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Jens Walther's *Abstieg vom Zauberberg* (1997) – a Literary Reflection on the World of Publishing in the Postmodern World

Abstract:

The world of book publishing is currently undergoing a major paradigm shift, but this was already full under way in the 1990s. In the German novel *Abstieg vom Zauberberg*, published in 1997 by an anonymous author under the pseudonym Jens Walther, we are given an excellent insider view of the concrete situation within literary publishing houses and how they operate behind the scene and in public to secure the best possible titles and to fend off manuscripts that appear to be trivial literature. The author proves to be highly educated in the history of German and western literature at large and also demonstrates great expertise regarding book fairs, book reviews, and book prizes, framing all this by a somewhat twisted love story involving a young author, Anna Becker, and two men, first the young Johannes Rieger, then his father Helmut Rieger, both representing the fictional publishing house Engsfeld.

Key words: book publishing; book market; book fairs; prizes for literature; book reviewers; journalists; contemporary literature; canonical literature; trivial literature; modern theater; TV and literature; the internet and literature

Publishing has never been an easy business, and it requires the cooperation of numerous individuals and entities. The writer/author needs to find a publisher willing to accept the manuscript and to risk a considerable investment, hoping that the reading audience might respond positively to the printed text or book. But once the title has appeared in print, hardly anything happens unless the public/audience learns about the book, so advertisement proves to even more important than the technical production of the book in hundreds or thousands of copies. The literary market represents a highly contested field, especially today with the internet and other media increasingly threatening the traditional print medium. Even large and well-established publishing houses face hard times, although this has not necessarily led to a steady decline of the absolute number of published books every year.

The critical questions then would be: Has the age of the book already come to its end, or would this all be only a premature obituary? Or, even if the world of printed books has not yet experienced its eclipse, can hard-bound copies or generally paper-based publications maintain

their market share compared to internet texts? Has the electronic book, now stored in digital readers or on the internet, taken the lead, or can we rely on the honorable pedigree of the bibliophile product that has determined much of the modern world since the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg in ca. 1450?¹

Interestingly, whatever the future might hold, we find ourselves in the midst of yet another paradigm shift. First, there was the shift from the scroll to the manuscript in late antiquity, then the shift from the manuscript to the incunabulum and the early printed book (ca. 1450-ca. 1500), and now we witness the shift from the printed book to the electronic database. The public discourse concerning this phenomenon is determined in the majority by doomsayers and in the minority by optimists who trust in the enduring quality and value of the printed book, especially when it contains a literary text. Granted, a Kindle reader, or a similar digital gadget, makes available today a stunningly large number of texts anyone might want to read at virtually no cost, but anyone who wants to work with a text more thoroughly knows only too well the superior and lasting quality of the print medium. Nevertheless, we have to wonder whether there will still be libraries in the future as we know them today, or whether that institution will transform entirely into an information center providing data and access points for digital users?

Surprisingly, and to the relief of many, it seems as if the printed book continues to maintain its role in our society, perhaps not so much because of the pragmatic knowledge contained in it in concrete terms, but because of its literary, aesthetic, cultural, ethical, moral, religious, and philosophical significance. Even though electronic versions of books make it cheaper and more easily accessible to consult them in a school or university setting, the pragmatic experience clearly confirms the vast superiority of the printed book both in teaching and in research. Deep reading, as I would call it, needs a printed text.² Also, from a purely technological perspective, anyone who has ever had to rely on electronic books and other texts for research would know only too well of the pain and concrete problems involved in relying on that media exclusively, at least at the present moment.

What do we really know about the current book market, however? How is literature produced, and how is it marketed? What role do editors, copy-editors, reviewers, journalists, or TV moderators of literary shows play in that business? To what extent should a student of literature even engage with issues concerning marketing, advertisement, bestseller lists, book

sales, bookstores, or book fairs? Those all belong simply to the other side of the same metaphorical coin, but we often do not learn enough about them unless we turn to specific economically-driven investigations and examine carefully statistical data about the book market.³ Those data are certainly available online, but can we also rely on other avenues or media? In our day and age, it seems highly advisable that any student earning a degree in the Humanities ought to have taken classes in the practical aspect of the production of literary works as well, although most scholars and teachers know fairly little about the publishing and marketing field, about the differences between regular copyrighted books/texts and open access publications, etc.⁴

The purpose of this paper, hence, is to turn our attention to a German novel published in 1997 under the pseudonym of a Jens Walther, with the title *Abstieg vom Zauberberg* which fully claims its status as a fictional work and yet also sheds important light on the operations and strategies by publishing houses, book vendors, book stores, book fairs, editing, and advertisement, at least in the German context.⁵ This novel, the identity of the author having never been determined, has not received much literary acclaim; on the opposite, the few reviewers have evaluated it fairly negatively, and considering some of the sensationalist aspects in this novel, probably with good reasons. Moreover, as far as I can tell, literary scholarship has entirely disregarded it, and only few major libraries worldwide hold a copy.

I myself happened to find a used copy some ten years ago in a box of books as giveaways in the library of the German cultural office, the Goethe-Institute, Seoul, South-Korea, and I was interested in it only because of the intriguing title, *Stepping Down from the Magic Mountain*, a direct, though negative allusion to Thomas Mann's famous Nobel-Prize-winning novel *Der Zauberberg* (1924; *The Magic Mountain*). We need to keep in mind that Mann himself had admitted at the end of his work that the protagonists, who had stayed in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps, ultimately had to leave and return to the lowlands where the First World War awaited them, an utter betrayal of all the cultural ideals and values advocated up on the mountains in an artificially maintained idyllic clinic-utopia. In Walther's novel, we possibly face a similar form of deconstruction, as the cover image already insinuates. It displays an elegant staircase in an older villa which does not seem to convey an invitation to climb up but rather mirrors the return down from the top floor to sober reality.

The anonymous author is identified on the back inside cover as someone who lives both

in Germany and abroad in Europe. S/he quickly demonstrates a thorough familiarity with the ins and outs of book publishing, at least in Germany, that is, fictional literature, and has sprinkled the entire novel with numerous references to major contemporary German and international authors, some well known in reality, others invented, and others as obvious place-holders of living authors. In the foreground we are confronted with the love story involving the young Anna Becker and, first, a young man, Johannes, the son of the highly esteemed editor-in-chief of the Engsfeld publishing house in Munich, more or less a dandy, and later, after a major conflict with him, an older man, Johannes's own father, Helmut, a development in the novel which has probably turned off many of the reviewers because of the overly sentimental elements.⁶

In the background, however, we are offered a fascinating insider perspective regarding how literature is not simply created through the author's or poet's genius, which is, granted, a fundamental component, but produced by means of very strategic, pragmatic, and material operations in public and in private, at book fairs (Frankfurt a. M.), and in book stores across the country.⁷

Although *Abstieg vom Zauberberg* exists only in its original German, this essay will bring to light many of the fascinating aspects that make this to a valuable literary reflection on the international contemporary book market, at least at the end of the twentieth century. The focus rests specifically on the history of German literature, past and present, and only those readers who can fully understand the countless allusions to famous and canonical poems, verses, plays, short stories, novels and romances from the Middle Ages to the end of the twentieth century will fully profit from this impressive literary treatment of modern book publishing. Nevertheless, any scholar working in the field of book publishing and any reader curious about the behind-the-scene operations that make or break a new novel or short story would discover the significant value of this text for its satirical, but certainly realistic reflections of the modern book market.

Obviously, the anonymous author was eminently qualified to evaluate this world in its past and present form because s/he introduces the elitist publishing house Engsfeld in its struggle employing many different strategies to continue with its literary tradition publishing not bestsellers for the broad reading interests, but ponderous, highly esteemed and recognized, masterpieces, and this despite rapidly changing market conditions increasingly dominated by

online media. In essence, the author illustrates the huge challenges and the responding efforts to maintain the ideals of ‘good’ literature in the canonical sense of the word.⁸ In light of these specific conditions reflecting the German-language book market, it might be doubtful whether we will ever witness a translation of this novel into another language. And yet, just this rich web of literary allusions which extend even to the Middle Ages deserves high recognition, especially because it is so intimately tied into the practical side of book productions.

Absent a solid body of critical opinions about this novel, we can dive *in media res* and analyze the text afresh without being influenced by various reviewers who so far have represented mostly journalistic and not necessarily scholarly perspective.⁹ As we can easily recognize, the entire story is predicated on the current literary market in the German-speaking world, and commentators have already pointed out the direct parallels between the fictional publishing house Engsfeld (Munich) and the actual publishing house Suhrkamp (Frankfurt a. M., since 2010 in Berlin).¹⁰ In German public media there has been a great interest in literary reviews proffered by highly influential critics, such as Marcel Reich-Ranicki (died 2013), who appear on TV together with a group of alternative voices and regularly discuss the latest publications or those titles on the latest bestseller list.¹¹ The anonymous author offers profuse references to this famous personality, combined with much irony and sarcasm, but he is not the only target of such fictional allusions.

In essence, good novels, appreciated as the highlights of the current literary culture, are ultimately identified as the nothing but the end-products of extensive negotiations, secret strategies, manipulations, and economic calculations behind the scene. At the same time, the editor-in-chief, Helmut Rieger, pursues a strict policy of accepting only high-quality literary manuscripts for publication, although there are no explicit comments on how this level is achieved. This constitutes a continuous struggle with the junior editor-in-chief, his son Johannes, who wants to establish his own profile in this business, then with various copy editors, the book vendors, the marketing department, and then also with the countless reviewers and critics, not to speak of the readers.

The main protagonist, Anna Becker, is a debutante as a literary author, and yet she wins the first prize at a major literary competition in Salzburg for her short stories about the tragic

history of Sinti and Roma in eighteenth-century Hungary. They might indeed represent first rate narratives, but the entire competition quickly unravels as a manipulative operation involving her own literary agent, who is good friends with Helmut Rieger, and who also serves on the jury deciding on the prize winner by public discussions aired on TV. The young woman quickly senses the fake publicity stunt of the entire competition with the members of the jury voicing many brutal, mean-spirited, unfair, and bitter opinions, praising some authors, mercilessly destroying others. Anna is just about to return home before she could have presented her stories in an official reading, when she falls in love with Johannes Rieger who wants to win her for his own new book series in his father's publishing house. At times, it seems difficult to distinguish between Anna's physical attractiveness and the appeal which her short stories exert, and the author subtly plays out the subjective dimension in the evaluation of new literary works, especially by highlighting the occasionally almost bitter debates among the members of the jury, which also seems to be somewhat divided along gender lines. The recent scandal among the members of the Noble Prize Committee in Stockholm, Sweden (2018-2019) almost appears as an avatar confirmation of the anonymous author's observations *post factum*.¹²

These emotional details, which seem to dominate at times, do not concern us here, especially because the author tends to employ almost unsavory clichés in his erotic narrative, and ultimately offers us rather torturous, perhaps even unbelievable love stories with many twists and turns, ultimately projecting some of the rich old men who defend the traditional value of literature as the most attractive love partners for this young author who virtually recognizes in the old editor a substitute for her rather absent father.

Anna has to calculate her personal budget carefully and actually cannot quite live on her meager salary as a dramaturge in a Düsseldorf theater and depends, although she is already in her thirties, on financial support from her little caring father, a musical conductor who travels the world for his job (191). Johannes, and later Helmut, by contrast, are millionaires and can afford a most luxurious lifestyle, which attracts Anna considerably, but not because of the money, as the narrator often hastens to emphasize; instead, she is deeply intrigued by elegance and the high quality of the material world, and never hesitates to spend whatever it might cost for luxury items that appeal to her deep sense of beauty and quality.

The underlying tension in this novel pertains to the father-son conflict, which actually

represents the dialectics between traditional, canonical literature and new, modern, even experimental texts. The central issue at stake thus proves to be whether a publishing house, such as Engsfeld, can preserve its reputation and status as a leader in the literary book market despite a changing readership and new business models. Economic factors, mentioned quite frequently, matter considerably, but father and son react differently to the financial side of the business and to the emergence of modern literature. Anna promises to be the new shining star in the 'Young Series' edited by Johannes, and he immediately encourages her also to write a novel on her own, for which she would probably receive a solid honorary. However, the young man loses out badly in this regard and has to make room for his father who wins out in their indirect competition, gaining both Anna's love and securing her manuscript for his publishing house.

While the love affair between the young author and the junior editor flourishes quite well at the beginning, a major conflict then erupts just at the time when the Frankfurt book fair takes place, where Anna's new book with short stories is strongly profiled. Despite his best efforts, Johannes does not have much time for Anna, who feels neglected and ignored, and things get worse when she suddenly receives a letter from one of the copy-editors working for Engsfeld who simply and resolutely rejects her proposal for a novel. Anna is deeply enraged, she feels betrayed by her lover, and quickly throws him out of her life, although he is quite innocent and had not been involved in that decision-making process, which underscores also the little influence which he exerts in the publishing house.

As the chapter title indicates, for the female protagonist the Frankfurt book fair turns out to be a black hole in the Gutenberg Galaxy (172), a term coined by Marshall McLuhan in 1962, and this because Anna has to face the reality that even the best book manuscripts are easily subject to subjective reviews and economic considerations. The entire book market proves to be fickle, while 'literary quality,' whatever that might be in specific terms, does not constitute any guarantee even for the best authors. Reviewers can easily destroy even a noteworthy and highly praised new publication, as happens with Anna's short stories which a critic condemns as nothing but trivial literature (173). And then, to remind ourselves of the convoluted internal struggles in Engsfeld, Anna receives the letter from the copy-editor Dr. Kiblinger who politely but firmly rejects her proposal for a new novel as unfit for the Engsfeld publishing house (190).

The female protagonist, however, does not give up and fights for her new novel. Soon

after having received the rejection letter she has a chance to meet Johannes's father, who surprisingly recognizes that her manuscript displays after all a high literary quality and thus would be a perfect match for his publishing house. Helmut is quickly convinced that here a new masterpiece is emerging, so it should not appear in the 'Young Series,' edited by his son, but as a central work of the entire publishing house. Soon enough, they also fall in love with each other, while Johannes is removed from the business, with his father buying him out of the Engsfeld publishing house, and leaves Munich for Paris, where he tries his own luck establishing himself as a publisher of French and Latin-American literature.

The anonymous author proves to be an expert also with respect to such a book fair and presents a most vivid, realistic tableau of the actual events at such a major event of global significance. Everyone of rank and reputation in the world of literature, in the media, in publishing houses, and other public figures appear at such a fair, everyone trying to profile him/herself to the best of their abilities. Literary critics, authors, journalists, editors, and reviewers plow the aisles at the fair, and every publisher is trying his/her best to appeal to the cohort of managers of this literary market. Even though Walther deftly mixes imaginary with factual names of publishing houses and authors, the lengthy description of the Frankfurt Book Fair proves to be impressively realistic, exposing the true business interests by the publishers and the critics.

Ironically, as much as Anna's inner voice urges her to remember that she has gained the accolades of an established literary author, the entire set-up of the book fair clearly reveals to her the extent to which all books are, after all, the product of an intensive collaboration of many players. Even though Anna is confronted by big posters displaying the photos of major contemporary authors, such as Bertolt Brecht, Botho Strauß, Umberto Eco, Peter Handke (the latter being the 2019 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature), and Elfriede Jelinek (the 2004 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature; here 181), who all seem to belittle her as a debutante, she rebels against this attack by the great names of German-language and other literature and insists on her own rights as a new voice, after she had won the first prize in the literature competition in Salzburg – this in direct allusion to the actual competition in Klagenfurt for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize founded in 1976.¹³

The second part of the novel, which is focused on the new relationship and ultimate

marriage between Anna and the head of the Engsfeld publishing house, addresses increasingly the contemporary problems of the traditional book market where titles of high-standard literary texts face a tough competition by the emerging mass market of trivial books, such as those by John Grisham. Helmut Rieger himself has to admit quietly that his publishing house represents a dinosaur from an earlier age (199), but he continues until the very end of the novel to uphold his own standards, a lonely rock in a flood of new popular publications, as he would describe it in his nostalgic fashion. It remains uncertain, however, to what extent he can withstand the growing criticism even from within the publishing house based on declining sales figures everywhere because of a lack of interest by the reading audience in those ‘grand old books’ (256-57).

One scene late in the novel also deserves to be highlighted where Anna, now well established and having published her novel *Papuscha*, is invited by the literary critic Claude Muller-Marceau to a dinner during which he discusses her work and also praises her ability to deal with eroticism in a highly sensitive manner, but then subtly begins to harass her sexually, which is interrupted only when Helmut Rieger suddenly appears and frees his wife from the critic’s plump attempts to seduce the young woman by means of promises that she would receive the “Oswald von Wolkenstein” prize, as the award committee has already agreed behind closed doors (269).¹⁴ In the presence of the editor-in-chief, the critic immediately withdraws his fake promise and returns to his usual negativity about young new authors, whereby he drastically betrays the entire process of awarding literary prizes as nothing but a marketing strategy within a well-oiled machine. In this moment, Helmut accuses him of corruption, which Muller-Marceau retorts with a similar charge against publishers, and from then on the latter is embarked on destroying Anna’s literary reputation through negative reviews written by various journalists upon his urging (273-74). Curiously, it is Johannes who reads one of those, and although he has to admit that he himself does not like Anna’s novel, he rejects the negative comments as utterly unfounded: ‘Such reviewers are ticks who suck the blood out of literature. They swell up from arrogance, turn fat and fatter, and pretend that their parasitic behavior represents a service for the readers’ (275). Sarcastically speaking, this phenomenon can also be observed in scholarly publications, where many reviewers display their own bias and pursue personal agendas.

Of course, the irony of this outcome cannot be overlooked because the very same critical opinions were voiced by reviewers discussing Jens Walther’s novel. The anonymous author

obviously anticipated this type of unfounded, highly subjective criticism that easily reveals its self-serving objectives. However, as Helmut Rieger realizes at the end with greatest worries, even the best publishing house has to face the reality that the literary market depends on sales, and if not enough titles are sold to bookstores and then to the mass of readers, the business of publishing books automatically comes to an end. Thus, the bitter question remains whether publishing literary texts constitutes a subtle form of prostitution or simply a form of illusion.

While hiking along a Belgian beach following the funeral of a deceased, very supportive investor in the Engelsfeld publishing house, deep fear grips Helmut, but he does not see an alternative to his marketing strategies and publication program. The potential death of ‘good’ literature in face of the flooding of the book market with trivial literature finds its drastic expression in the confrontation of Helmut with a stubborn and nasty seagull that does not let him through. This finds its direct parallel with a seagull that had approached an old and dying author in the very first chapter of the novel, whose delusional exchanges with the seagull anticipates what the entire novel mournfully indicates, the loss of literary idealism and the dream of the holy grail preserved on the magic mountain of canonical literature.

This Karsten Tröger was suffering from a writer’s block and lived only from a generous honorarium offered by the Engelsfeld publishing house on the promise that he would produce again. The seagull presented him with the reality that the writer had become useless and unproductive insofar as he was lacking creativity and had become stymied, living shut off from the world on the British Channel island Alderney. The same suddenly dawns upon Helmut, and both men seem to be overpowered by a seagull, a brutal messenger from the real world claiming that literature is meaningless. Granted, at the same time as Helmut wanders along the Belgian beach, almost fantasizing the death of his aesthetic world and of his publishing house, which might be an indirect allusion to Thomas Mann’s famous novella *Death in Venice* (1912), his wife back home embarks on writing her new novel in which she wants to reflect on the world of book publishing (284). The ultimate irony consists of the title which she has decided on, ‘The Lost Year,’ and this because she intends to outline her experiences in this business since her first reading at the literary competition in Salzburg where she gained the first prize. Would all of her efforts and those of her admirers thus have been nothing but a waste of time?

Does Helmut perhaps die at the end of the novel? We only see him turning away from the

seagull and stepping into his rental car. Does good literature thus come to an end, whatever that might mean? Or is the world of book publishing simply facing increasing competition from public mass entertainment and has to learn to adjust to the new conditions? While Anna begins writing her new manuscript by hand, the TV station airing behind her back has changed the program. Instead of presenting a report about the young author Anna Becker as she wandered through Munich followed by a TV crew, the station is airing a show of the American performance artist Annie Sprinkle who publicly displays her vagina to the world (284). Pornography thus seems to have replaced ‘good’ literature.

In light of this conclusion, the novel’s title appears to have been well chosen, ‘Stepping Down from the Magic Mountain.’ Helmut’s dream, amplified and refracted by Anna’s own efforts as a new novelist, slides down the slopes of the summit where Thomas Mann’s protagonists had spent their time in luxury and intellectual pleasantries until World War I had broken out and crashed their illusions. Granted, there is no parallel catastrophic development in Walther’s novel, but it unequivocally mirrors the dramatic changes in literature, in the production of literature, and hence the concept of literature as such. It dawns upon us as readers that the time of the grand writers might have passed away, and entertainment, mass media, and business principles have moved in and replaced the traditional publishing houses. Both the critics and the writers, both the publishers and the copy editors, both the capital investors and the consumers constitute members of an intricate, but not undecipherable operation predicated on the market product of ‘the book.’

Jens Walther, whoever he might have been, would have probably expanded his novel today because in 2020 the presence of the internet matters much more intensively now than in the late 1990s. In essence, however, this intriguing novel has lost little of its fascination because it uncovers in a brilliant and intriguing fashion the actual conditions according to which some book titles make it and turn into representatives of ‘high’ literature, while others never appear in print or are mostly dismissed as entertainment material. Every book publisher has to calculate carefully, has to establish a specific profile, has to fight for his/her share of the book market, and hence has to collaborate with the reviewers and literary critics.

The actual quality of a book manuscript does not seem to matter so much. Anna’s own manuscript of her future novel *Papusch* was even rejected by one of the copy-editors working for

Engsfeld. This is also mirrored by the new approaches to dramatic performances staged in the theater where Anna had been working at the start of the novel. The true success of the latest plays seems to be unrelated to their intrinsic value, whereas the public comes in droves when the actors have to masturbate on stage or are forced to crawl on their hands and feet completely naked.

All this is wonderfully represented in *Abstieg vom Zauberberg* in an ironic, probably even satirical and sarcastic fashion, so I would contradict some of the critics who quickly opined that the anonymous author had identified literature as nothing but a means to achieve an economic goal, or personal fame.¹⁵ There is considerable nostalgia involved, but the dream of outstanding and timeless literature still being of relevance even for the wider reading audience and hence also for some of the best publishing houses is not entirely lost here. Nevertheless, we are faced with a solid dose of skepticism concerning the naïve faith in poetic creativity and the literary genius. Without a powerful, well-run, and economically stable publishing house, not even the best author would have any success reaching out to his/her audience.

After all, every medieval manuscript and every printed book has required the support of sponsors, publishers, critics, and readers. Granted, the outcome of this novel proves to be rather problematic, underscored by the author's implicit sarcasm, with Anna returning to her house in Munich to watch a TV show that introduces herself exclusively as the new female star on the literary horizon, but it is a house which is identified as her personal ivory tower (sic) where she can withdraw from reality and reflect on past events she herself is hardly related to. At the same time, and this would be the real purpose of our critical reading of this novel, Walther's *Abstieg vom Zauberberg* proves to be hilariously realistic and illuminating with regard to its discussion of the many actors involved in the production of books and of the contemporary literary market.

This woefully neglected novel might not be a masterpiece of world literature, but it is certainly highly unique and most intriguing in its successful efforts to represent the world of literature as it is produced, published, marketed, reviewed, and sold on the market. Perhaps not an example of 'great' or 'good' literature, this novel easily holds the educated reader's interest for many different reasons and deserves our recognition as an excellent fictional reflection of the actual conditions of the contemporary book market, here mirrored in often satirical and sarcastic fashion.

Notes

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1. See, most recently, the contributions to *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*. Vol. 7: *The Twentieth Century and Beyond*, ed. Andrew Nash, Claire Squires, and I. R. Willison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Helmut Hilz, *Buchgeschichte: eine Einführung*. Bibliotheks- und Informationspraxis, 64 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019). For an optimistic paean on the role of the book even today, see Andreas von Arnould and Christian Klein, *Weil Bücher unsere Welt verändern: vom Nibelungenlied bis Harry Potter* (Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2019); Matthias Bickenbach, *Buch oder Bildschirm?: Versuch über die Zukunft des Lesens* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2017); cf. also Lorenzo Soccavo and Paul Soriano, *Gutenberg 2.0: le future du livre; six siècles après Gutenberg une nouvelle révolution va changer votre façon de lire*. 2nd ed. (Paris: M21 Éd., 2008).
 2. This is a huge issue extensively discussed by psychologists, learning specialists, philosophers, and others; see the contributions to *Deep Comprehension: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to Understanding, Enhancing, and Measuring Comprehension*, ed. Keith Millis, Debra L. Long, and Joseph P. Magliano (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Eric Purchase, *The Future of Reading* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).
 3. Paul Crosthwaite, *The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction*. Cambridge Studies in Twenty-First-Century Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); there are specialized studies on the book markets in many countries of this world, see, for instance, Jorge J. Locane, *De la literatura latinoamericana a la literatura (latinoamericana) mundial: condiciones materiales, procesos y actores* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019); *Las ferias del libro como espacios de negociación cultural y económica*, ed. Marco Thomas Bosshard and Fernando García Naharro (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 2019); Corinna Norrick-Rühl, *Internationaler Buchmarkt*. BRAMANN Basics - Buch & Medien. Bibliothek, 4 (Frankfurt a. M.: Bramann, 2019).
 4. Thomas Eger and Marc Scheufen, *The Economics of Open Access: On the Future of Academic Publishing*. Diagramme: New Horizons in Law and Economics (Cheltenham, UK, and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018).
 5. Jens Walther, *Abstieg vom Zauberberg* (Frankfurt a. M.: Eichborn Verlag, 1997). All translations are my own.
 6. For a vehemently negative review, see the critical comments in the famous magazine with news and cultural comments, *Der Spiegel* 44 (1997), Oct. 27, 1997, online at: <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-8810552.html> (last accessed Jan. 1, 2020). For a much more balanced and well-founded review, see anonymous, "Anna macht Karriere," *Focus Magazin* 42 (1997), section 'Literatur,' online at: https://www.focus.de/kultur/buecher/literatur-anna-macht-karriere_aid_168201.html (last accessed on Jan. 2, 2020).
 7. For book fairs in North America, see <https://www.bookfairs.com/fairs.html> (last accessed on Jan. 2, 2020).
 8. This is, of course, a rather subjective term; see *Canon and Canon Transgression in Medieval German Literature*, ed. by A. Classen. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 573 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1993); Albrecht Classen, "Response to Forum on the Canon in German Studies," *German Quarterly* 84.1 (Dec. 2011): 1-3; id., "The Torturous and Random Process of the

Canonization in Literary History from the Middle Ages to the Present. The Case of Erasmus Widmann as an Example – The Victimization of a Poet Oddly Situated between Epochs, Cultures, and Religions,” *Studia Neophilologica* 83.1 (2011): 94-103; *Reading the Canon: Literary History in the 21st Century*, ed. Philipp Löffler. American Studies, 281 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017).

9. For very brief exceptions, see Johannes Franzen, *Indiskrete Fiktionen: Theorie und Praxis des Schlüsselromans 1960–2015* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018), 126; see also David-Christopher Assmann, *Poetologien des Literaturbetriebs: Szenen bei Kirchhoff, Maier, Gstrein und Händler* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 331.

10. <http://www.bookinist.de/bookinist/content/text/xolds/hase/@waabsti.htm> (last accessed on Jan. 2, 2019): “Vieles im Buch ist schon bekannt oder wurde so vermutet, aber diese gekonnt geschriebene Abrechnung mit dem deutschen Kulturbetrieb liest sich so amüsant und süffig, man gönnt sich einfach ein Vergnügen, alles noch einmal in komprimierter Form schwarz- auf -weiß nachzulesen” (Much of the information contained in this book is already well-known or has been suspected so, but this skillfully conceived coverage of the German cultural market has been written in such an entertaining and addicting fashion that it is a pure joy to read everything once again in compressed form in black and white).

11. Uwe Wittstock, *Marcel Reich-Ranicki: Geschichte eines Lebens* (Munich: Blessing, 2005); Jasmin Ahmadi, *Der Papst und der Bienenkorb: Marcel Reich-Ranicki als ein Akteur im literarischen Feld der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt am Main: PL Acad. Research, 2015).

12. The scandal involved rape charges against the husband of one member of the jury, which then forced the Academy to postpone the awarding of the 2019 prize to 2020; https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/the-swedish-academy-took-a-year-off-to-fix-the-nobel-prize-in-literature-its-still-broken/2019/10/10/23f1b6da-eb7d-11e9-9306-47cb0324fd44_story.html; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nobel-prize-literature/two-members-leave-nobel-literature-committee-criticizing-swedish-academy-idUSKBN1Y61BC> (both last accessed on Jan. 2, 2020).

13. <https://www.kultur.klagenfurt.at/abteilung-kultur/preise-stipendien/ingeborg-bachmann-preis.html>; <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis> (both last accessed on Jan. 1, 2020).

14 There is no literary prize under that name, but Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77-1445) was one of the best late medieval poets, originating from Southern Tyrol. The author freely and intelligently plays with many references to the entire history of German literature from the Middle Ages to the late twentieth century.

15. Anonymous, “Anna macht Karriere” (see note 6).