Joshua David Shelly*

Between a Dream and Its Realization: Locating Utopia and Zionism in Kafka's American Story

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Abstract: This article analyzes Franz Kafka's first novel, *Der Verschollene*, as an extended meditation on the immigrant's experience of frustration when he relies on old national, social, and familial constellations grounded in another, far-off place; it thereby demonstrates how the novel depicts immigration as primarily a tale of loss, rather than gain. The article then pivots to situate *Der Verschollene*, and especially the novel's final fragment, in light of Kafka's passionate consumption of both American travelogues and Zionist periodicals and literature. In light of this literary-historical backdrop and the Kafka short story, *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden*, it argues that the departure of the novel's main character for "Oklahama" at the end of the work is an implicit celebration of literary travel narratives for their ability to achieve something real-life migration never can: a utopian moment suspended between a dream and its fulfillment.

Keywords: Franz Kafka; Der Verschollene; Utopia; Theodor Herzl; travel literature

1 Introduction: A Diary Entry

In 1911, Franz Kafka drafted a review of his friend Max Brod's recently published novel *Die Jüdinnen* (The Jewesses) in his diary. The review, which is also preserved in two additional drafts, critiques Brod's novel for its problematic (non-)presentation of Zionism.[1] It begins:

1 On *Die Jüdinnen*, see Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 183–7 and Kerry Wallach, *Passing Illusions: Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 112–4.

Dedicated to the memory of a real-life Karl Rossmann, David Wayne Hampton (*1965–†2022). A special thanks to Nathan Drapela, Kata Gellen, Sarah Heiman, Jan Kühne and Dana Rubinstein for their generous feedback on this work.

***Corresponding author: Joshua David Shelly**, Universitätsbibliothek Potsdam, Universität Potsdam, Am Neuen Palais 10, Potsdam 14469, Germany, E-mail: joshua.shelly@uni-potsdam.de. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9207-8507

> In Western European stories, as soon as they want to include even a few groups of Jews, we are now almost accustomed to immediately seeking and finding under or over the depiction the solution to the Jewish question too. Yet in the Jüdinnen such a solution is not shown indeed not even presumed…Without further ado we recognize in this a deficiency of the story and feel all the more entitled to such a criticism as today since the existence of Zionism the possibilities for a solution are so clearly arrayed around the Jewish problem that in the end the writer would have had to take only a few steps to find the possibility for a solution appropriate to his story (D81–2; T159–60, *translation modified*).[2]

Scholars analyzing this review often interrogate it to uncover Kafka's "true" stance on Zionism.[3] However, the manner in which the review addresses Zionism as a movement with literary, not simply sociopolitical, implications, is less frequently addressed. Indeed, irrespective of what it reveals about Kafka's position on Jewish nationalism, the review's approach evidences an engagement with Zionism as literature.

More than just Zionist literature generally, the faults Kafka goes on to enumerate in the review are suggestive. These include the fact that Brod's work lacks an answer to the Jewish question; fails to provide an outside, non-Jewish observer to witness the Jew who asserts himself as an individual and thereby dissolves the Jewish masses; and foregrounds a character who leads the Jews away, rather than toward, the center of Jewishness (D81–2; T160). These faults, in turn, find their mirror image in the archetypical Zionist novel, Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland* (Old-New Land). Herzl's text "solves" the Jewish question by proposing a *neue Gesellschaft*, or new society, in Palestine. It offers a non-Jewish observer in the character Adalbert Kingscourt and discredits the character Löwenberg's attempt to move toward the margins of Jewishness by setting sail for a "no-place." Instead, *Altneuland* celebrates the prominent youth David Littwak, who heads a Jewish-centered movement. Indeed, as Hartmut Binder claims, in summer 1910, the year before *Die Jüdinnen*'s publication, Brod intensively read Herzl's novel while, during the same period, he and Kafka met

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2 Throughout, I quote from Franz Kafka, *The Diaries,* translated by Ross Benjamin (New York: Schocken Books, 2022); Franz Kafka, *The Man Who Disappeared (America)*, translated with an introduction and notes by Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher*, eds. Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1990); and *Der Verschollene*, ed. Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1983). "D" and "T" indicate citations from the *Diaries* and *Tagebücher*, respectively; "M" and "V" indicate citations from *The Man Who Disappeared* and *Der Verschollene,* respectively. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are unmodified. For the other two draft reviews, see D17, 82; T36, 162.

3 For a reading of the review as parody and critique of contemporary Zionist discourse, see Iris Bruce, *Kafka and Cultural Zionism: Dates in Palestine* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 30–3. See also Vivian Liska, *When Kafka Says We: Uncommon Communities in German-Jewish Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 17–20 and Hartmut Binder, *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 1*. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979), 376.

daily and presumably discussed it, thereby suggesting the backdrop against which to understand the review's critiques.[4]

Given Kafka's evident awareness of and engagement with literary Zionism generally, and presumably *Altneuland* in particular, how might this productively inform our readings of his contemporaneous literary production? This question poses an acute challenge to the literary scholar: a "paradox" perhaps best summed up by Albert Memmi, who notes that even as "Kafka never wrote the word 'Jewish'" in any work published during his lifetime, his posthumously published diaries reveal a man "literally haunted by his Jewishness."[5] This ostensible disconnect demands that the scholar grapple with how (or whether) to productively read Kafka's literary texts against the backdrop of a Jewish, often specifically Zionist, milieu, even as these texts often appear to have nothing to do with said backdrop.

In her work, Vivian Liska notes scholars often resolve this quandary by either relying on historical and biographical evidence and/or deploying allegorical, symbolic, or parabolic readings to unlock the "Jewish Kafka" underlying his literary works.[6] While admittedly schematic, the work of scholars like Scott Spector and Iris Bruce perhaps best exemplifies the former approach, while scholars such as David Suchoff and Ritchie Robinson make productive use of the latter approach.[7] Though both methodologies have enabled scholars to provide insightful new readings of Kafka, Liska rightly argues these approaches can threaten to fall short, for "[i]n reading [Kafka's] fiction, one has no verifiable way of identifying what the different groups and communities [therein]…might refer to, and any attempt to assign them specific correspondences in the real world reveals only the choices and concerns of the reader."[8] Liska's scholarship, by contrast, charts a different path by "focus[ing] on the internal and external dynamics at work in Kafka's communal configurations as such."[9] Importantly, Liska does not a call for divorce of text and context here.

4 Binder, *Kafka-Handbuch. Band 1*, 375.

5 Albert Memmi, *Dominated Man: Notes towards a Portrait*. (New York: Orion Press, 1968), 93. Importantly, the line between Kafka's diaries and literary texts is murkier than Memmi suggests here. For example, see the many literary drafts contained in Kafka's diaries, including on T151–8, 168–191, and 347–348.

6 Vivian Liska, *Kafka Says We*, 16–17. For a related discussion, see Mark H. Gelber, "Kafka und zionistiche Deutungen," in *Kafka-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, eds. Bettina von Jagow and Oliver Jahraus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 293–303.

7 Spector, *Prague Territories*; Iris Bruce, *Kafka and Cultural Zionism*; David Suchoff, *Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) and Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). For Martin Buber's attempt to read two of his stories in this parabolic mode – something Kafka rejected – see Mark H. Gelber, "Kafka und zionistiche Deutungen," 299.

8 Liska, *Kafka Says We*, 17.

9 Ibid.

Instead, her method *first* approaches the text as a cohesive unit to understand the "communal configurations" depicted therein. The text, then, is not read as *really* about something else, but instead as a cohesive unit with its own autonomous dynamics that nonetheless mirror and comment upon the social, political, and historical concerns that characterized Kafka's milieu.

In what follows, I employ just such an approach to read Kafka's first novel, *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*) – a work begun around a year after he penned the review discussed above – and thereby draw out the connection between literary Zionism and Kafka's literary work. My reading neither suggests Kafka sought to emulate the expectations articulated in his review nor interprets the novel's main character, Karl Rossmann, and/or his milieu as Jewish.[10] It also follows an alternative path to the one taken by scholars Joseph Metz, Clemens Peck, and Philipp Theisohn, in whose work we also find arguments for reading *Der Verschollene* in a (Cultural) Zionist context. Metz's reading, perhaps best understood as following Liska's "allegorical approach," reads the novel as a Cultural Zionist work, where the signification of "east" and "west" is reversed, and Karl embraces a "primitive," eastern European Jewish authenticity when he heads west to Oklahama, and in so doing rejects western Jewish assimilation represented by an "eastern" New York.[11] Peck reads the novel as the site of multiple Herzlian intertexts, a rejection of Political Zionism and embrace of Cultural Zionism, thereby modeling a more "historical/biographical" approach.[12] Combining the two approaches, Theisohn reads *Der Verschollene*'s first part as an allegory of Jewish exile and the Oklahama theater as a reflection of Zionism as stagecraft.[13]

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10 Exemplary readings of this approach include Dušan Glišović, "Kafkas 'denationalisierte' Imagoloie," *Begegnung mit dem 'Fremden'. Grenzen – Traditionen – Vergleiche. Band 2*. Ed. Yoshinori Shichiji (Munich: iudicum verlag, 1991): 184–192; Bernhard Greiner, "Im Umkreis von Ramses: Kafkas *Verschollener* als jüdischer Bildungsroman," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 77 (2003): 637–658; Joseph Metz. "Zion in the West: Cultural Zionism, Diasporic Doubles, and the 'Direction' of Jewish Literary Identity in Kafka's *Der Verschollene*," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 78 (2004): 646–371; and David Suchhoff, *Kafka's Jewish Languages*, 93–130.

11 See footnote 10. I maintain Kafka's misspelling throughout my text as a recognition of Oklahama as part literary creation, not just political reality. For an important argument on Brod's use of the term *Naturtheater*, see Philipp Theisohn, "Natur und Theater. Kafka's 'Oklahama'-Fragment im Horizont eines nationaljüdischen Diskurses," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 82 (2008): 631–653, especially 631–3.

12 Clemens Peck, "'Verschollen' in 'Altneuland': Kafka liest Herzl," *Yearbook for European Jewish Literature Studies* 3 (2016), 42–63.

13 Theisohn, "Natur und Theater". Theisohn similarly argues Kafka turned to the Yiddish theater as an alternative to Zionism.

My approach begins instead by attending first to the novel on its own terms and independent of Kafka's Zionist milieu. In this reading, I direct our attention to the aforementioned "internal and external dynamics" underlying the work's "communal configurations." In doing so, I demonstrate how Kafka's American novel emphasizes the frustration the immigrant faces when he reverts to his reliance on national, social, and familial constellations that are grounded in another, far-off place – in this case, Europe. In so doing, I argue, *Der Verschollene* flips the narrative of successful immigration to a far-off place in the "New World," foregrounding instead how immigration and attempted assimilation to a new place is not a tale of unmitigated gain, but primarily loss, culminating in the disappearance of the immigrant's very identity. I conclude this reading with a discussion of *Der Verschollene's* final fragment where Karl joins a traveling theater troupe. Here, I read Oklahama as an ambivalent ending by showing how, on the one hand, the final fragement appears to depict Karl's successful discarding of old, German communal identifiers for new, American ones. However, I also show how textual clues indicate his paradoxical quest to "achieve" indigeneity is doomed to fail and suggest that Karl is destined to meet a violent end.

Having established a robust reading of the communal configurations and dynamics at the heart of *Der Verschollene* in the first section of this article, I turn in the second section to situate the work as a whole in light of Kafka's passionate consumption of travel literature, not only as found in books Kafka read about America, which in turn informed the composition of *Der Verschollene*, but also as found in the Zionist representations of Palestine he also thoroughly enjoyed reading at the time. Having created a bridge between Kafka's consumption of Zionist literature and his reading of depictions of the American continent, I turn to a second reading of *Der Verschollene's* final chapter in light of Kafka's short story *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden* (The Wish to be an Indian). I conclude by connecting this final reading to the ambivalence at the heart of *Der Verschollene*: a simultaneous demythologization of the utopian promise of *actual, real* immigration to far-off places and a concomitant celebration of literary *narratives* of all kinds that achieve that which reality can never actualize: a utopian moment suspended in air between a dream and its fulfilment. This reading shows how Kafka's novel is best understood as neither solely about America nor (secretly) about Palestine. Instead, I argue that the connection between literary Zionism and *Der Verschollene* is a subterranean one, whereby Kafka's work thematizes the structural conundrum at the heart of literary, utopian-like travel narratives of all kinds, including Zionist ones – a vast gap between what is promised and what is actualized.

2 The Man Who Disappeared: Charting Karl Rossmann's Downward Trajectory

Scholarly readers of *Der Verschollene* often categorize the work as a(n anti-) *Bildungsroman* and thematize the main character Karl Rossmann's largely downward trajectory during his time in America.[14] This failure, notably, stands in stark contrast to the generic expectations *Der Verschollene*'s premise might have awakened in readers: a departure from the "Old Country," arrival in New York and embrace from a rich uncle who provides both familial continuity and the resources for a "rags to riches" story in a new, modern place.[15] In what follows, I read Karl's repeated failures to arrive as the result of his misplaced reliance on old familial, national, and social constellations and a concomitant inability to adapt to the alternative *Verhältnisse* – a word often translated as relations, but sometimes better understood as circumstances – that structure the new place he inhabits. *Der Verschollene* clearly contains a repetitive structure at its heart best summarized as one of recurrent expulsions and new arrivals. Despite this circularity, its structure – much of which is played out in miniature during the novel's first chapter – also has a regressive trajectory. First, Karl experiences the unreliability of familial *Verhältnisse* with Uncle Jakob, then the impotence of German nationality in the Hotel Occidental, and finally, during his imprisonment by Burnelda, the dissolution of personal identity itself. I read these challenges first and foremost as indexed spatially, which I argue explains Karl's frequent disorientation in the novel, a phenomenon which intensifies in those acute moments he finds himself most incapable of navigating American *Verhältnisse*.[16]

The connection between spatial disorientation and Karl's misplaced reliance on these aforementioned constellations is encoded in Kafka's intended title for the

14 For scholarship on *Der Verschollene* as *Bildungsroman*, see Marion Sonnenfeld, "Die Fragmente 'Amerika' und 'Der Prozeß' als Bildungsromane," *German Quarterly* 35 (1962): 34–46; Jürgen Pütz, *Kafkas* Verschollener – *ein Bildungsroman?* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1983); and Greiner, "Im Umkreis von Ramses". For a critique of this approach and a reading of Karl's failure as a result of the cruel realities of technology and its effects on modern, especially American, urban life, see Robertson, *Kafka*, 38–86, especially 66–7.

15 See Ritchie Robertson's discussion of the "cultural myth" of a "rags to riches" narrative in *Kafka,* 62–69.

16 In reading Kafka's work in connection to nation and place, I am most notably preceded by Deleuze and Guattari and their deterritorialization thesis. My argument is not an attempt to reterritorialize Kafka, but instead a discussion of how *Der Verschollene* depicts the inefficacy of appeals to national identity outside the place of the nation. See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Kafka: toward a minor literature*, translated by Dana B. Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

work: *Der Verschollene*.[17] Though linguists show *verschollen* to relate to *verschallen* – "ceasing to echo" – the word most immediately appears to contain a negation (*ver-*) of the word *Scholle*, a clod of earth, which calls to mind the common phrase *heimatliche Scholle*, or native soil.[18] In other words, though the typical translation for *verschollen* is to disappear, just as an echo repeats into nothingness, a folk etymology of the word could be read as indicating the negation of a place to stand. Indeed, though not sound from a historical linguistic perspective, I argue that this alternative etymology fits Karl's spatial dislocation, which occurs as he gradually realizes the implications of the loss of the place where he once stood, his *heimatliche Scholle*. Indeed, Karl's is no traditional immigrant success story: instead, Kafka's work subverts immigrant tales of unambivalent gain by changing the perspective and foregrounding the loss required when the immigrant discards his diasporic baggage.[19]

Karl's landing in New York at the novel's beginning proves an aborted arrival and witnesses his first attempt to return to his origins. He disembarks the ship, only to immediately return to it, whereupon he experiences profound disorientation. He weaves through "innumerable small rooms, corridors constantly branching off, short flights of stairs always followed by others … until … he really [is] completely lost." (M5; V8)[20] This physical disorientation indexes a social one occasioned by Karl's attempt to rely on his German identity.[21] This recurrence to his national identity is evidenced in his encounter with a German stoker in a room where Karl feels "so at home [*heimisch*]" that he almost forgets he is "on the unsecure footing of a ship beside the coast of an unknown continent" (M8; V14).

The stoker, notably, warns Karl of the shifting ground underneath them, and thereby seeks to disrupt his illusion of being back home. He recounts his experience on the Hamburg America line, where his non-German superior, "treats us Germans

17 Max Brod initially released the novel posthumously as *Amerika*. For sources documenting Kafka's intended title, see Jost Schillemeit, "Entstehung" in *Der Verschollene. Apparatsband.* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1983), 87.

18 See *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "verschollen" and "scholle". For an analysis of the title in connection to *verschallen*, see Mark M. Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg* Fin de Siècle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104.

19 Of course, Kafka is not the only one to have problematized this narrative. For a longer discussion the trope of "a visit to America which begins with high hopes and ends in disillusion," see Robertson, *Kafka,* 63f.

20 For related discussions on this theme, see Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes,* 98–122 and John Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 41–70.

21 Traversing unnavigable places and is a frequent Kafka trope. Kata Gellen refers to this as "architectural narration," noting how Kafka's characters are rarely if ever "able to complete or comprehend an architectural construct." See *Kafka and Noise: The Discovery of Cinematic Sound in Literary Modernism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 74.

on a German ship like dirt [*schindet uns Deutsche*]" and "favors foreigners" (M7, 14; V13, 25). Soon, the stoker suspects, he will be dismissed, and the ship will be filled with "no one but Romanians [*lauter Rumänen*]" speaking their own language (M25; V47). Though he works on a vessel with a nominal connection to a German place (Hamburg), the stoker's frustration highlights the attenuating reliability of German national identification on the ship's unstable, liminal ground. In this spirit, he warns Karl of trusting his fellow countryman, Franz Butterbaum, with his suitcase given that: "On the ship, manners change along with ports. In Hamburg your Butterbaum might have guarded the suitcase, but here they've very likely both vanished without a trace" (M6, V10). The suitcase and its contents, including a passport and familial images, disappear and reappear repeatedly in the following chapters, and represent the slow disappearance of Karl's connections to nation, family, and self. As the stoker explains it, using a word – *Verhältnisse* – that recur throughout the novel: "Well that's the way things are [*das sind so die Verhältnisse*], it doesn't always matter whether you like it or not" (M7; V12).

In contrast to the stoker, Karl's wealthy Uncle Jakob, who appears at the harbor to spirit his nephew away, in no way mourns these reordered *Verhältnisse*. Instead of clinging to the old, he proudly claims to have discarded his familial name and admits to knowing neither European law, nor Karl's "parents' other circumstances [*sonstigen Verhältnisse*]" (M21; V40). Jakob dismisses any German or familial claim on him and instead proclaims himself an American with his "whole heart" (M21; V38). When Karl, by contrast, attempts to advocate for the stoker based on a now misplaced sense of German national loyalty, the captain reprimands and exhorts him: "know your place [*lerne Deine Stellung begreifen*]" (M27; V50; *my translation*). This reordering of national relations and the loss of a reliable German identity renders Karl's "profuse weeping" at chapter's end, which is brought on by his sense that "the stoker no longer exist[s]," explicable (M28; V53). Here, he not only grieves the loss of a single individual, but instead experiences a (partial) realization that the story's other characters no longer recognize the validity of his former national community. This is but a foretaste of the true loss facing Karl upon his arrival in America. For even as *Der Verschollene* grants him a rich uncle who provides him with the immigrant's dreamt-for welcome, the narrative foregrounds the loss of a national community, rather than the gain of seemingly assured material success.

Perhaps ironically, given the continuity of familial relations he might otherwise be thought to represent, Uncle Jakob proves singularly invested in separating his nephew from familial ties in an attempt to make Karl an American success story. Though the narrative early on informs readers that Karl adapts to "the new circumstances" [*Verhältnisse*] at his uncle's, subsequent events prove precisely the opposite, something first shown in spatial terms (M29; V54). During his first days in New York in his uncle's household, Karl stands all day on the balcony, lost in the tiny

figures below. This perspective, as Mark M. Anderson notes, situates Karl at the same height as the tallest building in his hometown of Prague; yet in New York, it only offers "a fragmented image without relation to a surrounding whole."[22] Jakob's expressed displeasure with his nephew's favored perch connects to his attempt to dislodge Karl from old ways of seeing and relating.[23]

Notably, the final event that sunders Karl's relationship with his uncle also relates to the nephew's inability to separate himself from this now foreign perspective. Unlike Uncle Jakob, who proves disinterested in any form of European past and way of seeing, one of his friends, Herr Pollunder, validates it by asking Karl "many things about his name [and] his family" (M36; V69). Karl, who then follows Pollunder to his country house, thereby implicitly embraces a backwards-looking approach in a way that echoes his return to the ship, as well as European perspectives and German national relations, in the first chapter. While there, Karl again experiences spatial disorientation, longing for a flashlight – a gift from his uncle – to provide guidance in the estate's unlit corridors. This suggests his uncle's superior ability to equip Karl with the tools to navigate this new place (M46; V89). It is while at Pollunder's estate that Karl realizes the true nature of his "relationship" [*Verhältnis*] with his uncle: rather than being based on their connection as blood relatives (*Blutsverwandter*), here Karl recognizes that "these circumstances [*Verhältnissen*]" allow him no room to do "anything [*das geringste*] against what [he] even suspect[s] to be [Jakob's] will" (M54–5; V106–7). The letter he receives from his uncle casting him out of the household informs Karl that "no good" (M63; V123) comes from his family. This confirms the low esteem in which Jakob holds Karl's parents and confirms that acceptance into the wealthy man's household is contingent on jettisoning familial ties. Clinging to Old World trappings such as his "name and family" will only lead Karl to non-arrival and continuous journeying.

Following this expulsion, during which he is reunited with his suitcase, Karl again tries to recreate the long-lost place of Europe during a scene in which he longingly gazes at a family photo in which he is not pictured. In looking at it, he seeks to resituate himself back in the frame of an image depicting his parents. Yet here he proves unable "to meet his father's gaze from various angles" (M69; V134–5). The failure to meet his father's eyes again demonstrates how spatial displacement and new social constellations threaten Karl's ability to even pretend to have a common, shared place with his closest relations back home.[24]

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22 Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 119.

23 Consider here Uncle Jakob's displeasure when Karl plays old military songs from home on the piano, in response to which he brings Karl sheet music of "American Marches" and the national anthem (M32; V61).

24 For an alternate reading based on bourgeois familial power structures represented in the photograph, see Carolin Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81–9.

Karl's subsequent venture into the nearby "Hotel Occidental" for food again proves his failure to adapt, as the narrative notes he is unable to navigate the "local circumstances [*hiesigen Verhältnisse*]" at the hotel bar, and is only able to secure food with the aid of the German head cook, who recognizes in Karl a "fellow-countryman [*Landsmann*]" (M79, 88; V155, 172–3). This German cook invites him in for the night and encourages him to bring his luggage, which poses "no problem" (M81; V159). Unlike his non-German fellow travelers, who are meanwhile breaking the lock to his suitcase, stealing his photos, and scattering the remaining contents on the ground (M82ff.; V161ff.), the head cook, a fellow German, appreciates and expresses a willingness to guard Karl's diasporic identity as embodied in the suitcase.

Throughout his time at the Occidental, Karl identifies himself by name and nationality (cf. M87; V171), implicitly recognizing the source of his access to the hotel. The head cook secures him a position as an elevator boy by exposing an Italian in the job, Giacomo, whom she discovers asleep while working, and in turn is demoted.[25] Karl, the head cook, and her secretary, Therese, meanwhile spend time together reveling in Karl's stories of places they all knew in central Europe. The head cook, however, must continually exclaim how Karl's recollections reveal that many things in Europe "ha[ve] changed entirely [*von Grund aus geändert hatte*] in a relatively short time" (M104; V204). In other words, even though Karl, from Prague; Therese, from Pomerania; and the head cook reconstruct a makeshift national community of sorts, it is a nation built on vanishing ground.

This vanishing ground becomes apparent when the "annoyed" Giacomo, aware of the cause for his demotion (M94; V186), together with Karl's earlier French and Irish travel companions and a group of elevator boys, conspire in a plot that causes Karl to lose his job and be expelled from the Hotel Occidental.[26] The conspiracy, the novel implies, arises because of Karl's reputation as the head cook's "protégé [*Schützling*]" (M121; V238), a relationship based on their shared German identity. Thus, though subtle, the same mechanism – German belonging – that allows Karl to quickly gain his position at the Hotel Occidental leads to his equally precipitous undoing. Here, Karl's reliance on national identity again proves unreliable while perched on unstable, American ground, where Irish, French and Italians are unwilling to honor the national constellation on which Karl seeks to rely.

If his stay with his uncle witnesses the final blow to reliable familial relations, and his experience in the Hotel Occidental provides a final disruption to Karl's

25 In response to this proposed placement, the head cook notes that "it is not particularly easy to get such jobs" (M88; V173).

26 Although the conspiracy against Karl is not clear to him, the drunken Robinson's outburst – "Renell is with Delmarche. The two of them sent me to you" – reveals the conspiracy behind the events (M110; V216). Giacomo, fittingly, delivers the final accusation that leads to Karl's dismissal (M127–8; V246–52).

reliance on a former national community, Karl's subsequent stay with the singer Brunelda witnesses the dissolving of identity itself. Upon arrival at her apartment, a police officer stops Karl and asks for his name and identification, which Karl cannot produce, having left the hotel without documentation. The scene, appropriately furnished with porters (*Gepäckträger*, literally: luggage bearers) standing around on break to witness the scene, depicts Karl left without passport or suitcase, severed from his final connections to national community, kin, and identity itself (M142f.; V279f.). Indeed, though his prior travel companions continue to refer to him as Rossmann in the pages that follow, Brunelda confirms this loss by never using his name, calling him instead "the little one," or "der Kleine" (cf. M164, 166, 170, 182, 183; V322, 327, 333, 357, 359).[27] When he meets a student on the balcony near chapter's end, moreover, Karl provides no name, even though the former directly asks "Who on earth are you [*Wer sind Sie denn*]" and "What's your name" (M175; V344). In short, Karl's arrival at Brunelda's apartment corresponds with a blow to his very self: a dissolution of name and personal identifiers.

3 Embarking for Oklahama: Disappearing into Space

In contrast to the downward trajectory discussed above, the final chapter of *Der Verschollene*, a fragment depicting Karl's recruitment into a traveling Oklahama theater troupe, seems to strike a hopeful, utopian note that nonetheless proves to have a foreboding undertone. At first glance, the scene seems to show Karl overcoming his misplaced reliance on old communal constellations.[28] Indeed, when the theater's personnel ask for Karl's name, he uses his lack of identity papers as an excuse to provide "the name [*Rufname*] by which he had been called in his last few posts," "Negro" (M203; V402). His identification as a more general European, rather than German (M202; V402) further suggests an explicit decision to discard his diasporic identity.[29] I will return to the problematic choice of name momentarily, but the recognition that he can no longer rely on his previous name in and of itself suggests that Karl finally grasps that reliance on old national and familial

27 In the English translation cited parenthetically, "der Kleine" is translated as "the boy".

28 See Irmgard Hobson, "Oklahoma, USA, and Kafka's Nature Theater," in *The Kafka Debate*, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian, 1977), 273–78; For a similar reading, see Greiner, *Im Umkreis von Ramses*, 656.

29 Even here, however, Karl is not without ambivalence. Later on, when seeing his name emblazoned on a board, readers learn: "As everything here was following its orderly course, Karl would not have minded all that much if the board had shown his real name" (M206; V409).

constellations and identifiers inhibits advancement in America. Bolstering this reading is the novel's final scene where new troupe members board the train for Oklahama without any luggage except a stroller. This evocatively suggests that there is no room in Oklahama for traditional suitcases carrying the detritus of old diasporic identities, such as the one Karl carries with him during the novel's first portion; only the stroller as an avatar of natality and new beginnings finds its place here (M210; V416).

In "disappearing" and losing the old, however, Karl appears to gain entrance into a new community. Following acceptance into the troupe, he encounters Giacomo, the Italian elevator boy from the Hotel Occidental. Despite their shared contentious history, they are now reconciled, and the text notes how both "of course always wish to stick together [*zu einander halten*]" (M209; V413, *translation modified*). At fragment's end, the two sit snugly next to each other on the train departing for Oklahama, forming a new communal arrangement: a friendship no longer hindered by differing national identifiers, but forged on new, American ground.

Despite this seemingly "happy American ending," textual clues give reason to suspect its neatness, something Kafka himself suggested in a later diary entry, when he wrote that Karl will be "killed in punishment … with a light[] hand, more pushed aside than struck down" (D400; T757). Indeed, key elements of the chapter – encounter with angelic avatars similar to the Statue of Liberty, an intake process that proves reminiscent of immigration through Ellis Island and departure for a far-off place – hints that rather than reaching a successful end, Karl is doomed to another aborted arrival, leading to a wearying repetition rather than utopian conclusion.[30]

Moreover, Karl's choice of name also suggests a continued misunderstanding of American *Verhältnisse*, specifically the racial politics undergirding the society. In providing the name "Negro" – the clerk processing his application appears distinctly suspicious in response (M203–4; V402–3) – Karl inadvertently allies himself with a group of people even more marginalized than German migrants. Thus, though apparently grasping the need to discard old attachments, Karl demonstrates a continued misunderstanding of the communal configurations of the new place he inhabits. In addition, as several scholars have pointed out, both the misspelled "Oklahama" and Karl's choice of name suggest a foreboding photo of a lynching with the ironic heading "Idyll in Oklahama" from Arthur Holitscher's richly illustrated American travelogue, a volume Kafka read in serialized form [Figure 1].[31] Given

30 Kafka's comment in a November 11, 1912 letter to Felice Bauer that the story "is designed to be endless [*ins Endlose angelegt ist*]'" would seem to support this reading.

31 See Wolfgang Jahn, "'Der Verschollene' ('America')" in *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 2*. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1979), 415; Hans-Peter Rüsing, "Quellenforschung als Interpretation: Holitschers und Soukups Reiseberichte über Amerika und Kafkas Roman 'Der Verschollene'," *Modern Austrian Literature* 20, no. 2 (1987): 1–38.

Figure 1: "Idyll aus Oklahama [sic]" from Arthur Holitscher, *Amerika: Heute und Morgen. Reiseerlebnisse* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1912), 367.

textual clues and this compelling intertext, readers can reasonably conclude that Karl's ending in the American West may be the exact opposite of *Der Verschollene*'s "idyllic" final scene.[32]

Supporting this reading is Kafka's incorporation of a further subtle citation of Holitscher's volume during the feast Karl and the other recruits share before their departure for Oklahama. During this meal, the servers invite them to look at pictures with views of the theater they are joining. The activity suggests a behavior like that of readers like Kafka who consumed the Holitscher volume's narrative and many photographic illustrations. However, in Kafka's text, Karl only glances at the first image of the theater's gold presidential box (M208f.; V412f.); yet, despite his ardent desire to look at further images, he is never passed the remaining ones, among which might be expected to be one depicting the aforementioned "Idyll in Oklahama."[33]

Karl's hunger for depictions – visual or textual – of far-off places is not isolated to this passage; earlier in the story, readers learn of his use of books about America before departing for New York (cf. M29, 69; V55, 133). Nevertheless, based on Karl's poor preparation for America, as well as the reader's foreboding that a violent

32 See Mark Christian Thompson, "The Negro Who Disappeared: Race in Kafka's *America*" in *Contemplating Violence: Critical Studies in Modern German Culture*, eds. Stefani Engelstein and Carl Niekerk (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 183–198.

33 See Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography*, 93–99.

ending may await him following his arrival in Oklahama, it is important to identify how these encounters with depictions of supposedly paradisical locales mediated through image or text are necessarily messy and selective, often eliding the ugly realities beneath the surface of a promised paradise. To fully consider this possibility and bring it into conversation with the question of literary Zionism with which we began, let us turn to the presence and role of travel literature in Kafka's first novel more generally. This helps us to appreciate the full import of the underlying ambivalence of *Der Verschollene's* (non)ending.

4 Traveling with Kafka & Echoes of Palestine in Kafka's America

In his work, John Zilcosky excavates the trope of travel in Kafka's work, especially in light of the author's love for "popular utopian colonial travel narratives" and similar texts, including American travelogues such as the Holitscher volume discussed above.[34] In this context, Zilcosky notes how many of Kafka's first literary attempts belonged to the travel genre and argues that the writer's "fantasies about travel were almost always benevolent, if not utopian."[35]

Briefly, I would like to build on Zilcosky's analysis of these travel writings to discuss how Kafka's engagement with depictions of travel and far-off locales often moved effortlessly between America and Palestine as location, as well as between direct and mediated experience of said places.[36] To demonstrate this, and as a way back into the question of Zionist literature, I invite us to consider the inaugural paragraph of Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer, written shortly before he began drafting *Der Verschollene*. In it, Kafka recalls the pair's first meeting: a shared experience examining photos of Kafka and Brod's *Thaliareise* – mostly likely a trip to Weimar – and a reminder of their mutual promise to undertake a trip to Palestine together.[37]

34 Max Brod makes a similar observation in his afterword to the novel's first published edition. He recalls how Kafka "enjoyed reading travelogues [*Reisebücher*]" and expressed "a longing for freedom and far-off countries" and "major journeys". Max Brod, afterword to *Amerika* by Franz Kafka (Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1927): 389–392, here 389.

35 See Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 1–18, quotes here 1 and 3. For examples of Kafka's travel writings, see T929–1064 and Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragemente, Band I,* ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1993), 182–6.

36 For Zilcosky's reading of *Der Verschollene*, based on Kafka's reading of Goethe and Flaubert's travel writings, see *Kafka's Travels*, 40–70.

37 Franz Kafka, *Briefe an Felice und andere Korrespondenz aus der Verlobungszeit*, eds. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, with an introduction by Erich Heller (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1967), 43. For the suggestion that this concerned a trip to Weimar, see 43n2.

The first key slippage in this paragraph has to do with location, something on display in Kafka's effortless move within the letter from Weimar to Palestine as travel destination.[38] Though Palestine as a place of Jewish, specifically Zionist, longing certainly played a role in Kafka's interest in a trip there, the fluid movement between the two places in the letter to Felice also suggests that the place existed in Kafka's mind as one in a series of functionally similar places suitable for tourism and (self-)discovery. Further evidence of simultaneous interest in two far-off places, America and Palestine in this instance, is also suggested in Kafka's diaries from the summer of 1912, when, within a month, he recorded his attendance at a talk by Davis Trietsch entitled "Palestine as Land of Colonization" and another by Czech political representative František Soukup about his trip to America (D221–2; T423–4). In other words, the ease with which Kafka moved from talking or hearing about one place to another suggests more an interest in travel generally, rather than any one place specifically.

In addition to the letter's effortless movement between different places for tourism, Kafka's letter to Felice contains a second slippage – between (re-)experienced and vicarious travel. This is played out in the recounting of an experience looking at the images of Kafka and Brod's recent *Thaliareise*. Notably this activity served a dual purpose. For the two travelers, the photos enabled their reexperience of a past trip. Meanwhile, for Felice and other Brod family members who were present, the images allowed for a vicarious experience of the trip for the first time through the photographic medium. These gestures, importantly, recall the new recruits' viewing of images of Oklahama while in Clayton, as well as Karl's attempt to resituate himself in family photographs earlier in the novel. In gazing at photographs, Karl – just like Kafka and Felice – achieves one of two different purposes: he either reanimates and expresses longing for past lived experience, or else vicariously "experiences" far-off places where he has never stepped foot.[39]

Within this context of our discussion of vicarious experience, as well as the relationship between America and Palestine, the Zionist work Kafka carried with him during his first meeting with Felice also bears closer examination. The periodical,

38 Suggestive in this context is the fact that Arthur Holitscher, who authored the previously discussed American travelogue and also came from a Jewish family, would later pen a volume about his trip to Palestine entitled *Gesang an Palästina* (Song to Palestine). (Berlin: Hans Heinrich Tillgner, 1922). Though written after *Der Verschollene*, this again suggests how both Palestine and America proved of equal interest to (Jewish) reading audiences during Kafka's lifetime. In a similar vein, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi notes of European Jews: "The quest for origins that proceeded over centuries throughout Europe linked both America and Palestine, at one time or another, to the lost continent of Atlantis." *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 6.

39 See Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography*, 62–66, especially 65.

entitled *Palästina: Monatsschrift für die Erschließung Palästinas* (Palestine: monthly journal for the development of Palestine), sought, per its editors, to show how Palestine might serve "as the largest, most obvious, and nearest area to immigrate" for Eastern European Jews, and through its depictions to make "it appear … just as vivid and enticing before the eyes of the oppressed as England and America have until now."[40] Here, the editors make clear how much America, as well as England, stood in contention with Palestine for Jews of Kafka's generation as a potential location for mass (Eastern European) Jewish migration. Yet, despite his initial plan to undertake a trip to Palestine with Felice – something which is far different than migration – the periodical seems to have served a more immediate purpose for Kafka. As he would later write Felice, despite being a subscriber, the periodical had ceased to arrive, probably because "with that one issue, it did more for me on our shared evening together than for other subscribers with an entire year."[41] In other words, just like Felice's experience of the Weimar photographs, here the Zionist periodical Kafka carried with him proved most immediately useful as a means for creating vicarious experience that in and of itself never led to real-life travel.

What we witness here and in other contemporaneous texts, including *Der Verschollene*, then, is Kafka's pleasure derived from narratives about, and images of, far-off places, slipping not only between actual and vicarious experience, but also between different places such as America, Weimar, and Palestine. All these slippages, I argue, help make sense of Kafka's avid engagement with Palestine in talks and periodicals even as his relationship to Zionism remained complex and ambivalent: his was a pleasure derived from the possibilities of travel and tourism as broadly construed, especially as mediated through text and image, and not only from Palestine specifically.[42] Taken from the other direction, moreover, this observation also allows us to appreciate how *Der Verschollene* might best be understood as a larger meditation on the possibilities and pitfalls of permanent spatial relocation writ large, rather than only a specific depiction of relocation to America as such.

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40 See Kafka, *Briefe an Felice*, 58. For the quotes, see *Palästina: Monatsschrift für die Erschließung Palästinas* (Vienna) 1.1 (January 1902), 3, *author's translation*. The German original reads: "das grösste, natürlichste und nächstgelegene Einwanderungsgebiet"; "so dass diese Ländergruppe ebenso lebhaft und verlockend vor den Augen der Unterdrückten stehen soll, wie bisher England und Amerika." Notably, the initial coeditor of the magazine was the aforementioned David Trietsch. Kafka carried the following edition with him: *Palästina: Monatsschrift für die Erschließung Palästinas* (Vienna) 9.7–8 (August 1912). For more on the periodical, see Bruce, *Kafka and Cultural Zionism*, 68.

41 Kafka, *Briefe an Felice*, 121–2, *author's translation*. The German original reads: "sie an unserem gemeinsamen Abend mit dem damaligen einen Heft für mich mehr geleistet hat als für andere Abonnenten mit einem ganzen Jahrgang und das ist allerdings richtig."

42 For a general summarization of Kafka's Zionist arc, as well as its complications, see Spector, *Prague Territories*, 142–3.

This argument returns us to our initial concern: Kafka and his relationship to Zionism as literature. Let us again consider Zionism's then best-known literary practitioner, Theodor Herzl. Like Kafka, Herzl wrote travel narratives early on, and his novel *Altneuland* famously blurs the lines between real and vicarious, fantastical travel.[43] Indeed, both *Der Verschollene* and *Altneuland* are literary creations that enable readers to experience migration to far-off places in novelistic form. From this shared foundation, however, the works critically diverge. For Herzl, the ideal relationship of reality to literature is captured in injunction "Wenn ihr wollt, ist es kein Märchen" – if you will, it is no fairy tale. In *Altneuland*, Herzl encourages his readers to actualize the literary dream such that it ceases to be a *Märchen*. Moreover, though he was a key opponent of Herzlian Zionism, the Cultural Zionist Ahad Ha'am would record a related observation in his article in the edition of *Palästina* Kafka carried with him when he met Felice. Writing of the Jewish colonies in Palestine, about which he was even then quite critical, the Cultural Zionist allowed, "I do not hesitate to openly confess that it appears to me this time, as if I saw with my eyes the 'dream' I had dreamt 20 years earlier gradually becoming reality."[44]

Here we gain insight into the alternative path that Kafka's *Der Verschollene* charts. For unlike Herzl's advocacy for a literary fantasy that is no fairy tale or Ahad Ha'am's dream that is in the process of becoming reality, Kafka's novel performs a far different operation. It first deconstructs the utopian depiction of relocation – here to America – foregrounding how the *Märchen* is anything but. It then concludes with the telling of an alternative *Märchen* – this time of Oklahama – but never allows Karl to arrive. In ending with Karl in transit, it leaves readers perched at the precipice of a dream's actualization with a light foreboding of what awaits Karl in Oklahama. Situated at the edge of the dream made reality, the novel provides a comment on the true pleasure of these utopian narratives: it is found in the telling of them and very much *not* in their actualization.[45] To illustrate this point further, I propose we take a brief detour through Kafka's short text about an "Indian" on horseback.

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43 Clemens Peck, *Im Labor der Utopia: Theodor Herzl und das 'Altneuland'-Project* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 2012), 33.

44 Achad Haam, "Die Lehre der Tatsachen," in *Palästina: Monatsschrift für die Erschließung Palästinas* (Vienna) 9.7–8 (August 1912), here 179–80, *author's translation*. The German original reads: "ich scheue mich nicht, offen zu gestehen, daβ es mir diesmal in Palästina vorkam, als sähe ich mit Augen den 'Traum' den ich vor zwanzig Jahren geträumt, allmählich zur Wirklichkeit werden".

45 Although not exactly the same, this stance shares a kinship with the phenomenon identified by Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi of an "orientation[] toward Palestine, in which the yearning for ultimate homecoming is compatible with the most radical form of homelessness and … ongoing, indefinite exile." See *Booking Passage*, 7.

5 Achieving Indigeneity: A Centaur Suspended in Air

In his masterful analysis, David Wellbery unpacks Kafka's "Wunsch, Indianer zu werden". The short story tells of the wish to be an "Indian" on horseback, shooting through the air. Pointing to the text's grammatical shift midstream from subjunctive mood to indicative imperfect, Wellbery reads the change as reflective of a shift from a wish state to a state of actualization with a culmination at sentence's end of man and beast united together in the form of a centaur. The centaur, he notes, functions both as a representation of the desire for "becoming other," but also as a fulfillment of the desire to move beyond the duality of nature and self. The text, given its grammatical peculiarity, ends in a suspended state between wish and fulfillment.[46]

At the end of his analysis, Wellbery briefly suggests that the short text's motif maps onto *Der Verschollene* and its main character, Karl Rossmann, whose last name literally translates as "Steed Man." Indeed *Der Verschollene* repeatedly connects Karl with the image of horses, including his emergence onto the race track at Clayton with his chosen name emblazoned on the board meant to display the names of the equestrian contenders.[47] Moreover, just as Kafka's short story expresses a desire to become indigenous ("Indian"), a being so connected to a land that the borders between man and nature disappear, Karl too appears in this moment to truly have "achieved" American indigeneity and become other. This association is bolstered by Karl's destination of Oklahama: a state known for its large Native American population.[48] In other words, the image of Karl as horse-man indexes a similar hope to the one found in Kafka's short story. Both express a desire to belatedly *achieve* indigeneity – a state bestowed by birth – and thereby gain entrance to a group rooted in a specific place. In no small way, it also relates to a specifically Zionist hope to re-create a land-based, Jewish identity in another, far-off place.

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46 A special thanks to the author for his generosity in sharing a transcript of his talk with me. David E. Wellbery, "Reading Literature: On a Sentence in Kafka." Transcript of lecture delivered at the colloquium "What is a Reading" sponsored by the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, April 15, 2020. See Spector, *Prague Territories*, 188.

47 Karl is repeatedly associated with and compared to horses in the novel. This includes his horse riding lessons (M33–4; V63–65) and comments made by Delmarche and Brunelda (M146, 183, 185; V286, 360, 363).

48 The notion of a European becoming Native American was captured in a story, then being covered in the newspapers wherein it was (erroneously) reported that the German Bohemian Herman Lehmann had ostensibly gained "official recognition in Oklahoma as the former adopted son of a famous Comanche chief and hence as a Native American Indian." See Stach, *Kafka: The Early Years*, translated by Shelley Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 323 and 510n27. See also Helmut Heuer, *Die Amerikavision bei William Blake und Franz Kafka* (Munich: UNI-DRUCK, 1959), 199.

Yet this "happy ending" contains a wrinkle. As Wellbery points out, "Wunsch, Indianer zu werden" is a grammatical contradiction, a centaur suspended midair between *wish* and *actualization*, leaving a successful synthesis in doubt. Moreover, when the horse shoots into the air, flying above the "trembling ground [*Boden*]," readers learn that the earth [*Land*] can hardly be seen.[49] The near actualization of the wish appears to require separation from the earth, and even as indigeneity appears to be within reach, the land quivers and nearly disappears. The dream of becoming an "Indian", then, requires an illusion. In a text, this illusion can remain suspended, halted in time. But reality cannot sustain it.

Similar to this is the referee's injunction to Karl on the racetrack before the latter's final departure in *Der Verschollene*: of chief importance, he exhorts, is to find a place where one can "hold on permanently [*dauernd fest[]halten*]" (M206; V408, *author's translation*). And yet in a movement that recalls a centaur suspended midair, Karl's journey ends en route, without his feet (or hooves) firmly placed on the ground. Thus, though seemingly having achieved a "happy end", Karl remains in transit in the liminal space between wish and actualization, just as Kafka's Indian.

6 Conclusion: Locating Utopian Joy in the Text

In his afterword written for Kafka's first novel, Max Brod recalls how the writer "especially loved" the Oklahama chapter and its end "on a conciliatory note." Brod continues, "with enigmatic words, Kafka hinted with a smile that his young hero would again, as by a paradisical magic, find profession, freedom, support, yes even a home and parents in this 'nearly limitless' theater."[50]

Given the ambivalences contained in *Der Verschollene*'s final pages and Kafka's diary entry about Karl Rossmann's final fate, we may be tempted to dismiss Brod's statement as unreliable. Yet I would propose another route. For Karl Rossman's final journey functions like a utopian travel narrative. It simultaneously provides the reader with the consolation of a seemingly "happy ending," even as it subtly hints at the continued, cruel realities of actual migration. In so doing, it allows the reader to experience the joy of utopian travel stories, even as the entire novel disrupts the hope that these narratives might successfully become reality. The joy is not in

49 Franz Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, eds. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1994), 32–3, *author's translation*. The German original reads: "zitternden Boden" and "kaum das Land s[ieht]".

50 Brod, afterword to *Amerika*, 389–390, *author's translation*. The German original reads: "versöhnlich ausklingen sollte" and "Mit rätselhaften Worten deutete Kafka lächelnd an, daβ sein junger Held in diesem 'fast grenzenlosen' Theater Beruf, Freiheit, Rückhalt, ja sogar die Heimat und die Eltern wie durch paradiesischen Zauber wiederfinden werde."

actualization, then, but in the articulation of the wish and the living out of that wish in the pages of a novel. Though careful readers may detect hints of foreboding, the process of telling these stories is itself the point. In other words, even while *Der Verschollene* warns readers of the reality of immigration to far-off climes and foregrounds the loss that accompanies spatial dislocation, it also ends with its own utopian story. In so doing, it recaptures the joy of relocation as narrative rather than lived reality.

A further illustration of this might best be encapsulated in the words Karl's friend Fanny relates to him about Oklahama: "to be sure, I haven't seen it yet myself, but many of my colleagues who've been in Oklahama say it's almost limitless [*es sei fast grenzenlos*]" (M199, V394). Fanny's joy does not come from Oklahama itself; her pleasure derives from the reported speech of others (*es sei*), a narrative of sorts. Indeed, it is in this reported speech that the place becomes limitless, akin to the effortless pose of Kafka's rider on horseback: situated between subjunctive and indicative, between dream and actuality.

To be clear, I would argue that this stance has echoes in a key Zionist concept of Kafka's time: *Gegenwartsarbeit*, or "work for the present". Based on this principle, Western European Jews encouraged *Ostjuden*, or Eastern European Jews, to immigrate to Palestine, even as they carved out for themselves a role staying behind in the diaspora, working toward secular redemption, without needing to leave Europe. In so doing, they too could engage in the pleasure of a utopian story, even as they deferred their own migration.[51]

Here then, I suggest, we find the genius of Kafka's American novel. For in telling the story of Karl Rossmann, a young man who experiences the horrors of disappearing as a consequence of spatial relocation, and at story's end sets off for Oklahama, Kafka locates the true source of utopian pleasures. The source is not in arriving in New York or in Palestine. It is, instead, in the telling of the story about these far-off places while still located in Clayton, and, for the first readers turning the pages of *Altneuland*, while situated comfortably back at home in Prague.

51 See also Scott Spector's discussion of Prague Cultural Zionism in the period before the First World War, perhaps best captured in Hugo Bergmann's contention, "We want to get out of the *Galut,* even while we remain in it physically." Notably, Bergmann would later change his focus and migrate to Palestine in 1920. *Prague Territories*, 135–159, here 157.