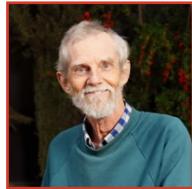


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## Rivers of Life and the Life of Rivers: Cultural Anthropology and Literature



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All major human cultures developed along rivers, and rivers have provided a major impetus to human life. Whether we think of the Nile, the Rhine, the Mississippi, or the Congo, people have always responded to rivers and identified it as a source of life. Much has been written about this topic, but here I want to examine one medieval and one modern text both intimately associated with the River. In the Middle High German epic poem *Nibelungenlied*, both the Rhine and the Danube matter critically, determining life and death. The question there rests on the question what the crossing of the river means for people. In Werner Bergengruen's short story, "Der Strom" (from ca. 1950), the issue is brought up again with the river serving as a kind of agent determining human existence. Only when the individual respects the river and acknowledges its agency, does life develop further. We could also refer to ancient examples, such as the Greek *Iliad*, or medieval cases, such as Dante's *Divina Commedia*. The two examples presented here, however, serve exceedingly well to confirm that the river and people have always served as intimately related entities.

### Biography:

Dr. Albrecht Classen is University Distinguished Professor of German Studies at the University of Arizona, Tucson. He has published currently 127 scholarly books on German and European medieval and early modern literature, most recently *The Secret in Medieval Literature* (2022), *Globalism in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Ages* (2023), and *A Translation of Johannes Pauli's Didactic Tales* (2024). He has won numerous awards for his teaching (Carnegie Professor of the Year, 2012), service (Honorary member of the American Association of Teachers of German, 2022), and research (Henry Koffler Prize for Research, 2009). The German government bestowed the *Bundesverdienstkreuz am Band* upon him in 2004, and he was knighted in 2017 (The Most Noble Order of the Three Lions). In Fall of 2022, he received a Fulbright grant for Egypt. He is the editor of three journals, *Mediaevistik*, *Humanities*, and *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, and he has published almost 780 scholarly articles and more than 2900 book reviews.