

IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE ▪ JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES



IMAGINATIONS

JOURNAL OF CROSS_CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES |
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy
and instructions for contributors:

<http://imaginacions.csj.ualberta.ca>

"Over Your Dead Mother: Rumors and Secrets in Stifter's "Tourmaline"

Christopher Lee & Sascha Brosamer

October 24, 2011

To Cite this Article:

Behrmann, Nicola., and Anders Dickson. "Over Your Dead Mother: Rumors and Secrets in Stifter's "Tourmaline"" *Imaginations* 2:1 (2011): Web (date accessed) 20-31. DOI: 10.17742/IMAGE.crypt.2-1.3

To Link to this article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.crypt.2-1.3>



The copyright for each article belongs to the author and has been published in this journal under a **Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives 3.0** license that allows others to share for non-commercial purposes the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. The content of this article represents the author's original work and any third-party content, either image or text, has been included under the Fair Dealing exception in the Canadian Copyright Act, or the author has provided the required publication permissions.

OVER YOUR DEAD MOTHER: RUMORS AND SECRETS IN STIFTER'S "TOURMALINE"

AUTHOR • NICOLA BEHRMANN
ARTIST • ANDERS DICKSON

Despite his confidence that he could create a simple and lucid masterpiece of descriptive narration, Adalbert Stifter's "Tourmaline" turned out to be the most obscure and complex tale in his story-collection *Many-Colored Stones* (1852). This essay traces the cryptological drive undermining the coherence and closure the realist narrator attempts to provide. Stifter's abundant description of seemingly superfluous details, the numerous narrative gaps and various rumors confuse any sufficient account of what really happened. The breaks and leaks in story-telling can be understood as indices leading to a submerged work of mourning. The pedagogical intention organizing Stifter's meticulous story-telling not only in this story turns upon itself through the incessant supply of these commemorative indices or fragments. Not only is such pedagogy unable to find an efficient narrative mode, it also consistently undermines the authority whereby the instructor-narrator might come to terms with his own tale.

Nicola Behrmann (Ph.D. 2010, New York University) is Assistant Professor of German at Rutgers University. Her research touches on literary theory, gender studies, avant-garde studies, German realism, and literature in exile. She is currently editing the collected works of Expressionist writer and poet Emmy Hennings. She has published articles on Hugo Ball, Walter Benjamin, Berthold Brecht, Franz Kafka, and Frank Wedekind.

Anders Dickson transferred in 2008 from the Wisconsin university system to the Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe, class of Daniel Roth. He is working to establish a system of symbols like a language in which to examine and share his views.

Malgré sa confiance de pouvoir créer un chef-d'œuvre descriptif simple et clair, Adalbert Stifter fait de son œuvre *Tourmaline* le plus obscur et le plus complexe conte de la collection *Roches multicolores* de 1852. Cet article suit la trace du dynamisme cryptographique qui sape la cohérence, ainsi que la possibilité d'une fin fermée que l'auteur réaliste essaye de fournir. La description abondante des détails apparemment superflus, les nombreuses lacunes narratives, ainsi que les différentes rumeurs compliquent le compte-rendu du vrai incident. On peut expliquer les interruptions et les fuites dans le conte comme des indices de la présence cachée du travail de deuil. L'intention pédagogique qui dirige la façon selon laquelle Stifter raconte une histoire se retourne contre lui à travers l'apport incessant des signes commémoratifs ou des fragments commémoratifs. Non seulement ce type de pédagogie ne peut pas trouver un mode narratif efficace, mais il sape aussi la capacité de l'instructeur-narrateur d'arriver en accord avec son propre conte.

Nicola Behrmann obtient un doctorat de l'Université de New York en 2010. Elle est maître de conférences en allemand à l'Université Rutgers. Ses recherches incluent des thèmes comme la théorie littéraire, les études sur le genre, l'avant-garde, le réalisme allemand et la littérature de l'exil. Actuellement, elle est en train de réviser les œuvres complètes de l'expressionniste Emmy Hennings, écrivaine et poète. Elle publie aussi sur Hugo Ball, Walter Benjamin, Berthold Brecht, Franz Kafka et Frank Wedekind.

En 2008, Anders Dickson passe de l'Université du Wisconsin à l'Académie des beaux-arts de Karlsruhe sous la direction de Daniel Roth. Son travail actuel consiste à formuler un système de symboles, comme un langage, pour pouvoir s'exprimer et partager ses perspectives.



DISAPPEARANCE

In 1852, every evening between five and nine after official hours, school principal Adalbert Stifter assiduously worked on the compilation of his story collection *Bunte Steine* (*Many-Colored Stones*). Although almost every story he prepared had been previously published and only needed to be transcribed, Stifter found himself caught in a revision compulsion. Unable to complete more than three pages in clean copy a day, he continued to beg his publisher Gustav Heckenast to allow him time for more thorough revisions.¹ He advised Heckenast to recognize the improvements he had already made as invaluable, and think of Goethe's *Iphigenie*, which the master had transcribed five times.² Reluctantly, he submitted "Katzensilber" ("Muscovite") and "Bergkristall" ("Rock Crystal"), and by the end of July, when he began with the revisions of "Der Pförtner im Herrenhause," now published under the title "Tourmaline," Stifter complained again that all he needed was time in order to turn this story into a "simple, lucid, and intimate masterpiece."³ However, "Tourmaline" not only became the "darkest" and most obscure piece in Stifter's petrified tales—a sort of *hapax legomena* that can only cumbrously be called back into its order—it also lacks the very transparency, lucidity, and smoothness he tried to achieve in his meticulous rendering and rasping. We are not being asked to read this text, but to read *in* it, "as in a letter bearing sad news" (Stifter 1986). What kind of letter does this story contain? What message is enclosed in the letter? To whom is it directed?

One of the intended addressees of *Bunte Steine* was Stifter's foster daughter Juliane Mohaupt, the so-called "wild child," who received a copy of *Bunte Steine* on her twelfth birthday. The dedication, which reiterates fatherly advice given to her in the recent past, indicates that the book should be interpreted as a didactic message.⁴ Stifter understood the transmission of the paternal lesson implicated in his stories as immaculate inception, which shifted from orality to textuality and is constituted as a *commemorative* letter Juliane was supposed to remember whenever she tried to escape the "good." The obscure pedagogy that is *en route* in "Tourmaline," however, appears to have lost its frame or hold. Dressed up as a letter of mourning, the course of the story is sup-

ported by transferential circuits of delivery and return, a coded and encrypted message that, nevertheless, centers on pedagogy:

[It is about a man who] *no longer understands life, when he abandons that inner law which is his steadfast guide along the right path, when he surrenders utterly to the intensity of his joys and sorrows, loses his foothold, and is lost in regions of experience which for the rest of us are almost wholly shrouded by mystery.* (128; emphasis mine)

What exactly could children learn from a moral lesson that concerns a proper understanding of things and at the same time cannot be unraveled? What is the relation between the moral lesson, Stifter's striving for transparency and lucidity, and the obscurity and inaccessibility this tale, nevertheless, unfolds?

According to many of his critics, Stifter got lost in the meticulous and seemingly superfluous description of objects and furniture in "Tourmaline."⁵ His first biographer Alois Raimund Hein found that the story lacked consequence, poetic justice, and complete closure (322).⁶ Walter Benjamin diagnosed a strange *Verschwiegenheit* (muteness) under the surface of abundant description and called the speech of Stifter's characters an "exposition of feelings and thoughts in an acoustically insulated space" (112). Stifter himself once stated that he experienced any lack of description as painful and was immensely concerned with the filling, if not the fulfillment, of narrative gaps and voids, remainders of his *Beschreibungswut* (description mania) which had been left unattended.⁷ Although the narrator opens up the apartment of the pensioner or *Rentherr* in Vienna and provides a meticulous description of its interior, we do not gain access into the protagonists' inner turmoil or moral conflicts. The *Rentherr's* study, in which he engages in painting, crafting, playing music, collecting, archiving, writing, and reading, is curiously covered with his private collection of poster portraits of that he terms "famous men," together with a number of ladders and armchairs on wheels that allow an intimate viewing of each of the portraits. This odd collection turns the privacy and seclusion of this room into an *epigone's* mirror space for narcissistic fantasies. The nonsense category

of “famous men” inevitably induces an endless collecting of portraits that transgresses the spatial limits of a private apartment.

The private room of the *Rentherr*'s wife that centers on a painting of the Virgin and Child receives equal descriptive energy. Framed by a curtain, and again framed by the sculpture of an angel holding the curtain the image unfolds a *mise en abyme* structure of pure femininity. The wife appears to be completely immersed in the description of the rooms she inhabits, subsumed by the overbearing image of the Virgin. What is the intention of this detailed account? Instead of delivering the key to the *Rentherr*'s psyche via description of his environment, Stifter actually locks us out from any further insight or conclusion. At no point does the narrator indicate that he has knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the characters. Not even the proper name and background of his main protagonist are disclosed, but only subject to rumors:

This man was known in the house as *der Rentherr*, but hardly anyone could say whether he was so called because he lived on a pension or because he was employed in a revenue office. The latter, however, could not be the case, because if so he would have had to go to his office at fixed times, whereas he was at home at all hours and often for whole days on end, working at the various tasks he had set himself. [...] It was clear then that he must have a small private income enabling him to lead this kind of life. (107)

The meticulous description of the apartment only adds to the secrecy and muteness of the events that are narrated all too hastily. A close friend, the brilliant actor Dall tears the order of the intimate household apart: “Dall began a love affair with his friend's wife and continued it for a while. In her anxiety the wife herself finally told her husband what had happened” (112). After she has been all too quickly forgiven and the old order all too quickly restored, the wife disappears: “Then, one day, the wife of the *Rentherr* disappeared. She had gone out as she usually did, and had not come back” (113). The narrator never discloses, motivates, or explains the reasons for her disappearance, or to where she has fled:” [N]ot a single report was received



of the [...] wife, not a soul had heard a word of her since the day of her disappearance, nor indeed has she ever returned” (146).

According to Liliane Weissberg, the course of Stifter's storytelling is less determined by the protagonists than by the objects they leave behind (264). In “Tourmaline,” however, these objects seem to lose their owners who disappear, go away, and leave them behind as dead things. Having convinced himself that his wife will never return, the *Rentherr* also abandons the apartment and departs together with his child, the heir to this crypt. When police and civil servants break up his abandoned flat, they find that “under a veil of dust” all the previously described things “lay in mourning” (117). In the wake of extensive description, the things in “Tourmaline” are no longer related to each other or to the persons they belong to and can only be put back in order through the intervention of the bureaucracy, the police, and the law. Perhaps nowhere more pressing and urgent as in this story does Stifter's description of things entail the catastrophic secret that threatens to disrupt the nar-

rative, and that secret must remain silenced and mute at all costs.

RUMOROLOGY

The *fort* of the mother and wife creates a traumatic blank in the story, which is never sufficiently disclosed, motivated, and explained. Neither protagonists, nor narrators trace the actual *Bahnungen* or *Erinnerungsspuren*—the tracks or memory traces—that might have led to her disappearance. Since the course or case of the m/Other has no fate, neither destiny nor destination, the narrators are merely tracing a continuous and obsessive series of displacements. After the sudden and inexplicable withdrawal of every character who had just been introduced, the narration breaks into two distinct parts, the inner connection between which remains obscure and in which events are being told—a connection that lacks coherence and closure. What started out as a causal and linear narrative collapses into a collection of fragmentary reports:

At one time a rumor circulated that the *Rentherr* was living somewhere in the Bohemian Forest in a cave where he kept the child hidden, going out by day to earn a living and returning to the cave in the evening. But then other things happened in the city, for events follow hard upon each other in such places, and there were other novelties to talk about, and before long the *Rentherr* and his story were forgotten. (117-18)

As if exhausted by the disseminated rumors that can be neither verified nor dismissed, the first narrator hands the rest of the narration over to a second, female narrator, “a friend,” a kind and warm-hearted housewife from the suburbs who lives much closer to the events told: “We shall now let her describe the sequel in her own words” (118). The unusual introduction of another narrator who supposedly “solves” the case marks a caesura in the text otherwise hosting rumor and secrets: instead of a framing narrative we have a doubling of the narrative.

In this moment of transference from one narrator to the other, the text seems to send signals about its inherent constitution, revealing that it is unable to fulfill the task of narration, to create coherence (*Zusammenhang*). In-

stead, everything we learn about the characters seems to have its source in rumor and hearsay, in riddles and uncertainties that perpetually circulate, all of which bear no origin and no specific destination and thus traverse and contaminate the “realist” fiction. Such obscurity concerns even the very constitution of the text, which is—unlike the majority of Stifter’s stories—based on real events (or rather: actual rumors) imparted by Stifter’s friend Antonie von Arneth on whom the second, female first person narrator is based.⁸ Although von Arneth’s original letter is not preserved, her story must have concerned her former mentor, Joseph Lange (1751-1831), a renowned actor, composer, and the painter of Mozart’s portrait, who appears in “Tourmaline” as the “brilliant actor” Dall.⁹ As though sustaining a secret kernel, out of which storytelling itself emerges, the rumors in “Tourmaline” appear as counter-text that discreetly enters the realist narrative and is—more or less successfully—controlled by a (split) auctorial narrator. Rumors are determined by repetition: “What I learn through rumor,” Blanchot writes in *The Infinite Conversation*, “requires no author, no guarantee or verification. Rumor is [...] a pure relation of no one and nothing” (19-20). Rumors purport the claim to being true—*perhaps* true—but without foundation and in an ambiguous relation to what we call “reality” and “truth.” Disturbing the general order of things, whose stability they at the same time wish to enforce, rumors enter storytelling as encrypted and fragmented pieces of information, as ghostly half-truths, and appear to boycott the project of mimetic representation, in particular poetic realism’s quest for moderation and transfiguration. Since rumors’ sources are indefinite, absolute, and fictive, they contain a rhizomatic force that can subvert, transgress, and tear down the house of representation.

CRYPTOLOGY

The course of the story now breaks into a series of time lapses, rumorous passages, and *Merkmale* (features or marks) that repeatedly force us to start anew, whenever another indication or a new mark (*neues Merkmal*) occurs that seems to be able to create coherence: “A long time had passed since this incident, and I had quite forgotten about it” (120)—“After this incident a consider-



able period again elapsed” (122)—“An appreciable time had again elapsed since this incident, when something else of significance took place” (128). The time passing between the *Merkmale* constitutes a space of forgetting and repressing, when things are happening we do not want to see or cannot see. To fill the interstices of the narrative, to master uncertainty and irresolution of the hermeneutically obscure passages, and at the same time, to preserve the inviolable silence at the core of this tale will now become the task of the narrator: How to re-integrate those incessantly described belongings of the *Reitherr* as cryptonyms, how to recall them, how to put them into a coherent order when they start to get out of control, and, finally, how to transfer them to their *Nachkommenschaften* (descendants)?

Marred by uncertainties and rumors, by turns and de-

tours, and by a storytelling that only makes its way through the text by a series of *Merkmale* and narrative gaps, “Tourmaline” develops “with great address” a textual movement that actually repents any disclosure of the secrets by which it is mobilized. Derrida has emphasized the great address (*große Geschick*) with which Freud’s grandson Ernst was throwing a wooden spool away and dragging it back in order to compensate for his mother’s absence. Enacting both the traumatic experience and the triumphant mastery of a disappearing mother, Ernst managed to invent a game in which the pleasure principle and a repetition compulsion could conjoin and work together.¹⁰ As Derrida has further pointed out in *The Post Card*, the famous *Fort-Da* game not only generates a certain rhythm that postpones, sets aside, and defers what might put the pleasure principle in question, but the game also determines Freud’s own

textual movement in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," his *Zauderrhythmus* (a rhythm of hesitation), which he "observes every time that something does not suffice, that something must be put off until further on, until later. Then he makes the hypothesis of the beyond *revenir* (come back) only to dismiss it again" (Derrida, *Post Card* 295). Writing as a way to involve the vanished or withdrawn love object into a game of absence and presence is enacted over and over again in Stifter's texts: *Studien* (*Studies*), *Bunte Steine* (*Many-Coloured Stones*), and *Spielereien für junge Herzen* (*Little Games for Young Hearts*). In the only incident in his brief autobiographical fragment *Mein Leben* (*My Life*), both Stifter's mother and grandmother threaten the withdrawal of their affection after the son breaks a windowpane. The terrified son linguistically miraculates up the small and marginal details of a traumatic close-up: *Mutter, da wächst ein Kornhalm*.¹¹

RABENMUTTER¹²

In her detective-like persistence to trace the secret kernel of the rumors and *Merkmale*, the second narrator discovers the *Rentherr* as gatekeeper in a slowly decaying manor house, which in contrast to other houses in the city, preserves all its memory traces as it was never renovated, torn down, or rebuilt. The *Rentherr* has become the *Pförtner* (gatekeeper) of his daughter, whom he has sealed off in a cryptic safe, a fort, where he dictates to her a writing program of aberrant mourning dedicated to the mother. Some of the numerous things that the first narrator established in his meticulous description of the *Rentherr's* apartment reappear deformed and displaced in the description of the sparse subterranean apartment. The iron grille that had closed off the *Rentherr's* apartment in Vienna comes back as the "strong iron bars [...] covered with dry scattered dirt from the street" (123) in front of the windows of the basement apartment he now inhabits; one of his two flutes is found in the subterranean apartment; the armchair and the rolling step ladders reappear as a white unlacquered chair and a wooden ladder—off of which the father eventually falls and dies. The gilded angel (at the bed of the child) turns into a black bird, the daughter's protector. All these things return, but in a disfigured and distorted



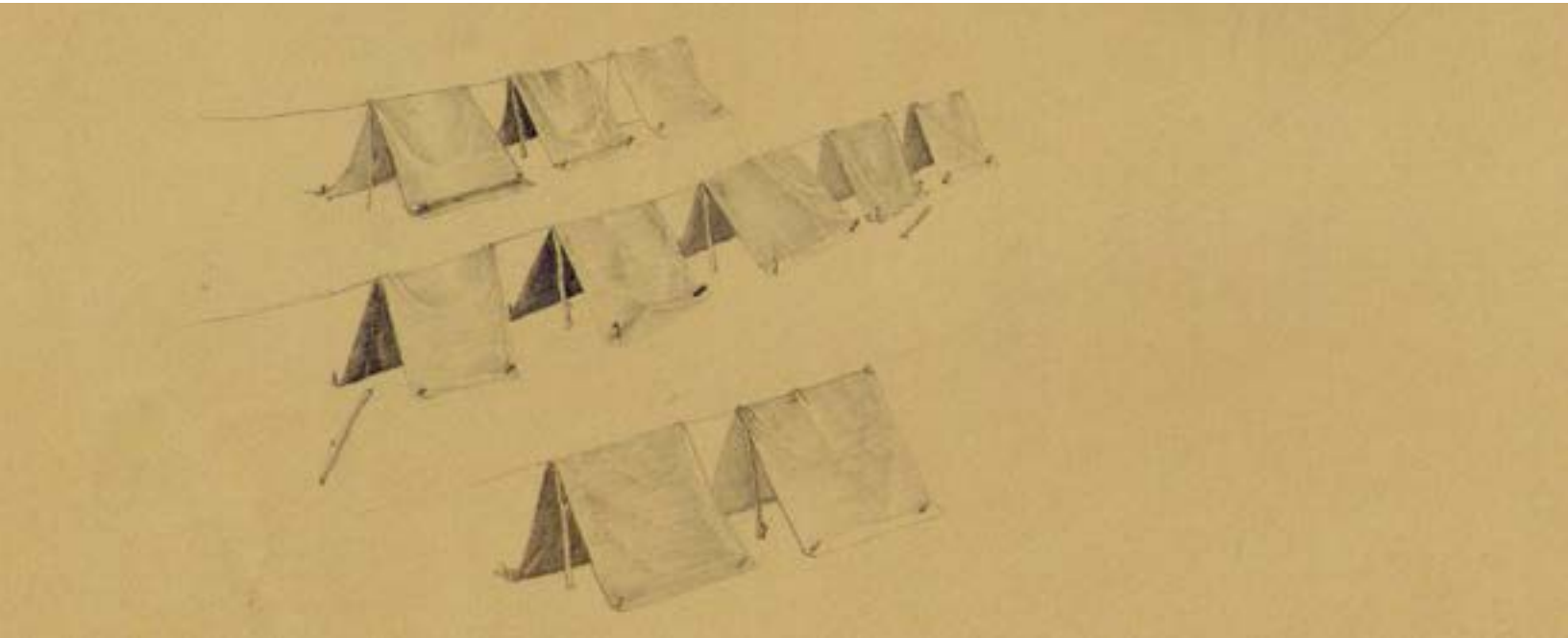
way, empty and impoverished. Stifter's things, which in the beginning are embedded in the peculiar and precise description of interior spaces and furnishings, turn into *Merkmale*, marks or indices, and congeal in the end into commemorative monuments, memorials and graves (*Denkmale*, *Grabmale*), from which one can learn. Only what is legible and does not resist description can be overcome. Each of the described *Merkmale*—the iron grille, the poster portraits of famous men, the child's bed with the guardian angel, the flute, the raven, and the big head of the girl—appear as indices that refuse to give account of a causal coherence and, instead, function as “hieroglyphs of the uncanny,”¹³ as cryptonymic word-things containing a secret script. What the “sad letter” then communicates is a disclosed, veiled account of the inheritance of a crypt, the crypt as legacy of a traumatic neurosis.

The *word-things* resist full disclosure while giving a signal that they resist narration, as it is not yet decided what they actually mean. The notion of a cryptonymy, as elaborated by Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, is a “false or artificial unconscious” settling in the unconscious and following the process of incorporation of the lost beloved object.¹⁴ The crypt is a *fort* [F-O-R-T] in the unconscious, or a safe, “a secret place, in order to keep itself safe somewhere in a self.”¹⁵ The crypt forms “the vault of a desire” (Derrida, “Fors” xvii), and erects a tomb or monument for the lost object. The crypt does not commemorate the lost object itself, but its exclusion, the exclusion of a specific desire from the introjection process of a “healthy mourning.” The subject “knows” that the beloved object is “fort,” but does not accept this, and does not master or overcome the experience of loss in the sense of remembering, repetition, and working through: “The topography of the crypt,” Derrida points out, “follows the line of a fracture that goes from this no-place, or this beyond place, toward the other place; the place where the ‘pleasure's death’ still silently marks the singular pleasure: safe” (Derrida, “Fors” xxi).

However, a crypt's partitions are never completely sealed; there is permeation from within or from without, passing from one part of the divided self to the

other (Derrida, “Fors” xv). The *Rentherr's* nightly flute play which can be heard in the neighborhood, the girl's disturbing big head which attracts the attention of every-one who sees her, and the girl's raven apparently exiting and entering the basement apartment through the *kotig* (filthy) window, can be considered as actual effects of the crypt that demonstrate such a permeation. Even the unstable attribution of either *Rabe* (raven) or *Doble* (jackdaw) to the pitch-black bird underscores the creature as one of the most preeminent ciphers of the crypt-nest in “Tourmaline.” The black bird, which is first discovered by Alfred, the son of the female narrator, not only provides an essential *Merkmal* that leads to the disclosure of the *Rentherr's* existence, but the bird also appears as dangerous cryptonym that must not be touched. When Alfred tries to touch the black bird, he is terrified by the scream of the girl in the subterranean dwelling and then by her monstrous appearance.¹⁶ The daughter seems to master the absence of her mother perfectly, as she cannot remember anything of her past and tells the female narrator “only things concerning the basement room” (158). But she appears as severely threatened when she sees the encrypted mother as *Rabel Doble* about to be taken away by another.

In both versions of “Tourmaline,” the bird is at first described as a raven and then corrected (removed and covered up) as jackdaw: “On a screen in front of another bed which I took to be the daughter's was the *Doble*, jackdaw—the bird which Alfred had tried to catch had not been a raven at all” (150). This shift from *Rabe* to *Doble* explicated by the virtuous female narrator and caretaker can be anagrammatically read as a transformation from *Rabenmutter* into a *holde Mutter* (a fair mother), thus enacting the subordination of the former under the law of a gentle mother whose position is being taken up by the second narrator herself. The raven holds the place of the dead/absent mother who has abandoned husband and child. Evoking a *Rabenmutter*, the word “raven” points to the ambivalence in which this mother is perceived. The ambivalence of *Rabel/Doble* works as a cipher in the text, referring to the circumstances in which a particular desire was barred from introjection and turned into incorporation, which is always secret and cryptic. Unlike the splitting



between a good, but usually dead, mother and an evil stepmother (common in fairy tales), Stifter takes great pain to preserve both dead mother and foster mother as “good” and thus, to prevent contradictory feelings. The *Rabenmutter*, who vanished without a trace, is without a destiny or desire of her own. Her empty place, as that of the *holde Mutter*, is represented by the female caretaker who also takes charge of the course of the narrative. Such replacement is closer to displacement and does not admit or preserve the memory of the actual mother as good or bad.

The cryptonym *Rabe/Dohle* is not the only word-thing the daughter inherits. Whenever he is absent, she erects as per her father’s instructions, a commemorative monument. The father has introduced an internal postal system of dead letters that have no addressee and circulate exclusively in the subterranean apartment. Trapped in her father’s repetition compulsion, she must repeat the traumatic instant. “Whenever I asked him what I should do when he was away,” the daughter tells the female narrator, he would say:

“Describe the moment when I lie dead upon the bier and they bury me.” Then, whenever I said: “Father, I have done that so many times,” he would reply: “Then describe how your mother is wandering through the world with a broken heart, how she is afraid to come back and, in despair, takes her own life.” And whenever I said, “Father, I have done that so many times,” he would reply: “Then describe it again.” (158)

It is the father who dictates to his child his own letters, which he alone will receive. Asked where she kept the homework assignments, the girl “replied her father had saved them and that they had been put aside somewhere” (158). While any other inheritance of the girl has to be considered as lost—not the tiniest scrap of paper remains to document her descent—the father keeps the daughter’s assigned notes delivering sad news. Together with the cryptonym *Rabe/Dohle* the letters will constitute the daughter’s only inheritance. The *père-version* of her father’s daily writing task, sending off hidden messages in a text, as incessant transference of a secret that manifested itself as mere “rumors” on a textual

level—the disappearance of wife/mother that marks the silenced quilting point of the story and its collapse.

As a temporal loop, the writing task falls into a repetition compulsion that cannot be resolved by “story-telling.” The loss of wife/mother is always too close to be buried, mourned, and forgotten. Writing fights forgetting as much as forgetting haunts it. Once it is written down, an event can be transferred to the next generation. His “dictations” are only exercised during the absence—the *fort*—of the father. The letter writing that constitutes “Tourmaline” might even be another spool or reel for mastering absence. The daughter does not “know” what she describes, for she has learned and developed a language without referentiality. She only repeats, trained in repetition compulsion, which bears *Worthörigkeit* (obedience to the word) without possible reference. She has no understanding of death, loss, and mourning, just as the father was “unable to understand things” (128). In this light, the daughter is indeed buried alive by a dead past and a dead future inside the subterranean paternal crypt. She appears to understand that her father is dead, but when the friendly caretaker/virtuous narrator adds that he has been interred in the earth as is the custom with the dead and where he shall remain, she bursts into tears (160). She was well acquainted with death, but only as something that time and again could be reanimated. In her world, only the dead are alive. Dwelling in the timeless space of melancholic incarceration, the (abjected) daughter is equally present and absent, *fort* and *da*—saved and buried alive.¹⁷ She does not know the difference between signifiers and the signified; she believes whatever one tells her. The task of the female narrator (“Antonie von Arneth”), who becomes the caretaker of the daughter as much as she provides a sufficient closure to the text, will be to “impart on her an understanding of the things of the world” (162). When the female narrator provides the girl with a new home and a healthy environment, her abnormally large head miraculously shrinks back to a normal size. Only those parts of the story appear in the narrative that we are able to bear, to overcome, restore, or heal. This might be the reason why so much attention is paid to the bureaucratic interventions, to the restitution of property rights, and questions of inheritance through which some

sort of order can be reestablished in the end. The rest is “wonderful” pedagogy, or rather, learning through literature. Pedagogy is a main concern—always in Stifter but in particular in “Tourmaline”—for it teaches an understanding of the things of the world, cleans the house of narration, puts up a new order, and teaches a reading and writing that implies reference, reliability, and context. The symbiotic dyad of mother and child that has provided an internal image and a frame of the textual space has been removed from narration, retrieved in an assiduous and miraculous way, and finally will be restored in the substitution of an ambivalent *Rabenmutter/holdte Mutter* by a foster mother who dresses up and instructs the monstrous heir of a crypt and turns her into a human being.

Not without reason, the daughter ends up in the same position, from which her own mother removed herself: she makes “rugs, blankets, and the likes for sales, from the proceeds of which, together with the interest from her small inheritance, she was able to live” (162). Weaving, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, is closely related to storytelling. On a textual level the female friend of the narrator—a good housewife, mother, and educator—fulfills the desire of this “dark” text to find its way back to “realism,” giving a comprehensible, coherent account, and producing a text under the *aegis* of that gentle law that matches its promise of meaning.

Notes

¹ “Don’t let me finish this thing only half-way through,” Stifter wrote to Heckenast: “Help me to keep a cheerful, uplifted mood, for this is for the plant like soil, air, and sun, as much as vexation is like mildew and poison for it.” – “[L]assen Sie mich das Ding nicht halb vollenden, helfen Sie mir, eine heitere, gehobene Stimmung zu erhalten; denn diese ist für das Gewächs Boden, Luft und Sonne, so wie Verdruß Mehltau und Gift dafür.” Adalbert Stifter, letter to Gustav Heckenast, February 7, 1852 (XVIII: 107).

² “You will realize the improvement, and the amount of work. Even Goethe transcribed his *Iphigenie* five times. [...] Think of the litharge, the transparency, and the filing!” – “Sie werden die Verbesserung erkennen, und

werden die Menge an Arbeit erkennen. Hat doch Göthe seine Iphigenie fünfmal abgeschrieben. [...] Welche Glätte, welche Durchsichtigkeit, welche Feile!" (Stifter, XVIII: 107)

³ "My only pain is, that I won't be able to put this story away for a year in order to revise it. I imagine, it would turn into a clear and intimate masterpiece." – "Mein Schmerz ist nur der, daß ich jetzt diese Erzählung nicht ein Jahr kann liegen lassen, um an eine Umarbeitung zu gehen. Ich bilde mir ein, sie würde ein einfaches klares inniges Meisterwerk werden." Stifter, letter to Gustav Heckenast, July 27, 1852 (Stifter, XVIII: 120).

⁴ "Receive herewith for the first time a book that your father has written, read his words for the first time in print, which until now you only have heard from his lips. Be good as the children in this book, keep it as a memory. If you are once about to abandon good, let these pages ask you not to go there." – "Empfange hier zum ersten Mal ein Buch, das Dein Vater verfaßt hat, lese zum ersten Male seine Worte im Druke [sic], die Du sonst nur von seinen Lippen gehört hast, sei gut, wie die Kinder in diesem Buche; behalte es als Andenken; wenn Du einst von dem Guten weichen wolltest, so lasse Dich durch diese Blätter bitten, es nicht zu tun" (Hein 574). Albrecht Koschorke calls this dedication a "literarische Adoptionsurkunde" (literary certificate of adoption, Koschorke 323). Juliane Mohaupt attempted to run away from home several times; and in 1857 she drowned herself in the Danube.

⁵ "[D]ie strenge Folgerichtigkeit, die poetische Gerechtigkeit und die vollständige Geschlossenheit."

⁶ His biographer Theodor Klaiber criticized that Stifter was getting lost in the wide depiction of exterior things and furniture (Klaiber 79).

⁷ Eva Geulen (1992) attributed his manic and abundant descriptions to his dependence on words ("Worthörigkeit"), his desire to fill any possible interval or gap that might produce a disturbed coherence.

⁸ Antonie von Arneth née Adamberger (1790-1867) had been a successful actress in her youth and later a benevolent caretaker; she even helped Stifter finding a new home for his foster child Josepha Mohaupt. She had

been Theodor Körner's fiancée and was later married to Joseph von Arneth (1791-1863) with whom she had one son, Alfred (1819-1897) who is also mentioned in "Tourmaline." In early 1853 Antonie von Arneth thanks Stifter in a letter for introducing her in "Tourmaline" as the female "friend" and adds: "How proud I am that you found my little sketch worth considering. However, I know very well that it is the frame that turned it into what it is, and if it is a tourmaline, it is beaded with pearls." – "Wie stolz bin ich, daß Sie meine kleine Skizze einer Beachtung werth gehalten haben. Freilich weiß ich wohl, das, was es ist, hat der Rahmen dazu gethan, und ist's ein Turmalin, so ist er in Perlen gefaßt." (Stifter, 2.3: 412-13).

⁹ Lange's second wife, Luise Maria Antonia Weber was Mozart's sister-in-law and also a well-known actress. In 1798, she left Lange for an engagement in Amsterdam and never returned to him.

¹⁰ Laurence A. Rickels connects Stifter's traumatic childhood memory with the only incident Goethe recollects from his childhood in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* when he threw "with great pleasure" his parents' pots onto the street (Rickels, *Abberations* 235). Both Goethe's and Stifter's autobiographical anecdotes follow the movement of "fort" and "da."

¹¹ Literally translatable as: "Mother, a stalk of grain is growing there." For an insightful reading of the relation between the encrypted code of *Kornhalm* and other *Merkmale* see: Rickels "Stifter's Nachkommenschaften."

¹² In German the expression "Rabenmutter" (raven-mother) indicates a negligent mother and/or a mother who abandons her child(ren).

¹³ "Hieroglyphen des Unheimlichen" (Macho 741).

¹⁴ "This crypt no longer rallies the easy metaphors of the Unconscious (hidden, secret, under-ground, latent, other, etc.) [...]. Instead, using that first object as a background, it is a kind of "false unconscious," an "artificial" unconscious lodged like a prothesis, a graft in the heart of an organ, within the divided self" (Derrida, "Fors" xiii).

¹⁵ The French *fort* (interior) and the implied Latin *foris*

(exterior) must be read in conjunction with the German *FORT*.

¹⁶ The young boy, trying to grasp the (forbidden) raven, reminds of the boy in “Granite,” who allows a vagabond to paint his feet with pitch and will be penalized by mother and grandmother with a withdrawal of love. The panic of the boy in “Tourmaline,” who did not do anything wrong but abhors the penalty of his mother finds such penalty anticipates in the reaction of the monstrous figure with the over-dimensional head who appears in the window.

¹⁷ Eva Geulen (1993) pointed out that the tale of the girl with the big head could be read as a variation of the case of Kaspar Hauser, a young man who appeared in 1828 in the streets of Nuremberg claiming that he has been raised in total isolation of a darkened cell. Part of the enthrallment in regard to Kaspar Hauser, who claimed to have been exposed to sunlight after being released from his prison for the first time, was his unawareness of the deformations of his body and of the injustice he had suffered from. In a similar way the deformed daughter of the *Rentherr* is neither happy nor unhappy, and rather willing than reluctant.

Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter. “Stifter.” *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1913-1926*. Ed. Marcus Bullock, Michael Jennings et al. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1996. 111-113. Print.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1969. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok.” Trans. Barbara Johnson. *The Wolfman’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Eds. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986. xi-l. Print.
- . *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. Print.
- Geulen, Eva. *Worthörig wider Willen: Darstellungssproblematik und Sprachreflexion in der Prosa Adalbert Stifters*. Munich: iudicium, 1992. Print.
- Geulen, Eva. “Adalbert Stifters Kinder-Kunst. Drei Fallstudien.” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* 67 (1993): 648-68. Print.
- Hein, Alois Raimund. *Adalbert Stifter: Sein Leben und seine Werke*. Vol. 2. Wien/Bad Bocklet/Zürich: Walter Krieg Verlag, 1952. Print.
- Klaiber, Theodor. *Adalbert Stifter*. Stuttgart: Verlag von Strecker und Schröder, 1905. Print.
- Koschorke, Albrecht. “Erziehung zum Freitod. Adalbert Stifter’s pädagogischer Realismus.” *Die Dinge und die Zeichen: Dimensionen des Realistischen in der Erzählliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Eds. Sabine Schneider/Barbara Hunfeld. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008. 319-32. Print.
- Macho, Thomas. “Stifters Dinge.” *Merkur* 676 (August 2005): 735-41. Print.
- Rickels, Laurence A. *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1988.
- . “Stifter’s Nachkommenschaften: The Problem Of the Surname, the Problem Of Painting,” *MLN* 100.3 (1985): 577-98. Print.
- Stifter, Adalbert. “Tourmaline.” *Limestone and Other Stories*. Trans. David Luke. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. 103-47. Print.
- . *Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. Gustav Wilhelm. Vol. XVIII: Briefwechsel 2. Hildesheim: A. H. Gerstenberg Verlag, 1972. Print.
- . *Werke und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Vol. 2.3. Ed. Hermann Kunisch. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1995. Print.
- Weissberg, Liliane. “Taking Steps: Writing Traces in Adalbert Stifter.” *Thematics Reconsidered: Essays in Honor of Horst S. Daemmrich*. Ed. Frank Trommler. Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995. 253-274. Print.

Image Notes

- p.21 The Dissolution of Reality into a Simple Form,
p. 23 The Messenger/Tower, p. 25 Duluth’s Plasma
Center, p. 26 The Mythology of Past and Present
(detail), p. 28 Broken Chords (detail)