

Carla Gebauer – Christiane Hadamitzky

## Editorial

If you stop and think about it, heroes and heroism seem to be ubiquitous in everyday life today. Be it the well-known discount grocery store looking for the “BBQ hero” of the season, the volunteer fire department recruiting new members with the opportunity to perform heroic deeds, or the flood of super hero movies (and the corresponding computer games and the other spin-offs) – the heroic seems to be especially attractive in the popular media landscape despite the repeated rejection of the heroic many times in the modern and postmodern world. Hence, in its second issue, the e-journal *helden. heroes. héros.* has ventured into the realm of popular culture.

Definitions of the term fill entire books and to a certain degree the wide variety of interpretations fundamentally contrast one another. In one aspect, however, all analyses agree: Popular culture always emerges in contrast to a foil. Whether this antithesis constitutes high culture, commerce, or a product with low sales numbers, the popular is always “other than...” This leads one to surmise why the heroic constantly seems to be opportunely inserted into popular media: the heroic figure is also suited to be isolated, to be positively as well as negatively identified with and simultaneously eludes an unambiguous definition. Medially communicated heroism and heroic deeds form the basis for communities and have the power to bind audiences to them. Hence it seems to be worth it to have a closer look at this medialization.

This issue focuses on the figures, the modes, the medium-specific characteristics, and the function in popular heroic representation. What distinguishes popular heroes? In which media are heroes and their heroic deeds spread and who selects them? Do dominant popular media that target the largest audience possible bring about the standardization of the discourse? What role do commercial interests play? In this issue,

these and similar questions are addressed in the articles through case studies on various media, genres and contexts.

First, **Dorothea Flothow** addresses in her article heroic figures in historical dramas from the 19th century. Through works by James Sheridan Knowles, Robert Brough, Edward Fitzball, among others, she shows how contemporary heroic role models diversify in the theater and also how the antihero finds his place. She concentrates especially on the constructing of ‘historical greatness,’ what counts as heroic and antiheroic in the genre, and the function of the historical setting for the works.

**Michael Butter**’s article examines the representation of William Henry Harrison during the presidential election campaign of 1840. He shows in what tradition the candidate was stylized as a hero and a president in touch with the people. The use of mass media and popular genres such as song are of central interest here as well as the question of their function for party politics.

**Julia Ingold** describes in her article (in German) the media shift in the legend of Saint Christophorus from its origins in illustrated vitae to its contemporary interpretation from 2012 in the form of a modern fresco cycle and comic book by the artist Markus Färber. Therein the author poses the fundamental questions, to what extent did the conventional comic hero genre serve as foil in order to popularize Reprobus/Christophorus as a broken hero outside of a religious discourse and to what extent Färber’s comic adaptation can nevertheless be regarded as a palimpsest of medieval saint veneration? (In German)

If there is still a place where real heroes are believed in, then in computer games, states **Hans-Joachim Backe** to open his German-language

4 article “Entfremdete Pixelhelden” (Estranged Pixel Heroes), in order to subsequently address the question of the relation between avatar and gamer as well as between implicit identification and the clearly differentiated other. The author then shows on the basis of rules, representations, and narratives from third person action games what new perspectives for dealing with modern heroic discourses are provided especially by the medium of the computer game. (In German)

**Olmo Gölz** introduces us to the comic super hero Jiya in his German-language article “Heldin für Bildung. Burka Avenger.” A young educator who with a special martial arts style fights for justice, peace and education, a burka serves as her disguise, the ambivalent message of which is consequently heatedly debated. (In German)

In her German-language article on the representation of the Battle at Thermopylae in Frank Miller’s comic 300 and its screen adaptation by Zack Snyder **Carla Gebauer** explains what happens when figures from Antiquity become super heroes. She concentrates especially on the reactions of the audience, the critique aimed at the popular products and the conflict potential when history and commerce meet. (In German)

By taking the example of The Song of Roland **Isabell Brähler-Körner** and **Detlef Goller** examine the significance of heroic role models in school. In their German-language article it becomes clear that the discussion of this medieval text in German class does not only target subject-specific learning goals; in combination with reflecting on different heroic models it also contributes to students’ identity formation.