

Figure 0.2. Friedrich Gerstäcker. Undated carte-de-visite, unknown photographer. Collection of Charles Adams.

"The Arkansas Regulators" by Friedrich Gerstäcker, Translated and edited by Charles Adams and Christoph Irmscher. <http://berghahnbooks.com/title/AdamsArkansas>

Introduction



It is no exaggeration to say that drama, role-play, and costumes accompanied Friedrich Wilhelm Christian Gerstäcker from the moment of his birth. The man whose life would be an extended performance, with the world for a stage, was born in Hamburg on 10 May 1816, as the first son of two opera singers. Indeed, his father, who died when Friedrich was only nine, was one of the most famous tenors of the day. From an early age, Gerstäcker was a restless soul. Apprenticed at fifteen by his widowed mother to a merchant in Kassel, Friedrich ran away from the position after two years, walking over a hundred miles back to his mother's home in Leipzig. At eighteen, inspired by his avid reading of Cooper and Scott, and especially by his love of *Robinson Crusoe*, he announced his firm intention to travel to exotic places, with America as his first destination. His mother, fearing that her quixotic son would have no way to support himself in the New World, managed to delay his departure by arranging for him to spend nearly three years on a farm in Saxony to study agriculture. He endured the tedium of farm life for as long as he could, and in 1837, just a few days shy of his twenty-first birthday, he left Bremerhaven for New York.¹

From the start, his time in America was marked by adventure and relentless movement. Upon landing in New York, he opened a tobacco shop on Broadway with a man that he had met on board the ship, hoping in this way to earn some money to support his travels. The venture failed after just a few months, and Gerstäcker set out for the wilderness, alone. Traveling by steamboat, train, and barge, but mainly on foot, he first went north to Niagara Falls, and then back south, pausing in Cincinnati before walking from there into Arkansas.

Over the next four years, he spent about thirty months in Arkansas, including two extended periods in 1839–40 and 1841–42. Toward the end of his life, he would look back with genuine fondness for the state and its people: "Arkansas! There I lived the best years of my youth, if I can even say that I had a youth. There I felt free and independent for the first time. There in the wilderness I found a home more beautiful and magnificent than any I could have then imagined. For me, the word itself was magic."² He traveled extensively throughout the state, hunting for his food and lodging with settlers when he needed companionship and something more than venison to eat. Most of his time was spent in the northeastern portion of the state, between

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the Mississippi and the White Rivers, and in the area west of Little Rock near the Fourche La Pave River. The latter region provides the setting for *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas*.

Gerstäcker returned to Germany in 1843, and (as he later claimed) was shocked to learn that he had become a writer. Unbeknownst to him, his mother had been giving Friedrich's descriptions of his American adventures to the editor of a literary magazine, *Die Rosen*, which published several sections during their author's absence.³ Gerstäcker embraced his accidental career with enthusiasm, producing his first book in 1844. *Streif- und Jagdzüge durch die Vereinigten Staaten Nord-Amerikas* ("Ramblings and Hunting Expeditions through the United States of North America," translated as *Wild Sports in the Far West* in 1854) was based closely on his American diaries, and focused on his adventures in Arkansas, including a tavern brawl in which Gerstäcker saw a man knifed to death and his near-fatal struggle with a bear in which his hunting companion was killed. This thrilling tale of the American wilderness sold well, encouraging the fledgling writer to try his hand at fiction based on his experiences. *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* was published in 1846 in a three-volume edition that also became a success. His career was launched.

For the rest of his life, Gerstäcker followed a pattern of alternating periods of obsessive writing in Germany with extended journeys to faraway places. In 1849, he left his wife and young son for a three-year expedition that included stops in the California gold fields, South America, several Pacific islands, Java, and Australia. In 1860, he escaped yet again, now for two years, visiting various places in Latin America, and subsequent trips during the 1860s took him to Africa and back to North, Central, and South America. Gerstäcker married twice (his first wife died while he was on his way home from South America in 1862), and he had five children, but his heart and mind were permanently engaged elsewhere, roaming through prairies, tropical rainforests, and South American pampas.

In the spring of 1872, his baggage was already packed for yet another adventure—this time to China, Japan, and India—when, at 2 AM on 31 May, he died of a stroke in the arms of his second wife, Marie Louise. He had collapsed, appropriately, next to his desk, where he had been working on a new novel, *Am Orinoco* ("At the Orinoco").

Gerstäcker's Work

Gerstäcker is a difficult writer to categorize, so vast and varied is his *oeuvre*. Although he was not the first European to write about the American frontier in the nineteenth century, he did so more extensively and passionately

than others. Whether in fiction, as in *Die Regulatoren*, or in his numerous accounts of his experiences in the New World, Gerstäcker offers a unique and trenchant commentary on many facets of American life west of the Appalachians, including slavery and race relations generally, the nature of American communities, the peculiarities of religious life and expression on the frontier, lawlessness and violence, and the tensions inherent in matters of gender and class in the volatile society beyond the settlements.

Like many of his generation in Europe, Gerstäcker's notions of the frontier and its inhabitants were largely shaped by his reading of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, the first three of which had achieved remarkable popularity in German translations by the time Gerstäcker left for America.⁴ Cooper's powerful images of the upright hunter and his noble Indian brothers living in simple freedom amidst the natural splendors of the American wilderness were eagerly embraced by Gerstäcker, whose imagination was fired by the writings of Goethe, Schiller, and Defoe, among others.⁵ Moreover, an idealized image of America had been popularized by several German-speaking novelists of the 1820s and 30s. A particularly important contemporary and model was the Austrian novelist and journalist Karl Postl (1793–1864), better known under his *nom de plume* Charles Sealsfield. A former priest, Postl spent many years living in the United States, interrupted by longer stays in Paris or London or Switzerland, and eventually became an American citizen. Postl's extensive travels in the American South became the basis for his best-known novel, *Das Kajütenbuch oder Nationale Charakteristiken* (1841; "The Cabin Book, or National Characteristics"), a series of tales told to a group of wealthy Southerners in Natchez, Mississippi. More explicitly political than Gerstäcker,⁶ Sealsfield combines his admiration for American democracy and freedom with atmospherically dense descriptions of the American "prairies" that must have resonated with Gerstäcker, as would have the story of the remorseful murderer and his botched hanging that is at the center of the best-known tale in *Kajütenbuch*, "Die Prairie am Jacinto" ("The Prairie near the San Jacinto River"). But whereas Sealsfield, despite his long exposure to America, writes about the southern landscapes from the perspective of the outsider—someone who wants to impart a lesson in American history and politics to his readers back home—Gerstäcker immerses himself fully in the world of his characters. Perhaps the principal source of interest in Gerstäcker's work is his effort, carried on in various ways throughout his literary career, to reconcile these early fantasies about the frontier, and about America generally, with his actual experience of the place and its people, ordinary people, that is. As indicated by the title of one of his relatively early works, *Wie ist es nun eigentlich in Amerika?* (1849; "What Is It Really Like in America?"), he understood that the purpose underlying much of his writing

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about the United States was to mediate for his German readers between the imaginative power of “Coopers reizende Erzählungen” (“Cooper’s charming stories”) and the real thing.⁷

This is certainly an important motive of his first published book, *Streif- und Jagdzüge durch die Vereinigten Staaten Nord-Amerikas*. Here, amidst the stirring accounts of bear hunts and other adventures, Gerstäcker bluntly relates the less attractive features of American life: the poverty and cultural deprivation of the isolated individuals or families living in the deep woods, the severe difficulties of carving a life from the sodden swamps and craggy highlands of Arkansas, and the crime and violence always haunting frontier society. A remarkable feature of this book is the author’s willingness to portray himself as driven by an almost surreal urge to kill everything that does not manage to get up a tree or into a thicket in time: from foxes and deer to bears, whose meat he particularly relishes. “We were all bear-killers,” exults Gerstäcker, looking back on the crazy, near-suicidal hunts in which he participated, including one which required them to enter a dark, seemingly endless cave in search of a bear with three cubs. He at first only wounded the bear who pursued them, and, when she finally died, had to be pulled out by means of a rope around her neck. No unpleasant detail is left out of Gerstäcker’s narrative, proof that he had indeed experienced all he wrote about: how the young bear cubs’ brains had to be bashed in so they would not make a sound and betray the men’s presence; how their mother’s spine had to be broken “so that the carcass might lay better across a horse”; or how the skin of a cougar the men, constantly hungry for more meat, killed a little later was so riddled with bullets “that it almost looked like a sieve.”⁸

In Gerstäcker’s world, companionship between man and beast is possible only after death. In one of the caves, they find the skeletons of a man and a bear “lying peaceably within three feet of each other.”⁹ The dead man’s foot-steps were still visible in the moist earth, even though Gerstäcker concludes that his body must have lain there for several years. Masculine bravado goes only so far in the West. Gerstäcker is struck by the number of widows he finds in the swamps of Arkansas: women must, he decides, be better suited to the climate. For all his fascination with frontier life, he has a clear sense of its limitations as well, and even as his English improves, he cannot shake the feeling that he comes from a superior culture: “The Americans in general,” he writes, “have little feeling for German music; they are a people who live in a hurry, and everything must go fast, even music; when they hear any which has not the time of a reel or a hornpipe, they say they do not understand it.”¹⁰ His first two novels, *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* (1846) and *Die Flußpiraten des Mississippi* (1848; “River Pirates of the Mississippi”) give fictional form to the same commitment to render the wild side of the antebellum West.

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These books also suggest that Gerstäcker had read Cooper more carefully than those Europeans who regarded the American writer mainly as a purveyor of “charming stories.” A gothic world of lawlessness and terror haunts all of Cooper’s tales of liminal societies, particularly *The Prairie* (1827), the climactic tragedy of the Leatherstocking series, and the one that most evidently influenced Gerstäcker. In Gerstäcker’s hands, this mood is deepened and darkened into a portrait of a world where virtue is a relative thing and survival becomes the principal goal of both the good and the bad. Those who last in the wilderness do so not because of divine providence but because they have managed to avoid making stupid mistakes. In a crucial scene in *Wild Sports*, a bear finally exacts his revenge on Gerstäcker and his companion Erskwine, who rashly attacks the furious animal armed only with a knife, an error for which he pays with his life. Gerstäcker’s later tales and sketches of American life—whether of the Mississippi and the Ozarks, or, subsequently, of the gold rush days in California—all illustrate with stern realism the point that Gerstäcker makes in “What Is It Really Like in America?”: “If [the reader] finds many of my descriptions painted in less brilliant colors than those with which his imagination may have possibly misled him . . . he should consider that America is not at all an ideal place, but rather a very materialistic and a very pragmatic land.”¹¹

As an unflinching observer of American customs, Gerstäcker continues to occupy an important place in the history of German popular culture, which has long been fascinated with a country Goethe famously thought “had it better” than the Old World.¹² There is no doubt that he influenced his prolific competitor, Balduin Möllhausen (1825–1905). Almost ten years younger than Gerstäcker, Möllhausen arrived in New York in 1850. He lived with the Ojibwe in the Great Lakes area, hunted in Illinois, and traveled west with Duke Paul of Württemberg, a naturalist and adventurer with a knack for getting them entangled in life-threatening situations. After becoming engaged to the mixed-race Pawnee Amalie Papin, Möllhausen returned to Berlin, where he became the protégé of the elderly Alexander von Humboldt. During a second stay in the US, he joined an expedition led by Lieutenant A. W. Whipple, which was intended to explore a route for the future transcontinental railroad. All of which is to say that in terms of adventurousness and personal derring-do, young Balduin was more than a match for Friedrich.

In terms of productivity, he would soon surpass him.¹³ Möllhausen published his first novel, *Der Halbindianer* (“The Half-breed”), in 1861, fifteen years after Gerstäcker’s *Regulatoren*. Over the next four decades, he went on to release one novel almost every year, returning again and again to his favorite theme, German–American relations. While he arguably never reached Möllhausen’s level of insight into native cultures, as manifested not only in the latter’s writings but also in his watercolor sketches of tribal life,¹⁴ Gerstäcker’s

novels stand out for their rapt attention to ethnographic detail—the clothes, shoes, dishes, food, and other objects of everyday use. As Wolfgang Hochbruck has shown, Gerstäcker, a realist by inclination and necessity, inserted a new level of factuality into the familiar genre of the adventure novel, which he introduced to a German readership. He also reinvented it, moving the events he described from a mythic past invoked by his predecessor Cooper into the present, or at least a present pretty close to the reader's own experiences.¹⁵ And thus he stirred adventure, anecdote, crime reportage, ethnography, and frontier humor into one powerfully addictive mix that lets the reader ignore the frequently careless writing, the repetitions (one does lose count of how many times his characters “laugh” at each other when they converse), as well as the long-winded nature descriptions. Incidentally, the latter are a hallmark of Möllhausen's writing too, and it is there that Gerstäcker's influence is most palpable. Like his model, the more romantically-inclined Möllhausen loves to invoke the play of light on the leaves of stately trees, the sounds their branches make when rocked by the wind, the many-fingered vines that lovingly loop themselves around them: “Solid as rocks they stood, the grey, partially wrapped tree trunks,” he writes, in a passage that could have come straight out of Gerstäcker's *Regulatoren*, “as if equipped with unshakeable self-confidence their proud tops reached towards the glowing rays of the sun, while motionless hung from the patient branches of trees the wondrous vines.”¹⁶

As the first German Western, *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* stands at the head of one notable strand of German fiction, made famous worldwide later in the nineteenth century by the work of Karl May, who had never been to the United States when he fabricated his frontier tales. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine May's literary project without Gerstäcker's example; May borrowed liberally, and sometimes literally, from his predecessor, and the enduring German fascination with the American West can be traced directly back through May to Gerstäcker's writings.¹⁷ Along with the work of May and Charles Sealsfield, Gerstäcker's rendering of America and Americans shaped German, and more broadly European, images of the US well into the twentieth century. Indeed, his eye for what mattered in American culture is illustrated by his remarkably prescient decision to translate Herman Melville's *Omoo* within months of its publication in 1847.

The Setting

Arkansas has had a complex and varied history, as unsettled as its name, the definitive pronunciation of which (“received by the French from the native Indians”) was not settled before 1881, when both houses of the Arkansas leg-

islature voted that it “should be pronounced in three syllables, with the final *s* silent, the *a* in each syllable with the Italian sound, and the accent on the first and last syllables.” With more than a trace of annoyance, the legislators added: “the pronunciation with the accent on the second syllable, with sound of *a* as in man, and the sounding of the terminal *s*, is an innovation to be discouraged.” And innovations were indeed not often welcomed during the early history of a territory that had to brawl its way into statehood, in the words of one of its most astute historians, the poet John Gould Fletcher (1886–1950), born in Little Rock.¹⁸ The debate over the correct pronunciation reflects the uncertainties surrounding the state’s genesis. One of the first Europeans to visit it, in the mid-sixteenth century, was the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto. But it was French explorers who created the first permanent white settlement, the Poste aux Arkansas or Arkansas Post, in the late 1600s, adding a French twist (the silent *s*) to what is believed to be an Algonquian word for some of the area’s original inhabitants, the Quapaw.

Arkansas became part of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, emerging as a separate entity—the Arkansas Territory—in 1819. Much political maneuvering had to take place before the state’s boundaries could be definitively established, with some of the wrangling still going on after Andrew Jackson, on 15 June 1836, signed the bill that made Arkansas the 25th state of the nation. Then, as now, the territory of Arkansas is bordered by the state of Missouri to the north, the prairies of Oklahoma and Texas to the west, the pine forests of Louisiana to the south, and the states of Tennessee and Mississippi to the east, with the shifting Mississippi River serving as an unreliable dividing line. As if to resist the flux and volatility suggested by its beginnings and uncertain borders, Arkansas culture, for the longest time, remained resistant to outside influences. Even as the cotton industry and chattel slavery of its southern neighbors spilled into its lowland regions, the mountain culture of the northwest, marked by the Ozarks and the Ouachita Mountains, continued to dominate the image of the average Arkansan for much of the nineteenth century and beyond. As Fletcher pointed out, well into the twentieth century the prototypical Arkansas resident was “far more likely to be a frontier settler in a coonskin cap, blanket cape, and buckskin trousers—or its modern equivalent of blue denim jumper, checkered shirt, blue overalls, and greasy black hat—than a planter in a broadcloth coat, satin vest, and ruffled shirt.”¹⁹ Self-sufficient to a fault, Arkansans were known for grinding their own corn, making their own clothes, building their own log cabins, whittling their own furniture, and, last but not least, distilling their own whiskey.

As Gerstäcker’s narrator notes, the “city folks in New York” seemed far away to a settler on the banks of the Fourche La Fave: “let each region establish its

own laws, and they will fit" (p. 135). In the absence of a strong and effective government, residents preferred to settle their own disputes, wrestling, gouging, pummeling, and kicking their way to the justice they felt they deserved. Many controversies were settled not by the courts but by the famous "Arkansas toothpick," the Bowie knife residents carried strapped to their belts (p. 24). In the backwoods, "Judge Lynch" rather than the courts prevailed—a nod to the famed Virginia planter and his improvised, rough method of dealing with suspected British loyalists, which included a swift trial by a hastily assembled court and a variety of quickly administered punishments, ranging from enforced oaths of allegiance to whipping or, certainly in the case of Arkansas vigilantism, hangings.

Friedrich Gerstäcker lived in Arkansas precisely during what Fletcher called the "dueling, knifing, brawling period" of the state's history, entering a world that was markedly different from that known to his artistic parents in Germany.²⁰ One of the most remarkable aspects of *Regulatoren* is the evident regard Gerstäcker has for the local vigilante movement. It is important to remember that during the months he spent in Arkansas, he fully participated in the lives of his new friends and neighbors. He did not share, as Robert Cochran has pointed out, the reservations of prior visitors such as Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, who were shocked by the rough manners of the Arkansans and would complain about everything from the absence of proper gardens to the inhabitants' "contempt of labor and hospitality."²¹ Gerstäcker was twenty-one when he arrived in Arkansas. A survivalist equipped with better than average hunting skills, he, like his neighbors, had little patience for the emerging bourgeoisie in the state's new capital of Little Rock. His anti-authoritarian streak—fueled no doubt by the dismal political situation in his home country, divided into small chunks of land ruled over by greedy aristocrats—found ample affirmation in his daily encounters with Arkansas frontiersmen. Like the settlers he met, he lived off the land, eating meat when the hunt had been good or sucking on sassafras leaves and ingesting acorns when nothing else was available.²² His descriptions of the trees in the Arkansas forests—the oaks, mulberries, papaws, cypresses, and pines—come from the pen of someone who has eaten their fruits, felled their trunks, or rested in their shade, someone who was not merely a visitor but, in the true sense of the word, an inhabitant. In 1835, the population of Arkansas had barely reached 52,000; by 1840, it had nearly doubled. *Regulatoren* recreates the intensity of these first crucial years after statehood when new settlers streamed into the new territory. What Gerstäcker's book captures, like few other documents from this period, are the twists and turns of fate that helped clarify who was suited for life in the woodlands and who was not. At the end of the novel, the punishments meted out to horse thieves, murderers, and liars seem less relevant than the

community feeling proper residents gain from hunting down those, who, by their own behavior, have shown that they do not belong.

Die Regulatoren: Adventure Novel, Ethnography, Morality Tale

Gerstäcker's novel is set in the 1830s, in the area drained by the Fourche La Fave River, a tributary of the Arkansas flowing through modern Yell and Perry Counties, about 50 miles west-northwest of Little Rock. The plot turns on the conflict between a band of horse thieves and a group of vigilantes, "The Regulators," determined to impose their improvised justice on a frontier from which formal law is absent. As Gerstäcker explains in the preface, his descriptions are loosely based on historical events, and he claims to have witnessed instances of vigilante justice during his time in Arkansas. The Regulators are portrayed sympathetically, more or less; their justice is crude and their punishments brutal, but their actions are represented as a necessary evil if the lives and property of this primitive society are to be protected.

The hero of the story is a Regulator named Brown, the embodiment of the nineteenth-century romantic hero, both in his stalwart commitment to bringing order and a rough justice to the settlement and in his eventual marriage to the heroine of the piece. But there are also two more unexpected characters in the novel—the villain of the drama, a particularly devious and brutal man named Rowson, and the Indian who plays a pivotal role in bringing him to justice, Assowaum, or the "Feathered Arrow."

Until he is exposed toward the end of the novel, Rowson has a public face as that of a pious Methodist minister, well respected by the members of his flock, and disliked for his tedious zealotry by the less devout denizens of the Fourche La Fave. Alternating between casting out devils at boisterous prayer meetings and rustling horses under cover of darkness from his fellow worshippers, he even manages to become engaged to the novel's heroine before his double life is exposed. Lest we forget the source of his villainy, Gerstäcker's favorite designation for him is simply "the Methodist." Rowson's undoing is his brutal murder of Assowaum's wife, Alapaha, after she accidentally discovers that he is the horse thieves' ringleader. The Indian—openly lamenting the loss of his lands, his people, and now his wife, all a result of the white man's coming—patiently determines the identity of his wife's killer and exposes him to the white community, asking only that he be allowed to exact justice on Rowson apart from the beatings and lynchings suffered by the rest of Rowson's band. In a powerfully rendered scene of horrific (and avowedly non-Christian) revenge, Assowaum burns a bound Rowson alive in the very hut where he murdered Alapaha.

As even this summary suggests, the novel draws from several traditions in early nineteenth-century literature, especially the gothic novel, the sentimental romance, as well as the adventure novel. Moreover, several scenes throughout the book incorporate elements of the tall tale “Southwestern humor” tradition, and it contains as well many vivid “local color” descriptions of the manners and conditions of the people of early Arkansas. The themes are richly textured and varied: for instance, Assowaum’s sympathetically rendered blood vengeance gives a startling twist to Cooper’s (and others’) sentimental concern for the vanquished Indian, and Rowson’s life of lies demonstrates a degree of authorial hostility toward frontier piety unusual (though not unique) for the literature of this period.²³ Assowaum is a composite of different stereotypes associated with Native Americans—the strong, moody brave holding onto the shreds of his disappearing world—and his tribal origins remain murky. The Indian phrases Gerstäcker inserted into his text were likely invented and are not recognized by linguists as belonging to any known indigenous language.²⁴ At the same time, equipped with superior wilderness skills and unwaveringly committed to uncovering the truth, Assowaum does occupy the moral center of the novel. In his quest for the murderer of his wife he needs no gang of semi-lawless Regulators around him to accomplish his goal.

But this is not where the complexities end. Consider, for example, the obvious disconnect between Gerstäcker’s heartfelt compassion for the Indians in his story and the virulent disdain for African Americans that pervades the text. When Gerstäcker describes blacks, he delves deep into the toxic lexicon of frontier racism, emphasizing their facial features, “scorched” hair, rolling eyes, and nodding heads. In Gerstäcker’s narrative, they are mostly caricatures rather than characters, holding the reins of their master’s horses or filling their food bowls and lighting their home fires, unless they, however unsuccessfully, attempt to aid and abet the horse thieves (chapter 26). To be sure, Gerstäcker was no friend of slavery and elsewhere wrote eloquently about the “horrors of the system.” But that did not prevent him from also believing that the treatment of the slaves “was generally better than it is represented by the Abolitionists and missionaries,” since it was, he pointed out, replicating an all-too-familiar argument, to the advantage of the owners to keep their slaves healthy.²⁵ Ultimately, human society interested Gerstäcker far less than the wilderness. While his characters throughout the book raise issues of law and/or justice on the frontier and debate the extra-legal measures of the Regulators, Gerstäcker makes clear that for him moral significance resides mostly in the natural world—by turns benign, menacing, and indifferent—which enables his story and which he explores with surprising subtlety.

As much as *Regulatoren* is about a certain group of people, it is also heavily invested in the world of things. Much time is spent on describing objects—what they are made of and how they are used. Of course, things—in the case of this novel, a button made of horn, a penknife, a neckerchief—carry special significance in detective stories, since they are potential clues. But it seems that Gerstäcker delights in describing them for their own sake, with an ethnographer's covetous zeal as well as a lover's eye. Sometimes things interest Gerstäcker more than individual people, who often, once they have been capriciously named (Cook, Hopper, Moos), again fade out of the narrative. And then there's the food, of course, the fresh meat, the wild turkey and honey, sweet potatoes, pumpkin mash, warm cornbread and sour pickles, the bowls of steaming coffee, and small bottles of whiskey greedily partaken of by settlers who don't take their survival for granted.

A startlingly progressive feature of *Regulatoren*, apart from the fervent critique of religious hypocrisy, is the emphasis Gerstäcker places on the role of female agency. Alapaha wounds Rowson, an act completed, more decisively, by Ellen, whose intervention saves Assowaum's life, as the "Feathered Arrow" himself admits. Since *Regulatoren* is at heart a detective novel, driven by the hunt for a murderer and thief, it is symbolically important that it is Mrs. Roberts who, after being prompted by Assowaum, unmasks Rowson in a key scene in chapter 33. The book's central clue, a horn button ripped from Rowson's coat by the dying Alapaha, is a piece of evidence procured by a woman for use by another woman. Thus, while the female characters are still frequently represented in ways that mark them as conventionally feminine (they are shy, timid, and tend to grow pale), their actions ultimately complicate that picture. By the same token, conventional masculinity often appears besieged in the novel: Assowaum's authority is challenged by Alapaha's conversion to Christianity, which sheds an interesting light on the brutality of the revenge enacted on a Christian minister, while other men—such as Roberts and Bahrens—lose themselves in tangents when they talk. Consider their random garrulousness during the ineffective siege of Rowson's cabin at the end of the novel, when the unarmed Roberts, making a ruckus outside the door, demands that he be let in. It does not seem altogether surprising, then, that the guardians of the Lynch Law are not the fierce avengers one would have expected: the one hanging they order is completed in their absence, and the most gruesome manifestation of frontier justice is carried out by Assowaum, who is not a member of their group. As Gerstäcker explains in *Die Flußpiraten des Mississippi*, the sequel to *Regulatoren* in which the action moves from the Fourche La Fave to the Mississippi, the Regulators' justice fails to deter wrongdoing. One of the perpetrators, Jones, insufficiently chastened by his flogging, un-

repentantly continues his nefarious ways, while another one, Henry Cotton, escapes and subsequently murders two people.

In *Flußpiraten* Gerstäcker completes the cycle of justice, but only barely so: Jones is buried alive, though this is a case of mistaken identity rather than an act of deliberate punishment, and Cotton is presumed to be on the steamboat filled with fleeing river pirates that explodes at the end of the novel, though we are not in fact told that he is dead. And, quite unexpectedly, the mulatto Dan, after also escaping from the Regulators and continuing to assist Cotton in his misdeeds, shows up at the end of *Flußpiraten* all chastened and reformed, an obedient servant to one of the good guys in the novel, James Lively. Thus, alone among the gallery of criminals in both novels, a black man is ultimately found to be “ein recht wackerer Bursche” (quite a valiant fellow).²⁶ All of which further proves the point that there is more to Gerstäcker than meets the casual reader’s eye.

The Translation

As the first German Western, and one of the very earliest European efforts to give fictional shape to the American frontier, *The Arkansas Regulators* deserves to be more readily available to English-speaking scholars and general readers. And as a seminal European response to Cooper and other writers of the American West, it offers an important perspective on early America that is effectively invisible to Anglophone audiences at this point. Readers with an interest in the history and literature of the lower Mississippi Valley, and the “Old South-west” especially, ought to have access to this essential text.

However, the 1854 translation by Francis Johnson is extremely difficult to obtain. The text was published as *The Feathered Arrow, or, The Forest Rangers*, and WorldCat lists only eight copies of this volume, all of them housed in non-circulating library rare book collections. Portions of the Johnson translation were published under different titles. For instance, in 1857, the translation was broken into thirds and published serially by Dick & Fitzgerald of New York. Chapters one through twelve appeared as “The Regulators of Arkansas,” while chapters thirteen through twenty-five were titled “Bill Johnson, or, The Outlaws of Arkansas.” The final third, chapters twenty-six through thirty-nine, was dubbed “Rawson the Renegade, or, The Squatter’s Revenge.”²⁷

The book was again published serially in thirds in New York in 1870, this time by Beadle & Co. The first portion was titled “Alapaha the Squaw, or, The Renegades of the Border”; the second part appeared as “The Border Bandits, or, The Horse Thief’s Trail”; and the final installment, chapters twenty-six through thirty-nine, was named “Assowaum the Avenger, or, The Destroyer’s

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Doom.” The baffling proliferation of titles is bad enough; the fact that these various portions of the book are accessible only by visiting one or more of a small handful of rare book rooms, or by obtaining microfilm or photocopies from these collections, means that none but the most determined will read it.²⁸

More importantly, though, the Johnson translation is problematic in several respects. Some of these problems are relatively trivial, if annoying. For instance, the names of characters are changed frequently, and for no apparent reason except perhaps to Anglicize them: Gerstäcker’s Rowson becomes Rawson, Heathcott becomes Heathcote, Bahrens becomes Barker, Pelter becomes Patton, Smeiers becomes Steele, and so on. Chapter titles are altered, sometimes dramatically. Worse, the language of the German original is regularly cleaned up and watered down, presumably to make it more palatable to a mid-nineteenth-century American readership. The changes may be at the level of individual words, as when the German “Schufte” is translated as “men,” though a more accurate rendering would be “scoundrels” or “villains”—even “bastards” would not be too strong. Similarly, Rowson is at one point called a “soul-merchant” by one of his gang, but this was apparently too harsh for Johnson, who allowed the Methodist minister to be called merely a “horse thief” instead. But some such changes involve more extensive rewriting of the original, as when a bawdy and humorous anecdote about a stallion and some mares is reduced and recast almost beyond recognition.

Worst of all, the Johnson text commits the cardinal sin of translation—it silently excises several passages from the original, while occasionally actually adding text. Many of the eliminated passages are fascinating portraits of frontier life that Johnson, or an editor, apparently thought were too long-winded. Others feature “songs” sung by Assowaum, presented as poems that were perhaps considered too provocative; one is a song of vengeance fulfilled, which the Indian chants over the charred body of the Methodist. The few interpolated passages appear intended to explain aspects of the story to the reader, but no distinction is marked between Gerstäcker’s original and the interpolated commentary. Whatever the motive, these silent deletions and additions, coupled with the “polite” translations deemed necessary by Johnson or his editor, underscore the need for a new and more faithful translation.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Earl Leroy Higgins (1896–1981), a history professor at the Arkansas State Teacher’s College in Conway, became so enamored with Gerstäcker that he translated both *Regulatoren* and *Die Flußpiraten des Mississippi*. Higgins’s translations were never published, though the typescripts may be found in the archives of the University of Central Arkansas. Higgins’s version of *Regulatoren* has the great virtue of following the original text very closely. Arguably, it is too close. Seeking to mirror Gerstäcker’s meandering and often unpredictable syntax, Higgins’s prose be-

comes stilted and confusing. A number of simple translation errors and the inexplicably missing chapter titles do not improve matters. While Higgins's word choices are lexically correct, he had a knack for settling on the one option, among several plausible alternatives, that obliterates the humor and energy that fuels much of Gerstäcker's writing.²⁹

Gerstäcker as Translator

Now, every translator of Gerstäcker must confront an important fact: that Gerstäcker was a translator too. Between 1844 and 1849, he frantically published translations of works by J. Tyrwhitt Brooks, Charles Fenno Hoffman, Seba (Elizabeth Oakes) Smith, and Charles Rowcroft. Most of these are perhaps mercifully forgotten today, with the exception of two works, one of outstanding literary merit, Herman Melville's South Seas tale *Omoo* (Gerstäcker's translation appeared in 1847, only months after the original), and the other of at least enduring literary notoriety, George Lippard's gothic novel *Quaker City, or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1845; translation, 1846).

Gerstäcker was an important and prolific mediator of American literature in Germany, offering his renditions of American writers "hot off the press," so to speak. As a translator, Gerstäcker was, well, Gerstäcker, and that is putting it mildly. In modern translation theory speak, he always came down in favor of "domesticating" the original, that is, he did what he could to transform it into an idiom and a form he thought German readers would recognize and that would also satisfy his own stylistic preferences as a writer. Good examples are the frequent passive constructions in *Omoo*, which are part and parcel of Melville's consistent attempts at concealing or obfuscating agency in the book, a strategy that reflects his narrator's often comical befuddlement. These passive constructions Gerstäcker typically transforms into active, assertive statements. Likewise, he combines or bundles Melville's short chapters to form longer sequences, a tribute presumably to the greater stamina of German readers brought up on a diet of Goethe and Jean Paul. In addition, he unabashedly poeticizes where he thinks Melville is too bland. See this example from the first chapter of *Omoo*: "The day was drawing to a close, and, as the land faded from my sight, I was all alive to the change in my condition."³⁰ This is not a complicated passage: it is getting dark, and as the island where Melville's hero, Tommo, was held captive vanishes into the distance, the narrator's mood also changes. If there's anything remarkable about Melville's writing in this passage, it is his use of the odd phrase "I was all alive to" where a simpler phrase such as "I became aware of" would have sufficed. But Melville's choice does make sense, given that Tommo thinks he has escaped certain slaughter by the

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skin of his teeth: “all alive” indicates his heightened state of consciousness as the fact of his own survival sinks in. In Gerstäcker’s busy hands, this comparatively pedestrian passage turns into the following: “Der Tag näherte sich nun seinem Ende und das Land schwand mehr und mehr in blaue Ferne—träumend aber starrte ich auf die wogende See hinaus, die uns umgab.” Rendered back into English, this “improved” sentence would read: “The day was drawing to a close and the land was fading more and more into the blue distance—in a reverie I stared out on the billowing sea that surrounded us.”³¹

Melville’s next sentence—“But how far short of our expectations is oftentimes the fulfillment of the most ardent hopes”—Gerstäcker changes completely, offering his readers the much-truncated: “Alle meine Wünsche waren erfüllt” (“All my wishes were fulfilled”) perhaps because he disapproves of the rather intrusive, philosophizing comment in the original, which also (clumsily, he might have thought) anticipates more than it should, at least at such an early point in the narrative. Gerstäcker was no fool. Since he imagines Melville’s novel from the inside out, as if it were a story *he* might be telling, Gerstäcker on occasion manages to be even more authentic and, in a dark sense, funnier than Melville. For example, when one of the sailors on board the *Julia* dies, the ship’s doctor observes, “He’s gone!” Gerstäcker has him say, “der ist fertig!” (“He is done for”).³²

Gerstäcker’s version of the radical Philadelphia writer George Lippard’s tremendously successful novel *Quaker City*, a combination of hard-hitting social exposé, satire, and sensationalist shlock, was not even identified as a translation. Publisher Wigand without further ado put the book out under Gerstäcker’s name, an unforgivable offense even then. Gerstäcker claimed he was shocked by Wigand’s act,³³ but the truth is that he had modified Lippard’s original text so much that he could have legitimately claimed to have written the book himself. He does keep the novel’s plot and satire and atmospheric details intact but cleverly manipulates its sensational and sexual references, for example by carefully re-orchestrating the (nearly) incestuous relationship between the depraved Father Pyne and his alleged daughter, the voluptuous yet innocent Mabel. Thus, when in Lippard’s original Father Pyne sees before his watery eyes not Mabel but “a marble statue of an intellectual and voluptuous maiden, with all the outline and shape, which gives fascination to the face and form of beauty, without the warm hues, which tint the lips with love, and fire the cheek with passion,” the same girl to Gerstäcker’s Father Pyne merely appears as if in “einem süßen heiligen Traum” (“a holy sweet dream”).³⁴ And while Lippard’s lecherous minister, his flabby hand resting on his presumed daughter’s bosom, asks her to kiss him, father and daughter in Gerstäcker tamely shake hands.

Why these radical changes? Not out of squeamishness, it seems. At the end of the same chapter, Father Pyne, to the reader’s relief, goes on to disclose

to “Devil-Bug” that Mabel is his daughter only in a “spiritual” sense, and it seems that Gerstäcker, experienced hand at novel-writing that he was, did not want to lose any of the more squeamish members of his audience en route to this important revelation. In a later chapter Mabel, under the influence of a drug expertly administered by the Reverend Pyne, responds to her alleged father’s caresses, and here Gerstäcker proceeds to *add* details that Lippard did not include. This is Lippard’s description (sufficiently nasty, one would think) of the kisses that the drugged-up “daughter” offers to her unholy “father”: “She extended her arms and kissed his lips,—Faugh! Those lips were gross and sensual, though they *were* a Parson’s lips! She kissed his lips again, and yet again.”³⁵ But Gerstäcker turns up the heat even more: “sie streckte die Arme aus, und küsste seine Lippen—huh—in ekelhaftem Zittern begegneten ihrem Rosenmund die seinigen—geschwollen und zuckend—wenn es auch eines Pastors Lippen waren; —aber wiederum presste sie die ihrigen darauf, und wieder und wieder.” Lippard never mentions any trembling (“Zittern”) or twitching (“zuckend”), neither on the Parson’s nor on Mabel’s side, and the “ekelhaft” (nauseating) serves to horrify the reader even further, as does the “wieder und wieder.” In the next few lines, Gerstäcker adds “schwammig” (“bloated”) to Lippard’s description of Pyne’s face, and when the puffed-up parson, in Lippard’s original text, gathers his arms “more closely” around Mabel’s waist, the German equivalent in Gerstäcker’s translation-novel goes a step further and “legte sein Antlitz liebkosend an ihren Busen” (i.e., he “rested his countenance caressingly against her bosom”).³⁶ These are clear examples of the translator feeding “on the original for his own increase,” in the words of George Steiner, of committing a “betrayal upward.”³⁷

When Gerstäcker translates, the writer he seems most beholden to is Gerstäcker. This sometimes improves the original; more frequently, though, from our modern point of view, it does not. This is not to minimize the importance of the cultural work his translations did. But it also helps us define what is at stake for us as we are translating Gerstäcker’s own work today. In our translation, we have tried hard not to domesticate Gerstäcker by making him sound more American than he was. If Gerstäcker occasionally makes Melville’s sailors sound as if they had spent time in Hamburg, we in turn did not want his *Regulators* to speak as though they had never left the wilds of Arkansas. But we also did not want to foreignize him more than is necessary, by making him sound like a German trying to speak English.³⁸

Of course, translating a novel written by an American about his own experiences in the South Seas for readers in Jena or Leipzig is a quite different task from translating a German novel that is already set in America for an audience of American readers, even if it is written by a German. Unlike Karl May, Gerstäcker *had* in fact seen what he wrote about. So, the challenge for us

has been not only to preserve what Gerstäcker really wrote, but also to recognize that Gerstäcker, addressing German readers, was already pretending to be something like an American writer, an American writing in German, that is.

Our hope is that this new translation of Friedrich Gerstäcker's first novel, in all its hybrid, scruffy splendor, its boisterous weirdness, will contribute to a richer understanding of a transatlantic literary culture in the nineteenth century—a culture that stands apart from both the nationalistic tradition championed by Emerson and the wider Anglophone tradition lionized by those on the other side of the ocean who preferred to see American literature as a derivative branch of the British canon. Significantly, a German edition of the novel was published in Philadelphia as late as 1880 or thereabouts, indicating the vitality throughout the nineteenth century of a multi-lingual literary culture in this country.³⁹ Long before the birth of Modernism and its well-known transoceanic literary culture, western literature was cosmopolitan in ways that remain yet to be discovered. Bringing Gerstäcker's work to the attention of contemporary readers will, we believe, help sharpen awareness of this lost tradition of American cosmopolitanism, a project that now seems more necessary than ever.

Notes

Some of the material discussed here was first used in Charles Adams and Christoph Irmischer, "Telltale Breezes and Swirling Bubbles: A New Translation of *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* (1846)," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 56–68, and appears here with the permission of the journal's editor.

1. For these and other details of FG's life we are indebted to the standard biography by Thomas Ostwald, *Friedrich Gerstäcker. Leben und Werk: Biographie eines Ruhelosen* (Braunschweig: Gerstäcker-Gesellschaft, 2007), the revised edition of a work first published in 1976.

2. FG, *In the Arkansas Backwoods*, ed. James William Miller (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 6.

3. FG, "Geschichte eines Ruhelosen," *Die Gartenlaube* 16 (1870): 245–46. It is worth pointing out that no issue of this periodical has surfaced. In the absence of conclusive evidence, it is possible that FG, in a coy attempt at authorial pseudo-modesty, fabricated the story.

4. On FG's relationship with Cooper, see Wolfgang Hochbruck, "Leatherstockings and River Pirates: The Adventure Novels of Friedrich Gerstäcker," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 42–55.

5. On FG and Schiller, Kathleen Condray, "The *Kerl* in the Wild West: Friedrich Gerstäcker's *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* and Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 69–77. In his study in Dresden, filled to the ceiling with memorabilia from his travels and other outlandish items, including tomahawks, a stuffed bird, exotic plants, and arrow points, he also kept a small replica of the Goethe-Schiller monument in Weimar on his writing desk (see Bernd Steinbrink, *Abenteuroliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu einer vernachlässigten Gattung* [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983], 139). In an autobiographical sketch

from 1870, he credits Defoe's Robinson Crusoe with having inspired his *wanderlust*; see FG, "Geschichte eines Ruhelosen," 244.

6. For a slightly different view of FG's political interests, see, however, Jeffrey L. Sammons, "A Plea for Taking Gerstäcker More Seriously as a Writer about America," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 2–16.

7. FG, "Amerikanische Skizzen: Die Indianer," *Das Ausland* 54 (February 1846): 213.

8. *WS*, 315, 320–24, 333. The English version, the work of an unnamed translator, takes some liberties with the German original (see FG, *In the Arkansas Backwoods*, 27) but nevertheless preserves the enthusiasm that drove the young author. Since it is more easily accessible to the American reader, it will serve as our reference text throughout.

9. *WS*, 337.

10. *WS*, 199.

11. FG, *Wie ist es denn nun eigentlich in Amerika? Eine kurze Schilderung dessen, was der Auswanderer in Nordamerika zu thun und dafür zu hoffen und zu erwarten hat* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1849), iv.

12. The first line of Goethe's late poem "Den Vereinigten Staaten" (1827), *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, 14 vols., ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegener, 1948), 1, 333.

13. See Andreas Graf, *Abenteuer und Geheimnis: Die Romane Balduin Möllhausens* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1993), 246.

14. Andreas Graf, "Nachwort," in Balduin Möllhausen, *Geschichten aus dem Wilden Westen*, ed. Andreas Graf (Munich: dtv, 1995), 296–97.

15. Hochbruck, "Adventure Novels," 49.

16. Möllhausen, "Präriebilder," 1867; Möllhausen, *Geschichten*, 51.

17. On May's borrowings from FG, see Josef Höck and Thomas Ostwald, "Karl May und Friedrich Gerstäcker," *Jahrbuch der Karl-May-Gesellschaft* 1979, 143–88; Andreas Graf, "Von Öl- und anderen Quellen: Texte Friedrich Gerstäckers als Vorbilder für Karl Mays 'Old Firehand,' *Der Schatz im Silbersee*, und 'Inn-nu-woh,'" *Jahrbuch der Karl-May-Gesellschaft* 1997, 331–60.

18. John Gould Fletcher, *Arkansas* (1947; Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1989), 1.

19. Fletcher, *Arkansas*, 5.

20. Fletcher, *Arkansas*, 55.

21. Robert Cochran, "The Gentlemen and the Deerslayer: Contrasting Portraits of Pioneer Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 32.

22. Kimberly G. Smith and Michael Lehmann, "Friedrich Gerstäcker's Natural History Observations in Arkansas, 1838–1842," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 17–30.

23. For FG's reservations about Methodism, see also Evan Burr Bukey, "Frederick Gerstäcker in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 3–14.

24. Personal communication, Marianne Mithun (UC Santa Barbara) to Charles Adams, 15 May 2017.

25. *WS*, 379–80. The juxtaposition of noble Indian and cartoonish African American continued to interest FG, as demonstrated, for example, by his story "Die Leichenräuber" (The Corpse-Snatchers), published in 1846 and set in Illinois. Here an African American boy named Sip, who is good at imitating Indian war whoops, offers to help a group of residents prevent the desecration of an Indian grave by the town's dubious Irish doctor. During the nightly raid, however, Sip flees in a panic when he encounters the son of the dead man who has also shown up. He was, as the narrator reminds us, "not the boy to stand up to a real Indian" (FG, *Heimliche und unheimliche Geschichten* [München: Borowsky, 1980], 256). For FG's later views on Recon-

struction, see Irene S. Di Maio, "Introduction," *Gerstäcker's Louisiana: Fiction and Travel Sketches from Antebellum Times through Reconstruction*, ed. and trans. Irene S. Di Maio (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 12–15.

26. FG, *Die Flußpiraten des Mississippi*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Leipzig: Costenoble, 1862), 3, 18.

27. *The Feathered Arrow; or the Forest Rangers* (London: Routledge, 1857); *The Regulators of Arkansas, A Thrilling Tale of Border Adventure*; *Bill Johnson, or The Outlaws of Arkansas*, and *Rowson the Renegade, or The Squatter's Revenge* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1857).

28. Francis Johnson, trans., *Alapaha the Squaw, or The Renegades of the Border*, and *The Border Bandits, or the Horse Thief's Trail*; and *Assowaum the Avenger, or The Doom of the Destroyers* (New York: Beadle and Co., 1870; reprinted in 1881 by Beadle and Adams [3 vols. in "Beadle's New York Dime Library"]).

29. "The Regulators in Arkansas by Friedrich Gerstäcker, Translated by E. L. Higgins," M89–22, box 1, folders 7 and 8; "The River Pirates of the Mississippi by Friedrich Gerstäcker, Translated by E. L. Higgins," M89–22, box 3, folders 2–4; Earl Leroy Higgins Collection, University of Central Arkansas.

30. Herman Melville, *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (London: Murray, 1847), 4.

31. Hermann Melville [sic], *Omoo oder Abenteuer im stillen Ocean mit einer Einleitung, die sich den "Marquesas-Inseln" anschliesst und Toby's glückliche Flucht enthält. Aus dem Englischen von Friedrich Gerstäcker. Erster Theil* (Leipzig: Gustav Mayer, 1847), 5.

32. Melville [sic], *Omoo oder Abenteuer*, 72.

33. See Ostwald, *Friedrich Gerstäcker*, 73.

34. George Lippard, *Quaker City, or The Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Author, 1847), vol.1, 248; George Lippard and Friedrich Gerstäcker, *Die Quäkerstadt und ihre Geheimnisse. Amerikanische Nachtseiten* (1845, 4th ed. 1851; München: Hanser, 1971), 350.

35. Lippard, *Quaker City*, 272–73.

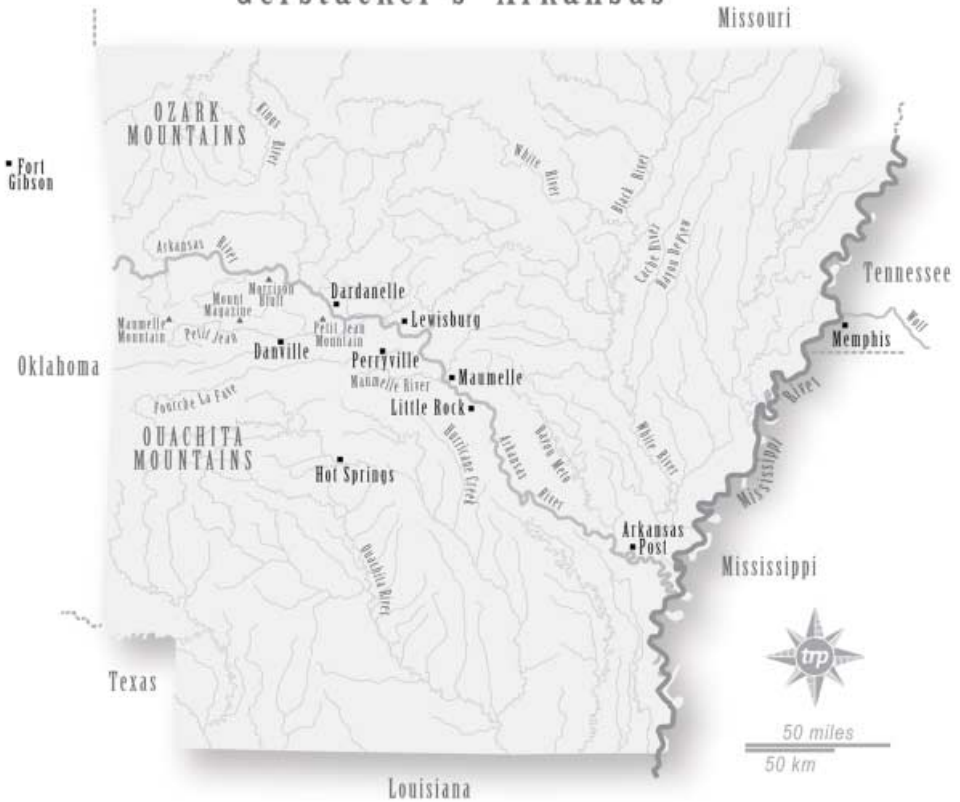
36. Lippard, *Quaker City*, 272–73; Lippard and Gerstäcker, *Die Quäkerstadt*, 350.

37. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 423.

38. For more on the theoretical problems inherent in domestication and foreignization, see Douglas Robinson, "The Limits of Translation," *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15–20.

39. FG, *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas: Aus dem Waldleben Amerikas* (Philadelphia: Morwitz & Co., 188–?). Edward Morwitz (1815–1893), originally from Danzig, Prussia, was a physician and newspaper publisher who had settled in Philadelphia. Among the several hundred German and English-language newspapers he eventually controlled was also the Philadelphia *Jewish Record* (from 1875 to 1886). See Leland M. Williamson et al., eds, *Prominent and Progressive Pennsylvanians of the Nineteenth Century: A Review of Their Careers* (Philadelphia: The Record, 1898), 318–20.

Gerstäcker's Arkansas



Map 0.1. "Gerstäcker's Arkansas." Original map by Thomas R. Paradise, University of Arkansas, 2018. Courtesy of Thomas R. Paradise.