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Cartooning the inverse zoo: The forgotten comic art of Kurt Wiese

International Journal of Comic Art, 2023; 25(1):197-217

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15 April 2024

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/140542>

Cartooning the inverse zoo: The forgotten comic art of Kurt Wiese

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Accepted version

Published in *The International Journal of Comic Art* vol. 25, no. 1 (2023)

The Inverse Zoo of Internment Camps

Kurt Wiese, one of the most celebrated children's book illustrators in America during the interwar period, began his artistic career in an unlikely way: as a cartoonist in a dusty World War I internment camp in rural Australia. Wiese was a German citizen who had been working as a merchant in China before being turned over to the British at the start of the war. He became one of more than 5,000 civilian 'enemy aliens' who were interned in Australia between 1914 and 1919, and he used this time to become an artist (Monteath 2018). His first published work in what would be a half-century career were for the *Kamp Spiegel*, a weekly newspaper published by the internees. In one cartoon from 30 July 1916, a German prisoner's eyes stare past strands of barbed wire to meet the gaze of a kangaroo who gazes back like a reflection. Their eyes mirror each other: beady pinprick dots under the eaves of arched eyebrows. This cartoon brings Wiese's career-spanning fascination with the relationship between humanity and animals into sharp focus alongside the experience of living in an internment camp.



Figure 1: A Kurt Wiese cartoon for the *Kamp Spiegel*, vol 1 issue 17 (30 July 1916).

This cartoon of an inverse zoo is captioned by a poem, which reads:

(German)	(English translation)
Stehst du zu Hause einst in Zoo. Und siehst Dir au das kanguru Danu denke dran soie andersaroo Das Kangaru besah den Mann.	There stands for you a house in a zoo. And when you spy the kangaroo Your thoughts turn then, a switcheroo The kangaroo inspects the men.

The cartoonist's tool of graphic abstraction allowed Wiese to draw an analogy between the eyes of man and marsupial, and the communal regard between species pictured here is the foundation for much of Wiese's substantial oeuvre. Wiese, who drew pictures for hundreds of children's books in American between 1928 and his death in 1974, is normally regarded as an illustrator, rather than a cartoonist. However, in this article I argue that the idiom of cartoon abstraction that Wiese developed while in internment is a thread that runs through Wiese's career, including some of his best-known work (particularly the "Freddy the Pig" series written by Walter R Brooks). In this article, I trace this thread primarily by analysing Wiese's artwork outside of children's literature: his cartoons for the internment camp newspaper in Australia, animated films he directed in Germany after the war, experimental paintings he produced in Brazil, and finally a pitch for a syndicated comic strip he co-created shortly after his arrival in America. This article argues that Wiese's experiences in internment profoundly affected his development as an artist, and continue to reverberate in children's illustration.

I became intrigued with Kurt Wiese's work after encountering the striking cartoons he drew while interned in Australia, where he worked alongside the proto-autobiographical graphic novelist C. Friedrich (Humphrey and Walsh 2021). This fascination spurred a visit to Friedrich's archives at the University of Oregon, which houses a substantial collection of his original artwork. I discovered there a fascinating trove of material which shows that the strand of cartooning that Wiese picked up in Australia persisted throughout his early work, as first a cartoonist in the Australian internment camp, an animation director in Germany, a painter in Brazil, and finally the artist of a comic strip in the United States. Most of this artwork has not been seen outside of this archive.

Today, Wiese perhaps is best remembered as the illustrator of the Freddy the Pig novels, a series of lightly satirical adventure novels about barnyard animals that read like a cross between Mark Twain, *Animal Farm* and *Silly Symphonies* (Cart 1989; Speth 1979; Zhang 2011). However, these are far from his only works. Wiese was one of the most prolific illustrators of children's books in the United States of the 1930s-1950s: he wrote and illustrated two Caldecott Honour books (1946, 1948), received the Newbery Medal in 1933, illustrated three other Newbery Honour books (1936, 1948 and 1949), and provided the illustrations for two books that were adapted into feature films by Walt Disney (The English translation of Felix Slatten's *Bambi* (1928, adapted as the film in 1942), and Sterling North's *Midnight and Jeremiah* (1943), about a farm boy who adopts a sheep, adapted as *So Dear to My Heart* (1948), a live-action/animation hybrid). He worked on a wide variety of projects, from fables to instructional books, and was a stylistic chameleon, just as adept at bouncy cartoon characters as detailed and realistic illustrations. However, if there is one aspect that defines Wiese as an *auteur*, it is his sympathetic way of picturing animals, a characteristic that can be seen as early as the inverse zoo cartoon discussed above.

A second major theme in his oeuvre is travel and many of his books sought to paint an image of faraway countries for young American readers. In the era of the League of Nations, there was a strong interest in children's literature with a liberal, internationalist perspective (Levstik 1990; O'Sullivan 2016; Time 1943). In this regard, Wiese's passport was a selling point for publishers. It hardly mattered that some of his voyages were involuntary; his travels through Europe, Asia, Australia and South America were a marker of authenticity (Cann 1934; Claes 2009). In hindsight, this trust in his vision seems inadequate. His depictions of Asia, South America and Africa don't stand up to modern scrutiny, and they are often littered with both ethnic stereotypes and the casual racism that was common in children's literature at the time.

In his children's book work that depicts non-Western people, his that fascination with the humanity animals manifests in a more uncomfortable way, as his gaze becomes fondly anthropological and sometimes paternalistic. If in Wiese's work animals and humans mutually regard each other as equals, they are nevertheless separated by a spectrum of civilisation. Along this spectrum, Western people are at one end, wild animals are at the other, and non-Western people are somewhere in the middle. This is a coloniser's logic, and it poisons many of his best-known books. Nevertheless, although Wiese worked on books about many countries, and nearly every American state, most of his biggest critical and commercial successes in his lifetime were with books about China.

In particular, Wiese specialised was Chinese folk tales, writing and illustrating *Liang and Lo*, a storybook, and *The Chinese Ink Stick*, a chapter book, both for Doubleday. Although Wiese had lived in China for years, his books on the country are thoroughly have a thoroughly orientalist outlook, coloured by a haze of nostalgia. Both of his Caldecott Honor books, his Newberry Medal and one of his three Newbery Honor books are about China (one of the other Newbery Honors is about Tibet). His most-remembered book, *The Story of Ping* combines his two major literary themes, as an animal fable set in China (Dalglish 1933). *Five Chinese Brothers* (1938), another fable he illustrated, which was illustrated by Claire Bishop, was found to be the most popular children's book about China more than three decades after its publication (Wong 1971), and remained influential into the 21st century (Zhang 2011). Although well-regarded in their day (Ewing 1934; Greer 1943; Lee 1931), since the 1970s, many of these books have been re-evaluated and are now considered culturally insensitive at best (Aoki 1981; Thananopavarn 2014; Wong 1971; Zhang 2011). Although I won't be focusing on Wiese's works about China in this article, it is important to note that his works were part of how Chinese people were conceived in the American popular imagination, particularly during the 1940s and 1950s.

Wiese lived in China for about six years as a young man. Although he had desired as a child to become an artist, his family pressed him into business a merchant. He moved to China and worked this trade there from roughly 1909 until 1914. Wiese would have been in the country for the tumultuous period that marked the end of the Qing dynasty and the early years of the Republic of China. However, at the outbreak of World War I, he was captured by the Japanese, and turned over to the British as a prisoner of war. Wiese spent time first in a Hong Kong internment camp, and then was eventually transferred to Australia, where he lived in a series of internment camps until 1919.

Wiese's cartoons from the *Kamp Spiegel* newspaper

Wiese regarded his time in the Australian internment camps as a crucible for his development as an artist. He was held in a series of internment camps for prisoners of war and enemy aliens who were primarily of German heritage. Prisoners in these camps were faced with indefinite detention until the end of the war. While some of these internees were Australian residents who had been detained because of their cultural background, Wiese had never previously set foot in Australia. In later biographical statements, he claimed that the beauty of the Australian fauna and natural landscape fuelled his imagination and latent ambitions as an artist. This natural beauty alone was not the reason for his development as an artist: the camps also provided Wiese with an unexpected release from his obligations to his family's business.

Wiese's imprisonment ironically gave him freedom to establishing an identity as an artist. He was not alone in this transformation. During World War I, the internees in Australia's German Concentration Camps developed strikingly robust artistic and cultural programs. His fellow internees included the Bavarian documentary photographer Paul Dubotzki, and the pioneering autobiographical cartoonist C. Friedrich, as well as dozens of other painters, musicians and actors. Wiese spent time in at least two different camps: Holsworthy, the largest internment camp, Trial Bay, which lodged some of the more privileged internees. Both camps had theatres and artists' workshops, and Holsworthy had an orchestra. The internment camps were by no means an artists' paradise. While Australian officials used the artistic life of the camps to promote an image of internment as civilised and beyond reproach, some internees wrote miserably of its conditions (Trojan 1922).

Absent his time in the German Concentration Camps (G.C.C.), Wiese's artistic development would have been quite different, and quite possibly non-existent. His first published artwork most likely appeared in the Holsworthy G.C.C. newspaper, the *Kamp Spiegel*. The internee-run newspaper was established in April 1916 and began running a cartoon illustration in most issues beginning with its eleventh issue. The first month's cartoons were all by Kurt Wiese.

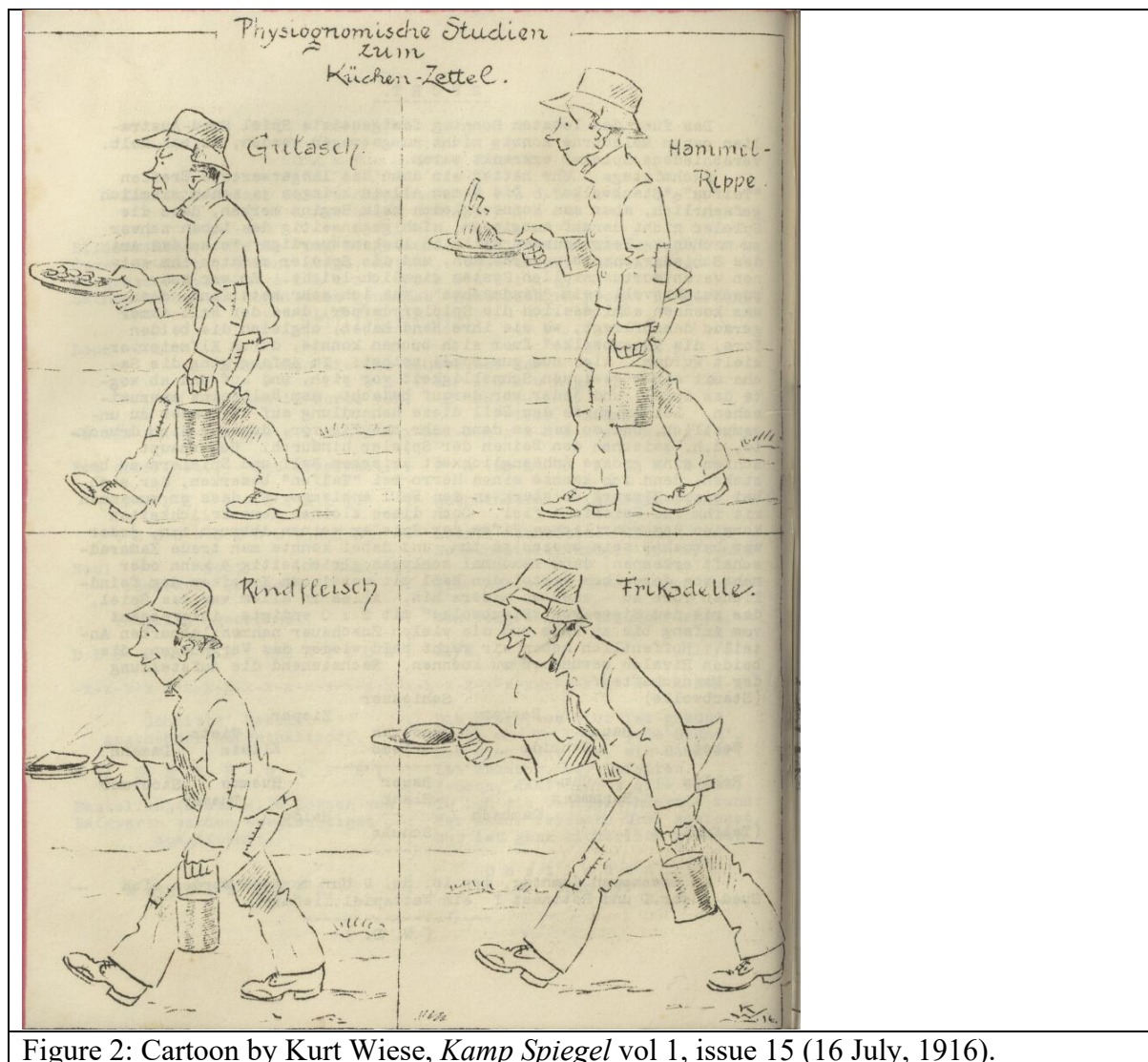


Figure 2: Cartoon by Kurt Wiese, *Kamp Spiegel* vol 1, issue 15 (16 July, 1916).

One of Wiese's first cartoons for the *Kamp Spiegel* depicts a sequence of a man walking with a billy can and a plate of food from the G.C.C. canteen. Each panel highlights a different type of food, and the sequence is ordered by preference for the dish provided – from Goulash, which receives a resigned scowl, to Frikadelle (meatballs) which the internee regards in a state of drooling ecstasy. Camp food is a typical target for cartoons drawn in internment camps, as camp menus often lacked in variety, quantity and/or nutritional benefits. At the G.C.C., the best dishes were only occasional available, and often limited to those who managed to find a place at the front of the dinner line. As Wiese's cartoon suggests, there was always plenty of goulash. Wiese's talent for depicting his characters emotions through posture and just a few lines of facial expressions is evident from this first cartoon, and the sequential ordering of the panels even suggests the simple progression of a children's story. Wiese's cartoon manages to align with these complaints while also projecting a kind of skewed optimism – note that the progression of the strip ends on a positive note, with the most desirable dish in the final panel. There is a dark humour here, as the ravenous Frikadelle-holder, attired in patched clothes, strolls across the dusty camp to find a place to eat his meagre feast. Although pleased with his good luck, he has nevertheless been reduced to regarding a single meatball as a delicacy. Nevertheless, Wiese composes the strip so that it

ends with the most desirable dish, and this progression gives the strip a skewed sense of optimism, a quality that would permeate most of his later work.

Similar to Wiese's first 'frikadelle' strip, most subsequent cartoons in the *Kamp Spiegel* by Friedrich and other artists are focused on the politics and frustrations of daily life in the camp. Wiese's interests however, appear to lay elsewhere. One of the cartoons that Wiese provided the *Kamp Spiegel* was a skilfully rendered menagerie of dogs, accompanied by a poem, presumably by Wiese himself. The poem, "Dogs Behind The Barbed Wire Fence," is addressed to the dogs who bark outside the camp at all hours. It extolls them to stop barking senselessly and instead report for the morning role call like the detainees do: "If you do the same as we do, you too will have mutton bones every lunchtime". The joke ends up being that the dogs don't need to obey this exhortation, because their lives are already better than what the internees experience in the camps. The combination of poem and drawing demonstrates Wiese's affinity for drawing animals, and his interest in pairing text and drawings that would eventually serve him well in the world of children's literature.

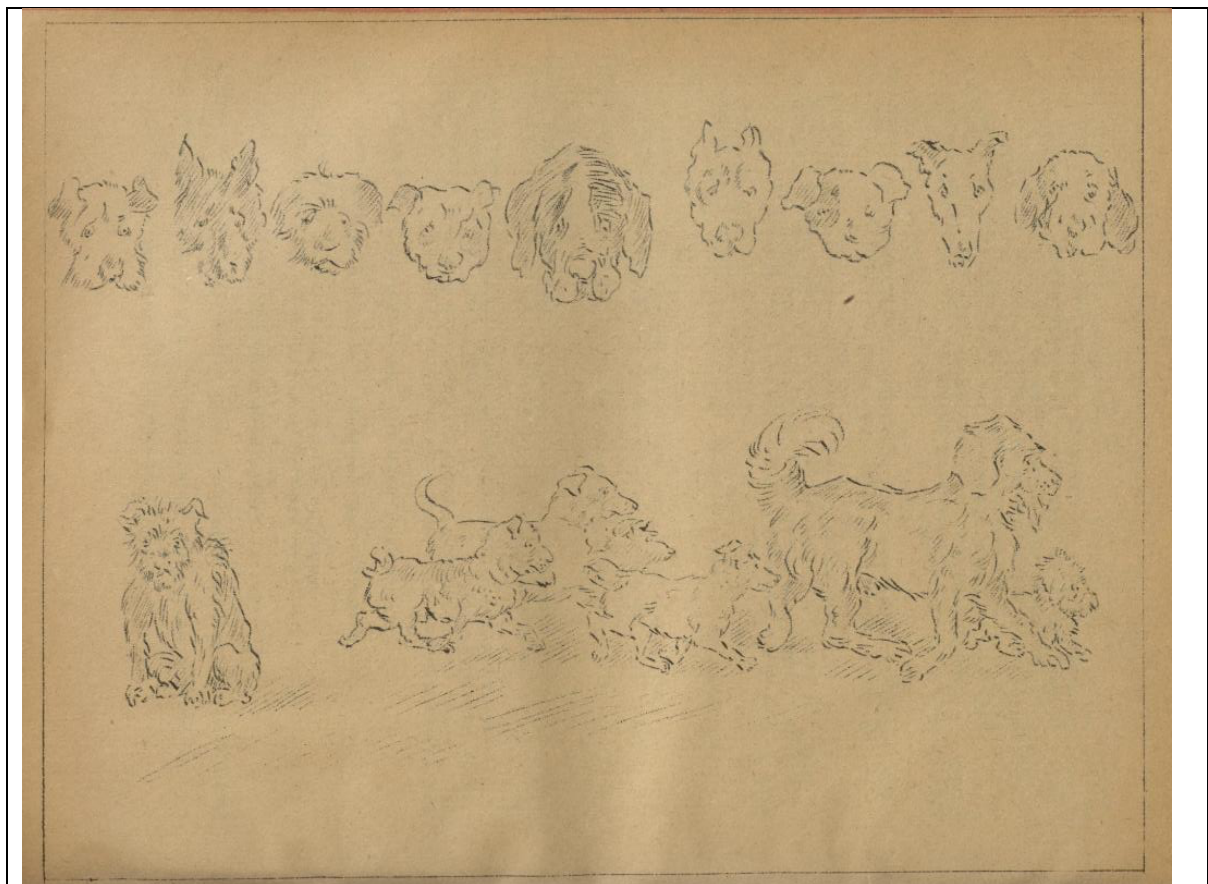


Figure 3: Cartoon by Kurt Wiese, *Kamp Spiegel* vol 1, issue 27 October 8, 1916

Animation director for Hagenbeck Studios

After the war Wiese was deported initially to Africa and eventually returned Germany, the homeland he had left more than a decade prior. He was now in his early thirties, with a drive to make a new life for himself as an artist. He quickly realised this ambition when he sold a whole production of art made in internment to a German publisher. Although it seemed like "a big success," as Wiese reflected later, the project became hampered by the economic realities of postwar Germany and sadly never saw print (Wiese 1930). Nevertheless, Wiese

spent several years in Germany after the war, and embarked on a career in the burgeoning field of animation as a director for a new film studio established by the world famous animal trader and zoo director John Hagenbeck (b. 1866). Heralded as the “world's greatest animal hunter” (Star Tribune, Minneapolis 28 Jan 1904), Hagenbeck had recently returned to Germany after spending more than a decade as a plantation owner in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. His studio produced 24 films between 1919 and 1923, including six animated shorts directed by Wiese.

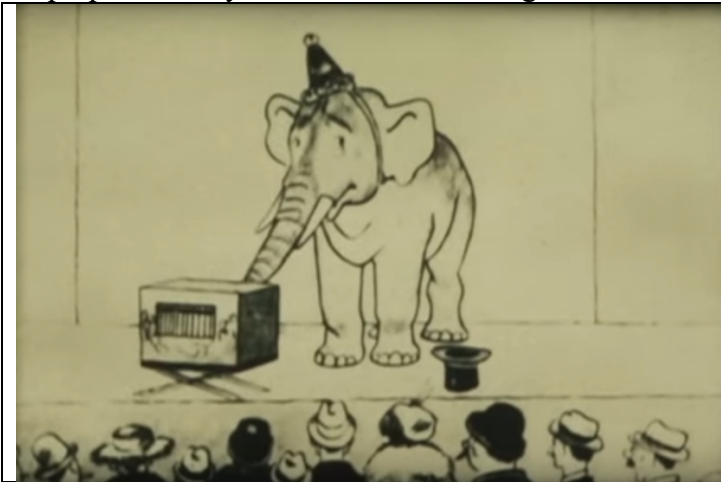
Given his experiences in the ‘inverse zoo’ of internment, it’s easy to speculate that Wiese had mixed feelings about his employer. John Hagenbeck lived in the shadow of his older half-brother, Carl Hagenbeck (b. 1844), who is still regarded as the father of the ‘modern zoo’. Both Hagenbecks were celebrities of their time, but are more infamous today for their work as leading producers of ‘ethnographic exhibitions’, also known as ‘human zoos’. For these exhibitions, the Hagenbecks brought Indigenous peoples to Europe and the United States to be exhibited alongside the flora and fauna of their native lands. These spectacles of exotic foreignness served to reinforce notions of Western civilisation and cultural superiority. Human zoos had been very popular during Wiese’s youth, though they were in decline by the time he returned to Germany. This change was not because changing social mores rendered such displays distasteful, but because the ‘exoticness’ represented by human zoos was being remediated in new ways such as natural history museums, photography and film. This change explains Hagenbeck’s interest in the latter, as he employed Wiese to bring his orientalist adventures to a life in animation.



Figures 4 & 5: Frames from *John Hagenbecks lustige Jagden und Abenteuer Nr. 3: Die Elefantenjagd*

Wiese’s six films for Hagenbeck comprise a series called “John Hagenbecks lustige Jagden und Abenteuer” (John Hagenbeck’s Merry Hunts and Adventures), and each film centres around a cartoon Hagenbeck tracking down a different animal for his zoo. There are episodes about a lion, a polar bear, an elephant, a kangaroo, a monkey, and a rhino. In the elephant episode (the only film that survives) Wiese has Hagenbeck pursue his quarry in a slapstick cartoon chase, which culminates when he ties the elephant’s trunk around a palm tree. The film ends on a final shot of the now-subdued elephant performing sadly in a circus for a small crowd of people. Wiese portrays the elephant with so much sympathy and pathos that the perpetual grin of his nominal hero Hagenbeck (also the film’s its producer and financier) is rendered psychopathically cruel. As with cartooning, animation provided a fitting venue for Wiese’s depiction of the communion between man and animal. The film’s most charming scene occurring when a parrot ends up wearing Hagenbeck’s hat and posing for the camera;

this hat later becomes a nest. This motif reappears at the end of the film, when the elephant is seen wearing a clown's hat for its performance, looking almost pathetically human. It shares the pinprick dot eyes of the man and kangaroo in Wiese's inverse zoo of internment.



Figures 6: Frames from *John Hagenbecks lustige Jagden und Abenteuer Nr. 3: Die Elefantenjagd*

Wiese's experimental Brazilian paintings

The Hagenbeck film studio released its last film in 1923, and that same year Wiese himself migrated to Brazil, claiming later that he was seeking sunshine and paper money. Interestingly, while he spoke publicly about time in internment, he rarely alluded to his German homecoming or work for Hagenbeck. The cartoon idiom that Wiese used for his internment camp comics and in his animations for Hagenbeck began an intriguing transformation in a series of paintings he produced in Brazil, between 1923 and 1925. These oil on board paintings are unique among Wiese's work because of their blend of realism and cartoon abstraction. This style recalls the technicolour whimsy that characterised the animated films of Walt Disney Studio and the Fleischer Brothers in the 1930s and 1940s. However, Wiese's Brazil paintings were ahead of their time in the early 1920s. While the style is certainly indebted to colour Sunday newspaper comics, the blending of the cartoon idiom with painterly realism also has some sympathies with the avant-garde expressionism. The Expressionism movement was in full bloom in Europe during the interwar years, and it is likely that Wiese would have encountered it during his time in Germany after the war. These paintings may be seen as an attempt by Wiese to synthesize the styles of drawing he developed in the G.C.C. into a new, experimental style inspired by the vanguard of expressionist painting.



Figure 7: Untitled oil on board painting by Kurt Wiese, circa 1923. University of Oregon archives.

While Wiese is certainly no Matisse or Rousseau, his Brazil paintings nevertheless are beguiling in their use of colour, form and composition. One painting features a steam ship leaving port. A crowd of well-wishes waves handkerchiefs from the dock, while the ship's passengers wave back in reply, in such volume that the ship struggles to contain their farewell and tilts comically toward the dock. While the ship and the ocean it floats on seem realistic, the people on the ship are little more than shapes: a chorus of pale circle heads, rectangular arms and repeating dashes of white paint standing for handkerchiefs. The people on the dock appear as cartoon parodies of the post-impressionist posters of Toulouse-Lautrec, reduced down to shapes of mauve, umber and cadmium yellow, with the bulbous noses of Hearst comic strip characters. It is an experimental work, which combines elements of post-impressionism, cubism, painterly illustration and cartoon physics.



Figure 8: Untitled oil on board painting by Kurt Wiese, circa 1923-1927. University of Oregon archives.

Many paintings from this period are clearly inspired by the colours, animal and people or Brazil. Wiese depicts jungles, parrots, tapirs and fruit sellers with a warmth and vibrancy that is rarely matched in his other works. The use of colour in Wiese's children's books was limited by the commercial considerations of the day, when children's books were printed with only one or two tones of ink to keep cover prices low.

Travel is a frequent theme in these paintings. Another painting from this period depicts an ocean liner. In the top right corner, gazing over the stern of the ship, we see a man in khaki fatigues with a hand outstretched, as if demonstrating the vastness of the ocean to his companion, a woman in a gently billowing pink shawl. These characters are composed like newspaper cartoon characters, with Wiese's trademark dots for eyes, and flat, simplified features. Wiese imbues them with expressions of hope, as if their journey is one filled with the promise of a better future. Below these figures, a cascade of clouds directs our attention to a seagull making a desperate dive towards the ocean. It glides beak agape straight towards a tin can, the most buoyant piece of trash in the chum of garbage churning in the wake of the liner's hull. In contrast to the man's optimistic smile, the bird's open mouth is frenzied and wild, ploughing towards a perilous collision: one set of dotted eyes pointed upwards, one set other directed down. This relationship between the eyes of humans and the eyes of animals is perhaps the defining theme of Wiese's entire career. He was equally able to draw out empathy and emotion for human and animals with little more than the cartoonist's technique

of using black dots of eyes. Here, as well as in many of his later works, he uses the simplicity of that technique to suggest an equal regard for the lives of man and beast.

Wiese's composition directs us toward further parallels between these two creatures through the repeated motifs of a concave angle. The inside of the seagull's wing makes a concave angle that is mirrored by the angle made by the man's inner arm, and these angles are set almost exactly diagonal from each other, with only empty sky between them. These mirrored concave angles suggest an unsettling link between the fate of the optimistic couple and that of the doomed seagull. These shapes are echoed in the angles formed by the seagull's wide open beak and the mouth of the tin can: two voids facing each other, beckoning towards mutual disaster. Wiese builds the entire composition around variations of this concave angle: the rudder of the ocean liner looming in the right-hand third of the painting, cutting through waves, which are themselves also concave angles, endlessly cresting over each other, until they are subsumed into pollution of the ship's debris that crowds the bottom of the frame.

This painting hints at a pessimism that begins to appear in Wiese's Brazil paintings despite their vibrancy. Although I find these paintings fascinating, the fact that they remain in Wiese's archives at the University of Oregon along with his personal papers and notebooks indicates that they were not sold, and perhaps never put on sale. One way or another, this experimental mix of styles did not find an audience in Brazil, and Wiese eventually moved north.

Hobbs and Hink: Wiese's attempt at an American newspaper strip

After about three years living in Brazil, Wiese arrived in the United States around 1927, the year he turned forty. Wiese spoke of "travelling through the canyons of Manhattan" looking for work (Wiese 1930). One of the first routes he appears to have ventured down was an



Figure 9: Untitled oil on board painting by Kurt Wiese, circa 1923-1927. University of Oregon archives.

attempt at a syndicated comic strip. In the University of Oregon archives there is a press pack from the Metropolitan News Service syndicate for a strip called Hobbs & Hink Adventures, Inc, drawn by Wiese and written by children’s author Julius King. The press pack includes a synopsis, character bios and about a month’s worth of strips, but it’s not clear if any newspaper actually picked up the feature. The steam ship painting discussed above seems to have been a direct inspiration for a panel of the second strip.



Figure 10: Hobbs and Hink strip by Julius King and Kurt Wiese, University of Oregon archives

The strip revolves around Hobbs, a feckless treasure-hunter, and Hink, a novelist who resolves to follow Hobbs to get ideas for stories. They are accompanied by Hobb’s dog Woof and Hink’s pet leopard Susie. The premise of the strip is lightweight, though good natured, but Wiese’s cartooning is the selling point rather than the frictionless plot.

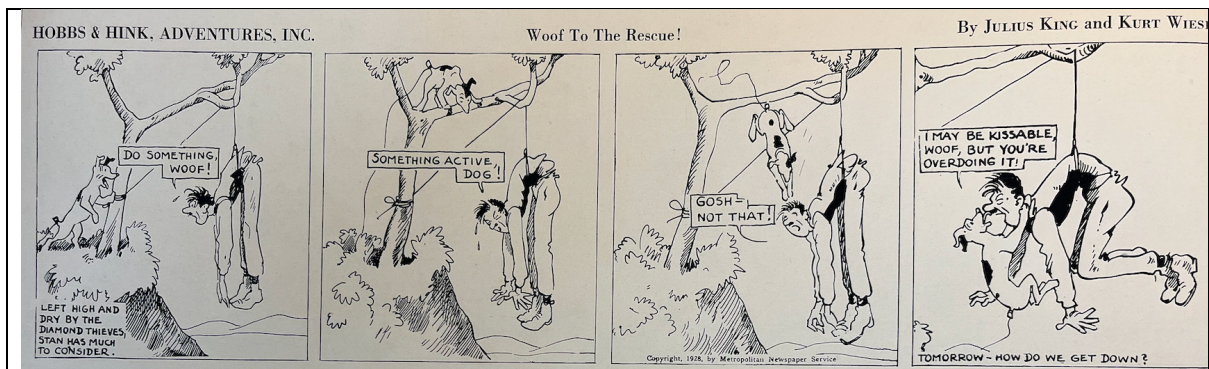


Figure 11: Hobbs and Hink strip by Julius King and Kurt Wiese, University of Oregon archives

The team-up between a writer and a world-traveller seems to be somewhat based on the relationship between the strip’s co-creators. Hink fervently desires to be an ‘author’, but lacks inspiration, and it’s easy to see a parallel between himself and King whose bio in the press pack notes that of all his roles in life it is ‘author’ which ‘rolls the best off the tongue’, although his published works only include books like “More Birds in Rhyme”, “Dogs” and “ABCs of Birds”. In the strip, Hink finds inspiration in the globetrotting Hobbs, and likewise Wiese’s life seems to have provided some of the basis for King’s plots, as the first story takes place in Brazil. Some panels are drawn directly from Wiese’s paintings, including the steamship painting discussed above.

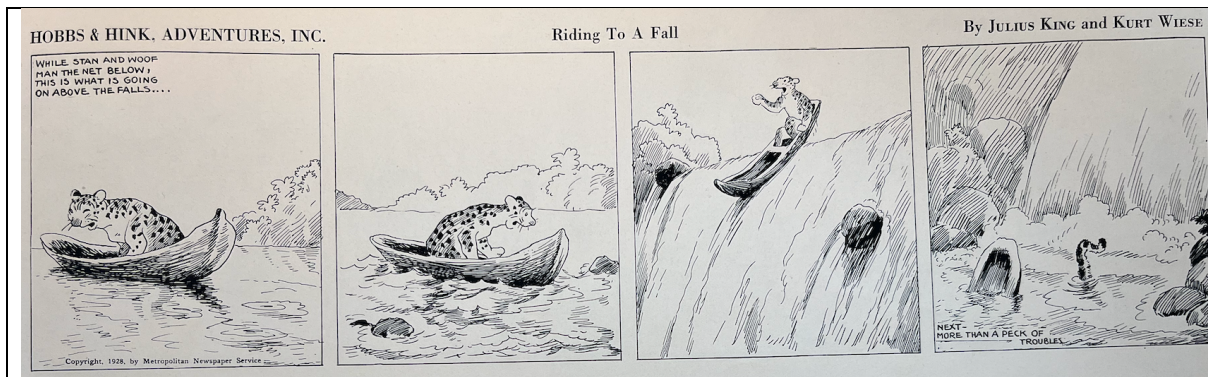


Figure 12: Hobbs and Hink strip by Julius King and Kurt Wiese, University of Oregon archives

If Hobbs and Hink makes literal the commodification of Wiese’s overseas adventures, a subtle force throughout the rest of his publishing career, it also shows that this trekking alone is not what make Wiese a bankable illustrator. The strip’s location never feels authentic or specific, but the expressiveness of Wiese’s figures carry the day. As always, Wiese’s most charming sequences involve the animals interacting with (or acting like) humans: Woof licking Hobbs’ face instead of rescuing him, Susie the jaguar inadvertently going for jaunt down a waterfall in a canoe, or a galloping tapir unexpectedly barrelling Hobbs onto its back as a passenger. In the latter sequence, the dots and double lines that Wiese uses to indicate the eyes of Hobbs, Woof and the Tapir mirror each other poetically, and Hobb’s protruding cartoon nose seems to resemble the proboscis of the tapir that he’s unexpectedly mounted.

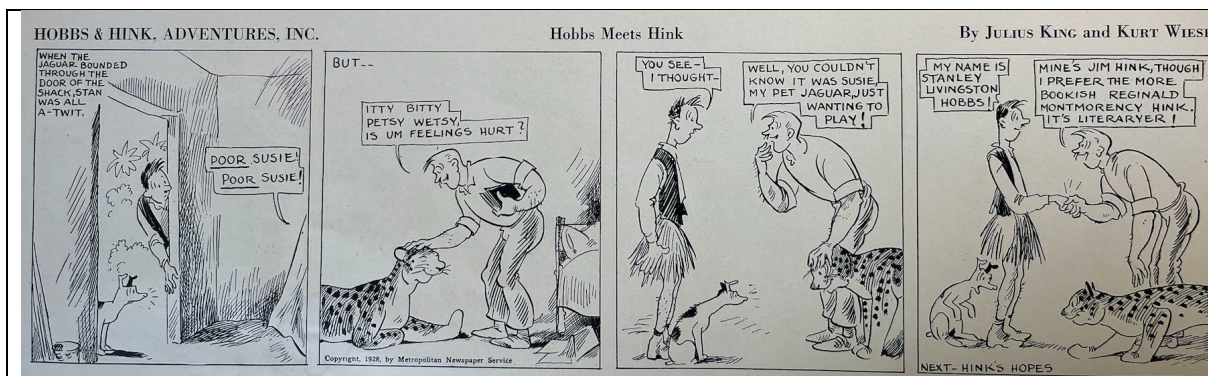


Figure 13: Hobbs and Hink strip by Julius King and Kurt Wiese, University of Oregon archives

While the context and the scenario are different between Hobbs and Hink and the ‘inverse zoo’ cartoon that Wiese drew in internment roughly 15 years prior, the parallel eyes of man and beast remain the focal point. In this switcheroo, where a Tapir becomes a steed, as in so much of his best cartooning and illustration Wiese uses the abstracted language of cartoons to ask: Who exactly is in charge here? What is civilised, who is wild? Is there any difference? His simple, but precisely placed pinprick eyes suggest that we are connected, as long as we can see each other.



Figure 14: Untitled oil on board painting by Kurt Wiese, circa 1923-1927. University of Oregon archives.



Figure 15: Hobbs and Hink strip by Julius King and Kurt Wiese, University of Oregon archives

Early children's book illustrations

Whether Hobbs and Hink was ever picked up in a newspaper, its existence was short-lived. On the contrary, Wiese's career as a children's illustrator ramped up quickly. Also in 1928, he provided illustrations for the first English translation of Felix Slaten's *Bambi*, which became a hit for publishers Simon & Schuster. Unlike the cartoon styles discussed throughout this article, for *Bambi* he used a stippled crayon lithography to create a delicate, ethereal look. He employed this as well in in *Karoo the Kangaroo*, a children's book also written by Wiese in a lyrical style not unlike Slaten's prose, and published by Coward-McCann in 1929. This was the first of a series of picture books written and illustrated by Wiese about young animals: *Karoo* was followed by *Buddy the Bear* (about a koala), *Wallie the Walrus*, and *Ella the Elephant*. Wiese also illustrated several other books with naturalist themes (ie Peary's *Tooktoo the Reindeer*, and Kellock's *Down in the Grass*). The tissue-thin pointillist style he used on *Bambi*, *Karoo* and some of these other books is impressive, but lacks the wit or vitality of Wiese's best drawings. Crucially, these animals seem to be designed to be looked at, but they don't seem to do much looking themselves. Their eyes are glassy, taxidermied.

 <p data-bbox="225 510 619 548">"Excuse me," said the woodpecker, "but I always have to laugh when I see you deer acting like that."</p>		 <p data-bbox="1102 566 1369 582">A little field mouse looked as big as a cow.</p>
<p>Figure 16: Kurt Wiese illustration for <i>Bambi</i> (1928)</p>	<p>Figure 17: Kurt Wiese illustration for <i>Karoo the Kangaroo</i> (1929)</p>	<p>Figure 18: Kurt Wiese illustration for <i>Down in the Grass</i> (1929).</p>

This was a period when children's books were being taken quite seriously in America. Lynd Ward, famous for his 'wordless novels' of woodcut engravings like *God's Man* (1929) and *Madman's Drum* (1930), wrote in 1930 that the modern book illustrator was distinguished by being "very seriously concerned with his work as a serious art" (Ward 1930), and there is a seriousness to Wiese's work in the first few years of his career, a sense of his pictures being precisely designed. He would summon this style as needed throughout his career, but by the early 1930s his illustration became looser. *Freddy the Detective* (1932, written by Walter Brooks) and *Honk the Moose* (1935, written by Phil Strong) showcase delightfully comic and expressive animals and a style that borrow more from his earlier work as a cartoonist and animator. Wiese's work for Brooks' books showcased this development towards a gentler, less stoic visual style not just in Wiese's own work, but in children's illustration in general at the start of the 1930s.

Freddy the Pig

The first book in what would become known as the Freddy the Pig series, *To and Again* (1927), chronicles the fanciful adventures of a group of farm animals who decide to vacation in Florida. It was written by Brooks and illustrated not by Wiese, but by the Mexican artist Adolfo Best-Maugard in an iconic wood-block style. Best-Maugard's illustrations are precisely composed, if at times deliberately comical in their primitivism. It is a style Lynd Ward would have approved of.

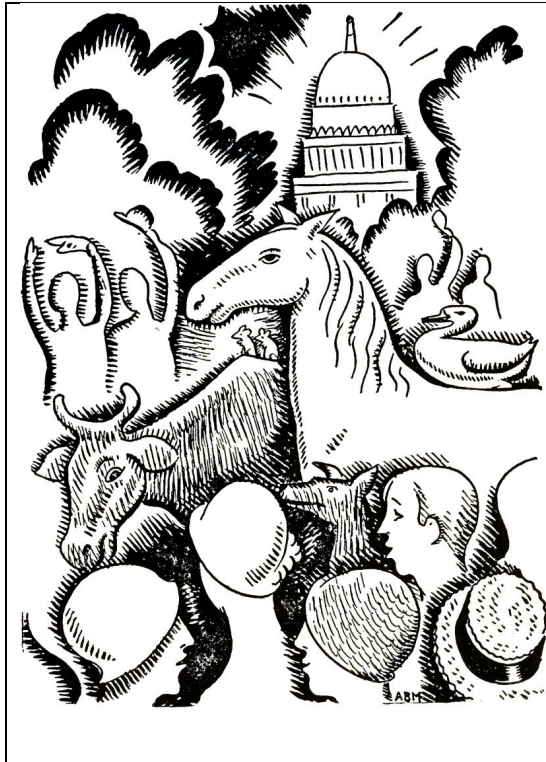


Figure 19: Adolfo Best-Maugard illustration for *To and Again* (1927).



Figure 20: Adolfo Best-Maugard illustration for *To and Again* (1927).

Wiese took over with the second book in the series, *More to and Again* (1930), in which the animals travel to the North Pole. Wiese presumably was hired for this job off of the strength of books like *Bambi* and *Karoo the Kangaroo*, and he dutifully provides realistic illustrations of animals, which are much less idiosyncratic than Best-Maugard's work. However, the more Brooks' text anthropomorphises the animals, calling upon them to talk, scheme and solve problems, the looser Wiese's drawing becomes. A cow jumps out of a barn with a porcupine on its back, and Wiese draws them in full flight, with the cow's mouth curled into a grin, and the porcupine's body reassembling a pair of spiky wings.



Figure 21: Kurt Wiese illustration for *More To and Again* (1930).

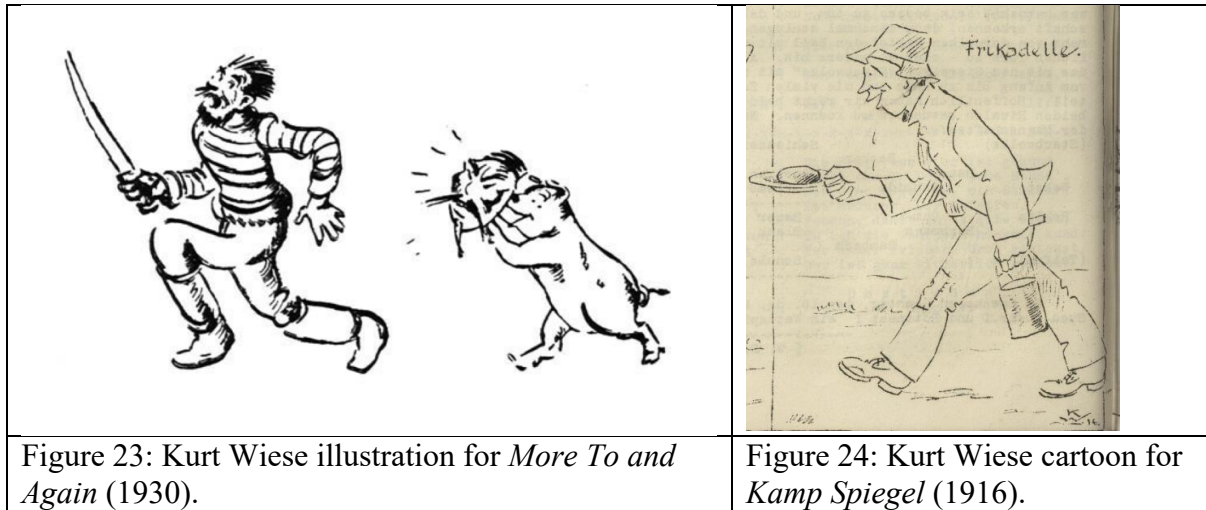


Figure 22: Kurt Wiese illustration for *More To and Again* (1930).

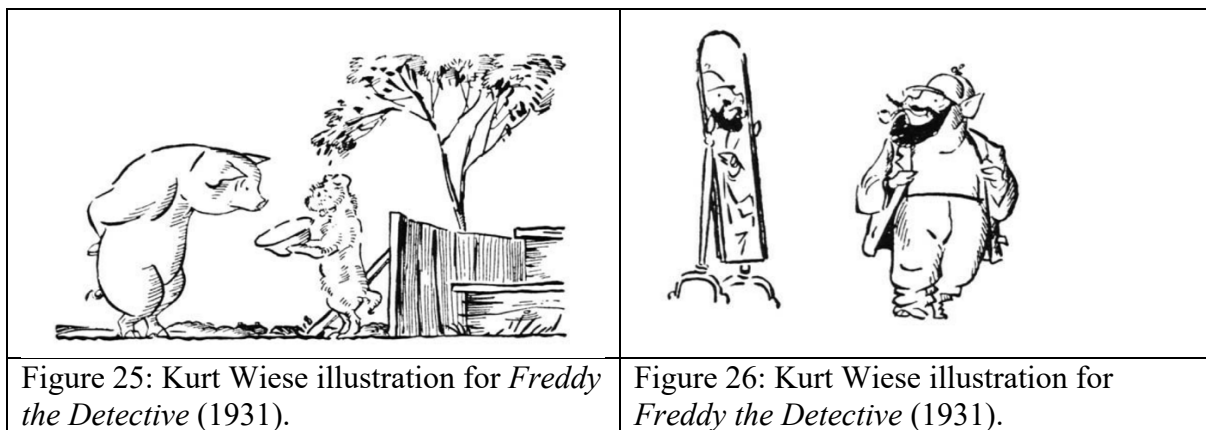
Wiese's first drawing of Freddy for this book are perhaps too pig-like, as he looks through a window with a heavily shaded snout that suggests that Wiese struggled with his visage (Figure 23). The rendition of Freddy that Wiese would adopt for the rest of the series emerges when Freddy dons a human mask to frighten a sailor. The pig strides on two legs, and appears more human than either the mask he holds, or the sailor he chases. His open-mouth grin recalls Wiese's internee who has been served Frikadelle, and the unadorned line work also marks a return to the style that Wiese used for the *Kamp Spiegel*.



Figure 23: Kurt Wiese illustration for *More To and Again* (pg 174, 1930).



For the third book in the series, *Freddy the Detective* (1932) Brooks put Freddy in the spotlight, and Wiese's rendition of the pig hit its stride. The book starts out simple enough, as Freddy becomes enamoured of detective novels and sets out to solve crimes. However, as the barnyard has no system of government, he realises that finding clues and identifying suspects is not enough. The book becomes a satire of law and justice as the animals must also set up a court to conduct trials, and a jail to hold prisoners. One wonders both whether the book was an inspiration for Orwell's darker take on barnyard governance (*Animal Farm*, 1945), and whether the arbitrary nature of Brooks' barnyard jail reminded Wiese of the Australian internment where his artistic career began. Certainly, Wiese's illustrations, which once again muse on the humanity of animals, seem to reflect his experiences behind barbed wire. He would continue to draw this version of Freddy the pig, a barnyard poet with a penchant for solving problems by dressing up as a human, for the rest of his long career. Wiese would illustrate hundreds of children's books over the next four decades, working from his farmhouse in New Jersey. His time as a world traveller and aspiring artist had come to a close.



The development of American graphic novels has been indelibly shaped by the experiences of artists held in internment centres and concentration camps. Spiegelman's *Maus* was inspired by autographic illustrated books by Auschwitz prisoners that his mother kept (Spiegelman 2011), Mine Okubo's *Citizen 13360* (Okubo 1983) about her experiences in the Topaz internment camp is a landmark graphic memoir, and even the conceptual cartoonist Saul Steinberg had been interned in an Italian concentration camp only months before he sold his first cartoon to *The New Yorker* in 1941 (Bair 2012). The arc of Wiese's early career

makes it clear that his own experiences in an internment camp in Australia also profoundly affected his long and influential career as a children's book illustrator.

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