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Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann (eds.), *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 396 pp.

This book might be seen as a German counterpart to the proceedings of a 2007 conference in France published as *Mountains Figured and Disfigured in the English-Speaking World* edited by Françoise Besson (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). There, fifty-six papers, including those of Robert Macfarlane, Rick Bass, N. Scott Momaday and Scott Slovic, examined the cultural meaning of mountains with, as its title implies, barely a reference to German culture. Here eighteen essays in English are assembled in historical order, mostly concerned with German literary texts, music and films, since the editors are aware of the 'voluminous' illustrated book on mountains in German fine art by Bettina Hausler, *Der Berg: Schrecken und Faszination* (Hirmer, 2008).

So, from a text composed around 1170 to Christophe Ransmayr's postmodern novel of 2006 *Der fliegende Berg* and Werner Herzog's mountain climbing films, the contributors to this volume try hard to challenge assumptions and develop appropriate theories to provide new insights into the essential enigma of mountains as they mirror the needs and fascinations of human culture. The assumption, for example, that Johann Jacob Scheuchzer's 1723 famous illustrations of sightings of dragons in the mountains typifies pre-Romantic attitudes is confounded by the attraction of mountains to medieval hunters in Emperor Maximilian's *Theuerdank* of 1517. The editors cleverly point out that the 1991 discovery of a Neolithic traveller with his framed rucksack circa 3,300 BC at 3,210m in the Ötztal Alps, was not the only person around at that height, as testified by the arrowhead buried in his shoulder that led to his death.

But the attractions of mountain climbing peculiar to Germans in the twentieth century are heavily indebted, as elsewhere, to cultural conditions. Wilfried Wilms argues that Arnold Franck's *Bergfilm* of the 1920s 'perform rituals of mobilization and restoration for an excited German audience bogged down by defeat and massive loss of life in the Great War. The films provide codes of conduct for a society in poor health' (269). Contemporary variations of the genre of *Bergfilm* manage to give an 'anti-Nazi spin' (16) to both a pre-war attempt on the Eiger (*Norwand*, 2008) and a post-war attempt on a Himalayan peak (*Nanga Parbat*, 2010). The editors even suggest that the German obsession with Nanga Parbat might be linked to a kind of postcolonial Aryan myth: 'Even though Germany had no colonial presence in India, nationalists traced their

ethnic history back to Indo-European origins and a mythic Aryan homeland' (14). Indeed, Harald Höbusch's chapter on this obsession concludes that a 1953 film 'sees nothing wrong with perpetuating fascist ideas into a democratic future' (298).

Between the medieval period and the twentieth century, essays range from the mountains of tropical Polynesia, the myth of von Humbolt's ascent of Chimborazo, Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, to W.G. Sebald's Magic Mountains. Novelist Christof Hamann relates how, in researching his novel *Usambara* (2007), he found a fascinating fictional and non-fictional history of the Mountains of the Moon and Kilimanjaro. The only ecocritical essay is Heather I. Sullivan's reconsideration of Faust's mountains in the light of Goethe's interest in climate science. Sullivan comes to quite different conclusions from Kate Rigby's by arguing for a pattern of 'Goethe's switch from potential moments of sublimity or transcendence to the material body and its surroundings' (122). Goethe's studies of the water cycle lend an irony, for Sullivan, to the fact that Faust 'succumbs, unwittingly [...] to the very forces against which he dedicates his final battle against the sea' (127). In an exemplary example of material ecocriticism, Sullivan produces a convincing conclusion that 'Faust resists and then succumbs to the modern human fate: he believes that he can move beyond matter, but he remains, of course, fully within environmental materiality, no matter how poetically garbed that realm may appear' (131).

Three caveats are needed. After noting in the Introduction the first recorded female ascent of an Alpine peak in 1552 by Regina von Brandis and her daughter, the editors then ignore women's ascents and neglect a potential gendered dimension to this book—which calls for another one. Second, also neglected is the body of mountaineering poetry which exists not far under the surface of all mountaineering cultures. Third, there is a long tradition of German mountaineering literature, the literary and cultural qualities of which might have the subject of a chapter here. Nevertheless this is an invaluable and intellectually lively contribution to a growing international scholarship on the cultural significance of mountains.