popularity at that time.

3. Nationality, Ethnicity, and Racial thinking

Immigration to America peaked between 1840 to 1860. Börnstein himself, was one of the more than four million immigrants who entered the country during this time frame. Most of them were German or Irish. Children of immigrants born on native soil are not considered immigrants. They are 'Natives', however, considering that they are strongly influenced by their parent's German customs, religious and political beliefs, and language, we can assume that Nativists, even though they did believe in rights of inheritance, meaning that they stress that native-born citizens have a higher standing than immigrants who obtained citizenship after residing in the country for multiple years, continue to have ill feelings towards them. Back in the nineteenth century one had to be living in the U.S. for five years before citizenship could have been considered. Nativist wanted to change this requirement to twenty-one years. Know Nothings had political power nationally between 1854 and 1856. According to Ritter, Nativism "often entails economic stability and some combination of uniform behaviors,

values, religious beliefs, language, or race.”⁷⁴ However, it was not just the Nativists who pointed out differences. Considering Irish-German conflicts and the Anglo-American’s dislike for German Sunday observation customs, we can assume that prejudice was present in all groups of people.

In his memoirs, for instance, Börnstein tells the story of an encounter with an Irish lady, whose husband had left for California. Her house was clean and she welcomed her German guests warmly. However, one can also sense a negative attitude towards the Irish in a report published on April 26, 1851. (Figure 5) This report talks about a ship that had 600 passengers, of whom 400 were Irish. The author describes them as being in poor physical condition, dirty and neglected. The report ends with the question “What will happen to them, once they leave quarantine?”, indicating that they don’t want them anywhere near them. Even this is an indirect negative expression, it sheds light on how fear is spread through articles like these. Many native-born Americans were mostly Protestant Christians and according to Ritter, around 95% of Irish Immigrants and more than 30% of Germans arriving after 1840 were Catholics.⁷⁵ It could be that the German-Irish conflict was due to the different religious beliefs, however, there are also German Catholics, making them ‘Glaubensbrüder’ (Brothers in faith). One would assume that their shared beliefs were bonding them. However, Ritter points out that due to their own languages, interactions between both groups was limited even in religious matter.

⁷⁴ Luke Ritter, *Inventing America’s First Immigration Crisis: Political Nativism in the Antebellum West*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.5422/SHMP/1688>.

⁷⁵ Luke Ritter, *Inventing America’s First Immigration Crisis*, 2.

To address the encounters between Germans and the non-white population, it seems that this limitation in the novel seemingly mirrored actual circumstances of German immigrants when considering the cities demographic makeup. According to Andersen, the black population of St. Louis was 4,034, which compared to the overall St. Louis population of approximately 77,860 in 1850 is very small⁷⁶. The Germans lived mostly in the First Ward and were able to take care of all their business needs there.

The depiction of Anglo-Americans, French, Irish, and Germans are strongly biased in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, as evident in the characterization of the protagonists. The French characters, Cecile and her boyfriend are described negatively and in connection with money, The only good French character mentioned was grandfather Böttcher's old friend, but he was not a character the family members personally encountered. Cecile is described as overly sexual in comparison to the German Maria, who is referred to as a saint.

One can exclude that Börnstein did not feel that national identity bore any importance, otherwise he would not have insisted of being known as an American citizen. On the other hand, he clearly identified with both German and French as well. In his memoirs he critiques American eating habits by saying that it was quite unusual for “**(us)** decadent Parisians.”⁷⁷ He seemingly identified as

⁷⁶ Kristen Layne Anderson, *Abolitionizing Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 10.

⁷⁷ Henry Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody, The Missouri Years of an Austrian Radical, 1849 – 1866*, ed. Steven Rowan, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), 62-63.

French, or at least with the French culture, by also stating that upon moving into his first apartment in St. Louis,

“We were able to live as we had been accustomed to in Europe, cooking **our** French *pot au feu* of soup, meat, and vegetables. By all means we avoided the American practice of the many meals in a day, all dominated by meat in excess, particularly pork. Rather, we remained true to **our** old customs. We did not visit inns or public places,…”⁷⁸

Not only refers he repeatedly to his ‘Frenchness’, but he also states that he did not go to inns or public places. Given the traditional German Sunday activity of going to *biergartens*, this passage also raises the question how strong his ties to or participation were in German customs on his arrival to St. Louis. One year later, Börnstein does however, deplore the Anglo-Americans’ dislike for social events on Sundays, as evident in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*. He is also accredited by Richter to be the leader of the Fourth of July protest in the year of 1854 when this day fell on a Sunday, clearly supporting that the Germans hang on to their customs of Sunday observance.

4. Slavery

Börnstein, even though an opponent of slavery, depicts it in the novel passively and describes it as something that is part of Missouri or the South. According to Anderson this reflected the attitude of most German immigrants at

⁷⁸ Boernstein, *Memoirs of a Nobody*, 87.

the time of publication. She even states that “Missouri Germans were more willing to undermine the racial hierarchy by questioning slavery than were most white Missourians, although after emancipation was achieved, many Missouri Germans showed little interest in continuing to demolish the hierarchy that benefited them and did not fight for black rights.”⁷⁹

In the novel, Smartborn has a black servant in his estate and many more on a farm. In a conversation between him and his business partner Asa, the following is said:

Smartborn says,

“Es ist ein böses Ding um die Sklaverei,” seufzte Mr. Smartborn, „ich hab‘ es Ihnen oft schon gesagt, guter Asa, - ein großes Uebel ist sie, aber ein Uebel, das sich nicht heben läßt. – Was können wir dafür, daß unsere Väter die Sklaverei einführten? Wir müssen nun darunter leiden. Gewiß, ich bedauere die armen Schwarzen, wie irgend ein gefühlvoller Philantrop im Norden, aber wenn ich bedenke, daß sich daran nichts ändern läßt, ohne den Wohlstand, ja die Existenz von hunderten der achtbaren Familien zu untergraben, ihnen ihr wohlervobenes Vermögen, die Mittel zu stürzen, - dann kann ich Denen nur Recht geben, die da sagen: Die Sklaverei ist ein geheiligtes, unantastbares Recht!

Gewiß, das ist sie,“ bestätigte Asa, „und die heilige Bibel weist dies an hundert Stellen nach.“

⁷⁹ Layne Anderson, *Abolitionizing Missouri*, 5.

„Unsere Constitution gewährleistet sie, Asa, - und ein guter Bürger muss die Gesetze seines Landes achten und ehren, „ sagte Mr. Smartborn.

„Und die Neger sind schon von Natur aus zur Sklaverei bestimmt,“ setzte Ufa hinzu, - „ein berühmter Arzt hat mir gesagt, schon ihr anatomischer Körperbau beweise das.“

„Gewiß, Asa, gewiß. Das alles sagte ich auch immer dem guten Lovejoy, - aber er wollte mir nicht glauben, und rannte sich immer tiefer in das Abolitionswesen hinein, bis sie ihn hier mobbten und dann in Alton drüben todschossen. – Mitten in die Stirne schossen sie ihn, mein guter Asa, den armen Lovejoy, die bösen Leute, - aber er hatte es selbst nicht anders gewollt.“

„Es ist gut,“ meinte Asa, wenn von Zeit zu Zeit so ein Trepel statuiert wird, denn die Abolitionisten werden täglich frecher. Der Congreß sollte etwas für uns thun, - z. B. Alle Abolitions-Zeitungen verbieten und auf das Entführen von Sklaven die Todesstrafe setzten,- aber in Washington fangen sie leider auch schon an, Philantropie zu treiben und schwärmen für die Nigger-Republik Liberia.“⁸⁰

English translation:

“Slavery is a bad thing. I often tell them so, dear Asa, a great but necessary evil which cannot be remedied, for our forefathers introduced slavery into the country, which we cannot help. We have to bear the evil. I

⁸⁰ Heinrich Börnstein, *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, 55.

am sorry for the poor slaves, certainly as much so as the most sensitive philanthropist in the East, but when I consider that nothing can be altered without undermining the welfare, nay, the very existence of thousands of families – that thousands may lose their lawful property – nay the very means of their existence, and may be thrown into poverty and misery – I cannot contradict those who say slavery is a holy, inalienable right”.

“Certainly, so it is,” remarked Asa, “and the Holy Bible says so, in a hundred places.”

“our dear Constitution grants us those rights, Asa, and a good citizen ought to esteem and honor the laws of his country,” said Smartborn.

“And by nature the negroes are destined for slavery,” added Asa. “A celebrated doctor told me the anatomical fabric of their bodies showed it.”

“Certainly, Asa, certainly; all this I told to the good Lovejoy. However, he would not believe me, but ran deeper and deeper into the Abolitionists’ mire, till he was mobbed here, and shot at Alton. Right in the forehead they shot him, dear Asa -shot the poor Lovejoy, wicked rascals. But he himself seemed to court his fate.”

“It is right,” said Asa, “that an example should be set from time to time – the Abolitionists are daily getting more impudent and rascally. Congress ought to do something in this matter, such as suppress all Abolition papers and punish by hanging all kidnappers of slaves. But they have already

begun in Washington to replace philanthropy, and are in ecstasies about the nigger republic in Liberia.”⁸¹

It is unclear why Börnstein, as an abolitionist of slavery, would not clearly state his opposition to it throughout the novel. One assumption would be that he did not want to take a clear stand against it in order to keep his readership.

Conclusion

Reading any kind of print source from the past, especially one that was written over 170 years ago, without a cultural understanding from that time, will not reflect the text's real value. When we read certain stories from our time, we will have very different reactions to it, depending on where we live and how the content relates to the individual. One cannot grasp the true effects that a news report or a creative work had on a reader at a specific time in history (or at the time it was read) without considering the prevailing situations of that time and location. If “shared cultural resources” as Mussell calls it, are lacking, such an approach will sacrifice and even undermine the importance of texts that could provide clues about specific immigration experiences. The same is true for *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*. To truly understand its value, one must not only consider the novel's content, but also investigate the time and location it was written and read. When approaching such texts, it is crucial to answer following questions: Who wrote and who read it? Where and when was it written and read?

⁸¹ Boernstein, *Mysteries of Saint Louis*, 26-27.

What historical, social, and political events had significance during the time of publication? To avoid generalizations, these questions need to be broken down further and require a multi-directional and interdisciplinary approach. Scholarly collaboration from different disciplines can ensure that accurate statements can be made about each work.

By investigating many aspects of immigrant life using an array of primary material and especially focusing on the newspaper and Börnstein's biography, this study tells us that many readers could indeed identify with the characters and events in the novel, and that popular fiction should, therefore, not be neglected as a source for future research on immigration experiences.

If one only draws conclusions about the German immigration experiences in mid-nineteenth century St. Louis from *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* then the assumptions could be made that German in St. Louis preceded Anglo-American presence keeping the Böttcher's family history in mind. However, through historical records, it is known that Germans started arriving in Missouri quite some time after the Louisiana Purchase. The first German immigration wave to Missouri began in the 1830s after the publication of various travel reports were published in the German-speaking territories. Most notably were Duden's publications, which painted Missouri as an utopian place, perfect for German settlements. Later millions of other individuals, families, and larger groups started arriving. The second wave of German immigrants was between 1840 and 1860, well after settlers from other European countries or the eastern parts of the United States set foot in Missouri.

In the novel, only Joshua Shaw, the neighbor of the Böttchers seem to be the only non-German who altruistically offers help. All other non-Germans are part of the counterfeit Money clan. Therefore, the novel suggests that German and non-German encounters were limited to negative experiences. Tom Quick is another character who stays by his German friend's side and ends up marrying the German Caroline. However, he also owes his life to the Böttchers who nursed him back to health after he got insured in the explosion. In reality, the general encounter between Germans and non-Germans was dependent on where one lives. Through the school and education ads in the *Anzeiger*, one knows that Germans were indeed encouraged to learn English. These ads would not exist if the Germans were discouraged from engaging with non-Germans.

Because the opposition to slavery is not convincingly portrayed by Börnstein, one would assume that it was not a topic that German immigrants dealt with. Many sources attribute the abolition of slavery to the efforts of the German forty-eighters, but as Anderson states, the majority of German immigrants were indeed not concerned with this issue, among other things. She states that most Germans were financially simply not able to afford slaves to have them work on their farms. In the case of the Böttchers, this statement could indeed reflect the immigrant experiences accurately in the novel.

The Catholic church's' influence on its follower's life is portrayed by Börnstein as excessive and intrusive. He even includes two characters, who despite being members of this church, don't want anything to do with the church. Mr. Kneipe for instance, recognizes the change in his wife's attitude which seems

to get more radical the more she listens to her priest. Tom, on the other hand, just doesn't feel connected to the church anymore. Considering debates about the use of certain, non-pope approved Bibles in schools, and other anti-Catholic messages in English-language text sources of that time, the anti-Catholic narration in the movie could indeed be a reflection of prevailing public opinion. However, it must be considered that around 30 Percent of the German immigrants were Catholic and most likely supporter their church. Therefore, one must consider that for some the novel was received negatively. Knowing about Börnstein's personal convictions, one can read his promotional tactics for the Freethinkers, which is presented by Anton Böttcher's conversation with Smartborn about Sunday church visits.

Concerning the topic of crime, *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, make it seem to be non-present within the German community, or among the Germans themselves. Except of William's case, in which out of desperation, he took money from Smartborn to pay an open bill, the Germans are presented as honest and law-abiding citizens. This would give the impression that the German community was safe, close knit, and homogenously supporting one another. Even though Big Bob is involved with a criminal mob, he is still presented as a remorseful person who still carries good German virtues. His criminal involvement is excused by the lack of his German upbringing. However, German criminals existed among the population of St. Louis as well.

By analyzing the female characters in *Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, we can see that their presentations are dependent on their nationality and religious

beliefs. The French Cecile, the Californian Pepita, Smartborn's Anglo-American sister are at least initially presented as not good people compared to the German female characters. In Mrs. Kneipe's case, it is the Catholic church's influence that makes her become less sympathetic. Two of the novel's three non-German protagonists, Cecile and Smartborn's sister, are both wealthy enough not to have to work. However, all other female characters are not in a such a good financial situation and are therefore required to work, either inside or outside of their homes.

Börnstein presents the German characters overall as being secluded or isolated because there is no communal gatherings or celebrations that they did or even wished to attend. This is contrary to the many ads that advertised for meetings of social clubs. The Böttcher's immigration also seems contrary to the many group emigration experiences. Once in America, they usually had family members or members from their home or religious communities waiting for them. Even Börnsteins himself, came as part of a large group. Therefore, concerning social interaction with like-minded people or people with similar backgrounds are not reflected accurately in *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*.

By presenting the German characters in such a saintly way, aside from the German Catholic clergies, Börnstein seems to stress German's superior and more desirable character traits. In a time of prevailing anti-immigration sentiments, and as a response to it, this could have very well been a reflection of Germans' attitudes. However, the author also conveys the idea that Germans are now becoming "better Americans" by adapting to the new country's ideologies in

terms of freedom and self-sufficiency. This is mostly evident in the part where he compares Europe and America after the fire disaster.

In conclusion, a contextual reading of the novel, considering different aspects of immigration life and utilizing additional materials, can shed light on how Börnstein's own convictions are reflected in the novel and how those are either reflections or contradictions of the prevailing general attitudes and experiences. Even though a fictional source, the success of *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis*, as well as the investigation of events that happened around the time of its serialization tells us that most readers could identify with the characters and events in it, making it a significant material for the investigation of German immigrant life in mid-nineteenth century St. Louis and one that belongs to different academic disciplines.

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