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## ARTICLES

Edward G. Fichtner

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### Sigfrid's Merovingian Origins

The basic premise of this article is that the figures of Sigfrid and related characters in the *Nibelungenlied* are not mythical in origin, but are composites, based for the most part on events in the life of Frankish king Sigibert I (535–575) and his contemporaries. Using the historical accounts of Gregory of Tours and Fredegar, this article attempts to show how these figures have been constructed from events in which Sigibert, his queen Brunichilde, her sister Gailswintha, and others played a role.—Two other features of Sigfrid's persona are his relation to Hagen, and his horny skin. The proposed source for Hagen is the Avar chieftain, whose title was “khagan,” and who attacked Sigibert's realm in 561 and 568 with forces containing contingents from Thuringia, referred to in Gregory of Tours's history as “Toringia.” “Hagen von Tronje” is thus derived from “Khagan [. . .] Toringiae.”—Sigfrid's horny skin is interpreted as a disorder called ichthyosis, in which the skin becomes hairy or horny. According to medieval sources, this disease was hereditary in the Merovingian dynasty, and thus presumably active in Sigfrid's case. (EGF)

Johannes Anderegg

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### Wie böse ist der Böse? Zur Gestalt des Mephisto in Goethes *Faust*

Who is Mephisto, this dramatic persona who, with his many faces, is not really a person? What does he represent? The paper examines some of the traditional interpretations of Mephisto as well as his self-portrayal and his art of camouflage. Crucial for the argumentation are the relationships between the Lord and

Mephisto and between Faust and Mephisto and above all the dialogue between Mephisto and Faust on vulcanism (V.10075–10123) together with Goethe's reference to the Epistle to the Ephesians. Thus, the article argues that the biblical concept of the devil is radically transformed by Goethe and that Mephisto is not the epitome of negativity. Rather Mephisto or the Mephistophelian element can be understood as a fundamental and indispensable force in human life and in human society. (JA) (In German)

### **Oliver Lubrich**

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#### **Alexander von Humboldt: Revolutionizing Travel Literature**

Alexander von Humboldt's *Relation Historique du Voyage aux Régions équinoxiales du Nouveau Continent* . . . (1814–1831), an account of his journey to South America (1799–1804), revolutionizes the conventional format of the travelogue. Each central feature carries multiple meanings and thus deprives the text of coherence and stability: 1. The subject (traveler, author, narrator), 2. the object (the countries studied), 3. the addressee (explicit and implicit readers), and 4. the text itself (as a literary genre with specific formats and styles, subject to self-reflection) are polyvalent. A narratological analysis and a structural reading shed light on the ways in which Humboldt's poetics reflect his approach to cultural difference. This travelogue's deconstruction of its own genre de-authorizes imperial forms of colonial writing. "Identities" and "differences" are no longer defined unequivocally from a privileged perspective. (OL)

### **Markus Weidler**

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#### **Toward a New Materialist Semiotics: Undoing the *Dialectic's* Philosophical Hypocrisy**

While the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944; 1947) is often judged to be too limited a cultural critique, it is still widely accepted as pioneering cultural criticism, a mix of critical discourse analysis, hermeneutics, and semiotics. This article contests this reputation by turning to a source that Horkheimer and Adorno are at pains to occlude: Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–29). Drawing on the tradition of eighteenth-century German Christology revived by the Young Hegelians in general and F.W.J. Schelling in particular, Cassirer evolves a critical strategy broader than that in the *Dialectic*, yet clearly implied by it. Most particularly, Cassirer's Schelling analysis discriminates philosophy, art, and religion as forms of knowledge and forms of epistemological critique, where Horkheimer and Adorno recast the art of the *Bildungsbürger* to occlude Cassirer's innovation, a new materialist semiotics that offers cultural critique in the broader terms that the *Dialectic's* critics would favor. (MW)

### **Richard E. Schade**

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#### **Günter Grass's *Mein Jahrhundert*: Histories, Paintings, and Performance**

Günter Grass's text *Mein Jahrhundert* (1999) perplexed readers and critics alike with its unusual narrative. Verifiably important events as well as lesser-known and even fictional happenings make up the chapters, each of which is keyed to

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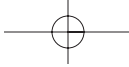
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a specific year of the twentieth century. The history of the century is a disjointed sequence, a highly personal mix. First, the article describes Grass's historiographic stance as well as focusing on his predilection for the depiction of literary figures, including himself. Then, an analysis of the function of the watercolor paintings argues that they reinforce the textual message significantly. Each chapter illustration is a discrete part of a chaotic tangle of events, a jumble represented by the dust jacket art, yet the interspersed 'tangle-paintings' bring order to the chronology of the century. Finally, the evaluation of Grass's public reading to percussion accompaniment from the work in Dresden makes clear that the author selected those chapters that interpreted the century's events meaningfully. Grass performed his text from the stage against the backdrop of the projected watercolors, thereby taking artistic possession of and controlling the meaning of his literary narrative. (RES)

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## From the Editor

Unser mittelfristig angelegtes Projekt *(Re)Readings—New Readings / (Wieder)Gelesen—Neu gelesen* ließ sich prächtig an und hat auch guten Zuspruch gefunden. Der ursprüngliche Plan, die Kolumne *regelmäßig* in jedem Heft zu präsentieren, erwies sich dagegen als zu optimistisch. Das liegt nicht an mangelnden Zusagen von Autorinnen und Autoren, sondern eher daran, daß die Synchronisierung von “alten Hasen” und Kollegen der jüngeren Generation sich schwieriger gestaltete als abzusehen war. Es liegen zu einigen vorgesehenen Titeln bereits seit längerer Zeit Beiträge sowohl älterer als auch jüngerer Kolleginnen und Kollegen vor—nicht aber von beiden zu *denselben* Titeln, d.h. die ‘Paarung’ ist das Problem. Die Lösung liegt offenbar in einer diskontinuierlichen Fortsetzung dieser Kolumne. Wir werden diese Sparte also je nach Manuskriptlage fortführen.

Hans Adler

