

Winnetou eventually invites Old Shatterhand to stay with the Apaches and he accepts.

Their friendship symbolizes the idealized concept of the good Native Americans and the reasonable (German) pioneer, in sharp contrast to the actual prevailing hostile attitudes of most Native Americans and white men of that era. This interpretation remains firmly ensconced in the minds of many Germans, as evidenced by the 366,000 visitors who came to the *Karl May Festspiele* ("Der Schatz im Silbersee") in Bad Segeberg (Schleswig-Holstein) last year. This number was a record for a festival that has attracted large crowds for the past 65 years.

The legendary Pierre Brice and Lex Barker

When the first adaptation of a Karl May Western was planned in 1962, two international film stars were picked for the leading roles. **Pierre Brice** (1929 -2015) was a French actor who played Winnetou and **Lex Barker** (1919 – 1973) was cast in the role of Old Shatterhand. Barker, who was American but looked *deutscher als alle Deutschen* according to producer Horst Wendlandt, was at first not very enthusiastic about acting in a German movie since they rarely achieved any kind of international importance at that time. But his wife, Irene Labhardt, was Swiss and knew of the Shatterhand character. Fortunately, she convinced him to accept the offer. *Der Schatz im Silbersee* became a huge success and led to the wave of Karl May movies in the sixties. Brice and Barker appeared together in seven Karl May film adaptations (Brice in eleven) and they became the most popular actors in the German speaking world at that time. These movies created a veritable cult around these two actors.



So when the latest Winnetou trilogy was in the planning stage, the casting of these two roles was of paramount importance, and even somewhat risky because the legacy of Brice and Barker cast such a long shadow. But **Nik Xhelilaj** (who is Albanian) as Winnetou and **Wotan Wilke Möhring** as Old Shatterhand got excellent reviews, and were even nominated for a number of awards for their portrayal of Karl May's best known characters. All three movies were filmed in different locations in Croatia, the same country where the Brice/Barker renditions were made. As far as anyone knows, Karl May never made it to Croatia either, but no doubt he would enthusiastically approve of these latest cinematic reincarnations of his captivating stories.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Winnetou. Der Mythos lebt Part 1: Eine neue Welt (2016)

By Phillip Stölzl

April 20, 2018

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

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Winnetou. Der Mythos lebt

Part 1: Eine neue Welt (2016)

Director: Phillip Stölzl

Screenplay: Karl May (based on Winnetou 1), Jan Berger, Alexander M. Rümelin, Phillip Stölzl

Production: Christian Becker, Christoph Müller, Matthias Wendlandt, Felix Wendlandt

Music: Martin Böttcher, Heiko Maile

Camera: Sten Mende

Cut: Sven Budelmann

Year: 2016

Cast: Wotan Wilke Möhring as Old Shatterhand, Nik Xhelilaj as Winnetou, Milan Peschel as Sam Hawkens, Iazua Larios as Nscho-tschü, Gojko Mitic as Intschu-tschuna, Henry Reents as Belle, Rainer Bock as James Bancroft, Jürgen Vogel as Joseph Rattler

Commentary: Karl Moehlmann



Karl May (1842 – 1912)

In 1908, four years before he died, Karl May undertook a trip with his second wife Klara to America. He visited New York City, Albany, Buffalo and Niagara-Falls. He had finally arrived in the new world, which he had written so much about fifteen years earlier when he finished "*Winnetou 1*" in 1893, followed by "*Winnetou 2 and 3*" in the same year. These were a series of adventure novels about the chief of the Apache tribe and his friend Old Shatterhand. They helped make Karl May the most successful author of popular adventure fiction in the 19th century.

Published editions have reached an estimated 200 million copies with 100 million in German speaking countries alone. So how did this man whose travel and adventure books have been translated into 33 languages write such vivid and detailed accounts about lands that he never visited? How did he bring such characters as Winnetou, Old Shatterhand, and Kara Ben Nemsí to life for so many readers? As is often the case, particularly in the case of creative writers, past is prologue.

Karl May was born 175 years ago in Ernstthal in Saxony, the 5th of 14 children of a poor family of weavers. Nine of his siblings died in childhood. Karl as the only surviving son was supposed to become a teacher, but he often got into conflict with the law and led a life of petty crime. Theft, fraud and imposture led to four years of forced labor beginning in 1865. From 1870 until 1874 he was imprisoned in the Waldheim "*Zuchthaus*". When he was released at the age of 32, he had stored up in his fertile imagination a long list of tales that he planned to write.

And indeed, May became a prolific writer. At the peak of his productivity, he was writing up to 3,800 pages per year. Those long years of imprisonment had somehow intensified his creative energy and then unleashed it in a torrent of story telling. Eventually it got to the point where he could barely discriminate between reality and fiction. He got so caught up in the Old Shatterhand legend that he claimed to be Old Shatterhand himself. He even had the famous rifles (*Bärentöter*, *Silberbüchse*, *Henrystutzen*) made for himself. Remarkably, he remains one of the most widely read German writers to the present time.



Winnetou. Der Mythos lebt. Part 1: Eine neue Welt

This movie is based on Karl May's 1893 novel "*Winnetou 1*". It was directed by Phillip Stölzl for a special television event for Christmas 2016. It was the first part of the new Winnetou-Trilogy (Part 2: *Das Geheimnis vom Silbersee*. Part 3: *Der letzte Kampf*) that has received widespread acclaim. Perhaps this adaptation has resonated with viewers in large part because of the initial scenes where the protagonist enters the US at Ellis Island in 1860 and introduces himself as Karl May. The author is here the hero himself, a German engineer coming to America to escape the Old Continent and be a pioneer in building the New World.

Thus it is a migrant story (a migrant of German descent like so many millions of Germans who came to America) and it is not difficult to see how the German audience can identify with this well-educated and highly skilled individual (portrayed so convincingly by Wotan Wilke Möhring). May sets out to build a new life in this unsettled new continent. He finds a job with the Central Pacific Railroad Company in Roswell, Arizona to conduct land measurements for a tunnel that is under construction.

But the projected railroad line runs through the land of the Apaches in the area between Arizona and New Mexico, and May's foreman is a dubious and cunning character named Joseph Rattler who doesn't hesitate to carelessly destroy a sacred burial ground of the Apaches. In the ensuing violent conflict between the Indians and the *Bleichgesichter*, Karl May and Winnetou, the son of Intschu-tschuna, the *Hauptling der Apachen*, meet for the first time. Karl's name changes to "Old Shatterhand" because of his strong fists, which he acquired as member of the Boxing Club Saxonia 68 back home in Germany.

True to his enlightened belief in reason, Old Shatterhand promotes peaceful negotiations to settle the dispute about the direction of the railroad line, but is bitterly disappointed when murder and mistrust torpedo his valiant efforts. Despite his prodigious imagination, May touches here on the historical reality of frequent and egregious treaty violations in dealing with the Indians. Winne-