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“To Make My Knowledge Be of Use to My Fellow Human Beings”: Alma M. Karlin, Peru, and Cultural Agency

1 Introduction

“Dear reader, you, who follow me patiently, be prepared to find everything different here: the people, the houses, the plants, the animals, the birds – yes, even more: the stars, the air and the time.”¹ These lines are part of an article on Peru, the first of six that round-the-world traveler Alma M. Karlin (1889–1950) wrote mostly in Arequipa² in the spring and summer of 1920 and which appeared between 27 June and 10 October 1920 in the *Cillier Zeitung*, a newspaper that was published twice weekly in her home town of Celje/Cilli.³

1 Alma M. Karlin: Im Reiche der Inka. In: *Cillier Zeitung* 50 (June 27, 1920), p. 1. In this article, all German quotations into English whose translator is not given have been translated by myself.

2 Ibid., p. 3; Alma M. Karlin: Vom Essen und Trinken nah und fern. In: *Cillier Zeitung* 61 (August 5, 1920), p. 2; Alma M. Karlin: Eine entschwundene Kultur. In: *Cillier Zeitung* 63 (August 12, 1920), p. 2; *Cillier Zeitung* 64 (August 15), p. 2; Alma M. Karlin: Die Hauptfeste im Reiche der Kinder der Sonne. In: *Cillier Zeitung* 70 (September 5, 1920), p. 3; Alma M. Karlin: Zauberei und Aberglaube in Peru. In: *Cillier Zeitung* 75 (September 23, 1920), p. 3. The last article, dated 14 August 1920, was written at sea. See Alma M. Karlin: An der Küste von Peru. In: *Cillier Zeitung* 80 (October 10, 1920), p. 3.

3 At that time this industrial town was no longer part of Austria-Hungary but part of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, one of several countries that emerged as successors to the empire. Until the end of the World War I, the majority population in Celje was of German origin. In the first post-war years, however, the numerical proportion and social power shifted in favour of the Slovenes. See Janez Cvirn: Meščanstvo v Celju po razpadu Avstro-Ogrske. In: Marija Počivavšek (ed.): *Iz zgodovine Celja (1918–1941)*. Celje: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Celje 2001, p. 201; Janez Cvirn: Nemci na Slovenskem (1848–1941). In: Dušan Nečak (ed.): “Nemci” na Slovenskem 1941–1955. Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete 2002, p. 99–144, p. 109. Interestingly enough, although Karlin came from a Slovenian family, she was raised speaking German by her mother, a teacher at a German girls’ school. See Jerneja Jezernik: *Alma M. Karlin, državljanka sveta: Življenje in delo Alme Maximiliane Karlin (1889–1950)*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga 2009, p. 7; Jerneja Jezernik: *Alma M. Karlin: Mit Bubikopf und Schreibmaschine um die Welt*. Klagenfurt:

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While research on Karlin has so far focused mainly on her life,⁴ on language and style in her work,⁵ or specifically on her writings with reference to Japan,⁶ the following article is the first to deal with her representations of Peru. Karlin will be treated here as a *cultural agent* – a term derived from the network theory of cultural production developed by the literary scholar Joachim Küpper (see section 4). In particular, I am interested in two questions: first, what ‘knowledge,’ in Karlin’s terms, or what ‘cultural material,’ in Küpper’s terms, did Karlin bring from Peru to Central Europe (see section 5), thus opening up the possibility of entanglements between these two areas? And second, related to this: from where did she draw the cultural material on Inca culture that she afterwards passed on to her readers (see section 6)? To answer these questions, both Karlin’s travel literature and her fiction with reference to Peru will be considered (see section 3). But to start with: What was the background to Karlin’s journey around the world? Why did it also include a visit to Peru?

2 Before Peru: “The Ardent Desire to See Foreign Continents”

The six articles about Peru mentioned in the introduction appeared in a supplement titled *Reiseskizzen* [*Travel Sketches*], consisting of a series of 136 articles that Karlin published in the *Cillier Zeitung* between 1920 and 1928.⁷ That was how long it took her to complete her round-the-world-journey: she embarked on it from Celje

Drava 2020, p. 9–10; 13; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje Alme M. Karlin: Življenje, delo, zapuščina*. Celje: Pokrajinski muzej 2020, p. 77; 80–83; 85–86.

4 See, e.g., Jerneja Jezernik: *Alma M. Karlin*; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*.

5 See, e.g., Vida Jesenšek/Horst Ehrhardt (eds.): *Sprache und Stil im Werk von Alma M. Karlin*. Maribor: Univerzitetna založba Univerze v Mariboru 2019.

6 See, e.g., Klemen Senica: Following in the Footsteps of Isabella Bird? Alma Karlin and Her Representations of Japan. In: Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik (ed.): *East Asia in Slovenia: Collecting Practices, Categorization and Representation*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete 2021, p. 225–257; Maja Veselič: The Allure of the Mystical: East Asian Religious Traditions in the Eyes of Alma M. Karlin. In: *ibid.*, p. 259–299.

7 See Vladimir Šlibar: Članki Alme Karlin v *Cillier Zeitung* 1920–1928. In: Tatjana Badovinac/Teo Bizjak et al. (eds.): *Celjski zbornik*. Celje: Kulturna skupnost Občine Celje 1988, p. 191; 193.

on 24 November 1919 and likely returned on 28 December 1927.⁸ It was not Karlin's first experience of living abroad, however. In 1907, when she was 18, she traveled around Europe with her mother.⁹ In addition, from 1908 she stayed outside her homeland for at least eight consecutive years.¹⁰ Among other places, she lived in several capitals: in London she worked in a translation office and a language school and studied foreign languages; she lived in Paris, and after the start of World War I, she lived in what was then Kristiania, today's Oslo, and in Stockholm.¹¹ Previously, she had passed foreign language exams in English, French, Italian, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish at the Royal Society of Arts in London and exams in French, Spanish, and Russian at the London Chamber of Commerce.¹²

Karlin had been thinking about exploring "the wide world"¹³ as early as her time in Kristiania.¹⁴ Later, she wrote that she "harboured the ardent desire to see foreign continents through the eyes of a writer, a painter, and above all through the eyes of a woman."¹⁵ Soon after returning to Celje she started teaching foreign languages at her home to earn money for her journey.¹⁶ On 24 November 1919, as well prepared as possible, she boarded a Trieste-bound train, taking with her an Erika travel typewriter and her handwritten ten-language dictionary.¹⁷

Once in Italy, Karlin was forced, for financial reasons, to give up her plan to travel to her originally intended destination, Japan, through India. She decided to change course and travel through South America.¹⁸ But in Genoa, it became clear that this journey would not be easy either:

It was a difficult period. All the steamship lines turned out to be useless: I hadn't enough money for some, and in other cases special documents were required. Argentine refused to admit anyone from the Slav countries, because they regarded them all as Bolsheviks; most

8 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman*. Transl. by Emile Burns. London: Gollanz 1933, p. 10; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 63.

9 See Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird: Auf dem Weg zur Weltreisenden*. Berlin: Aviva 2021, p. 115–123.

10 See Jerneja Jezernik: *Alma M. Karlin*, p. 25; 37; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 98; 102.

11 See Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird*, p. 126–274.

12 Ibid., p. 207–212; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 101.

13 Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird*, p. 247.

14 Ibid., p. 246–252.

15 Alma M. Karlin: *Der Todesdorn und andere seltsame Erlebnisse aus Peru und Panama*. Berlin: Hofenberg 2021, p. 8.

16 See Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird*, p. 280–283.

17 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 11; Jerneja Jezernik: *Alma M. Karlin*, p. 39.

18 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 13; Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn: Magic, superstitions, and beliefs of urban Indians in Panama and Peru*. Transl. by Bernard Miall. Detroit: Blaine Ethridge-Books 1971, p. 41–42; Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird*, p. 280.

of the English colonies were still closed to visitors. So there was only one single chance – a ship which was going down the west coast of America as far as Chile. I had read so much about the Incas that I wanted to land on the way and admire them at closer range. [. . .] I bought a ticket as far as Mollendo, the last port in Peru.¹⁹

She traveled in third class.²⁰

Even though the ticket to Mollendo was a last resort, Karlin does not seem in the least dispirited. To the contrary, she wrote that her Spanish teacher in London had often talked to her about Latin-American literature.²¹ What is more, at the St. Geneviève Library in Paris she had once unexpectedly found “a grammar of the ancient Quichua tongue, the Court language of the Incas.”²² She had also come into contact with Peruvian culture at the Stockholm University Library:

It was in Stockholm, as I was looking for material for my novel, when the valuable work in the original 16th century [sic!] print: *Comentarios Reales* (History of the Incas) [(1609, 1617)] by the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega [(1539–1616)] fell into my hands. I then studied the costumes of the day in modern works because I was writing a play that met its end peacefully in the wastebasket with several of its colleagues. These studies of ancient Inca [. . .] [culture] later moved me to seek out the land of the Children of the Sun.²³

Or, as Karlin wrote elsewhere: “In Sweden I had studied the culture of the Incas in books, how fascinated I was! I felt emotionally connected to these people in an inexplicable way. Now I wanted to see for myself, travel through the empire of the Children of the Sun and search for traces of this vanished people.”²⁴ “What more natural than to break my journey in Peru, the land of the Children of the Sun? Had I not always longed to learn more of their vanished glory and their high civilization?”²⁵ Here, she describes the *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* by Garcilaso as “the best book on the civilization of the Incas.”²⁶

The impression Karlin had of Peru before disembarking at Mollendo on 5 April 1920²⁷ seems quite exalted:

19 Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 23–24; see Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 41–42.

20 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 26.

21 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 41.

22 Ibid.

23 Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird*, p. 267.

24 Alma M. Karlin: *Der Todesdorn* (2021), p. 9.

25 Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 42. On Karlin's decision to visit Peru see also Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 23–24.

26 Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 41.

27 See Jerneja Jezernik: *Alma M. Karlin*, p. 44; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 19.

To Don Luis [another traveler on the ship] I said cheerfully: “At last I’ll be rid of this evil-smelling old box and I’ll be able to stretch out my legs in bed – which is something I haven’t been able to do for forty-five days.” The young man said quite earnestly: “Perhaps before the week is out you’ll be longing to be able to lie down in these narrow bunks.” But I was dreaming of the time of the Incas, of the wonders of Titicaca and the beauty of the lofty Andes, and I smiled a superior smile. I was ready to be paddled down the Ucayali with an Indian at the bow and another at the stern, with a puma following along the bank and a snake hanging down from the trees. I was not afraid of anything.²⁸

It seems Karlin felt similarly enraptured the first time she saw the Andes in Peru:

Such a feeling as I never experienced before or since crept over me as I saw its brown mountains and its snow-white nitre-fields gliding past me, and as the train carried me up into the region of the lofty Andes, and I was more than ever conscious of it when I stood at the foot of Misti [Figure 1], beyond Arequipa. A premonition awakened within me, or was it a misty recollection? Somehow I knew these mountains, and they knew me; they spoke to me in a terrible and immortal speech. Alas, I understood but a word of it here and there.²⁹

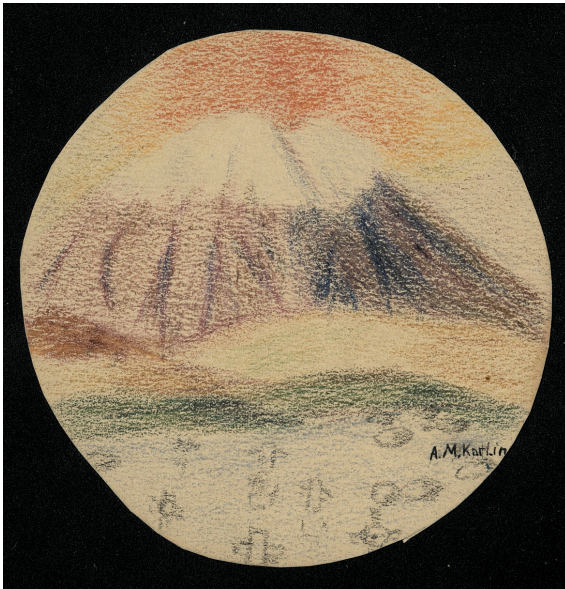


Figure 1: Karlin’s drawing of a cemetery below Misti, drawn in Arequipa and dated April 15, 1920 (Manuscript Collection of the National and University Library, legacy of Alma Karlin, Ms 1872, Slovenia).

²⁸ Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 85–86.

²⁹ Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 42.

3 Karlin's Works with Reference to Peru: "Speechless in the Face of the Achievements of this Woman"

Karlin stayed in Peru for more than four months.³⁰ During this time, she lived in Arequipa,³¹ where she made a living mostly by teaching local children.³² As mentioned above, her six articles about Peru were published by the *Cillier Zeitung* as soon as they made it across the Atlantic. However, Karlin's work about Peru is not limited to these articles. Upon return from her round-the-world journey, between 1930 and 1935, Karlin published with different German publishers five works that are at least in part about Peru and which had definitely not been intended solely for readers in Celje: the work of travel writing *Einsame Weltreise* [*The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman*] with the subheading *Die Tragödie einer Frau* [*The Tragedy of a Woman*], which was published by Wilhelm Köhler of Minden in 1930, the first part of a literary trilogy about her journey;³³ the article *Mode und Körperkultur bei den Frauen fremder Völker* [Fashion and Physical Culture among the Women of Foreign Peoples], which Karlin published in 1931 in the publication *Der weibliche Körper und seine Beeinflussung durch Mode und Sport* [*The Female Body and How It Is Influenced by Fashion and Sport*];³⁴ the novel *Der Götze* [*The Idol*], published by Müller und Kiepenheuer of Potsdam in 1932;³⁵ the travel writing *Der Todesdorn und andere seltsame Erlebnisse aus Peru und Panama* [*The Death-Thorn. Magic, Superstitions, and Beliefs of Urban Indians in Panama and Peru*], published by the Berlin-based Prismen-Verlag in 1933;³⁶ and the short story *Tränen des Mondes* [*Tears of the Moon*] with the subheading *Eine Geschichte aus Peru* [*A Story from Peru*], which was published by Paul Kupfer of Breslau, now Wrocław, in 1935.³⁷

The work of travel writing *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* was the biggest success. Initially it was issued in 10,000 copies and due to high demand a so-called 'popular edition' with photos was published in 20,000 copies two years

30 See Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 58.

31 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 92–131.

32 Ibid., p. 97; 104–105; 117; 129; Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 110–114.

33 See Alma M. Karlin: *Einsame Weltreise: Die Tragödie einer Frau*. Minden: Köhler 1930.

34 See Alma M. Karlin: *Mode und Körperkultur bei den Frauen fremder Völker*. In: Rudolf M. Arringer/Else Rasch et al.: *Der weibliche Körper und seine Beeinflussung durch Mode und Sport*. Berlin: Verlag für Kultur und Menschenkunde 1931, p. 105–188.

35 See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze: Roman*. Potsdam: Müller und Kiepenheuer 1932.

36 See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Todesdorn und andere seltsame Erlebnisse aus Peru und Panama*. Berlin: Prismen-Verlag 1933.

37 See Alma M. Karlin: *Tränen des Mondes: Eine Geschichte aus Peru*. Breslau: Kupfer 1935.

later, also at a more affordable price, making it more accessible to the general public.³⁸ But the first edition had already received a very warm welcome in the media. *Der Erdball*, for example, one of Berlin's main ethnological magazines of the time, said the following about the book: "We are speechless in the face of the achievements of this woman. [. . .] The book itself can be warmly recommended, it contains the journey around the world of a heroine who had to earn the money on the spot to be able to continue her journey. Where is the researcher who did something similar?"³⁹

Not surprisingly, similar praise could be found also in *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*, a publication of an organization promoting the retaking of colonies Germany lost after World War I: "In 1919, just after the end of the war, a young woman, Alma M. Karlin, driven by the ambition of a Columbus, embarked on a journey around the world that was quite unique and from which she only returned home in 1928, after eight long years, filled with the most exciting adventures and privations. An unusually exciting and rare book."⁴⁰

According to Karlin's publisher, *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* had been praised not only in Germany but also in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain and Scandinavia.⁴¹ In 1933, the work was published in English⁴² and a year later also in Finnish.⁴³ The work of travel writing *The Death-Thorn* was also published in English in 1934.⁴⁴ It seems

38 See Alma M. Karlin: *Einsame Weltreise: Erlebnisse und Abenteuer einer Frau im Reich der Inkas und im Fernen Osten*. Minden: Köhler 1932, p. 5. A similar publication sequence followed in the second part of her trilogy, while the third part, which appeared in 1933, was published in 20,000 copies. Ibid. In total, the circulation of the trilogy and its first reprints reached 80,000 copies. See Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 66.

39 Anon.: Alma M. Karlin. In: *Der Erdball* 3, 12 (1929), p. 477. For excerpts from 18 selected newspaper reviews mentioned by the publisher in the foreword of the 1932 reprint, see Alma M. Karlin: *Einsame Weltreise* (1932), p. 6–7.

40 Anon.: *Einsame Weltreise*. In: *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* 11 (November 15, 1929), p. [6]. The extensive library of the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, held at the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt a. M., also includes three works by Karlin, among them *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* (see Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main: *Katalog der Bibliothek der deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft in der Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt a. M.: Gliederung nach der ehemaligen Aufstellung*. Frankfurt a. M.: Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg 2004, p. 382; 726, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/14504954.pdf> [July 20, 2023]).

41 See Alma M. Karlin: *Einsame Weltreise* (1932), p. 8.

42 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*.

43 See Alma M. Karlin: *Yksin maailan ääriin: Naisen elämyksiä inkain valtakunnassa ja kaukaisessa idässä*. Transl. by Mika Waltari. Porvoo: Söderström 1934.

44 See Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*.

that Karlin was one of the most popular travel writers between 1930 and 1935, at least among a German-speaking readership.⁴⁵

4 Karlin as a Cultural Agent: Joachim Küpper's Theory of Cultural Production

While excerpts from newspaper reviews cited by the publisher in the 1932 edition of *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* underline the adventurous nature of the work,⁴⁶ Karlin herself says in the foreword it was not the desire for adventure that led her on her journey: "It was not any lust of adventure that drove me on, but the urge of a task that I had set myself and could not be evaded."⁴⁷ In one of the articles about Peru, mentioned earlier, that appeared in the *Cillier Zeitung* she also refers to the effort needed to acquire the knowledge she later conveyed to her readers: "Do any of my readers suspect the high price I paid for my knowledge, the fruits of which they enjoy comfortably in the company of their loved ones with a good apple strudel and a glass of fresh beer?"⁴⁸ And, in another article: "The purpose of my trip is to make my knowledge and my experience be of use to my compatriots and my fellow human beings [. . .]."⁴⁹ Here, Karlin appears as a *cultural agent* – a term that derives from the network theory of cultural production presented by the literary scholar Joachim Küpper in 2018. What are its basic assumptions?⁵⁰

The metaphor of a 'cultural net' is at the forefront of Küpper's extensive discussions. While 'cultural' is to be understood in its broadest, i.e. etymological, sense,⁵¹ the term 'net' or 'network' is defined tersely: "A network is a non-hierarchical struc-

45 See Amalija Maček: "Biti jaz v popolni svobodi": Poskus orisa Alminega pojmovanja književnosti in ljubezni. In: Marijan Pušavec/Matic Majcen (eds.): *Alma M. Karlin*. Maribor: Aristej 2018, p. 16; Barbara Trnovec: *Neskončno potovanje*, p. 145.

46 Alma M. Karlin: *Einsame Weltreise* (1932), p. 6–7.

47 Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 10. See the statement, mentioned earlier, by Karlin that she "harboured the ardent desire to see foreign continents through the eyes of a writer, a painter, and above all through the eyes of a woman." Alma M. Karlin: *Der Todesdorn* (2021), p. 8.

48 Alma M. Karlin: *An der Küste*, p. 3.

49 Alma M. Karlin: *Vom Essen und Trinken*, p. 2.

50 The following outline of Küpper's theory refers specifically to Joachim Küpper: *The cultural net: Early Modern Drama as a Paradigm*. Berlin: De Gruyter 2018, p. 7–8; 10–13; 35–37; 115; 217.

51 "The term ['cultural'] is meant in its etymological sense (from Latin *colere*), that is, as referring to any activities – not only artistic ones – by which humans produce items that do not exist in the natural world." *Ibid.*, p. 8, n. 13.

ture without a center.”⁵² Accordingly, no network in the field of culture arises spontaneously or in an extra-human, evolutionary process, but rather through humans, and therefore each time with conscious intent. Cultural networks, which are in themselves an anthropological constant, are never complete or eternal: they are subject to human will and can be extended, limited, or temporarily suspended. If the original intentions remain unfulfilled, those who established a cultural network may dissolve it again.

As formulated by Küpper, the central goal of all these network structures is “the enabling of processes of transfer of a material that would remain inert without the existence of such structures.”⁵³ The material that is transported in a cultural network is culture, to which Küpper ascribes a complex, dual nature: “Culture exists in two different registers bound to each other: as material forms, and as conscious concepts which inform the respective forms or can be extrapolated from them. [. . .] Cultural networks primarily contribute to transferring the conceptual forms underlying the actual artifacts. The material forms may ‘travel’ as well (paintings, statues, books) [. . .].”⁵⁴

To enable both material and conceptual forms to circulate, according to Küpper, a physical, material substratum is needed. This may be traveling people who, alone or together with their products, serve as a transport device. The cultural transfer carried out by such agents takes place either consciously or unconsciously – artists, for example, fall into the former category.

⁵² Ibid., p. 8.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 10–11. With respect to final artefacts such as paintings, sculptures, and books, Küpper speaks of multiple levels on which *cultural material* floats: “‘Below’ this level, components of texts (motifs, personages, particularly well-conceived formulations [*dicta*]) may be items integrated into the floating process. ‘Above’ this level, cultural material may float as formal concepts, partly rhetorical, partly generic, whose components – that is, specific tropes and topoi, or the range of *procédés* ascribed to the genre of tragedy in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, e.g., peripety or anagnorisis – may likewise float on their own. On an even higher level of abstraction, one may identify the floating of world-modeling concepts linked to certain texts or genres, such as, in the case just mentioned, the ‘tragic vision’ of life as doomed to (unredeemable) failure, which may be expressed by texts whose formal shaping differs from Aristotle’s definition of the genre of tragedy – one may think of certain pieces by Samuel Beckett – but also from the genre as such – one might think of Baudelaire’s famous poem *A une passante* (1855/1857). Finally – and this may be the most abstract level of culturally relevant material floating in the net – it may be enabling structures which float and are thus transferred from one cultural community to another. These are institutions that favor the production of concrete cultural material, but are not linked to any specific variant of such material. They serve as incubators for creative processes. As to culture *sensu lato*, one could point to schools, universities, and academies.” Ibid., p. 36–37.

5 Cultural Material from Peru: The 1920s and the Period of the Inca Empire

For our case, it is interesting that Küpper explicitly mentions, among the cultural networks, the one that began to operate with the so-called ‘discovery’ of Christopher Columbus:

One might think in particular of the network established between Europe and the Americas, starting in 1492. Its original purpose was merely economic; its establishment was motivated by the quest for an *El Dorado* in the literal sense of the term. Especially with regard to South America, it became an infrastructure for the perhaps most important and most radical transculturation in the species’ history, as early as from the first decades of the sixteenth century onward.⁵⁵

As a travel writer [Figure 2] who visited Peru, Karlin belongs to the category of active, conscious cultural agents, and can be seen as part of the cultural network just mentioned. But what cultural material, or, in Karlin’s terms, what knowledge is she talking about as regards Peru?



Figure 2: Karlin with her Erika typewriter and her dog named Blacky (Manuscript Collection of the National and University Library, legacy of Alma Karlin, Ms 1872, Slovenia).

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 8, n. 14.

One of the ways to answer this question is to examine all her works that are in any way related to Peru and try to extract and synthesize information that appears in more than one work,⁵⁶ irrespective of whether it is travel writing or fiction. An example that may seem to support this approach is given by descriptions of a dish from a Peruvian railway station, featured both in the travelogue *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* and the novel *The Idol*:

At La Joya we could have our midday meal – Picante. Old Indian women were sitting on the ground alongside of gigantic earthenware pots, shaking their tresses and helping rice [sic!] with a tin spoon and pounding pepper of various kinds on tin plates.⁵⁷

‘Picante,’ a Spanish word for spicy food, and old local women with braided tresses who sit on the ground alongside earthenware pots, serving rice and pepper of various kinds with a tin spoon on tin plates – this information from *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman* is repeated almost literally in *The Idol*:

“Picante, Picante . . .”

Out on the platform crouched an old Indian woman in a ribbonless, tattered straw hat, begrimed by a full decade of dirt, with a long, unkempt braid spilling out from behind each ear that seemed to crawl like a giant black caterpillar over withered, ill-covered breasts. Around her on the ground stood a row of pewter plates, which she filled with a tin spoon, scooping rice mixed with all sorts of peppers out of a bulbous clay pot.⁵⁸

An overview of the recurring information related to Peru in Karlin’s works shows that it either refers mostly to the present, specifically to the 1920s and the 1930s,⁵⁹ or mostly to the past, specifically to the period of the Inca Empire. The first category includes, above all,⁶⁰ information about corn, chicha, freeze-dried potatoes or ‘chuño,’ about chilli and coca,⁶¹ about lice in food, a guinea pig called ‘cuyo’ as a

⁵⁶ Articles published in the *Cillier Zeitung* are treated as a single unit.

⁵⁷ Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 90–91.

⁵⁸ Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 37–38.

⁵⁹ The novel *The Idol* is set in 1930. See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 105.

⁶⁰ The following summary of information conveyed by Karlin has been drawn from Alma M. Karlin: *Im Reiche*, p. 1–3; Alma M. Karlin: *Vom Essen und Trinken*, p. 1–2; Alma M. Karlin: *Eine entschwundene Kultur* (August 12, 1920), p. 2; Alma M. Karlin: *Eine entschwundene Kultur* (August 15, 1920), p. 2; Alma M. Karlin: *Zauberei und Aberglaube*, p. 1–2; Alma M. Karlin: *An der Küste*, p. 1–3; Alma M. Karlin: *Mode und Körperkultur*, p. 166; 168; 170; Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 18; 37–40; 44; 48; 50; 67; 68; 86–87; 90; 92; 93; 112; 144–145; Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 81–85; 90–131; Alma M. Karlin: *Tränen des Mondes*, p. 14–15; 17; 23–24; Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 32; 34; 39; 40; 60–66; 68; 75; 88; 112–113; 116–117; 122; 124.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Alma M. Karlin: *Vom Essen und Trinken*, p. 2; Alma M. Karlin: *Tränen des Mondes*, p. 23. It should be emphasized that Karlin sees these last four foods as holding economic potential for her compatriots as well as others. On chicha: “Since the corn beer contains very little alcohol,

dish, and about chicha bar or 'chichería.' Also referring mostly to the present is information about the poncho and the mantilla, about the local women with braided hair, about local women with straw hats, about the cohabitation of people and animals in one house, about locals urinating in the street, about local women squatting in the middle of the street, about the locals riding donkeys with one of them sitting backwards so he could chat to the man behind him, and about stray dogs scavenging through piles of garbage during the night. This also includes information about the Peruvian mountains, an earthquake, the Peruvian coast, about Arequipa, Lima, Trujillo, and Cajamarca, about llamas, vicuñas, and gallinazos, and about willows, palms, cacti, and nasturtiums. Also referring mostly to the present is information about sad, melancholic locals, about a local playing a flute, about a local offering a bite of their meal to a stranger out of hospitality, but also information about locals harassing foreign women, about a church with the symbols of the cross, the sun, and the moon, about locals plucking an eyelash to show devotion, about locals pulling dogs' tails so that their squeals would prevent a lunar eclipse, information that

corn thrives well here, the drink is nutritious and also has an excellent effect on liver, kidney and bladder problems, it would be a blessing for our local rural population. Even children can drink chicha without harm. What a cheap and wonderful substitute for example for sour apple cider on a bad year!" Alma M. Karlin: *Vom Essen und Trinken*, p. 1. On dried potato: "Who does not complain bitterly about the fact that potatoes keep so badly? Peruvians know 25 different types of potatoes which often keep for thirty years without spoiling or losing their original taste. [. . .] In order to achieve this benefit, they know two types of processing, of which the first in particular could also be carried out by us. As soon as the night frosts set in, the potatoes are boiled, peeled and exposed to the frost but also to the sun during the day. We would have to use strong artificial heat, such as that produced by ovens in our farmhouses. The frost contracts the potatoes, the heat absorbs their moisture and after about three weeks, often earlier, they are completely dry. [. . .] The second type is less recommended because the taste suffers [. . .]. [. . .] They [the potatoes] keep for many, many years, but for our taste they would only be usable in spicy dips." Ibid. On chilli: "The aji [. . .] contributes [. . .] to increasing body heat without heating the blood like the East Indian pepper – a very pleasant circumstance given our shortage of coal and materials. [. . .] The rocote [sic!] would without a doubt also do well here and would make the simplest, cheapest fare tasty, would make cheap dips possible, make it easier to enjoy horse meat and put the dry potatoes to good use." Alma M. Karlin: *Vom Essen und Trinken*, p. 2. On coca: "Would this [coca] not be an excellent invigorator for the poor soldiers, for tourists who cannot carry a large supply of food with them into the mountains, and an important aid for all people who want or need to work beyond their abilities (mental or physical)?" Ibid. However, Karlin's own experience with coca does not confirm its alleged benefits: "I know that I spent one whole long Sunday [. . .] chewing coca in order to find out whether one really did not feel either hunger or thirst. The coca-leaves tasted bitter, and besides they should not be chewed, but slowly squeezed out by pressing them with the tongue against the gums. I found that I did not want anything, but the next day I was so exhausted that it cost me considerable effort to walk far enough to buy my daily bread in the market." Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 129.

local women, who give birth in the fields, continue working immediately afterwards [Figure 3], information that the birth of twins is unlucky, information about a sect of bloodsuckers or ‘chupadores,’ information about witches, about making a witch’s needle, information about the plant ‘piripiri,’ which grows in Chachapoyas and is used to make a love potion, and information that any cursed drink can be uncursed by making a cross at the bottom of the glass with your ring finger and little finger.



Figure 3: Karlin’s drawing of a “female native with a child” (Manuscript Collection of the National and University Library, legacy of Alma Karlin, Ms 1872, Slovenia).

The information Karlin provides about Peru’s present refers mainly to the everyday street life in Arequipa and either derives from her own observations and experiences (e.g. the description of the locals) or she obtained it through conversations with the locals (e.g. information about their religious and superstitious beliefs). Interestingly, she never addresses the socio-political developments of the time, al-

though Peru underwent a major political change in 1919. After a military *coup d'état*, the country moved from an oligarchic regime known as the 'Aristocratic Republic' (1895–1919) to a reformist, initially democratic-oriented period, the so-called 'Oncenium' (1919–1930). In January 1920, less than three months before Karlin disembarked in Mollendo, a new progressive constitution was promulgated.⁶² But what information does Karlin present about Peru's past?

Mostly referring to the past – meaning the Inca Empire – is, above all,⁶³ information about the founding of Cusco, about the beginnings of the Inca Empire, about the name of this empire, 'Tahuantinsuyu,' about the Inca ruler, as well as information about the holy bird caracara or 'corequenque' and the feathers that were incorporated into the ruler's garb, about Inca gods, about the sacred objects or 'huacas,' about the Virgins of the Sun and about confession among the Incas. This category also includes information about Inca gold and silver, about Inca architecture, about Inca writing or 'quipo,' the information that the Incas did not know individualism, that the Incas did not know fine arts, information about the Inca postal system, information that Cusco residents' location in the city depended on what province they moved from, information about division of crops between them and about the women whom the provinces would send to the ruling Inca, information that the ruling Inca personally officiated at the weddings of newly married couples in Cusco, information about women weaving, information that women who bore a child to the ruling Inca returned to their home village and were given a house and land and were highly revered, information that there were no idlers among the Incas, information about mutual lice removal among children, information that old people who could no longer work took on the role of scarecrows in the fields and information about hunting. Also mostly referring to the past is information about the festival of the Sun or 'inti raymi,' about the health and ritual purification festival or 'citua,' about the 'festival of conferral of weapons,' as Karlin calls the festival 'huarachico,' about the festival of the first hair-cutting or 'rutuchico,' and information about a gold chain the Inca ruler Huayna Capac had made for his son Huascar on this occasion. Finally, this also includes information about the origins of the name Peru.

⁶² See Ombeline Dagicour: Political Invention in the Andes: The Peruvian Case. In: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 51, 1 (2014), p. 72.

⁶³ The following summary of information conveyed by Karlin has been drawn from Alma M. Karlin: Eine entschwindene Kultur (August 12, 1920), p. 1–2; Alma M. Karlin: Eine entschwindene Kultur (August 15, 1920), p. 1–2; Alma M. Karlin: Die Hauptfeste, p. 1–3; Alma M. Karlin: Mode und Körperkultur, p. 166; Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 14; 16; 44; 60–61; 71–72; 110–112; 117; 126; 292; Alma M. Karlin: *The Odyssey*, p. 117; Alma M. Karlin: *Tränen des Mondes*, p. 21–22; 31; Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 44–46; 48–51; 55–59.

6 Karlin's Source: Garcilaso's *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*

The question that arises here is: where did Karlin acquire the cultural material on the history of the Incas? As already mentioned, she first came into contact with Inca culture even before her visit to Peru, in Stockholm and Paris. In addition, she later also read about it at the library in Arequipa, as she writes in *The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman*: “The following days passed without incident. [. . .] I spent from two to five in the public library, reading all kinds of old manuscripts about the Children of the Sun and copying old drawings.”⁶⁴ In her works, Karlin refers to Polo de Ondegardo (approx. 1500–1575) and the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, chroniclers of Peru.⁶⁵ But while the name of the former appears only in the work of travel writing *The Death-Thorn*, spelled wrongly as ‘Ondegano’⁶⁶ and without mention any of his works, Garcilaso is mentioned in the novel *The Idol*,⁶⁷ in *The Death-Thorn*⁶⁸ and in Karlin’s autobiography *Ein Mensch wird [A Human Becomes]*, published posthumously in 2018. In the latter⁶⁹ and in *The Idol*,⁷⁰ Karlin also cites Garcilaso’s work *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* by name. What is more, in *The Idol* this work is presented as of extraordinary importance through the character of Professor Garfeld, an old and famous German archaeologist, who lives and researches in Cusco, and often reads the *Royal Commentaries*:

“Garcilaso de la Vega!”

A short bark, like a military “yes, sir,” then the animal raced up and down the porch, sniffed at tables and chairs, ran through the rooms, got up on its front paws, peered at the bedside table and into the bed, came out again and searched again.

Sieglinde [Professor Garfeld’s niece] rejoiced inwardly.

Then Diana threw three volumes off a chair with her snout, took a thick black-bound book in her teeth and laid it on the professor’s knee.

He patted the dog on the back encouragingly.

“Is this the book?” asked Sieglinde, stepping close to the table to read the title for herself.

It was Garcilaso de la Vega!

⁶⁴ Alma M. Karlin, *The Odyssey*, p. 104.

⁶⁵ For Garcilaso as a transcultural, transatlantic and transandean writer, see Ottmar Ette: Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca oder die Konvivenz der Kulturen. In: Ottmar Ette: *Erfunden/Gefunden: Potsdamer Vorlesungen zur Entstehung der Amerikas*. Berlin: De Gruyter 2022, p. 370–387.

⁶⁶ See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Todesdorn* (2021), p. 20.

⁶⁷ See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 94–95; 108; 186; 261; 309; 321.

⁶⁸ See Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 18; 41; 48.

⁶⁹ See Alma M. Karlin: *Ein Mensch wird*, p. 267.

⁷⁰ See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 94.

“She doesn’t know all the books,” he remarked apologetically, “but she knows this one well. It’s my favorite work!”⁷¹

To what extent did Karlin consult Garcilaso’s *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*? Comparing her information on the Incas to those given by Garcilaso, one can find small discrepancies here and there. For example, she says that Inca women [Figure 4] could not marry before turning 18 and men could not marry before 22,⁷² while Garcilaso says in one place that serfs could marry after the age of 20⁷³ and in another place he sets the age limit at 18 for women and 24 for men.⁷⁴ While Karlin interprets the term ‘coya’ only as ‘princess,’⁷⁵ Garcilaso says that ‘coya’ was primarily used for the ruler’s wife and only secondarily also for her daughters.⁷⁶ And while Karlin reports that Peruvians had superstitiously been pulling dogs’ tails since Inca times so that their squealing would prevent the lunar eclipse,⁷⁷ Garcilaso’s account is similar, though the Incas do not pull the dogs’ tails but beat them.⁷⁸ Sometimes Karlin adds an emphasis that does not exist in Garcilaso’s work. The latter writes about the probationary period of military service among boys, describing a demanding running competition from the hill of Huanacauri to the fortress in Cusco, and reporting that the first ten competitors to reach the finish line were treated with great honour;⁷⁹ Karlin adds that they were served chicha by the Virgins of the Sun.⁸⁰

But much more interesting than discrepancies in information, or Karlin’s provision of information not offered by Garcilaso, is the close similarity of passages in the *Royal Commentaries* and Karlin’s texts about Inca culture. Here are three pairs of examples:

71 Ibid., p. 95.

72 See Alma M. Karlin: *Eine entschwundene Kultur* (August 15, 1920), p. 1.

73 See Garcilaso de la Vega: *Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru: Part One*. Transl. by Harold V Livermore. Austin: University of Texas Press 1966, p. 53–54.

74 Ibid., p. 205. A similar discrepancy can be observed in the ages at which blood was drawn from children, to be used on bread, before the ‘citua’ festival. Garcilaso says the children were between five and ten years old, while Karlin says they were between the ages of eight and ten. Ibid., p. 413; Alma M. Karlin: *Die Hauptfeste*, p. 3.

75 See Alma M. Karlin: *Der Götze*, p. 94; Alma M. Karlin: *The Death-Thorn*, p. 58.

76 See Garcilaso de la Vega: *Royal Commentaries*, p. 63.

77 See Alma M. Karlin: *Im Reiche*, p. 1.

78 See Garcilaso de la Vega: *Royal Commentaries*, p. 118.

79 Ibid., p. 367.

80 See Alma M. Karlin: *Die Hauptfeste*, p. 3.



Figure 4: A photograph of Karlin in Inca-style dress, published in the 1932 edition of her work of travel writing *Einsame Weltreise* [The Odyssey of a Lonely Woman].

*They would take a black lamb [i.e. a young llama], this being the color these Indians preferred above all others for their sacrifices, regarding it as having greater divinity. [. . .] For this reason the kings usually dressed in black: when in mourning, they wore the natural grey-brown color of the wool.*⁸¹

When the drinking was over and the golden cups collected, the crowd went to the place of sacrifice and a black llama was brought, because the black colour was considered particularly sacred, while a dull grey meant mourning.⁸²

In the second passage, Karlin, like Garcilaso in the first, emphasizes the black colour of the llama that was to be sacrificed at ‘inti raymi.’ Immediately after-

⁸¹ Garcilaso de la Vega: *Royal Commentaries*, p. 360, highlighted by J. D.

⁸² Alma M. Karlin: *Die Hauptfeste*, p. 2, highlighted by J. D.

wards, she too, like Garcilaso, explains that black was considered more sacred than other colours in Inca culture. In addition, Karlin, like Garcilaso, notes that gray was associated with mourning – a piece of information that does not really relate to ‘inti raymi.’

*They took the sheep or lamb and placed it with its head facing the east. Its feet were not tied, but it was held by three or four Indians. While still alive, its left side was opened, and by inserting the hand they drew forth the heart, lungs, and entrails, which were plucked forth with the hand and not cut: the whole must come out together from the throat downwards. [. . .] They regarded it as a most happy omen if the lungs came out still quivering [. . .].*⁸³

*The victim's head was turned to the east, and four Indians held it. It was a bad sign if the animal managed to get up during the act of sacrifice. With a sharp piece of quartz, because they did not know iron, the left side of the ribs of the living animal was opened and the heart and lungs were ripped out of the body. It was considered a good omen if all the parts came out intact, and especially auspicious if the heart was still pounding or the lungs were still trembling from the air.*⁸⁴

Here Karlin, like Garcilaso, reports that the head of the llama to be sacrificed during ‘inti raymi’ was turned to the east while four Incas held it. Afterwards, she too, like Garcilaso, notes that the left side of the living animal was opened and the heart and lungs were removed. Furthermore, Karlin, like Garcilaso, points out that if the lungs were still throbbing at that time, it was considered a good sign.

*There was a law that a nun who forfeited her virginity should be buried alive and her accomplice hanged. As they thought it was a small punishment merely to kill a man for so grave an offence as venturing to violate a woman dedicated to the Sun, their god and father of their kings, the law provided that the guilty man's wife, children, and servants should be slain too, together with his kinsmen, his neighbours, and his fellow townsmen, and all his flocks, without leaving a babe or suckling, as the saying is. His village was destroyed and strewn with rocks, and the home and birthplace of so wicked a son left forsaken and desolate and the place accursed, to remain untrampled by the foot of man or beast, if possible.*⁸⁵

*[The] terrible punishment was intended for him who sought to divert a Virgin of the Sun from the path of virtue. He himself was to be hanged, and the Virgin of the Sun, if guilty, to be buried alive, but besides him all his relatives, all the inhabitants of his village, even the livestock of his village, had to die; the trees cut down, the fields destroyed, the houses demolished, and the whole area strewn with salt or sand, so that neither man nor beast should ever visit such a shameful place.*⁸⁶

⁸³ Garcilaso de la Vega: *Royal Commentaries*, p. 360–361, highlighted by J. D.

⁸⁴ Alma M. Karlin: *Die Hauptfeste*, p. 2, highlighted by J. D.

⁸⁵ Garcilaso de la Vega: *Royal Commentaries*, p. 199, highlighted by J. D.

⁸⁶ Alma M. Karlin: *Die Hauptfeste*, p. 1, highlighted by J. D.

In describing the punishment for sexual relations with a Virgin of the Sun, Karlin, like Garcilaso, reports that in such cases the Virgin of the Sun was to be buried alive, while the culprit was to be hanged, his relatives, livestock, and fellow villagers killed, and his village demolished. In addition, Karlin, like Garcilaso, notes that the complete destruction of the culprit's home village should prevent not only any human from ever visiting the area, but also any animals – a piece of information that is rhetorically effective, but not essential to understand the punishment.

There is repeated, virtually exclusive mention of Garcilaso among the chroniclers of Inca history; repeated and exclusive mention of his *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* among the historical writings about Peru; a special place for Garcilaso and the *Royal Commentaries* in the novel *The Idol*; excerpts about Inca culture that are, both in terms of their content and style, very similar to those in the *Royal Commentaries* – all this indicates that Karlin was very familiar with at least the first part of the work, which recounts the history of Peru up to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. It can be assumed that she also, at least to a certain degree, used the work as her source even where the cultural material she provides is too dispersed to allow definitive proof of Garcilaso's influence. Indeed, the material on the Incas contained in the *Royal Commentaries* had been accessible in the German-speaking world for at least 130 years⁸⁷ by the time Karlin published her works related to Peru. Yet it seems that, by intertwining this material with the material drawn from her travel experiences, she was able to convey it to a much broader readership than any previous edition of Garcilaso's work.

7 Conclusion

Against the background of Küpper's network theory of cultural production, Alma M. Karlin has been considered in this article as a cultural agent between Peru and Central Europe. It has been shown that she visited Peru rather by chance on her journey around the world in 1920. Already during her stay in Arequipa, she regularly transmitted cultural material about Peru to her home town of Celje. The rest of German-speaking Europe gained access to this material through her works

⁸⁷ The first German translation of Garcilaso's *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* was published in 1787/88. See Garcilaso de la Vega: *Geschichte der Ynkas, Könige von Peru: Von der Entstehung dieses Reichs bis zu der Regierung seines letzten Königes Atahualpa*. Transl. by Gottfried Conrad Böttger. Nordhausen: Groß 1787/88.

published between 1930 and 1935, when she became one of the most popular travel writers in the German language.

Following Karlin's motto that the purpose of her round-the-world trip was to convey her knowledge and travel experiences to her compatriots, and, ultimately, to all of humanity, all her works that refer to Peru have been examined. Representative cultural material has been extracted, synthesized, and categorized into information concerning the present, specifically the 1920s, or concerning the past, specifically the period of the Inca Empire.

While the information from the first category – the present – mainly relates to everyday street life in Arequipa, interestingly no information could be found about the socio-political developments in Peru at that time. As far as information about the Inca Empire is concerned, a review of the status of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega in Karlin's writings and a comparison of several passages from her works and Garcilaso's *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* suggest that Karlin made extensive use of the latter as a source.