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FRAMING REALISM: THE MOTIF OF THE FRAME IN THE WORKS OF  
GOTTFRIED KELLER, ADALBERT STIFTER, AND THEODOR STORM

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This project investigates the frame as a recurring motif in works of German poetic realism. Despite the frame's pervasiveness throughout this body of literature, its function has remained largely unaccounted for by scholarship. Accordingly, my analyses reposition the frame as a signifier that requires interpretation. Focusing primarily on the role of picture frames within these narratives, my analyses also include other types of extra-aesthetic frames, as well as certain linguistic, structural, and discursive frameworks. In Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* (*Green Henry*, 1855/1879), Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften* (*Descendants*, 1864), and Theodor Storm's *Viola tricolor* (1874), the frame represents a privileged site for reflecting on the aesthetic agenda of poetic realism. At the same time, frames often communicate ideas of a non-literary nature. An analysis of Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* reveals the frame's essential function as a moderating force between excesses relating to economics, aesthetics, and gender. Keller's novel is thereby situated as both a timely social critique and an important means for explicating a theory of realism based on aesthetic moderation. Harnessing the frame's

ability to represent absence, Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften* reveals a fundamental message about the power of certain invisible realities that not only provide life with immanent meaning, but are also essential to the author's specific conception of the realist project. Finally, Storm's *Viola tricolor* employs the frame in order to theorize the construction of literary and gender identity, both of which are the product of exclusion, an attempt to order an inherently disordered system. The residual traces of such exclusion are evidenced by the presence of various frames, which shed light on a tension between superficial order and an underlying disorder, a tension between "fiction" and "reality" that lies at the heart of Storm's understanding of the realist literary enterprise.

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For Pop-Pop Werner

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## INTRODUCTION

The frame, an integral component of the artwork, demands interpretation. Despite scholarship's more recent efforts to redirect focus to the frame – and even today, when theories of the frame are largely uncontroversial – we continue to be blinded by the artwork. This is true regardless of whether one speaks of real-world encounters with visual works of art, fictional moments of ekphrasis, or even those conceptual frameworks that shape our (aesthetic) experiences. In the end, the frame's fundamental role in the construction of meaning is often left unacknowledged: “we see the artwork, but we do not see the frame.”<sup>1</sup>

The historical lack of attention to the frame, together with criticism's continued preferential treatment of the image, has served as an essential departure point for my research in this dissertation. My primary goal in each of the following chapters is to explore the largely neglected role of the frame as a recurring motif within works of German realism, otherwise referred to as poetic realism. I am interested first and foremost in examining the function of *Bilderrahmen* (picture frames) within these narratives, yet my analyses also account for other types of extra-aesthetic *Rahmen* (e.g., walls, windows, and holes) as well as certain linguistic, structural, and discursive frameworks that guide an understanding of these works. As such, my project relies also on a broader understanding of “the frame,” foregrounding an acute awareness of those invisible frameworks that guide our recognition and apprehension of aesthetic objects.

My analyses are unique in terms of their comprehensive treatment of the frame. To date, there have been no extensive studies of the function of picture frames within this

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Duro, introduction to *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

body of literature, a fact that is striking for more than one reason, and not least of all because of the marked affinity displayed by the poetic realists for the frame narrative (the *Rahmenerzählung*). Realism's proclivity for the *Rahmenerzählung* is by now axiomatic; one thinks perhaps first of works such as Adalbert Stifter's *Bunte Steine* collection (*Many-colored Stones*, 1853) or of Theodor Storm's famous triple-frame narrative *Der Schimmelreiter* (*Rider on a White Horse*, 1888). Yet a large number of lesser-known texts likewise make use of the frame on the structural level. All of the works considered in this dissertation might be cited as examples in this regard, and where appropriate, I examine their use of the frame not only as a textual motif, but also as a structural device.

There is certainly no shortage of theories of the *Rahmenerzählung*. As a structural device, the outer frame may help to reinforce the credibility (that is, the objectivity) of information or events presented in the inner frame (the *Binnenerzählung*) through its presentation of a fabricated source on which the information or events are purportedly based. Scholars have furthermore cited the frame's ability to contain disorderly (i.e., uncanny, supernatural, or romantic) elements within the confines of an ordered structure.<sup>2</sup> The frame may also have the effect (often intended by its author) of creating distance between reader and character, of preventing "penetration of, and subjective identification with, the protagonist."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the *Rahmenerzählung* may produce a sense of

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<sup>2</sup> Be that as it may, the frame may also fail in its intended strategy of containment. In this regard, see Andrew Webber, "Double Agencies in the *Novelle* of Poetic Realism," in *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 232-316. As Webber notes, "The extensive theorizing of the *Novelle* throughout the nineteenth century points up a perceived need for objective regulation of anarchic material, as if to compensate for this lack of conventional formality...the need for control is apparently answered above all by the various types of frameworking which characterize the genre...But the frame – as *parergon* – may also work 'against the work', failing in the strategy of containment" (236).

<sup>3</sup> Gail Finney, "Revolution, resignation, realism (1830-1890)," in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. Helen Watanabe-O'Kelley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 322. This idea is presented within the context of Finney's discussion of Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter*.

detachment between (narrating) present and (narrated) past: that is, “Der Wechsel zwischen Gegenwart der Rahmenhandlung und Vergangenheit der Binnenerzählung erhöht die Distanz zum Stoff und schafft die Atmosphäre des Historischen.”<sup>4</sup> The *Rahmenerzählung* may also allow for the generation of multiple perspectives, thereby suggesting the fallibility of memory and the inherently subjective nature of experience. With particular regard to the novella, the preferred narrative form for many of the poetic realists, the frame emphasizes the architectonics of the literary form (“die Architektur der Kurzform unterstreicht”) and enhances the pretense of objectivity (“die scheinbare Objektivität...steigert”).<sup>5</sup>

It strikes me as curious that so much critical effort has been aimed at developing a richer understanding of the function of the *Rahmenerzählung* within the literature of poetic realism, while the frames that one repeatedly encounters within these stories have not received proper attention.<sup>6</sup> Within those texts considered at length in each subsequent chapter, the reader is met with an abundance of frames – frames of a physical nature, as well as linguistic and conceptual frameworks, all of which will prove critical with respect to our interpretive efforts. This preponderance of frames notwithstanding, close readings of this literature have tended to focus, instead, and as one might expect, on eliciting the significance of visual works of art. This is unsurprising, particularly when one

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<sup>4</sup> Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, 7th ed. (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1989), s.v. “Rahmenerzählung.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> It is precisely not my intention to suggest that no effort has been made to better understand the function of the frame within this body of literature. For evidence of this, see Eric Downing, “Binding Magic in Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*,” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 3 (2015): 156-170, or his longer study, “Painting Magic in Keller’s *Green Henry*” in *The Chain of Things: Divinatory Magic and the Practice of Reading in German Literature and Thought, 1850–1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 36-120. In this regard, see also Christiane Arndt, “On the Transgression of Frames in Theodor Storm’s Novella *Aquis submersus*,” *Monatshefte* 97, no. 4 (2005): 595-614 and Laurence Rickels, “Stifter’s Nachkommenschaft: The Problem of the Surname, the Problem of Painting,” *MLN* 100, no. 3 (1985): 577-598. In spite of these and other examples, a more comprehensive treatment of the frame motif within this body of literature is, to date, lacking.

acknowledges that the images that confront readers oftentimes exert a strong, uncanny influence, creating narrative tension and affecting narrative trajectory.

No other oeuvre provides more convincing evidence of the powerful, unsettling nature of the image than does Theodor Storm's: in *Immensee* (1850), the portrait that appears within the narrative frame first sets the narrator's memory, and with it the embedded narrative, into motion; in *Viola tricolor* (1874), the portrait of the deceased first wife represents a site of terrible angst for the younger second wife, competing with her for her new husband's attention and further destabilizing already precarious familial relations; when shown the portrait of his grandfather's childhood friend, feelings of lust are incited in the young male protagonist of *Im Nachbarhause links* (1875, *The Neighbor's House on the Left*); in *Aquis submersus* (1876), the protagonist of the inner narrative is unable to escape the feelings of dread he experiences when his eyes meet those immortalized in the *Urahne's* portrait; in *Eekenhof* (1879), the deceased mother's presence as (animate) portrait exerts an equally unnerving effect on the tale's young male and female protagonists.

And yet the degree to which picture frames present themselves within this body of literature is equally striking, and not only when one reflects on particular stories, but also on the corpuses of individual authors. In this respect, Storm's work again serves as an especially illustrative example. Nearly three decades separate the first of the aforementioned tales from the last, and yet Storm is relentless in his thematization of the frame throughout. All of the above examples, many of which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, employ the frame as a textual motif, and this, as we shall see, in ways that are highly programmatic.

It is my belief that scholarship's more general inattention to the frame has left a significant layer of meaning untitled. As Duro suggests: "the striking imbalance of inquiry that the artwork has received in comparison to its frame has not helped us to see the role, the function, or purpose of the frame in the construction of the artwork, or how it contrives a meaning for itself and for that which it encloses."<sup>7</sup> In each of the following chapters, I explore the function of the frame as a prominent, recurring motif in the literature of poetic realism. As such, my project fills a pronounced scholarly gap, thereby enriching our critical understanding of this important moment in German literary history. Through extensive analyses of a selection of three texts, I seek to shed light not only on the respective function of the frame in each, but also on the reasons why this particular motif is relevant to the aesthetic enterprise of poetic realism in general.

With its focus on canonical works written by three well-known representatives of German realism from Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, my project aims to provide a comprehensive approach to an analysis of the frame. In each of the three primary works examined – Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* (*Green Henry*, 1855/1879), Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften* (*Descendants*, 1864), and Theodor Storm's *Viola tricolor* (1874) – the frame presents an essential mode of (self-) reflection: the frame represents a medium *par excellence* with which each author is able to convey a very specific theory of realism; at the same time, however, frames are also used to communicate ideas of a non-literary nature. For instance, in Storm's *Viola tricolor*, the frame is employed as a means for theorizing not only the construction of narrative identity, but also the constitution of the gendered subject.

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<sup>7</sup> Duro, introduction to *The Rhetoric of the Frame*, 1.

One of the main goals of this project is to disrupt, and thereby to dissolve the traditional hierarchy that presents the frame as inherently subordinate to the image. It will, moreover, be important to remember that

Der Rahmen eines Gemäldes kann ein selbstständiges Kunstwerk sein, er befindet sich aber jenseits der Linie, die die Leinwand begrenzt, und wir nehmen ihn nicht wahr, wenn wir das Gemälde betrachten. Dabei brauchen wir nur zu beginnen, *den Rahmen als einen selbständigen Text zu betrachten*, und die Leinwand wird aus unserem künstlerischen Blickfeld verschwinden – sie ist jetzt jenseits der Grenze.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of this dissertation, I hope to have compelled my readers to reevaluate the oftentimes latent notion of the frame as an afterthought, an object that is only belatedly imposed onto the work of art, and whose function is not essential in the construction of meaning. Instead, we must regard it – as it rightfully should be regarded – as “einen selbständigen Text.” It is a “text” – a veritable body of signification – that has existed all along. In order that we might “read” it, we need only to shift our gaze ever so slightly, and allow, if only for a moment, “die Leinwand...aus unserem künstlerischen Blickfeld [zu] verschwinden.”

Bearing this in mind, my goal is not to shift focus away from the role played by the image in so many of these stories; as the work of numerous scholars attests, analyses of the status and function of visual artworks have the potential to be both productive and enriching. As will be evident in each of the chapters that follow, the image itself is also implicated in each of my respective analyses of the frame, precisely because of my belief that an analysis of one necessitates an analysis of the other. Crucial as the image itself may be in the production of meaning, my aim is to give the frame its due attention, to bring something that normally remains unseen into our field of vision with renewed

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<sup>8</sup> Jurij M. Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*, trans. Rolf-Dietrich Keil (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), 300. My emphasis.

vigor, precisely because there is something essential that remains hidden when it is overlooked.

### Theoretical approaches to the frame

Broadly speaking, there is certainly no lack of theoretical encounters with the frame. While some theoretical texts evoke the narrower sense of the object, in other words, the frame conceived of as the physical enclosure of an aesthetic object, there are still others whose primary understanding of the object is as a non-material or symbolic boundary. These theories are not limited to the field of aesthetics alone, but have emerged within the context of various discourses (e.g., within gender studies, semiotics, or sociology), a clear testament to the important status of the figure within extra-aesthetic systems of thought.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, there have also been theoreticians who have advocated for the fundamental role of the frame in determining meaning, and those who have understood it instead as a supplemental or subordinate appendage to the image (the “text” or the “sign” proper). My own analyses in the chapters that follow repeatedly confirm the frame’s intrinsic potential for signification, and thereby espouse the former theoretical stance. However, it will be important to consider even those that present divergent stances, and to read them in dialogue with each other.

My focus on the frame is as both a material and non-material (that is, symbolic) field of enclosure. For this reason, I find it most fitting to reflect in more detail on those theories in particular that demonstrate a similarly dualistic understanding of the frame. In

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Shearer West, “Framing Hegemony: Economics, Luxury, and Family Continuity in the Country-House Portrait” or Amelia Jones, “Interpreting Feminist Bodies: The Unframeability of Desire,” both in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63-78 and 223-241, respectively.

what follows, my goal is to provide brief summaries of three hugely influential theories of the frame: Georg Simmel's "The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study" (1902), Meyer Schapiro's "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art" (1969), and finally, Jacques Derrida's "The Parergon" (1979).

If one begins with Simmel and ends with Derrida, as I do here, one sees the marked shift in our critical understanding of the frame that takes place within the course of less than a century, a shift away from the traditional conception of the frame as an extrinsic, supplementary appendage to the image, toward a more equitable treatment of the frame in its relation to the work of art. Although the works of Keller, Stifter, and Storm predate the earliest of the essays considered here, namely Simmel's, as I hope to show, they clearly reflect a more progressive, modern understanding of the frame, one that sees in it an inherent potential, its essential role in the construction of meaning.

#### Georg Simmel and the subordination of the frame

At the turn of the twentieth century, the German sociologist, philosopher, art historian and critic Georg Simmel pioneered the field of frame theory with his essay "The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study," offering a particular set of reflections on the frame that clearly adhere to the more traditional of the two theoretical stances highlighted above. Simmel's essay, and in particular its rigidly conceived notion of the frame in its relationship to the artwork, will help us to form a deeper sense of the discursive practices that have shaped our traditional understanding of the frame as inferior, extrinsic, or supplemental to the image.



Simmel's essay commences with a discussion of the work of art, which, he argues, represents an entity that is "sufficient within itself...a whole for itself, not requiring any relation to an exterior, spinning each of its threads back into its own centre."<sup>10</sup> Opposed to this notion of the artwork as a self-sufficient form is the frame, whose primary function, according to Simmel, is to reinforce and protect the autonomy of the former:

...for the work of art [boundaries] are that absolute ending which exercises indifference towards and defense against the exterior and a unifying integration with respect to the interior in a *single* act. What the frame achieves for the work of art is to symbolize and strengthen this double function of its boundary. It excludes all that surrounds it, and thus also the viewer as well, from the work of art, and thereby helps to place it at that distance from which alone it is aesthetically enjoyable. The distance of a being from us signifies in everything psychological the unity of this being in itself. For only to the extent to which a being is self-enclosed does it possess that sphere into which no one can penetrate, that existence for itself with which it can protect itself from every other sphere.<sup>11</sup>

Critical emphasis is thereby placed on several functions of the frame: it excludes the viewer (together with the broader milieu) from the sphere of the artwork; it creates distance between the viewer and artwork; and it reinforces the unity and wholeness of the work of art.<sup>12</sup> At a later point, Simmel will also discuss the frame's function as a focusing device, in other words, as an important means of directing the viewer's gaze to the artwork with ease. As becomes increasingly clear throughout the course of the essay that follows, Simmel's specific conception of the frame repeatedly subordinates it to the artwork. Its ideal function, according to Simmel, is inseparable from the work of art.

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<sup>10</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11 (1994): 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> This rather neat delimitation between "inside" and "outside" is subsequently problematized in Jacques Derrida's essay "The Parergon," in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 37-82.

Everything it does is in the service of the image: accordingly, the “mere frame” is “the mere borderguard of the picture.”<sup>13</sup>

In his theorization of the frame, Simmel also sees fit to construct a set of parameters concerning what the frame should and should not do or be. We learn, for instance, that

the frame, through its configuration, must never offer a gap or a bridge through which, as it were, the world could get in or from which the picture could get out – as occurs, for instance, when the picture’s content extends into the frame, a fortunately rare mistake, which completely negates the work of art’s autonomous being and thereby the significance of the frame.<sup>14</sup>

The author furthermore maintains that the frame should never enter into artistic competition with the image: in other words, the frame should never be “the expression of a self-sufficient artistic idea,”<sup>15</sup> should never “take on an organic life and a weightiness of its own which enter into a degrading competition with its existence as a mere frame.”<sup>16</sup> In general, “an error in ranking occurs if one wishes to grant the frame an aesthetic value of its own by figurative ornamentation, by the independent appeal of the colour, by design or symbolism.”<sup>17</sup> This, Simmel argues, “displaces the subordinate position of the frame with respect to the picture.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Simmel, “The Picture Frame,” 15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. This idea of a competition between artwork and frame should remind one of a point made in Kant’s Third Critique, which Derrida returns to nearly two hundred years later in “The Parergon.” In particular, Derrida draws our attention to Kant’s discussion of the problematic nature of the gilded frame. Paraphrasing Kant, Derrida writes that “this degradation of the simple *parergon* into a seductive adornment is again a frame, this time the gilded frame [*goldene Rahmen*], the gilding of the frame done in order to recommend the painting to our attention by its attraction [*Reiz*]. What is bad, external to the pure object of taste, is thus what seduces by attraction” (64). This, I believe, is roughly equivalent to Simmel’s distinction between individuality and style: he writes, moreover, that “The same error in ranking order occurs if one wishes to grant the frame an aesthetic value of its own by figurative ornamentation, by *the independent appeal of the colour*, by design or symbolism, all of which make it into the expression of a self-sufficient artistic idea...the frame should possess no individuality, but rather a style” (14-5, my emphasis).

In positing such disruptions as “errors” or “mistakes,” Simmel’s theory of the frame not only presents itself as severely inflexible. At its core, the essay also fails to acknowledge the nature of the frame as artifact, and, moreover, one that is unable to be separated from the cultural systems and historical processes of which it has always, inevitably been a part.

### Meyer Schapiro and the historically-conditioned frame

Seventy years after Simmel’s essay was first published, art historian Meyer Schapiro offered an entirely different set of reflections in “On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art.” What should perhaps first strike one is that Schapiro’s theoretical reflections are markedly less conservative when compared to Simmel’s: Schapiro’s focus is not on presenting strict definitions of what the frame is and is not, or relatedly, what it should or should not do. Rather, Schapiro’s essay presents a far more lenient, malleable conception of the frame, particularly as concerns its role in the communication of meaning. For Schapiro, the frame represents a form that is not only “historically developed,” but one that is also “highly variable”; “though obviously conventional,” it needn’t “be learned for the image to be understood”; it “may even acquire a semantic value.”<sup>19</sup>

Whereas Simmel’s essay would seem to imply an eternal sameness of the frame’s ideal function, Schapiro focuses instead on the frame in its relationship to history, necessarily acknowledging it as a historically-conditioned object. Toward the beginning of his essay, he argues, moreover, that “It is not commonly realized how late an invention is the frame.... Apparently it was late in the second millennium BC (if even then) before

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<sup>19</sup> Meyer Schapiro, “On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs,” *Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 6, no. 1 (1972-1973): 9.

one thought of a continuous isolating frame around the image, a homogenous enclosure like a city wall.”<sup>20</sup> Much like Simmel, Schapiro also presents the possibility that the frame should function as “a finding and focusing device placed between the observer and the image.”<sup>21</sup> Yet he is quick to supplement this with the acknowledgement that “the frame may enter also into the shaping of that image; and not only through the contrasts and correspondences incited by its strong form...but also, as in modern styles, in the practice of cutting the foreground objects oddly at the frame so that they appear to be close to the observer and seen from the side through an opening.”<sup>22</sup>

Importantly, Schapiro also accounts for the possibility of the frame’s violation, a crossing-over of the image into the field of the frame that Simmel would certainly deem reprehensible, seeing it as a failure of the frame to maintain its “proper” function. Instead, Schapiro presents the argument that

Our conception of the frame as a regular enclosure isolating the field of representation from the surrounding surfaces does not apply to all frames. There are pictures and reliefs in which elements of the image cross the frame, as if the frame were only a part of the background and existed in a simulated space behind the figure. Such crossing of the frame is often an expressive device; a figure represented as moving appears more active in crossing the frame, as if unbounded in his motion. The frame belongs then more to the virtual space of the image than to the material surface; the convention is naturalized as an element of the picture space rather than of the observer’s space or the space of the vehicle.<sup>23</sup>

Not only does Schapiro recognize the frame’s potential role in the construction of meaning; he also accords it the status of artistic object in its own right, “as an element of the picture space rather than of the observer’s space or the space of the vehicle.” Schapiro

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

does not entirely discount more traditional conceptions of the frame. Still, he concedes that

...although the strictly enclosing rectangular frame seems natural and satisfies a need for clarity in isolating the image for the eye, it is only one possible use of the frame. The form can be varied to produce quite opposite effects, which also satisfy some need or concept. All these types [of frames] are intelligible as devices of ordering and expression, but no one of them is necessary or universal. They show the freedom of artists in arbitrarily constructing effective deviations from what might appear at first to be inherent and immutable *a priori* conditions of representation.<sup>24</sup>

For Schapiro, the frame is “universal” neither in its application nor with respect to its intent; rather, its form is mutable, even arbitrary. Acknowledging that there are no “inherent and immutable *a priori* conditions of representation,” Schapiro clearly recognizes that the frame itself is invariably “framed” by the immanently personal impulses of the artist.

A comparison of Simmel’s and Schapiro’s respective assessments of the frame elucidates several crucial differences. As we have seen, Schapiro’s essay relinquishes the notion of an “ideal” or “model” function of the frame, whereas this very notion forms the basis of Simmel’s essay. At the same time, Simmel’s belief in a certain prototypical function of the frame clearly implies the presumed universality of his specific understanding of the object. Schapiro’s essay could not be more different in this respect, precisely because it posits the frame as historically conditioned, as an object whose function is mutable rather than stagnant. Finally, Schapiro’s acknowledgement of the frame’s potential role in the construction of meaning is key. While it is plausible to suggest that Simmel recognizes a similar potential, his understanding of the frame

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12.

confines its function to that of a supplement to the already “complete” aesthetic experience afforded by the image.

As we shall see, Derrida’s theory of the *parergon* reinforces Schapiro’s recognition of the frame as a constant (albeit largely invisible) source of signification.

### Kant, Derrida, and the *parergon*

First published in 1979, Jacques Derrida’s essay “The Parergon” posits the fundamental importance of “the frame” not only within aesthetic theory, but also within the larger tradition of Western philosophical discourse. Kant’s Third Critique – the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790) – is used as a platform for Derrida’s reflections on the “parergon,” or “by-work,” a concept nebulously defined by Kant in his discussions of aesthetic judgement as a type of “ornamentation,” one which furthermore maintains a supplementary (i.e., extrinsic, non-integral) relationship to the aesthetic object, that is, the beautiful object proper. As paraphrased by Derrida, Kant’s concept of the *parergon* posits it as an object that “is not internal or intrinsic (*innerlich*), as an integral part (*als Bestandteil*), to the total representation of the object (*in die ganze Vorstellung des Gegenstandes*) but which belongs to it only in an extrinsic way (*nur äusserlich*) as a surplus, an addition, an adjunct (*als Zuthat*), a supplement.”<sup>25</sup>

Countering this Kantian narrative of the inherently extrinsic nature of the *parergon* in its relation to the *ergon* (“the work”), Derrida maintains that

A *parergon* comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done [*fait*], the fact [*le fait*], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board [*au bord, à bord*]. It is first of all on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [*Il est d’abord l’à-*

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<sup>25</sup> Derrida, “The Parergon,” 57.

*bord*].<sup>26</sup>

During a particularly significant moment of reflection, Derrida furthermore maintains that the *parergon* exerts its greatest influence precisely when it remains unseen, hidden, as it “obliterates,” “dissolves,” “sinks in,” “disappears.” In other words,

The *parergon* is distinguished from both the *ergon* (the work) and the milieu; it is distinguished as a figure against a ground. But it is not distinguished in the same way as the work, which is also distinguished from a ground. The *parergonal* frame is distinguished from two grounds, but in relation to each of these *it disappears into the other*. In relation to the work, which may function as its ground, it disappears into the wall and then, by degrees, into the general context. In relation to the general context, it disappears into the work. Always a form on a ground, the *parergon* is nevertheless a form which has traditionally been determined *not by distinguishing itself, but by disappearing, sinking in, obliterating itself, dissolving just as it expends its greatest energy*. The frame is never a ground in the way the context or the work may be, but neither does its marginal thickness form a figure. At least it is a figure which arises of its own accord.<sup>27</sup>

In delimiting his theory of aesthetic judgement, Kant has recourse to three examples of *parerga*, objects that, according to Kant, serve to reinforce the beauty of the aesthetic object, but do not belong to it in a proper sense. The three examples given are as follows: the garments adorning a statue (*Gewänder an Statuen*), the columns surrounding a building (*Säulengänge um Prachtgebäude*), and the frames of paintings (*Einfassungen der Gemälde*). In his attempt to understand Kant’s specific choice of examples, which together with their connection to one another is not self-evident, Derrida reaches the conclusion that, in all instances, the *parergon* is precisely that which problematizes the border between “inner” and “outer,” “intrinsic” and “extrinsic,” “inside the work” and “outside the work.” Not only that, but “The *ergon*’s lack is the lack of a *parergon*, of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 61. My emphasis.

garment or the column which nevertheless remains exterior to it.”<sup>28</sup> In a reversal of the traditional hierarchy that presents the frame as subordinate or extrinsic to the image, Derrida argues that “that which cannot stand alone, which cannot be established in its process, is moved forward. Framing always sustains and contains that which, by itself, collapses forthwith.”<sup>29</sup>

Derrida’s work in “The Parergon” serves not only as an important reflection on the importance of the frame within aesthetic theory, but also on the underlying, invisible systems that condition meaning and generate knowledge, in other words, those *parerga* that problematize the notion of *a priori* knowledge. That is to say: “In the case of the *ergon*, its non-self-identity, the inability of the *ergon* to define itself as a whole, is revealed through the *parergon*. There is no *ergon* without the *parergon*. At the origin of the *ergon* there was the work, but framing that work is already the *parergon*. Never pure, the *ergon* reveals a duplicitous origin.”<sup>30</sup>

The ideas put forth by Derrida in “The Parergon” – certainly controversial at the time of the essay’s publication in 1979, now far less so – are strikingly antithetical to Simmel’s 1902 reflections in his study of the picture frame. Within the course of less than a century, a tremendous shift hence occurs with respect to theories of the frame. Whereas Simmel’s essay presents a conceptualization of the frame as the rigid, impenetrable boundary between “inside the work” and “outside the work,” Derrida’s theorization of the *parergon* posits it as an object that problematizes the very notion of a clear distinction between “inside” and “outside.” What is more, Derrida’s theory presents the *parergon* as

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>30</sup> K. Malcolm Richards, “Framing *The Truth in Painting*,” in *Derrida Reframed* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 36.



a figure whose power is most potent precisely *not* at the moment of its heightened visibility, but rather, when it remains invisible, disappears, is effaced – an idea that will resonate in significant ways with my readings of the works of Keller, Stifter, and Storm.

### Poetic realism and the frame

#### Reflecting on realism

Understanding the precise nature of poetic realism is no easy task. With the study of this body of literature comes the largely unavoidable problem of its definition, a challenge that has confronted even the most renowned scholars of this nineteenth-century literary epoch.<sup>31</sup> Stressing precisely this point, Eric Downing begins his disquisition on realism with the assertion that “It has become a critical commonplace in almost every discussion of literary realism that it is nearly impossible to define the term itself, and that is particularly the case when the subject is German realism or, as it is also called, poetic realism.”<sup>32</sup> Facing the same dilemma, Robert Holub suggests that it is perhaps best “to give up the search for a normative definition” of this literature all together.<sup>33</sup> Walter Silz also eschews this crucial problem of definition; already in his preface, the author foregrounds his reluctance to define realism quite matter-of-factly, writing that his study does not “attempt anything like a systematic account of Realism, or even a definition of it.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that this same problem accompanies the more general study of literary realism as both a historical period and a stylistic mode.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Downing, *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Holub, *Reflections of Realism: Paradox, Norm, and Ideology in Nineteenth-century German Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Silz, *Realism and Reality: Studies in the German Novelle of Poetic Realism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954). I cite here from the preface, which appears on an unnumbered page.

Certainly related to the difficulty of defining poetic realism is the fact that realism as a stylistic mode is unique neither to the works of German realism, nor even to the broader literary trend that swept through Europe (most notably France, Russia, and England) during the course of the nineteenth century. Rather, as Theodor Fontane articulates, “Der Realismus in der Kunst ist so alt als die Kunst selbst, ja, noch mehr: *er ist die Kunst*.”<sup>35</sup> There is also the related problem of defining “realism” and “reality” as conceptual categories. “Reality” is “permanently connected to the norms and conventions of the time at which writing is taking place.”<sup>36</sup> At the same time, any experience of “reality” is necessarily filtered through the eyes of the perceiving subject. Thus, there is no “reality” as such, no objective, universally-accepted notion of what constitutes “reality” or “realism”; instead, “reality” is always, inherently subjective, inextricably connected to the time and place in which the (reading and writing) subject lives.

Of course, the type of literature that emerges in Germany in or around the year 1848<sup>37</sup> is also unique, particularly when compared to the literature being produced in England, Russia and France at the time.<sup>38</sup> As Baker has noted, the literary movement that began in Germany around the middle of the nineteenth century “did follow the tendency

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<sup>35</sup> Theodor Fontane, “Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848,” in *Sämtliche Werke* Vol. 21/1: *Literarische Essays und Studien*, ed. Kurt Schreinert (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1963), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Christine Baker, “Landscape in Theodor Storm’s Novellen: An Aspect of the Development of Storm’s Descriptive Style into Poetic Realism,” PhD diss., University of Leicester, 1999, 6.

<sup>37</sup> There is some contention among scholars regarding the beginning of the poetic realist period in Germany. Still, most seem to concur that the revolutions of 1848/1849 are the primary impulse that occasioned the move toward an increased degree of realism in literature.

<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, some critics have cited the perceived influence of the Danish brand of poetic realism on the somewhat later, German variant. In this regard, see, for instance, Clifford Bernd, *Poetic Realism in Scandinavia and Central Europe, 1820-1895* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995). As some scholars have also noted, the major differences between the particular form of realism that developed in Germany during this period and the form adopted by its European counterparts is largely attributable to the unique political and social situation of Germany compared to countries such as England, France, and Russia. Germany did not become a unified nation nor experience industrialization until later in the nineteenth century, which many have suggested resulted in a unique variant of literary realism when compared to the great novels of realism being produced in other European countries at the time.

of European literature in general, i.e. it was a form of realism, however it contained a poetic element which distinguished it and its authors from its contemporaries in other countries.”<sup>39</sup> As one might expect, the introduction of the word “poetic” to the already complex literary designation “realism” compounds the difficulty of definition. Even to critically untrained eyes, the term appears oxymoronic.

Understanding the nature of poetic realism requires us, moreover, to rethink certain conceptual categories that are traditionally understood as antithetical. How can the construction of a literary work be guided both by an artistic/poetic impulse and an impulse toward realism? Whereas the word “poetic” evokes a sense of romantic “Innerlichkeit,” a retreat into subjectivity, the conveyance of something “real” would seem, at the same time, to require an objective, external stance with respect to one’s subject matter.

Any attempt to untangle this dichotomous web requires that we contemplate the nature of “reality” as an empirically-recognizable category. What is “real,” and what not? Is “reality” grounded in an objective perception of the external world, or is that which is most “real” the uniquely subjective experience of some inner reality? Can one speak of pure objectivity or pure subjectivity, or is objectivity always and inevitably tinged with the traces of a latent but potent subjectivity? What is the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in the literature of the period? Where does external reality end and the inner reality of the poet begin? How is a work to be understood as “poetic,” but precisely not “romantic”?

An inquiry into the nature of poetic realism seems to open up a veritable Pandora’s Box, requiring us not only to question the status of this body of literature as a

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<sup>39</sup> Baker, “Landscape in Theodor Storm’s Novellen,” 5.

unique form of fiction; an understanding of the fiction also necessitates that we rethink the nature of “reality” itself. This, I would suggest, lies at the core of the difficulty occasioned by most, if not all, attempts to define the aesthetic agenda of this literature. As the work of those mentioned above and that of many others attests, criticism has tended to shy away from attempting to concretely define the literature of this period. This leaves us with a feeling of the inevitably of not knowing. The irony here should not escape us: the aesthetic agenda of realism itself is largely indistinct and amorphous although it is a literature that presents itself, as it were, as a mirror image of the external world.

Yet perhaps it is precisely what has remained and what continues to remain unarticulated that is most important. It is conceivable to suggest, I believe, that the possibility of defining this literature has represented an inherent impossibility from the very beginning. In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of poetic realism, and indeed, of literary realism in general, we should be prepared to be met with more questions than answers, perhaps even to be assailed by a multitude of indefinitely unanswerable questions regarding the nature and construction not only of these texts, but also of “reality” and “fiction” as conceptual categories. But perhaps this is precisely the point. Perhaps it is important to let go of our quest for categorical answers: it is our perpetual inquisition into the nature of “reality,” “fiction,” and their intersections that would seem to lead, so I would suggest, to a heightened state of understanding. The task set to us is to question the nature of our world – both the world in which we live and in which we read – and, ultimately, to relinquish the sense of security we find in clearly-defined, homogenized categories of understanding. What is “real”? What is not? These are

questions that beg answers, and which I hope will remain with us as we delve into the readings I propose in each of the following chapters.

### Reflecting in realism

These important examples from modern critical literature provide convincing evidence of the genuine struggle faced by scholarship in its attempt to understand the aesthetics, methods, and goals of poetic realism. Yet to say that this struggle originated only in more recent times would, of course, be a fallacy: “There are no written rules or regulations, nothing to refer to from nineteenth century literature which explains and defines realism coherently. Some essays and reviews can be found...but there is no formulated consistent theory suggesting what constitutes a piece of realism.”<sup>40</sup> Certain nineteenth-century theorists might be cited in this respect, in particular Otto Ludwig and Julian Schmidt, but their treatises on German realism do little to assuage one’s feeling of uncertainty.<sup>41</sup>

Self-reflexivity presents a valuable avenue of approaching a more concise definition of realism. Yet Robert Holub’s contention that realist literature displays a marked “penchant for limiting reflexivity” seems to anticipate an initial barrier.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, moments of self-reflection do exist, but often in a form that is not readily discernible as such.<sup>43</sup> This is necessary, Holub argues, because “the fiction [that realist texts] perpetrate is that they are not fiction at all.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, “realism...self-

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<sup>40</sup> Baker, “Landscape in Theodor Storm’s Novellen,” 6.

<sup>41</sup> The particular theories of Ludwig and Schmidt will be considered at greater length in Chapter One of the dissertation.

<sup>42</sup> Holub, *Reflections of Realism*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> According to Holub, this absence of direct or explicit reflection on the relationship between text and reality becomes particularly apparent when one compares realist prose to works of romantic literature.

<sup>44</sup> Holub, *Reflections of Realism*, 16.

deconstructs by reflecting on its own fictional underpinnings.”<sup>45</sup> Importantly, Downing challenges Holub on precisely this point, arguing that these rupture points are “actually conscious, inherent aspects of realism itself.”<sup>46</sup>

Fittingly, the works to be considered in the following chapters each present a strong self-reflexive component, yet as I will also suggest, the most important instances of self-reflection are transmitted to us in a form that is inherently difficult to recognize. In each case, it is my contention that the image functions as a veritable red herring: it is meant to divert attention from that other, at least equally important signifier – the frame. Clearly, the red herring has led us astray, for our focus on the image has been unbridled, and in the process, we have not given the frame its due attention.

As I will argue, Keller, Stifter, and Storm use literature as a platform to speculate on the nature of the realist project. It would seem that each author considers it imperative to delineate the parameters of this new literary paradigm, not only for their readership, but perhaps more importantly, one might argue, for themselves as authors working in this literary tradition. In each of the primary works examined in this dissertation, it is as Holub suggests: instances of self-reflection are inherently difficult to recognize. What is more, one also discovers many crucial moments of reflection where one least expects them. In each story – Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*, Stifter’s *Nachkommenschaften*, and Storm’s *Viola tricolor* – the frame provides an essential medium for commenting on the nature of the realist literary enterprise, albeit in distorted form.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>46</sup> Downing, *Double Exposures*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> While the works of Keller, Stifter, and Storm provide especially illustrative examples of the frame’s function as self-reflexive medium, I feel certain that the work of other authors of this period might be considered with respect not to their “penchant for limiting reflexivity,” but with respect to their fondness for, or perhaps more accurately, their awareness of the necessity of self-reflection in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of their own poetics.

Why then, we might ask, is the frame privileged with respect to self-reflection? What is it able to achieve that the image alone cannot? In my discussion of Keller in Chapter One, I argue that the frame – itself a figure of moderation between the extremes of representation and reality – is used to convey a notion of “aesthetic moderation” as one of realism’s guiding impulses. Stifter’s reasons for employing the frame motif are quite different: in Chapter Two, I maintain that the frame’s ability to represent absence is harnessed, thereby allowing for a formulation of the artist’s task not as the conveyer of a present reality, but a reality that is essentially absent from sight. Finally, in Chapter Three, I show how Storm repurposes the frame (with particular interest in the object’s function as an exclusory medium) in order to present a theory of narrative and gendered identity that is itself founded on a principle of exclusion.

- Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*

Chapter One of my dissertation examines a specific subset of frames encountered in Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich* (1855/1879) with respect to the notion of moderation.<sup>48</sup> More specifically, my inquiry into the frame reveals its essential symbolic function as a moderating force between various excesses relating to economics, aesthetics, and gender. My analysis suggests, moreover, that connections purposefully forged between these (seemingly) separate discourses – economics, aesthetics, and gender – help to guide an understanding of Keller’s *Bildungsroman* both as a timely social critique, as well as an important medium of reflection on the literary enterprise of poetic realism.

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<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of my argument in Chapter One, I rely on the second, heavily revised edition of Keller’s novel.

In the first part of my analysis, I begin by considering the interdependency of the novel's economic and aesthetic discourses, and relatedly, how Keller's novel thereby presents a critical assessment of the growing (and inherently problematic) divide between art and the (economic) realities of life that takes place in the nineteenth century. Setting into play a productive tension between economics and aesthetics, Keller's novel presents the task of poetic realism in terms of what I refer to as *aesthetic moderation*. Within this context, the frame represents an important symbol of moderation, establishing connections between various polarities such as *Kunstwerk* and *Handwerk*, the individual (artist) and society, and also, importantly, art and life. Thereby implied is a notion of poetic realism as a mediating force between the seemingly antagonistic realms of artistic imagination on the one hand, and an oftentimes mundane reality on the other.<sup>49</sup>

The second strand of my argument shifts focus to an examination of gender in its relation to economy. Within this context, I suggest that Keller's novel also implicitly promotes the idea of an *economy of gender*, one whose maintenance is likewise crucial to the *Bildungsprozess* of the male protagonist. In order to substantiate this claim, I maintain that certain female characters – those whose power over the male subject is deemed “extreme” or “excessive” and thus “dangerous” to his intended *Bildung* – are ultimately subjected to moderation. Importantly, this “economy” also leaves its impression on the figure of the frame: both structurally and at the level of content, the frame repeatedly functions as a means for the male's (attempted) containment of the “excessive” allure of an undesirable femininity.

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<sup>49</sup> The idea of realism as a force of moderation between extremes (e.g., between art and life, subjectivity and objectivity) forms a significant part of the theoretical undercurrent not only for Keller's contemporaries (e.g., Otto Ludwig and Julian Schmidt), but also for more modern critics (for instance, Walter Silz). Such theoretical considerations will be unpacked in Chapter One.



- Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften*

Chapter Two proposes a reading of Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften* (1864) through the lens of Stifter's 1852 *Vorrede* to the *Bunte Steine* collection (*Many-colored Stones*, 1853). Reading the text against this backdrop, I consider it from two different vantages, namely vision and the family, and specifically as these relate to the frame. A survey of the narrative from both angles elucidates a fundamentally similar message: the power of absence. As I will argue, *Nachkommenschaften* is a story about the power of what remains hidden, inaccessible to sight, even actively or deliberately suppressed. It is an absence, moreover, whose force will repeatedly assert itself throughout the course of the narrative. In this regard, it will be crucial to examine the means by which the frame (both as a textual motif and structural device) is used to underscore the presence of a reality that is powerful despite – and perhaps even more so because of – its absence.

In the first section of my analysis, I explore how the narrative establishes a tension between presence and absence at a visual level (a tension that lies at the heart of Stifter's conception of realist vision as expounded in the *Vorrede*). As a means of developing this idea, I examine the various framing devices employed by the protagonist, and in particular, as these appear in chronological sequence: a progressive narrowing of perspective occurs here. This movement toward an increasingly circumscribed field of vision is meant, so I suggest, to allegorize the artist's maturation from one who perceives with the "leibliche[s] Auge" to one who ultimately learns how to see with "das geistige [Auge] der Wissenschaft."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Adalbert Stifter, "Vorrede," in *Adalbert Stifter Werke und Briefe. Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 2.2., ed. Alfred Doppler and Wolfgang Frühwald (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 11.

In the second part of my analysis, I consider the function of the family. According to the *Vorrede*, it is the family that serves as a regulatory force for the individual. The same holds true for the particular case of *Nachkommenschaften*, in which the family presents itself as a regulatory force (or “frame”) for the protagonist, Friedrich Roderer. Although Friedrich is initially presented as “unframed,” there is nevertheless a consistent effort made to “frame” him within the confines of his patrilineal name and its accompanying realities. Despite the active suppression of the protagonist’s patronym, the Roderer family will continue to exert its unseen, but still powerful influence on the young protagonist.

In the end, the trajectory of the narrative will lead to a destruction of the particular (the individual) and, at the same time, to an acknowledgment of a more general reality (the family). Stifter clearly means for us to understand the “destruction” of the individual and his incorporation into the collective familial structure as an essentially natural process. What *Nachkommenschaften* ultimately describes is a process of absorption in the human/social world that, because of the metaphorical language used to describe the same processes at work in nature, is presented as “proper” or “natural.” Yet at the same time, despite the text’s apparent insistence that such processes are “natural,” there is also a certain resistance to assimilation that is foregrounded throughout, one which is paramount with respect to the novella’s exposition of its realist aesthetic program.

- Theodor Storm’s *Viola tricolor*

The third and final chapter of my dissertation presents a close reading of Theodor Storm’s *Viola tricolor* (1874), encouraging an understanding of the frame in its function as a reflection on the nature of both literary and gendered identity. In Storm’s novella,

both types of identity are implicitly presented as the direct result of certain processes of exclusion, processes guided by an attempt to order an inherently disordered system. As I furthermore argue, the residual traces of such processes are elucidated by the presence of various framing devices, which together help to shed light on a tension between superficial order and an underlying, deeply-rooted disorder.

I begin with an examination of Storm's use of the frame motif as a means of articulating a self-reflexive theory of the realist novella. To this end, I rely heavily on Andrew Webber's exposition of the realist novella, which, Webber maintains, is "in a key sense anti-historical."<sup>51</sup> Against this backdrop, I argue that Storm's novella, in its presentation of various alterities, represents a narrative space in which official histories and ahistorical "outliers" exist side by side. Importantly, the official, accepted narrative is kept intact by means of a frame, which serves as an exclusory medium, thereby perpetuating a sense of order. In this regard also, I depend on Webber's critical voice. In particular, his work foregrounds a critical engagement with certain principles (i.e., exclusion, inclusion, order, and disorder) that not only define the literary project of the German realist novella, but also determine the narrative landscape of *Viola tricolor* in significant ways.

The second part of my argument considers the frame's essential role in theorizing the nature of gendered identity. This latter section of my analysis allows for an important connection to the former if one considers both realism and gender as essentially narrative constructions. My reading of Storm's novella is consequently based not only on an understanding of the realist novella itself as narrative, but also on an implicit acknowledgment of the fundamentally narrative character of gender presented therein. In

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<sup>51</sup> Webber, "Double Agencies," 233.

fact, a very specific narrative of gender has been subtly woven into the textual fabric of *Viola tricolor*, one in which “woman” emerges as a constructed object of a specifically male imagination. In its function as both exclusory and inclusory medium, the frame serves to reinforce the inherent disparity between two images of femininity, one stable and constructed, the other dynamic and natural.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Moderating Excesses in Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich***

To speak about economy – of *moderating excess* – in connection with a novel that spans over seven hundred pages might at first seem nonsensical, if not ironic. Yet the issue of economy is highly pertinent to a reading of Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* (*Green Henry*, 1855/1879).<sup>1</sup> A closer analysis of the novel in its economic dimensions will reveal a connection to questions of both aesthetics and gender, and furthermore, the relation of all three discourses to one central, recurring image: the frame. That such diverse subjects should be superimposed onto the figure of the frame is, perhaps, not readily apparent. Be that as it may, readers of Keller's *Bildungsroman* will encounter certain frames whose function is largely ideological in nature: whose goal is the transmission of a specific set of ideals relating to economics, aesthetics, and gender, all of which are to be understood as central to the *Bildung* of the novel's male protagonist.

*Der grüne Heinrich* is clearly a novel of extremes: spirituality and sensuality, religion and the human world, prodigality and asceticism, imaginative potential and practical concerns, art and life; these binaries are only several of the most conspicuous examples of the text's construction of antithetical structures. Within this context, the frame functions as a vehicle of mediation, or moderation, between these and other polarities. In the analysis that follows, my main goal is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of each and every frame encountered by the reader of Keller's novel. Instead, my attention will be directed at a particular subset of frames that present themselves in a specific locale, namely the countryside where Heinrich spends an impressionable,

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<sup>1</sup> Gottfried Keller, *Der grüne Heinrich*, ed. Heinz Amelung, 4 vols. (Berlin: Bong & Co., 1921). All parenthetical references in this chapter are taken from this edition and refer exclusively to *Der grüne Heinrich*.

especially meaningful time during his younger years (the reasons for this choice will become clear in the analysis that follows). More precisely, my investigation into the frame's role in conveying meaning relies on an examination of the following: the frame that is chosen for Heinrich's painting of a bouquet of flowers; the frame that is reused for the protagonist's portrait of his beloved Anna; the crude frame that surrounds Heinrich's representation of the "Heidenstube," which he paints on the wall of Anna's bedroom; the window-like opening (and piece of glass) that display Anna's countenance in her coffin; and finally, the frame that surrounds the "Hexenkind" Meretlein's portrait (together with the clothing that "frames" her body).<sup>2</sup> Importantly, my analysis of Meretlein's character in the penultimate section of this chapter will also take into account certain non-traditional "frames," i.e., the structural and linguistic frameworks that are imposed on the female child. All of these frames will have significant implications for a reading of Keller's novel with respect to the notion of moderation, particularly where matters of economics, aesthetics, and gender are concerned.

The text's proclivity toward the construction of antithetical structures articulates itself in various ways. Such structures are especially visible when one considers the novel from the vantage points of aesthetics and economics, the tension between which *Der grüne Heinrich* seeks to resolve. To begin, it is important to underscore that Heinrich's art oscillates throughout the course of his *Bildung*, expressing itself at times as crude, objective reproduction; at other times, it is the result of an overly fertile, romantic

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<sup>2</sup> My analysis of Meretlein's character with respect to the frame is particularly indebted to the work of Eric Downing in his article "Binding Magic in Gottfried Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich*," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 3 (2015): 156-170. To be clear, and although I cite it at points throughout this chapter, my analysis was developed independently of any and all arguments made by Downing in his longer study of Keller's novel, "Painting Magic in Keller's *Green Henry*," in *The Chain of Things: Divinatory Magic and the Practice of Reading in German Literature and Thought, 1850-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 36-120, which was published after the bulk of the work for my own analysis was completed.

imagination. After being expelled from school at an early age, the young protagonist is forced to consider a profession, which leads him (as one might expect) to the world of art. A brief period of employment with the commercial artist Habersaat ensues, yet the “soulless mechanical labour” involved in the tedious process of reproduction does not stimulate Heinrich, but instead causes him to retreat into “the most romantic compositions.”<sup>3</sup> After a temporary apprenticeship to the travelling artist Römer (from whom he does in fact acquire a certain amount of artistic knowledge), Heinrich leaves his native Switzerland (and with it, his lonely, widowed mother) and travels to Munich in the hopes of further developing his artistic career. There he resides for several years, but his art does not improve; instead, “his paintings, romantic at first, lose more and more in content till he spends his working hours filling a huge canvas with an infinite cobweb of lines.”<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to make ends meet, Heinrich resorts to selling his paintings (and not only paintings, but also other possessions) to a second-hand dealer of art and antiques. Still, the protagonist’s inability to reconcile his grandiose notions of art and the artist with his current socio-economic reality leads him, quite literally, to the brink of starvation, whereupon he has no choice but to accept a job painting flagpoles for an impending royal wedding celebration. In the end, Heinrich leaves Munich, and with it, the modest financial security he has gained in his new-found employment as an artisan, his first stable source of income. On his return to Switzerland, he happens upon the castle of a count and his daughter. The pair, he soon learns, has been slowly amassing a now sizeable collection of his paintings, which Heinrich eventually sells to them for a respectable amount before continuing on his homeward journey. After returning home, he

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Pascal, *The German Novel: Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), 33.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

takes on a position managing a chancery office in a small district in Switzerland. Yet he does not abandon art altogether, but continues to expand the chronicles of his life, the product of which, as we know, is *Der grüne Heinrich*.

As evidenced in this synopsis of Heinrich's artistic development, it is impossible to extricate the aesthetic struggles faced by his character from the fundamental matter of economy, of profession, of financial self-sufficiency. We should recall that Heinrich's time in Munich is fraught with significant financial difficulties. Yet even much earlier in life, as a child, his character exhibits a pronounced disregard for the value of money. He repeatedly misuses the already very modest sum of money at his disposal, nearly depleting his savings in order to impress his young companions with his extravagant spending habits, profligate tendencies that will accompany him to adulthood, where the repercussions of his fundamental lack of economic intelligence become particularly significant. While in Munich, Heinrich repeatedly spends in excess of his means, and is plagued with feelings of shame and self-reproach as a result. Still, and in spite of his apparent remorse, he continues to incur various debts during the years he spends fruitlessly pursuing his dream of becoming a landscape artist. Time and again, and without hesitation, he accepts the financial assistance of his already poverty-stricken mother ("...keinen Augenblick zögerte ich, das Opfer anzunehmen" [IV, 221]).<sup>5</sup> In the end, Frau Lee also becomes an "Opfer" to her son's excess, her death a direct result of his financial overindulgence.

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<sup>5</sup> The issue of economics also connects the author's life to that of his protagonist in important ways. In this regard, see J. M. Lindsay's monograph, *Gottfried Keller: Life and Works* (London: Wolff, 1968). As Lindsay draws attention to, the young Keller was clearly ill equipped when it came to managing his finances. His spendthrift ways become particularly apparent when one examines the time he spent in Munich pursuing the selfsame artistic dream as Heinrich Lee: his "resolution to practice strict economy" (19) while living in the Bavarian capital sooner than later gave way to excessive spending habits, tremendous "financial anxieties" (109), and feelings of guilt, particularly as concerned his relationship with his own mother.



Yet as I would suggest, this basic lack of economic acumen should not be dismissed as the stereotypical mark of an immature, undisciplined youth; rather, it ought to be understood as an immediate effect of a fundamental shift in valuation that takes place in nineteenth-century society. Within the context of her own analysis of Keller's novel, Caroline von Loewenich points out that

in der Frühzeit der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft beginnt die Abspaltung von Kunst und Poesie von der bürgerlichen Lebenswirklichkeit. Diese charakterisiert sich im 19. Jahrhundert durch die Ausrichtung des Lebens auf materielle Werte, zusammen mit dem Arbeits- und Sittenethos der calvinistisch-zwinglianischen Religion, die...diese Ausrichtung unterstützte.<sup>6</sup>

Such issues are clearly problematized in Keller's novel, which underscores the difficulties that are apt to arise when art becomes disengaged from a reality in which increasing importance is placed on economic value. In setting into play a productive tension between two seemingly disparate discourses, namely economics and aesthetics, the text also reframes Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) in its development of a new poetic realist aesthetic. Like Keller's novel, Goethe's paradigmatic *Bildungsroman* revolves around a central tension between the economic and the aesthetic, and Wilhelm, like Heinrich, must learn to mediate between these value spheres as he undergoes a process of socialization.

The primary aim of my analyses in this chapter will be to examine the ways in which three separate discourses – namely economics, aesthetics, and gender – help to frame an understanding of Keller's novel. Still more than this, I hope to show how each discourse frames one possible understanding of the others. In particular, I will focus on

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<sup>6</sup> Caroline von Loewenich, *Gottfried Keller: Frauenbild und Frauengestalten im erzählerischen Werk*. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 15-16.

how the issue of economy is used to frame an understanding of both aesthetics and gender.

In the first part of my analysis, I argue that *Der grüne Heinrich* formulates the task of poetic realism as *aesthetic moderation*, that is, as a moderating force between the extremes of art and life. Within this context, the frame itself represents an important symbol of moderation, establishing connections between *Kunstwerk* and *Handwerk*, the individual (artist) and society, and thus ultimately, also, art and life. Thereby implied is a notion of poetic realism as a mediating force between the seemingly antagonistic realms of artistic, subjective imagination on the one hand, and an oftentimes mundane, objective reality on the other.

Following this, I shift focus to an examination of gender in its relation to economy. Here I argue that Keller's novel also implicitly promotes the idea of an *economy of gender*, one whose maintenance is likewise crucial to the *Bildungsprozess* of the male protagonist. As a means of substantiating this argument, I maintain that certain female characters (the "Hexenkind" Meretlein and Heinrich's beloved Anna) – those whose power over the male subject is deemed "extreme" or "excessive" and thus "dangerous" to his intended *Bildung* – are ultimately subjected to moderation. As was the case with the aesthetic dimensions of the text, this "economy" leaves its impression on the figure of the frame: both structurally and at the level of the story's content, the frame repeatedly functions as a means for the male's (attempted) containment of the "excessive" allure of a specific type of femininity. Importantly, such feminine elements are not extinguished entirely. Rather, they are allowed to co-exist with the male subject, yet they must be kept at a safe (but still pleasurable) distance.

### Theoretical considerations

One of the goals of my introductory chapter was to elucidate some of the main issues that have impeded efforts to clearly and harmoniously define the aesthetic agenda of poetic realism. Considered as a whole, it would not be inaccurate to suggest that the scholarship surrounding this body of literature seems most certain of its own uncertainty. In fact, the task of formulating an understanding of German literary realism has proven an oftentimes frustrating, seemingly insurmountable one for critics, and rightfully so. Still, criticism's inability to arrive at a consensus with respect to the precise nature of this literary phenomenon does not preclude theoretical commonalities.

Reflecting on the expansive body of theoretical and critical literature that has attempted to come to terms with poetic realism, it seems to me that one idea in particular is repeatedly emphasized: as numerous scholars have suggested, some certainly more explicitly than others, poetic realism represents a space of confluence – or, let us say, moderation – between certain aesthetic extremes. This idea has been emphasized both by present-day scholars as well as by Keller's contemporaries. Drawing heavily on the work of Otto Ludwig, one of Keller's contemporaries, Walter Silz suggests that this uniquely German literary phenomenon represents “a compromise between pure ‘Romantik’ at the one extreme and ‘Naturalismus’ at the other, between the poetisation of the world and the stark reflection of things as things, without symbolic valuation or interpretation.”<sup>7</sup> The result, then, is a “representation of reality which was neither purely mimetic nor had simply been born from the author's subjective imagination, but an evenly balanced

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Silz, *Realism and Reality: Studies in the German Novelle of Poetic Realism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 12.

portrayal avoiding the two extremes.”<sup>8</sup> We might say, moreover, that poetic realism’s representational modus is located somewhere between the “extremes” of detached, naturalistic observation and the romantic imagination, between an objective externality and a perceiving, inward-looking subjectivity, and, as the literary designation itself implies, between the seemingly antagonistic realms of poeticism and reality.

Ludwig’s work is also important to consider with respect to the notion of moderation. In his well-known juxtaposition of “der Idealist” and “der naïve Dichter,” Ludwig argues that

Der Idealist giebt die Gefühle und Reflexionen, die er bei einer Anschauung gehabt und gemacht, die Sache ist ihm nur der Vorwand, uns mit seinem Ich zu regalisieren; der naive Dichter dagegen giebt die Sache selbst unvermischt mit seinem Ich. Er sorgt nur, die betreffende Anschauung zu einer geschlossnen zu machen, nur die Abstraktion vom Unwesentlichen besorgt er, die Heraushebung des Wichtigen; er giebt darum nicht die gemeine Natur, sondern ein künstlerisches Spiegelbild derselben.<sup>9</sup>

According to Ludwig, then, the process of genuine artistic composition involves an abstraction from reality of certain inessential elements (the poet concerns himself with “die Abstraktion vom Unwesentlichen”); at the same time, the essential or important elements must be emphasized (“die Heraushebung des Wichtigen” is also crucial). True art should not regale the reader with the poet’s ego (“uns mit seinem Ich...regalisieren”); yet neither should it present a crude, overly naturalistic image of an external reality (“die gemeine Natur”). Instead, a selective filtration<sup>10</sup> of “reality” seems to be the ultimate goal: “ein künstlicheres Spiegelbild derselben” (an artistic reflection of the natural

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<sup>8</sup> Christine Baker, “Landscape in Theodor Storm’s Novellen: An Aspect of the Development of Storm’s Descriptive Style into Poetic Realism,” PhD diss., University of Leicester, 1999, 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Otto Ludwigs gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Adolf Stern and Erich Schmidt, vol. 6 (Leipzig: Grunow, 1891), 10.

<sup>10</sup> I have borrowed this particular term from Silz, *Realism and Reality*, 13.

world). Ludwig's argument implies, moreover, that true art occupies the seemingly contradictory status of both copy and original. It is neither pure reproduction nor wholly unique; rather, as "ein künstlerisches Spiegelbild," it is situated in a liminal space between reproduction and original.<sup>11</sup>

Similar ideas are emphasized by the Prussian critic and editor of the *Grenzboten* Julian Schmidt, regarded by some as "the movement's theoretical father."<sup>12</sup> As Clifford Bernd suggests, Schmidt's theory of the then-nascent body of literature was grounded in a simultaneous condemnation of both "literary excess of fantasy and escapism" and "poetic substance [that] had withered to a state of artificial incrustation."<sup>13</sup> Not only was fantastic or escapist literature no longer to be "tolerated" in the wake of the 1848 revolutions; quite the opposite, "the mission of literature was now to become 'engulfed in life itself.'"<sup>14</sup> The function of literary texts, then, was no longer to divert the reader's attention from reality; instead, it should bring one closer to it. Accordingly, the task of the author was to reestablish the connection between art and life, and by extension, between representation and reality, a connection that had (arguably) been lost in the age of romanticism.

The idea that realism should constitute a middle ground or moderating force between certain aesthetic extremes is also reflected in Keller's *Bildungsroman*, which presents a similar notion of the poetic. Approximately halfway through the narrative, Heinrich arrives at the following conclusion about the nature of "das Poetische," namely that

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<sup>11</sup> Understood against this backdrop, Keller's choice in *Der grüne Heinrich* to thematize such issues (i.e., the question of copies versus originals) makes greater sense.

<sup>12</sup> Clifford Bernd, *German Poetic Realism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

...in bezug auf manches, was ich bisher poetisch nannte, lernte ich nun, dass das Unbegreifliche und Unmögliche, das Abenteuerliche und Überschwengliche nicht poetisch ist, und dass, wie dort die Ruhe und Stille in der Bewegung, hier nur Schlichtheit und Ehrlichkeit mitten im Glanz und Gestalten herrschen müssen, um etwas Poetisches oder, was gleichbedeutend ist, etwas Lebendiges und Vernünftiges hervorzubringen...Denn wie es mir scheint, geht alles richtige Bestreben auf Vereinfachung, Zurückführung und Vereinigung des scheinbar Getrennten und Verschiedenen auf einen Lebensgrund, und in diesem Bestreben, das Notwendige und Einfache mit Kraft und Fülle<sup>15</sup> und in seinem ganzen Wesen darzustellen, ist Kunst; darum unterscheiden sich die Künstler nur dadurch von den anderen Menschen, dass sie das Wesentliche gleich sehen und es mit Fülle darzustellen wissen...Ich hatte es weder mit dem menschlichen Wort noch mit der menschlichen Gestalt zu tun und fühlte mich nur glücklich und zufrieden, dass ich auf das bescheidenste Gebiet mit meinen Fuss setzen konnte, auf den irdischen Grund und Boden, auf dem sich der Mensch bewegt. (III, 12-13)

Heinrich's reflections elucidate important parallels between Keller's thought and Ludwig's earlier theoretical writings. Here, too, emphasis is placed on the importance of moderation as opposed to extremes, on the "essential" ("das Wesentliche") as opposed to the "excessive," i.e., the "ostentatious," "lavish," "adventurous," or "fantastic" ("das Abenteuerliche und Überschwengliche"). In this passage, grand, extravagant conceptions of "Kunst" are replaced by a system of ideals that favors simplicity, honesty, and reason. Words such as "Vereinfachung," "Schlichtheit," "Vernünftiges," "Notwendige," "Einfache," "Ruhe," and "Stille" help to reinforce a similar spirit of moderation. Art, according to Heinrich, is precisely not about the representation of something incomprehensible ("unbegreiflich"), impossible ("unmöglich"), or lavish ("überschwenglich"); nor should art concern itself with the extravagant or fantastic. Rather, it should appeal to our reason ("Vernunft"). Despite its simplicity, however, it is powerful and rich in meaning, and ought to be expressed "mit Kraft und Fülle und in seinem ganzen Wesen."

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<sup>15</sup> Keller's choice of the word "Fülle" is particularly interesting. More precisely, the word denotes not only a type of fullness, but also evokes a sense of excess, of "overabundance," "prodigality," or "lavishness." This, I believe, bespeaks the quasi-economical undertones of the passage.

As Heinrich tells his readers, the poetic is furthermore to be understood as something “living” (“etwas Poetisches oder, was gleichbedeutend ist, etwas Lebendiges”). The author/protagonist feels happy and satisfied only to be able to tread the most modest of domains (“das bescheidenste Gebiet”), the earthly ground on which man moves (“auf dem sich der Mensch bewegt”), a statement that repositions art within the realm of life, and with it, the artist himself within the domain of the living. The artist is no longer disconnected from life; rather, he is intimately, irrevocably connected to it, treading the same, unassuming ground on which man moves. Heinrich’s specific conception of the poetic furthermore presents it as inextricably bound to a certain type of convergence, the goal of the poet’s striving (“Bestreben”) being a “Vereinigung des scheinbar Getrennten und Verschiedenen” (a unification of that which is apparently separate and different). This, I believe, goes hand in hand with those theories that consider poetic realism to be a force of aesthetic moderation, a middle ground between certain extremes.

If poetic realism constitutes a force of moderation between extremes, a space in which “antitheses” commingle, then it certainly makes sense that Keller should favor the frame as a means for transmitting such a theory, precisely because the object – as a midpoint between “representation” and “reality,” “art” and “life,” “object” and “subject” – is itself a figure of mediation, of moderation. Belonging neither wholly to the realm of representation nor reality, the frame resides instead in the interstices, between the space of the artwork and the space of the viewer. For this reason, the figure is well-suited for the transmission of a theory of aesthetic ideals whose orientation is likewise toward moderation. This, I would add, is arguably one of the main reasons why the frame

becomes a favored medium of self-reflection for the poetic realists in general: as a mediating force between the extremes of art and life, the frame serves as a visual metaphor for the interstitial space of poetic realism.

Of course, an appreciation of the frame as such requires that we relinquish our long-held conception of the frame as border, and by extension, the notion that the realms separated by it are inherently incompatible. In other words, the frame should not be understood as a rigid, insurmountable boundary between two disparate realms. In Keller's novel, the frame is no longer a "border guard"<sup>16</sup>; it does not "isolate" like a "city wall."<sup>17</sup> In the same way, the work of art does not represent a "self-sufficient closure."<sup>18</sup> Instead, the frames encountered by the reader of Keller's novel present themselves as permeable thresholds, ones that allow for the interpenetration of realms that are only apparently discrete. As we shall see, the text's economic "frame" represents an important case in point, precisely because of the impossibility of extricating it from the issue of aesthetics.

#### Toward an aestheticization of economy: *Kunst, Wirtschaft*, and the novel's economic "frame"

As von Loewenich has argued, the nineteenth century bears witness to the rise of the middle class, and with it, a growing divide between art and the (economic) realities of everyday life. Within this context, it will be important to consider how Heinrich's family is implicated in this phenomenon. We might begin, in this regard, with a discussion of Heinrich's father, Meister Lee, in whose character the figures of the artist and artisan

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<sup>16</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11 (1994): 15.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 6, no. 1 (1972-1973): 11.

<sup>18</sup> Simmel, "The Picture Frame," 12.



clearly coalesce. A largely self-educated man who transcends the confines of his training as a stonemason, Heinrich's father eventually becomes a successful, respected architect and master builder in Zurich. He and his friends – a group of politically and socially active journeymen – read a variety of scientific, historical, and philosophical works, including Schiller. Importantly, they also found a theater troupe, and regularly perform as actors in various theatrical productions. Heinrich's elucidation of his father's early education reveals, moreover, that

dem Steinhauer [war] in den großen Werken altdeutscher Baukunst ein Licht aufgegangen, welches seinen Pfad noch mehr erleuchtete, *indem es ihn mit heiteren Künstlerahnungen erfüllte* und den dunkeln Trieb jetzt erst zu rechtfertigen schien, welcher ihn von der grünen Weide hinweg dem gestaltenden Leben der Städte zugeführt hatte. Er lernte zeichnen mit eisernem Fleiße, brachte ganze Nächte und Feiertage damit zu, Werke und Muster aller Art durchzupausen, und nachdem er den Meißel zu den kunstreichsten Gebilden und Verzierungen führen gelernt und ein vollkommener Handarbeiter geworden war, ruhte er nicht, sondern studierte den Steinschnitt und sogar solche Wissenschaften, welche andern Zweigen des Bauwesens angehören. (I, 33)<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, we also learn of Meister Lee's constant striving to combine beauty and utility in his work ("Dabei war er immer bestrebt, das Schöne mit dem Nützlichen zu verbinden" [I, 34]). As a figure of moderation between the extremes of art and life, his character represents a wholeness to which Heinrich will eventually return. Yet he dies, as a direct result not only of overexertion, but also, importantly, of overextension. This fact in particular has given von Loewenich cause to suggest that "Die ideelle Zielsetzung des Vaters, Kunst und Realität miteinander zu verbinden, gelingt nur noch mit verzehrendem Kräfteinsatz, der dann zu seinem frühen Tod führt."<sup>20</sup> More specifically, we are meant to understand that it is Meister Lee's joint economic and artistic impulses that lead to his

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<sup>19</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> von Loewenich, *Frauenbild und Frauengestalten*, 19.

ultimate demise: after one day becoming “stark erhitzt” (I, 37), “den Keim gefährlicher Krankheit” (I, 38) is sown, and yet, as Heinrich tells us,

Anstatt sich nun zu schonen und auf jede Weise in acht zu nehmen, konnte er es nicht lassen, sein Treiben fortzusetzen und überall mit Hand anzulegen, wo etwas zu tun war. Schon seine vielfältigen Berufsgeschäfte nahmen seine volle Tätigkeit in Anspruch, welche er nicht plötzlich schwächen zu dürfen glaubte. Er rechnete, spekulierte, schloss Verträge, ging weit über Land, um Einkäufe zu besorgen...und statt dann zu ruhen, hielt er am Abend in irgendeinem Verein einen lebhaften Vortrag oder war in später Nacht ganz umgewandelt auf den Brettern, leidenschaftlich erregt, mit hohen Idealen in einem mühsamen Ringen begriffen, welches ihn noch weit mehr anstrengen musste als die Tagesarbeit. Das Ende war, dass er plötzlich dahinstarb, als ein junger, blühender Mann, in einem Alter, wo andere ihre Lebensarbeit erst beginnen, mitten in seinen Entwürfen und Hoffnungen, und ohne die neue Zeit aufgehen zu sehen, welcher er mit seinen Freunden zuversichtlich entgegenblickte. Er liess seine Frau mit einem fünfjährigen Kinde allein zurück, und dies Kind bin ich. (I, 38)

Plainly foregrounded in this passage is the inherent difficulty of uniting artistic impulse and economic reality, a reality that defines the framework of Heinrich’s family in highly significant ways. Indeed, the Lees’ strict economical code of conduct is emphasized from the opening pages of the novel. Importantly, Meister Lee is also described as a man who had “fast keine persönlichen Bedürfnisse,” and among whose many principles “der Sparsamkeit in der ersten Reihe stand” (I, 34).

Yet there is another character whose economic inclinations far surpass those of Heinrich’s father in programmatically significant ways. It is the protagonist’s mother, Elisabeth Lee, “welche keinen Pfennig unnütz ausgab und den grössten Ruhm darein setzte, jedermann weder um ein Haar zu wenig noch zu viel zukommen zu lassen” (I, 34-5). The excessive frugality of Heinrich’s widowed mother displayed throughout the ensuing tale is clearly meant to serve as a counterpoint to the initially prodigal nature of her son. Frau Lee’s seemingly natural inclination toward a particularly severe form of economic asceticism is repeatedly emphasized, and indeed, it is clear that she herself is

“framed” within the confines of an increasingly economic discourse. After the untimely death of her husband, we read, for instance, that Heinrich’s mother undertakes “eine gänzliche Einschränkung und Abschaffung alles Überflüssigen” (I, 41). Words such as “Einschränkung” and “Abschaffung” further reinforce the act of circumscription or (de)limitation – let us say, of “framing” – at stake in Frau Lee’s particular form of economy. Later in the narrative, her “streng[e] Sparsamkeit” (I, 110) will receive further attention, as Heinrich reflects that “Allein in allem anderen, dass nur entfernt unnötig schien, beharrte sie eigensinnig auf dem Grundsatz, dass kein Pfennig unnütz dürfe ausgegeben werden” (I, 110). It is this obstinacy, an inveterate unwillingness to relinquish her perceived sense of economic control, which will have highly deleterious consequences for her character.

As the novel progresses, Frau Lee’s parsimony becomes progressively more extreme. For instance, Heinrich considers his mother’s “entsagend[e] Unbeweglichkeit und Selbstbeschränkung” (II, 214) as well as her “genaue Einteilungskunst” (IV, 210). After leaving for Munich, the protagonist later recalls that

Am Tage nach meiner Abreise von nunmehr länger als drei Jahren hatte die Mutter sogleich ihre Wirtschaft geändert und beinahe vollständig in die Kunst verwandelt, von nichts zu leben...Um die gleiche Zeit wurde sie karg und herb gegen jedermann, im gesellschaftlichen Verkehr vorsichtig und zurückhaltend, um alle Ausgaben zu vermeiden. (IV, 209-10)

Ultimately, Frau Lee sacrifices everything in order that her son might achieve his (ultimately failed) goal of becoming an artist. She dies, as a direct result of her “Selbstbeschränkung,” completely disconnected from her milieu, and in a state of utter destitution.

Keller's pointed decision to describe Frau Lee's severe form of economic behavior as a type of "Kunst" is of particular consequence. On more than one occasion, the mother's personal economy is cited as a type of art, as Heinrich refers, for instance, to her "genaue Einteilungskunst," or has cause to reflect that "die Mutter [hatte] sogleich ihre Wirtschaft geändert und beinahe vollständig in die Kunst verwandelt." By presenting "Wirtschaft" as a type of "Kunst," a scenario is presented wherein economy has replaced art (has itself become a type of art) in an individual world devoid of it, a world in which the (economic) realities of life have been emphasized to the detriment of creativity and artistic imagination.<sup>21</sup>

At the opposite end of this same spectrum is Heinrich, whose character ultimately engages in a nearly wholesale retreat from the socio-economic realities of life into the recesses of his (oftentimes overly fertile) imagination. Both Martin Swales and Roy Pascal have highlighted the inherent and highly problematic tensions between the protagonist's internal and external realities, tensions that will also come to define the scope of the poetic realist project (what I mean by this will become clearer in the following section). Swales focuses on "the falsity of [Heinrich's] imaginative life," writing, moreover, of his "relentless encapsulation from reality."<sup>22</sup> Heinrich, so Swales contends, is unable "to love and trust the real."<sup>23</sup> This leads to a "continuous divorcing of his imaginative life from social reality."<sup>24</sup> In much the same way, Pascal underscores the

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<sup>21</sup> Directly related to this, I would suggest, and as von Loewenich has commented on in her analysis of the figure of Frau Lee, is "die Unfähigkeit Frau Lees sich in die Phantasiewelt des Kindes einzufühlen" (24).

<sup>22</sup> Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 89.

character's struggle "between reality and imagination, nature and the ideal, community and isolation."<sup>25</sup>

The internal, psychical tension between art and economics experienced by Heinrich is also reflected in the external world around him, i.e., in the form of two geographic locations. Bernd draws our attention to precisely this: on the one hand, there is Heinrich's native country, Switzerland, with its "extreme practicality" and its "sober commonwealth of practical persons devoid of romanticism," where "All flights of idealism, all imaginative subtleties seem lacking"; on the other hand, there is the "fairy-tale-like Bavaria," a place "so thoroughly smothered by the artificialities of civilization that it no longer has any roots in reality."<sup>26</sup> The fictitious nature of Munich is also reinforced by Pascal, who writes that the bohemian city foregrounds the idea of a society in which art has become "divorced from real life."<sup>27</sup>

Von Loewenich reflects in similar fashion on the seemingly natural incompatibility of art and the economic realities of life as it is presented within the novel:

Schon zu Lebzeiten des Vaters können Kunst und ideelle Werte nur noch mit Mühe in Einklang mit den Erfordernissen der ökonomisch ausgerichteten, städtischen Gesellschaft gebracht werden. Die ideelle Zielsetzung des Vaters, Kunst und Realität miteinander zu verbinden, gelingt nur noch mit verzehrendem Kräfteinsatz, der dann zu seinem frühen Tod führt...Dem heranwachsenden Heinrich ist es dann unmöglich, Kunst und Realitätsbewältigung zu vereinen, denn die Spezialisierung, die aus der ökonomischen Entwicklung hervorgeht und die sich zu Lebzeiten des Vaters schon abgezeichnet hat, nun Realität geworden, schliesst die Kunst aus dem Erwerbsleben aus oder die Kunst muss sich in diese Entwicklung einordnen, wie es in Habersaats Werkstatt geschieht.<sup>28</sup>

And yet to my mind, it seems as though one of the goals of Keller's novel is to reunite "Kunst und ideelle Werte" with "den Erfodernissen der ökonomisch ausgerichteten,

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<sup>25</sup> Pascal, *The German Novel*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Bernd, *German Poetic Realism*, 112-113.

<sup>27</sup> Pascal, *The German Novel*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> von Loewenich, *Frauenbild und Frauengestalten*, 19.

städtischen Gesellschaft.” It perhaps goes without saying that the novel valorizes neither the mother’s nor the son’s extreme behaviors: not only do Heinrich’s financial overindulgences signal his more general psychical disengagement from certain socio-economic realities; they also result in his largely self-imposed exclusion from the world around him. In much the same way, Frau Lee’s increasingly ascetic forms of economic behavior also lead to her eventual retreat from reality. As von Loewenich notes, “Je schlechter es dem Sohn in der Ferne geht, je weniger er sich vor einer bedrängenden Realität retten und bewahren kann, desto mehr nähert sich die Mutter in der Heimat dem Abgrund – bis hin zu Existenzvernichtung.”<sup>29</sup> Of course, Frau Lee is not afforded the same “happy ending” as her son (at least in the novel’s second edition); rather, she dies entirely disconnected from any social context.<sup>30</sup> It is a death that alludes to the deleterious effects of a life that has become so engulfed in economic concerns that it has lost sight of any artistic impulse. Reality, we are thereby told, does not thrive in the absence of art, in much the same way that art cannot – and in fact, should not – exist apart from reality.

Heinrich is ultimately afforded a much happier ending than his mother. At the novel’s conclusion, the development of a personal economy proves central not only to the protagonist’s intended *Bildung*, but also to his very survival: although Heinrich exhibits a pronounced prodigality throughout much of the narrative, nearly starving to death in consequence of his inability to economize, his character eventually comes to learn the inevitability of socio-economic reality, and at the same time, the impossibility of escaping it. Importantly, the economic and aesthetic struggles faced by his character are rooted in the same fundamental issue, i.e., his inability to reconcile certain internal and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>30</sup> Importantly, Heinrich’s mother also denies the existence of her own, subjective reality. In other words, Frau Lee’s self-denial is to be understood, quite literally, as a denial of self.

external realities. Indeed, we might say that the aesthetic and economic crises experienced by the protagonist are one in the same, and that the resolution of one leads naturally to a resolution of the other. Out of necessity, Heinrich is ultimately forced to abandon his lofty artistic ideals, and in the process, he becomes a contributing member of society. Literally on the brink of starvation, he accepts a job painting flag poles for an upcoming royal wedding ceremony in the Bavarian capital, and over the course of some months is finally able to sustain a modest living. In terms of his economic and artistic development, this is arguably the most pivotal moment, for it presents the message that the artist must enter into society, must become a part of society, and thus part of a greater “reality,” in order to thrive. Heinrich’s physical survival ultimately depends on his ability to relinquish grandiose conceptions of “art” and “the artist” and reenter the “real world” as a functional, contributing member.

Importantly, Heinrich’s artistic maturation may be described as a development from solipsism to socialization, whereby excessive flights of the imagination and grand, oftentimes delusional conceptions of *Kunst* increasingly give way to a more moderate, and thus realistic, practical understanding of the world and his place in it. With this comes an acknowledgement of the socio-economic realities that inevitably define his life. In the second, 1879 version of the novel, Heinrich does not die. Rather, he returns home in order to take on a position as a chancery clerk. With respect to the concept of moderation, it thus seems fitting that the final chapter of Heinrich’s written account of his life finds him, quite literally, in a liminal position. The last chapter, titled “Der Tisch Gottes,” appropriately begins with the following recollection:

Etwa ein Jahr später besorgte ich die Kanzlei eines kleinen Oberamtes, welches an dasjenige *grenzte*, worin das alte Heimatdorf lag. Hier konnte ich bei

bescheidener und doch mannigfacher Wirksamkeit in der Stille leben und befand mich *in einer Mittelschicht* zwischen dem Gemeindewesen und der Staatsverwaltung, so dass ich *den Einblick nach unten und oben* gewann und lernte, wohin die Dinge gingen und woher sie kamen. (IV, 376)<sup>31</sup>

Although he never achieves his dream of becoming a landscape painter, he does ultimately succeed in another artistic capacity, that is, as a poet, as the author of his own development. Significantly, he is a poet who writes in the realist tradition, and whose story, moreover, presents a fundamentally important social critique about the harmful repercussions of certain societal realities. In this way, Heinrich will ultimately succeed where his father once failed, namely in the previously sought-after, yet impeded goal of uniting art and reality.

Keller's novel thus presents an important social critique: just as a reality disengaged from art is presented as inherently harmful, so too is an art form disengaged from the realities of life; just as life cannot thrive without artistic impulse, neither does an art form that fails to acknowledge certain (socio-economic) realities. As such, *Der grüne Heinrich* represents Keller's attempt to (re-)situate art within the realm of practical, social reality. Suggested thereby is an etymological return to the root of the word "Kunst" as "Können," a realization of art as (economizable) skill. In direct opposition to society's increasingly economical and, at the same time, decreasingly aesthetic orientation, Keller's novel will advocate for a reengagement of art and life. In slightly different terms, we might say that this work marks an important effort to "re-frame" art and the artist in a mediating gesture, re-inscribing both within an economic framework of communal living and its accompanying realities.

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<sup>31</sup> My emphasis.



### Art “auf den irdischen Grund”

As should now be evident, the idea of moderation (i.e., between art/representation and life/reality) forms a crucial link among many of the most prominent theories of poetic realism, as well as the various critical literatures that have attempted to come to terms with it. The task set to us now will be to consider Keller’s novel with regard to its own presentation of a theory of literary realism as aesthetic moderation. While the problem of aesthetic moderation constitutes a fundamental component of the novel’s subtext, of equal concern is the idea of economic moderation. As I have attempted to show at the outset of this chapter, the novel’s aesthetic and economic discourses converge in interesting ways: we should recall, moreover, that *Der grüne Heinrich* presents Frau Lee’s particularly severe form of “Wirtschaft” as a type of “Kunst,” and this on more than one occasion; at the same time, however, it strikes me as consequential that Keller’s specific conception of “Kunst” should be grounded in a type of economic-based decision-making process. In other words, the specific brand of aesthetics presented in the novel seems couched in what might plausibly be understood as a type of quasi-economic discourse. In this regard, the author’s choice of words in those passages in which Elisabeth Lee’s economic behavior is foregrounded becomes particularly relevant. Importantly, such descriptions rely on a similar vocabulary to that used by Heinrich in his elaborations on the nature of “das Poetische”: words that tend to recur in the protagonist’s exposition of his mother’s “Wirtschaft,” e.g., “notwendig,” “überflüssig,” and “unnötig,” are to be understood, so I would suggest, as contrasting terms in much the same way as Heinrich’s choice of words such as “überschwenglich” and “notwendig” when reflecting on what is – and what is not – “poetic.” As such, it is justifiable to argue that Frau Lee’s

economic competency is meant to mirror the artistic competency implied by Heinrich in his reflections on “das Poetische”: such competency, we are told, results from an understanding of what is necessary; at the same time, it also demands an intuition of what is excessive, inessential, or unnecessary.

Adding to this, we might say that the extreme modes of economic expression encountered in the novel (i.e., the mother’s asceticism and the son’s prodigality) can – and should, I would suggest – be understood as a reflection of the two “extremes” of literary expression discussed above (i.e., naturalism as a type of unadulterated objectivity, romanticism as a mode of pure subjectivity), the tension between which poetic realism seeks to resolve. In other words: naturalism may be understood as a mode of literary expression that relies on an economy of asceticism (as a “barren” representation of external reality disconnected from subjective reality); in much the same way, romanticism may be conceived of as a mode of literary prodigality or excess (as an “overly” subjective or poeticized version of reality disconnected from objective reality). Literary realism thereby functions as a mediating force between these two extremes of literary economy.

Clearly, then, the economic and aesthetic tensions developed throughout Keller’s novel are intimately connected to one another, and it is with both that the picture frame interacts. Although the extremes of asceticism and prodigality dominate elsewhere, the frame is repeatedly privileged by Keller in his efforts to reinforce a spirit of both economic and aesthetic moderation. To reiterate, *Der grüne Heinrich* presents an attempt to (re-)situate art within the realm of practical, socio-economic reality, thereby suggesting an etymological return to the root of “Kunst” as “Können,” a realization of art as

(economizable) skill. In direct opposition to society's increasingly economical and decreasingly aesthetic orientation, Keller's novel advocates for a reengagement of art and life, and this by means of the frame.

Importantly, this impulse toward moderation is fostered neither in Munich nor in Heinrich's Swiss hometown. Here we might recall once more the words of those scholars who have argued that "the fairy-tale-like Bavaria"<sup>32</sup> represents a place in which art has become "divorced from real life."<sup>33</sup> As Bernd has suggested, this specific locale symbolizes excess, imagination, and a detachment from physical/objective reality. For Heinrich in particular, the city affords the possibility of a retreat into the imagination, into the realms of idealism and subjectivity. Directly opposed to this is Heinrich's hometown, a place of "extreme practicality," a "sober commonwealth of practical persons devoid of romanticism," where "All flights of idealism, all imaginative subtleties seem lacking."<sup>34</sup> Heinrich's hometown presents an apparent distaste for the creative, artistic imagination; it is furthermore connoted by an extreme form of asceticism, one which is grounded in a reality that forfeits other realms of experience.

To discover a genuine impetus toward moderation between the "ideal" and the "real," the artistic imagination and practical reality, we need look no further than the village in which Heinrich's parents were born, the countryside where many of Heinrich's relatives (his uncle's family and his cousin Judith in particular) still reside, and where the protagonist spends an especially formative time as a youth. As a space of moderation between the geographical "extremes" highlighted above, the "Dorf" presents itself as a space of convergence between certain ideals that appear at variance with one another.

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<sup>32</sup> Bernd, *German Poetic Realism*, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Pascal, *The German Novel*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Bernd, *German Poetic Realism*, 112-113.

Other scholars have suggested just this: according to Pascal, the native village of Heinrich's parents presents "a natural, cheerful, healthy community."<sup>35</sup> It is a space, moreover, in which "imagination...is not opposed to reality, but rises out of it, purifies and strengthens it."<sup>36</sup> In slightly different terms – and once again with emphasis on economy – von Loewenich describes the village as a place in which "Arbeit und Leben im Rahmen der Natur bilden eine Einheit. Hier ist es immerhin noch möglich Rousseausche Naturverbundenheit zu leben und in der Idylle Zuflucht zu nehmen, ohne ökonomische – und damit existenzielle – Schädigung zu erfahren."<sup>37</sup> This milieu, as von Loewenich also reminds us, stands in stark contrast to the city: "Nicht das Leben im Einklang mit der Natur ist der Hintergrund, sondern andere Normen gelten: Erwerb, ökonomisches Geschick, Klassengesellschaft....Es ist das Geld, das das städtische Leben normiert."<sup>38</sup>

Reinforcing this spirit of moderation within this space of moderation is the frame: indeed, each picture frame encountered by Heinrich during the time he spends in his paternal village is inscribed within this overarching discourse of both economic and aesthetic moderation. I find it highly consequential, moreover, that each frame with which the protagonist interacts is either reused or repurposed, thereby subtly reinforcing an ethos of economic moderation. In two of these instances, a decision is made to remove the frame from the image to which it is affixed in order to transplant it onto a new image. In the third case, Heinrich rediscovers a long-forgotten piece of glass (a constituent element of its former frame), which is subsequently used as an appendage to the coffin of

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<sup>35</sup> Pascal, *The German Novel*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>37</sup> von Loewenich, *Frauenbild und Frauengesalten*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

his beloved Anna. It is certainly intentional, I would suggest, that the only three frames that appear in the paternal village are either reused or repurposed. For this reason, I believe that there is a deliberate, albeit subtle attempt being made to bring the frame into alignment with the economic topos that informs the novel as a whole. Such an economic system, one which relies on reusing and repurposing, elucidates a set of principles whose primary concern is the use of readily accessible means. As such, the repeated choice to either reuse or repurpose the frame may be said to represent a form of mediation between the economic extremes of asceticism and prodigality that dominate elsewhere.

At the same time, these picture frames work to reinforce a theory of literature, i.e., poetic realism, as an aesthetic system based on a mediation between extremes. Closer analysis of each frame will help to elucidate a very specific theory of aesthetic ideals, a theory that presents literature as a moderating force, the proper place of its aesthetic modus in the middle ground between various binaries – between (romantic) subjectivity and (naturalist) objectivity, representation and reality, art and life.<sup>39</sup> In this “natural, cheerful, healthy community,” art and life, the imagined and the real, the subjective and the objective, are reintroduced to one another, a reintroduction that is subtly, but repeatedly inscribed onto the figure of the picture frame.<sup>40</sup>

Telling in this regard is an assertion made by Heinrich to the village trustees upon requesting their relinquishment to him of his small legacy. With an air of elitism and in keeping with his perceived erudition, the young Heinrich tells these men, the countrymen of his ancestors, that “Die Zeit sei längst vorbei, da die Kunst mit dem Handwerk

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<sup>39</sup> Other binaries will be equally important to consider, for instance reproduction and originality as well as opacity and transparency.

<sup>40</sup> Pascal, *The German Novel*, 33.

verbunden gewesen" (III, 70).<sup>41</sup> It is a statement that conveys the protagonist's more general opinion that the "noble" world of Art has, in contemporary times, become estranged from the general ebb and flow of communal life, that Art is, and should be separate from everyday life. What is more, Heinrich's statement elucidates an underlying belief that "art" and "practicality" are inherently antonymous terms: art, by its very nature, is not practical, nor does it need to serve any functional or economic purpose. It exists in a realm outside the confines of societal practicalities, and this is precisely what differentiates it from "Handwerk" (the work of the artisan).

And yet those frames that appear in the countryside village repeatedly betray the falsity of Heinrich's opinion. Quite the opposite, the figure is used to reinforce the ever-present connection between "Kunst" and "Handwerk." Not only does the frame reestablish a symbolic connection between art and life; it also, importantly, re-grounds art within the realm of practicality, functionality, and economy.

During the time Heinrich spends in the village with his mother's family in his younger years, he paints two pictures that eventually receive frames. The first is a picture of a bouquet of flowers; the second, a portrait of Anna. Both of these he later presents as gifts to the schoolmaster and his daughter. He chooses to paint a third picture – an image of the "Heidenstube" that he discovers together with Anna – on the wall of Anna's bedroom. Heinrich's representation of the heathen chamber will be particularly important to my subsequent inquiry into the frame with respect to gender, not least of all because it is also circumscribed by a frame, "ein sauberes Viereck" (II, 217). While the first of these paintings is arguably less significant as concerns the frame, it is still important to

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<sup>41</sup> Pascal also draws attention to this statement, arguing that "The Munich Carnival is an ironic comment on this theme" (43).

consider: not only does the appearance of this frame reinforce a spirit of economy based on reusing, but it also is the first to fuse a subtle yet still important connection between the seemingly disparate realms of aesthetics and economy.

The painting in question depicts a bouquet of flowers in an old glass vase, procured by the artist himself with the help of Anna, and which he ultimately inscribes with both his and Anna's names. After relinquishing his possession of the painting to Anna, Heinrich recalls that on the following day, the schoolmaster "nahm einen Rahmen von der Wand, in welchem eine vergilbte und verdorbene Gedächtnistafel der Teuerung von 1817 hing, nahm sie heraus und steckte den frischen, bunten Bogen hinter das Glas" (II, 191). We might first consider the fact that the "Gedächtnistafel" is described as "vergilbt" and "verdorben"; the yellowed, tarnished memorial tablet is then contrasted with Heinrich's painting, presented as "frisch" and "bunt." Here, a vibrant, colorful present replaces a tainted past, emphasized by the repetition of the prefix *ver-*. This is also, importantly, the first time that the picture frame is implicated within an economy based on reusing, and it will not be the last. Particularly consequential with respect to the issue of economy is the author's choice to present a representation of the European famine ("Teuerung") of 1817 as the image that is replaced. This is significant if one considers the dual meaning of the German word "Teuerung," which denotes not only "famine," but also "inflation." And indeed, as history tells us, the European famine of 1816-1817 was accompanied in Germany by soaring food prices, the direct result of bad harvests, among other things. It is in this dual sense that Keller means his readers to understand this particular "Teuerung." In this way, aesthetics and economics converge, and not only because it is an aesthetic object that enters into a certain economic

discourse; in this scene, an artistic rendering of reality is also infused with economic undertones.

The second image painted by Heinrich during his time in the village is a portrait of Anna, which is ultimately (and against the artist's original intentions) gifted to the schoolmaster one year on his birthday. Heinrich's female cousins arrange for the framing of the portrait, and after not seeing it for some time, Heinrich first catches sight of the image (together with its new frame) once again, shortly before the entire family is to make its way to the schoolmaster's house to celebrate the occasion. Astonished at the sight of his painting, now adorned with such finery ("in diesem Aufputze"), Heinrich recounts that

Erst jetzt bekam ich mein Bild wiederzusehen, welches ganz fein eingerahmt war. An einem verdorbenen Kupferstiche hatten die Mädchen einen schmalen, in Holz auf das zierlichste geschnittenen Rahmen gefunden, welcher wohl siebzig Jahre alt sein mochte und eine auf einen schmalen Stab gelegte Reihe von Müschelchen vorstellte, von denen eins das andere halb bedeckte. An der inneren Kante lief eine feine Kette mit viereckigen Gelenken herum, die äussere Kante war mit einer Perlenschur umzogen. Der Dorfglaser, welcher allerlei Künste trieb und besonders in verjährten Lackierarbeiten auf altmodischem Schachtelwerk stark war, hatte den Muscheln einen rötlichen Glanz gegeben, die Kette vergoldet und die Perlen weiss gemacht und ein neues, klares Glas genommen, so dass ich höchst erstaunt war, meine Zeichnung in diesem Aufputze wiederzufinden. (II, 247-8)

When considering this passage in greater detail, what should first strike us is Keller's use, once again, of the adjective "verdorben" to describe the image being replaced, namely the "Kupferstiche." That the image being replaced is a "Stich" or "engraving" is also significant; the process of engraving suggests, moreover, that the image is perhaps not an original, but might likely be a copy or reproduction, thereby embedding it within the novel's more general discourse on copies versus originals. In this scene, it is clear that something old (and something that might have been copied) is being replaced by



something wholly new and original. Here too, the emergence of a new type of poetics is symbolically mediated via the figure of the frame.

The lengthy description of the frame elucidates the way in which the object has been elevated to the status of artwork. In this scene, the frame is given far more attention than the painting itself, raising the question of whether the frame might not represent the true artistic object. In this passage, Keller presents the frame not as a mere functional appendage to the artwork; rather, the object serves both functional and artistic purposes. Art and practicality/functionality, in other words, are not mutually exclusive. This passage bears witness, moreover, to the confluence of “Kunst” and “Handwerk,” thereby serving as commentary on the statement that Heinrich will later make to the village trustees before his departure to Munich. Here we learn that the frame has been refurbished by the “Dorfglaser” (the village glazier), “welcher allerlei Künste trieb.” In this sense, it is plausible to argue that it is not Heinrich, but rather the craftsman, the “Handwerker,” who is presented as artist. Not only this, but his particular form of art is inextricably connected to the production of something functional.

A similar amalgamation of “Kunst” and “Handwerk” occurs not long after this, and once again, the frame plays an important role in uniting the two. Shortly after the untimely passing of his daughter, the schoolmaster hires a carpenter to construct her coffin, a project to which Heinrich seems glad to lend a helping hand. The final appendage to the young girl’s newly-constructed coffin is to be – so the craftsman intends – a pane of glass through which mourners will be able to see her face before she is buried. Heinrich obtains this from a picture frame in the schoolmaster’s house that has remained unused and “forgotten” (“vergessen”) for a considerable time, recounting that “Ich wußte

schon, daß auf einem Schranke ein alter kleiner Rahmen lag, aus welchem das Bild lange verschwunden. Ich nahm das vergessene Glas, legte es vorsichtig in den Nachen und fuhr zurück” (III, 57).

The subsequent actions taken by the protagonist are crucially important with respect to a delineation of the aesthetic principles that inform the text. Before placing the piece of glass into the opening of Anna’s coffin, Heinrich cleans it with water, since it is “ganz bestaubt und verdunkelt” (III, 58), as he tells us. Thereafter, he recalls the following:

Dann hob ich sie empor und liess das lautere Wasser ablaufen, und indem ich das glänzende Glas hoch gegen die Sonne hielt und durch dasselbe schaute, erblickte ich das lieblichste Wunder, das ich je gesehen. Ich sah nämlich drei musizierende Engelknaben; der mittlere hielt ein Notenblatt und sang, die beiden anderen spielten auf altertümlichen Geigen, und alle schauten freudig und andachtsvoll nach oben; aber die Erscheinung war so luftig und zart durchsichtbar, dass ich nicht wusste, ob sie auf dem Sonnenstrahlen, im Glase oder nur in meiner Phantasie schwebte. Wenn ich die Scheibe bewege, so verschwanden die Engel auf Augenblicke, bis ich sie plötzlich mit einer anderen Wendung wieder bemerkte. (III, 58)

Together with the protagonist’s highly meaningful reflections on it, this piece of glass presents a series of powerful messages about the interdependency of various “alterities,” not least of which is the interdependency of “Kunst” and “Handwerk,” or more generally, of art and life. Heinrich’s pointed choice to affix an object associated with the world of “art” (the glass as a constituent element of the picture frame) to the work of the craftsman (the wooden coffin) is a gesture that effectively reinscribes art within the realm of communal life and, at the same time, within the confines of practicality and functionality. Art, in this instance, is not something that is detached from the craftsman’s work, nor is it disengaged from practical and functional concerns; rather, art is presented here as the necessary appendage to the craftsman’s work. Further evidence to support this idea

asserts itself if we consider the subsequent presentation of Heinrich's deceased beloved as portraiture incarnate, her face framed behind the "Glasscheibe" and within the four edges of the coffin's opening. At the symbolic level, we might say that art has been (re-) embedded within the realities of life and communal living (the mourners will behold not merely the deceased figure of the girl, but Anna as artistic object). At the same time, the crude realities of life become saturated with artistic – and also, undeniably, religious – meaning as the largely unstable, ethereal impression of the "drei musizierende Engelknaben" is ultimately superimposed onto the lifeless, static image of Anna's countenance.

The "Glasscheibe" not only helps to reconcile the tension between art and life, but also serves as a mediating force between other binary structures of experience. Relevant in this regard are Heinrich's reflections during Anna's burial. Speaking specifically of the piece of glass that has since been affixed to the opening of the girl's coffin, he recalls that "die Glasscheibe tat es mir an, daß ich *das Gut*, was sie verschloß, gleich einem hinter Glas und Rahmen gebrachten Teil meiner Erfahrung, meines Lebens, in gehobener und feierlicher Stimmung, aber in vollkommener Ruhe begraben sah" (III, 60).<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, it is not only Anna's countenance that Heinrich perceives as being framed by the "Glasscheibe"; it is also his own experience that he chooses to describe as being "hinter Glas und Rahmen gebracht." Importantly, Heinrich experiences himself in this moment both as perceiving subject and as the object of his perception. The suggestion here seems clear enough: the protagonist's remarks express the impossible possibility of disassociating one's subjective experience from any objective experience of reality. Not only has the objective, external reality of death been represented (the dead figure of Anna

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<sup>42</sup> My emphasis.

as portraiture incarnate), but a certain subjective experience has also been embedded into the “artwork.” Again, “the frame” no longer serves the function of border, but allows for an interpenetration of apparently antagonistic realms of experience. At a linguistic level, this is reinforced by Heinrich’s choice of the word “Gut,” which also has the effect of transforming subjective experience into a tangible object. Understood as a commodity or product, the word also resonates within the economic dimensions of the text, in much the same way as the “Gedächtnistafel der Teuerung” from which the first frame is removed. Once again, the economic and aesthetic converge.

Considered in greater detail, Heinrich’s comments about this piece of glass are also revealing, and indeed, are programmatic in nature. More precisely, the protagonist’s reflections foreground a confluence of various binaries that converge around the figure of the “Glasscheibe.” The most important of these binaries are subjectivity and objectivity. As the previously discussed theories have shown, the space between subjectivity and objectivity constitutes an integral part of the domain of poetic realism. Closely related to these binaries are notions of opacity and transparency. In this instance, Heinrich’s comments suggest that objectivity does not exist in any pure, unobstructed form, nor does pure subjectivity. Rather, his ruminations reveal that both objectivism and subjectivism are integral to the artist’s perception of reality and as such, his subsequent representation thereof. As a space of moderation/mediation between the extremes of objectivity and subjectivity, transparency and opacity, the figure of the “Glasscheibe” provides fertile ground for Keller’s reflection on the nature of literary realism.

With respect to notions of transparency and opacity, the deeper significance of this one piece of glass is only able to be properly understood when it is considered in

conjunction with the novel's overarching glass metaphors. What is evinced on numerous occasions throughout the course of Keller's tale is Heinrich's desire, so he tells us, "wie ein Glas zu sein, das man jeden Augenblick durchschauen dürfe" (III, 44), his wish for Anna in particular to be able to look through him – "dass sie mich durchschauen dürfte wie einen Kristall" (II, 308). In a sense, then, Heinrich's first "gift" to his beloved, his painting of a bouquet of flowers – which he chooses, importantly, to place "in ein altmodisches Prunkglas" (II, 187) – seems to resonate with this idea.

Heinrich's desire to be glass-like allows for different interpretations: his wish to be "wie ein Glas," particularly where his beloved is concerned, is reflective of a more general desire for transparency (that is, a desire to be genuine and unambiguous) with respect to his feelings and intentions; at the same time, Heinrich's desire to be glass-like is also reflective of his artistic goals. That is, his longing to be "wie ein Glas" seems to go hand in hand with his understanding of the ideal position of the artist as a passive observer of reality, as "leidend und zusehend" (III, 12). In general, then, it is fair to suggest that one of the self-perceived goals of Heinrich's maturation (both artistic and otherwise) is to become transparent.

Yet Heinrich's discovery of the partially transparent/partially opaque piece of glass in the aforementioned passage seems to call such ideas into question. The protagonist's observations tell us, that is, that the "Glasscheibe" allows only for a partial filtration of the sun's light. The residue of an image – an image that, importantly, cannot be erased – results in a partial obstruction of perspective. The fact remains that this piece of glass is neither wholly transparent, nor is it wholly opaque, which leads us to the following questions: should glass-like transparency be a goal of the artist's striving? Is the aim of

art to reproduce reality as if one had seen it through a transparent piece of glass, unobstructed by the perceiving subject? The answer to both questions, as Keller seems to suggest by means of the only partially transparent, angel-laden piece of glass, is no. What Heinrich sees when he holds the glass up to the rays of the sun is not an unobstructed view of an objective, external reality, but neither is he afforded a wholly subjective perspective. This image of the only partially transparent, only partially opaque “Glasscheibe” suggests that “reality” itself, or at the very least one’s perception of it, is neither wholly objective, nor wholly subjective. Rather, “reality” (and by extension, I would suggest, literary realism) resides in the interstitial space between objectivism and subjectivism. In this moment, “reality” is presented not in any sort of purely objective state; rather, it is tinged with the subtle, but ever-present traces of the subjective, inner workings of the artist’s mind. Adding to this, Heinrich’s descriptions of the at times present, at times absent image of the “Engelknaben” hint at the inherent difficulty of locating “reality,” whether externally (be it “auf dem Sonnenstrahlen” or “im Glase”) or internally (“in meiner Phantasie”). Reality, so this passage suggests, is not stagnant, but in a dynamic state of flux, changing based on the perspective one adopts.

That the figure of the glass is particularly well-suited as a means for reflecting on the realist artist’s understanding of reality and its representation becomes clearer when one considers what is afforded by the object’s specific physical properties. Glass makes visible a process of filtration, or a lack thereof, depending on the degree to which it is either transparent or opaque. It seems to me that this is the foremost reason why this object is privileged in the novel’s attempt to articulate a very specific theory of poetic realism: Keller exploits the physical properties of the glass – he is particularly interested

in the visualization of a certain type of (partial) filtration afforded by the figure – in order to present a theory of literature whose construction of reality depends on a process of selective, or economic, “filtration.”

I am not the first to rely on the word “filtration” when describing the task of poetic realism, and as such, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of Walter Silz, who, in citing Ludwig’s theory, has presented the idea that

The Poetic Realists saw the world more sharply than anyone had done before them. Careful observation and recording of the concrete details that make up *milieu* is their forte. But they subordinated these things to an artistic purpose and plan; *they filtered them*, as it were, through a poetic medium which transformed crude fact into artistic truth. They did not believe in photographic reproduction, but reserved the right of selection and stylization. They steered a course between what Ludwig termed “the subjective ardors of lyrical rhetoric” and the “thin, aimless speech of vulgar reality.”<sup>43</sup>

According to Silz, then, it is a selective process of filtration that forms a crucial component of the realist author’s task. Keller seems to have had a very similar idea in mind when he chose to direct his protagonist’s focus to the “Glasscheibe.” As Silz reminds us, poetic realism entails much more than a mere “photographic reproduction” of reality. Rather, the author takes “vulgar reality” and filters it “through a poetic medium” in order to arrive at “artistic truth.” Importantly, this particular argument also works to reinforce the idea of realism as a moderating or mediating force, for as Silz maintains, these authors “steered a course between...the subjective ardors of lyrical rhetoric and the thin, aimless speech of vulgar reality.”

As I have attempted to show at the outset of the preceding analysis, the economic and aesthetic struggles experienced by Heinrich Lee throughout the novel are, at their core, the result of the same underlying issue, namely a proclivity toward excess, whether

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<sup>43</sup> Silz, *Realism and Reality*, 13. My emphasis.

this manifests itself in the form of lavish spending habits or imaginative, artistic fancies. By externalizing his protagonist's psychical struggles through the creation of opposed realms of expression, Keller's novel seeks to resolve both economic and aesthetic tensions in an ethos of moderation. That liminal space in which moderate tendencies exercise their influence is undoubtedly the native village of Heinrich's parents. Within this space, the frame presents itself as the medium *par excellence* for the transmission of a theory of economic and aesthetic moderation. Not only does the frame repeatedly appear within the context of its reusing or repurposing, thereby reinforcing a spirit of economic moderation; onto the figure, itself a symbolic space of moderation between the extremes of reality and representation, is inscribed an aesthetics of moderation that mediates between the forces of naturalistic realism and romantic imagination, objective exteriority and subjective interiority, and indeed, even art and life.

During the century in which Keller lived and wrote, his society underwent a fundamental shift, as increasing emphasis came to be placed on economic (and relatedly, economizable) value; at the same time, decreasing emphasis was placed on the merits of art and the artistic imagination. And yet Keller's novel clearly advocates for a reunification of these two realms, not only in life, but also, importantly, in literature. In delineating the silhouette of Heinrich Lee, the author was surely reminded of his own youthful experiences, of the guilt he felt over his own prodigality and the flights of imagination that had led in large part to his own failure as a landscape painter. Perhaps he recognized that the core issue that had defined his own economic and aesthetic troubles was the same, and that the key to effectively overcoming both was the adoption of a more moderate stance, both with respect to the realities of life, and the "realities" of literature.



Moderating femininity: Meretlein, Anna, and the framing of the female subject

Having explored the ways in which the text's aesthetic and economic dimensions converge around the figure of the frame, I will now shift focus to a consideration of gender in its relation to economy. Closer analysis of several key episodes in Keller's novel will reveal that an "economization" or "moderation" of the feminine forms a crucial component of the narrative's subtext. What is more, such moderation is fundamental to the processes of both female and male *Bildung*. In this respect, it will be important to examine in greater detail the function of two female characters: the first is the "Hexenkind," Meretlein, whose story makes a brief appearance early on in the novel; the second is Anna, the seemingly cherished object of the young Heinrich's affection. As I will argue, the latter is merely a disguised repetition of the former, a reincarnation of the original love object.<sup>44</sup> In economic terms, we might say that the original love interest is "repurposed," and while Meretlein and Anna are certainly two discrete individuals, the various frameworks that are imposed on their characters by the male protagonist are inherently similar.

In her essay, "Risky Resemblances: On Repetition, Mourning, and Representation," Elisabeth Bronfen explores the implications of "an economy of love based on repetition" in Poe's "Ligeia" (1838) and Hitchcock's "Vertigo" (1958).<sup>45</sup> According to Bronfen, each "text" presents the same basic plotline: the male protagonist's first love dies, he later "refinds" her in the form of a second woman, and

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<sup>44</sup> This argument is based in part on Downing's observation in "Binding Magic" that Meretlein functions as a "proleptic projection or likeness" (157) for Anna. Unlike Downing, however, my primary interest is in exploring the function of the frame as a means of establishing a connection between these two female characters.

<sup>45</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, "Risky Resemblances: On Repetition, Mourning, and Representation," in *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 103.

this second woman then also dies. As I would like to suggest, the same situation presents itself in Keller's novel. The first "beloved" (Meretlein) dies. She is then (subconsciously) re-presented in the form of a second beloved (Anna), who then also perishes. As Bronfen has maintained, such a "repetition in death constitutes a desire to foreclose difference"<sup>46</sup>; in other words, this repetition represents the male's desire to return to a state of sameness, and with it, to the original object of his love. Importantly, it is not a return to the physical or material feminine body that he desires, but rather, a return to the female as image. Just as the original "beloved" (i.e., Meretlein) is first encountered as image, so too does the second (i.e., Anna) make her exit from the text as image. Heinrich's love, as I would furthermore like to suggest, is a love "which privileges the image over any concrete presence."<sup>47</sup>

Yet as I would also argue, there is an added feeling of ambivalence that is unique to Keller's novel. The repetition of one female (Meretlein) in the other (Anna) certainly hints at the male's desire to "foreclose difference" between the two. However, in her "otherness," Meretlein also represents a threat to the intended formation or *Bildung* of the male subject, Heinrich, and by extension, a possible disruption to a certain narrative of male progress. Meretlein's is a particular type of femininity that is deemed "excessive" and thus dangerous. Because Anna functions as a repetition – albeit a highly distorted one – of the former, she also comes to be perceived as a threat, though likely only subconsciously. To contain this threat, the perceived excess of femininity must be moderated.<sup>48</sup> I prefer the term "moderated" as opposed to "extinguished" or "eliminated"

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>48</sup> Ironically, what is perhaps most "excessive" about woman is that she reminds man of his own "excess." See Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 2005). As Rose has suggested,

because a certain sense of enjoyment clearly remains, and, in fact, is allowed to remain (and must, perhaps, remain). A delicate balance seems to be the ultimate goal. The female “object” evokes a sense of pleasure (we are told quite pointedly that Meretlein’s portrait awakens “in dem Beschauenden eine unwillkürliche Sehnsucht” [I, 52]). And yet she must still be kept at a “safe” distance with respect to the male subject/spectator.

Here too, an inquiry into the function of the frame will be important: on the formal level, as well as on the level of content, the frame hints at the male’s attempt to contain the toxic, excessive allure of femininity. Acts of “framing” allow, moreover, for the female subject to be kept at a “safe,” yet still pleasurable distance. Still, as our consideration of the figure of the young witch-child Meretlein will make evident, such “otherness” is not so easily contained. Despite attempts to suppress it, to silence it, to appropriate it as one’s own, this femininity repeatedly transcends the bounds of those “frames” that are placed on it, i.e., the physical and symbolic female body. Although Heinrich will attempt to appropriate Meretlein’s story as his own, it remains an unincorporated excess with respect to the overarching male narrative, and as such, it returns, as if from the dead, to repeat itself.

The sorrowful tale of the young Meretlein (short for “Emerentia”), which dates, we are told, to the year 1713, is inserted into the main narrative early on, apparently as a means of forging a connection between the girl and Heinrich himself, bound by their religious “Verstocktheit.”<sup>49</sup> Significantly, the child’s sexual allure is manifest even before the commencement of the story proper: we are told that she “hätte...erwachsene

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woman “comes to represent two things – what the man is not, that is difference, and what he has to give up, that is excess” (219).

<sup>49</sup> In “Binding Magic,” Downing has also noted that the young girl “serves as an analogue for Heinrich himself” (157).

Mannspersonen verführt und es ihnen angetan, wenn es sie nur anblickt, dass selbe sich sterblich in das kleine Kind verliebt und seinetwegen böse *Händel* angefangen hätten” (I, 51).<sup>50</sup> The protagonist’s encounter with the female child (i.e., her portrait) might arguably be said to represent his first erotic experience, at least within the confines of his own account of his life. He tells us, moreover, that the girl’s representation had the power to arouse “in dem Beschauenden eine unwillkürliche Sehnsucht, das lebendige Kind zu sehen, ihm schmeicheln und es liebkosen zu dürfen” (I, 52).

Fragments of Meretlein’s story are subsequently inserted into Heinrich’s narrative. The account of the girl, who lived and died over one hundred years prior to the time of Heinrich’s writing, is of course not a first-hand narration. Rather, Heinrich discovers “her” story in the diary of the priest who was once charged with the girl’s care and “education.” It is for the following reason, we are told, that the protagonist chooses to copy down parts of the story: “Folgende Stellen habe ich mir ihres seltsamen Inhaltes wegen abgeschrieben und will sie diesen Blättern *einverleiben* und so die Erinnerungen an jenes Kind in meinen eigenen Erinnerungen *aufbewahren*, da sie sonst verlorengehen würde” (I, 52-3).<sup>51</sup> That the primary goal of such transcription should be to preserve the girl’s memory is certainly pretense. More than this, Heinrich’s attempt to appropriate Meretlein’s story as his own (“diesen Blättern *einverleiben*,” “in meinen eigenen Erinnerungen *aufbewahren*”) reflects his desire to take possession of the girl herself, to reestablish appropriate power dynamics, to take control of an eroticism that threatens to destabilize the projected stability of his own *Bildung*. Indeed, the protagonist’s choice of the verb “*einverleiben*” is also telling in this respect, for it suggests not only a process of

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<sup>50</sup> My emphasis. Keller’s choice of the word “Händel” (meaning among other things “business” or “commerce”) clearly resonates once again with the economic dimensions of the text.

<sup>51</sup> My emphasis.

inclusion, but also a narrative framing of sorts, that is, the male's intent to assimilate, to absorb the female's story into his own. Still, Meretlein's story will resist Heinrich's attempts to incorporate it, to absorb it, and thus to control it; it will continue to remain outside of and apart from his own. Despite his best efforts to appropriate it, it will continue to exert its control over him.

Heinrich's attempt to exercise his authorial power over the female subject certainly has its reasons. As von Loewenich has suggested, "Das tragische Schicksal des Meretlein ist ein drohendes Symbol dafür, wie es einer Frau ergehen kann, die ihre Sinnlichkeit frei entfalten und leben will."<sup>52</sup> Indeed, clear in the priest's diary entries is that the young girl is inclined to expose her naked body. Shortly after the priest has his wife tailor a "Busskleidung" made to fit the girl's body, we learn, for instance, that while playing with the peasant children of the village in the woods, Meretlein hangs the garment on a tree branch and jumps and dances before it naked ("nackent davor gesprungen und getanzt" [I, 54]). In a later entry, we read that the girl is found one afternoon "auf dem *Buchenloo*," "wo sie entkleidet auf ihrem Busshabit an der Sonne sass und sich bass wärmte. Sie hatt' ihr Haar ganz *aufgeflochten* und ein Kränzlein von *Buchenlaub* darauff gesetzt, so wie ein dito Scherpen um den Leib gehenkt, auch ein Quantum schöner Erbeeren vor sich liegen gehabt, von denen sie ganz voll und rundlich gesessen war" (I, 56).<sup>53</sup> Aside from the unabashed way that Meretlein suns her naked body (the "Erdbeeren" certainly reinforce the erotic undertones of this scene), there is something else, something arguably more important, which is striking about this passage. Indeed, the scene seems at first to bespeak the potential of female agency, of disrupting

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<sup>52</sup> von Loewenich, *Frauenbild und Frauengestalten*, 38.

<sup>53</sup> My emphasis. The poetic quality of the priest's description is intensified in particular by means of alliteration (i.e., through the choice of words such as "Buch," "Buss," and "bass").

the status quo, as it were. And yet the repeatedly implied connection between the female child and the act of textual production would seem to oppose this notion of female power. For instance, we read that Meretlein's hair is "ganz aufgeflochten," interesting when one reflects on the etymology of the word "Flechten," which stems from the Latin "texere," meaning "to weave."<sup>54</sup> Adding to the underlying textual dimensions of this scene is the well-known association of the beech tree with the written word, reinforced in the German language more than in others by the obvious linguistic similarity between the word "book" ("Buch") and "beech" ("Buche"). Significantly, Meretlein's character is positioned (she does not position herself, but is, significantly, positioned within the text by the male narrator) "auf dem Buchenloo"; she also adorns her head with "ein Kränzlein von Buchenlaub." Not only is Meretlein's character, and by extension, her story, inscribed within a story that is not her own, but rather someone else's (i.e., first the priest's, and later Heinrich's); she is also presented not in her connection to nature, as one might initially understand this scene. Quite the opposite: Meretlein is thoroughly textualized, a textual construct, her braided (text-ured) hair adorned with a little crown made of beech leaves.<sup>55</sup>

Situated between these two moments of the female's bodily exposure is a third moment, which this time involves not a lack of clothing, but rather an excess of it. The priest's own description of Meretlein's portraiture attire is rather unexceptional. Of the clothes that adorn her figure, only her "Habit," her "Sonntagsstaat," a "Schapell" and "Gürtlen" are mentioned (the last of which certainly bespeaks the constrictive nature of

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<sup>54</sup> The etymology of this particular word will also have significant implications for my analysis of Storm's *Viola tricolor* in Chapter Three.

<sup>55</sup> Downing's analysis of the text in "Binding Magic" similarly suggests that "the natural world is also consistently half-revealed as a book-world" (163).

her clothing). Offered in the narrative present, Heinrich's description of the girl's portrait supplements the priest's original description. Heinrich's impression of the painting reflects, moreover,

ein ausserordentlich zartgebautes Mädchen in einem blassgrünen Damastkleide, dessen *Saum* in einem weiten Kreise starre und die Füßchen nicht sehen liess. Um den schlanken feinen Leib war eine goldene Kette geschlungen...Auf dem Haupte trug es einen kronenartigen Kopfputz aus flimmernden Gold und *Silberblättchen*, von seidenen Schnüren und Perlen *durchflochten*. (I, 51-2)<sup>56</sup>

When reflecting on this description, Downing is quick to note "the particular way in which her clothing coerces and constrains her," how Meretlein is "trapped by her trappings: from the border (*Saum*) that locks her within its circle and deprives her of feet, of any means of movement or escape, to the chain bound about her body and the straps (*Schnüren*) about her head."<sup>57</sup> As the meaning of the German word "Saum" (which denotes a "hem," but also a "border" or "margin") suggests, clothing is the first, but certainly not the only means by which the female child is "framed" in an attempt to constrain her, and thereby to contain the powerful allure of her "Sinnlichkeit."

At the same time, it is important to highlight the textual metaphors utilized in this description of the female's attire. We are told, in particular, that Meretlein wears a headdress consisting of silver leaves ("Silberblättchen"), and that these are interlaced ("durchflochten") with pearls and silky lace. Yet the meaning of the German word "Blatt" also denotes a sheet of paper, in much the same way as the word "Flechten" (which, as one will recall, has already appeared once before in the preceding passage) finds its etymological root in the Latin "texere." In this way, Meretlein is once again

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<sup>56</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>57</sup> Downing, "Binding Magic," 161-162.

presented as a textualized, i.e., narrativized construct, smothered by the text-ured articles that have been imposed on her body by the masculine hand.

As a symbol of unharnessed female sensuality, the child clearly presents a dangerous presence to the status quo, and a particular threat to the male subject (to the priest and those other men who appear within his diary entries, and also to Heinrich himself). She represents a femininity that overwhelms, that quite literally drives men crazy, and it is because of this that her power must be moderated. As previously suggested, however, the framing structure that exists is more complex than the constrictive articles of clothing that adorn her physical body (or the frame that will come to adorn her portrait). In other words, it is not only at the level of content, but also at both a linguistic and structural level that Meretlein is “framed” in an attempt to contain her power.

We should recall, moreover, that the female child’s story is first framed by the priest’s account of her, and then again when, many years later, Heinrich makes the decision to transcribe this story (already no longer Meretlein’s own) and re-present it within the limits of his own story. This gesture of re-appropriation allows the protagonist, just like the priest, to exercise his power as authorial agent, selecting in particular those diary entries that he finds most interesting. In so doing, the child and her story are not only taken out of context, but are left in a state of fragmentation. On a linguistic level, the female subject is also “framed” in a sense. If Heinrich’s decision to present the title of this story as “Das Meretlein” (as opposed to “Meretlein”) should at first seem trivial, I would argue that this is done with intention, as a means of objectifying the child and thus linguistically divesting her of her subjectivity. At the structural level, it is equally



interesting to consider that the child's story is delineated within the confines of Heinrich's own by two chapters that deal explicitly with the topic of God and religion (preceding the chapter titled "Das Meretlein" is a chapter called "Lob Gottes und der Mutter. Vom Beten" and it is directly followed by a chapter titled "Weiteres vom lieben Gott. Frau Margret und ihre Leute"). In this way, Heinrich's specific positioning of the "Hexenkind"'s story within his own would seem to function as a repetition of the priest's original attempt at religious "correction."

Yet despite such efforts, Meretlein's story will ultimately transcend the confines of the various "frames" that have attempted to contain it. Later in the novel, the residual traces of the child's still powerful presence will leave their mark on the figure of Heinrich's beloved Anna. What is more, the framing structure that was once imposed on Meretlein's physical and symbolic body by both the priest and Heinrich himself will be repeated on Anna.

To substantiate this argument, I would like to return to two specific moments within the narrative, both of which I have already discussed at length in the previous section. Nonetheless, they also help to elucidate important connections between gender and the act of framing. First, I will examine once more the frame that adorns Anna's portrait, which Heinrich begrudgingly presents to the schoolmaster on his birthday. After this, I will return to the scene that unfolds in the aftermath of Anna's death. Both moments not only establish a connection between Meretlein and Anna; each also sheds light on the power of the frame as a means of containment, and as such, the male subject's need to moderate the irrepressible power of the female subject.

Of course, Anna's threat to Heinrich is not as apparent as the threat represented by Meretlein, whose nonconformist sensuality constitutes an easily discernible danger to a narrative that presents the stable, progressive formation of the male subject as its goal. Unlike the brazen, unwieldy "Hexenkind," Anna is by all accounts a seemingly timid, rather unassuming figure. Yet there is still reason to believe that her presence also constitutes a very real threat to the process of male *Bildung*.

In this regard, we might first consider Heinrich's increasing preoccupation with the idea that Anna is able to read his thoughts and discern his movements in absentia, a preoccupation that, while undoubtedly a projection, infuses the female with a supernatural omnipresence. What is more, it seems clear that Anna also represents a veritable sexual threat to the young protagonist. In this regard, Downing has drawn readers' attention to a particularly significant moment within the narrative, to a scene wherein Anna is tasked with a specific project.<sup>58</sup> We are told that the young girl "hatte eine mächtige Wanne voll grüner Bohnen der Schwänzchen zu entledigen und an lange Fäden zu reihen" (II, 186-7). Together with the threat of castration represented in this act (Anna must dispose of the "Schwänzchen"), Downing also calls attention to the fact that Heinrich refers to Anna as a "Hexe" in the same scene, thereby establishing a connection between Anna and her predecessor, Meretlein.<sup>59</sup>

If the relationship between these two figures still seems tenuous, one ought to consider a decision made by Heinrich, in Anna's absence, to paint an image of the "Heidenstube" on her bedroom wall. Keller's protagonist recounts to his readers that "*ich konnte mich nun nicht enthalten, auf der schneeweissen Wand des Kämmerchens, ein*

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<sup>58</sup> Downing, "Binding Magic."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

*sauberes Viereck* zu ziehen und das Bild mit der Heidenstube, so gut wie ich konnte, hineinzumalen. Dies sollte ein stiller Gruss für sie sein und ihr später bezeugen, wie beständig ich an sie gedacht“ (II, 217).<sup>60</sup> As a symbol of heathenism, the “Heidenstube” also subtly reinforces Anna’s connection to the “Hexenkind” Meretlein, whose “ungodly” ways – her “hartnäckige Abneigung gegen Gebet und Gottesdienst jeder Art” (I, 52) – represent one of the female child’s defining characteristics.<sup>61</sup> Importantly, the scene also repeats the original act of framing, and not only in the sense that an image associated with Meretlein receives a frame (albeit a crude one). At the same time, Heinrich’s decision to circumscribe his rendering of the “Heidenstube” with “ein sauberes Viereck” should remind us of those other four-sided figures, the “viereckig[e] Gelenken” (II, 248) – themselves frames in miniature – that also adorn the repurposed frame of Anna’s portrait.

As a repetition of the original female threat, Anna must also be contained, precisely because Heinrich – as he tells us pointedly in the above passage – cannot contain *himself* (“ich konnte mich nun nicht enthalten”). This attempt at containment occurs first at the symbolic level, i.e., in “framing” Anna as portraiture, and finally in death, whereby Anna is also both literally and figuratively “framed.” At this juncture, it is fitting to return to Heinrich’s earlier description of Meretlein’s portrait. In his own analysis, Downing devotes a considerable amount of attention to the child’s attire, which

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<sup>60</sup> My emphasis. Heinrich’s choice to paint this image on the wall of Anna’s “Kämmerchen,” of all places, cannot be unintentional. As a private, female, erotically-connoted space, Anna’s bedroom represents a forbidden space for the male subject. Despite this, he enters into this realm, one clearly connoted as pure, only to defile the “schneeweissen Wand” in the process of painting his intended image. I would go so far as to suggest that Heinrich’s gesture constitutes an act of sexual frustration turned aggression toward Anna.

<sup>61</sup> In “Binding Magic,” Downing argues that the image replaced with the first of Heinrich’s “Anna paintings,” namely the image of the “Gedächtnistafel der Teuerung von 1817,” should also be read in its connection to Meretlein. In Downing’s own words, “the reference to the famine resonate[s] with the starvation regimen to which Meretlein was subjected as part of her *Bildung*” (169).

ultimately results in a thoroughly thought-provoking interpretation. Yet what still requires our consideration is the way in which the properties of Meretlein's portrait (and in particular her attire) are later subtly transferred onto the image of the frame meant to house Heinrich's portrait of Anna. Indeed, closer analysis of both descriptions (of Meretlein's portrait and of the frame of Anna's portrait) will reveal striking similarities.<sup>62</sup>

To begin with, Meretlein's portrait, which is said to represent

ein ausserordentlich *zartgebautes* Mädchen in einem blassgrünen Damastkleide, dessen *Saum* in einem weiten Kreise starrte und die Füsschen nicht sehen liess. Um den *schlanken feinen* Leib war *eine goldene Kette* geschlungen...Auf dem Haupte trug es einen kronenartigen Kopfputz aus flimmernden Gold und Silberblättchen, von seidenen Schnüren und *Perlen* durchflochten. (I, 51-2)<sup>63</sup>

Later in the novel, Heinrich will describe the frame that surrounds Anna's painting as follows:

Erst jetzt bekam ich mein Bild wiederzusehen, welches ganz *fein* eingerahmt war. An einem verdorbenen Kupferstiche hatten die Mädchen einen *schmalen*, in Holz auf das *zierlichste* geschnittenen Rahmen gefunden, welcher wohl siebzig Jahre alt sein mochte und eine auf einen *schmalen* Stab gelegte Reihe von Muschelchen vorstellte, von denen eins das andere halb bedeckte. *An der inneren Kante lief eine feine Kette mit viereckigen Gelenken herum, die äussere Kante war mit einer Perlenschnur umzogen.* Der Dorfglaser, welcher allerlei Künste trieb und besonders in verjährten Lackierarbeiten auf altmodischem Schachtelwerk stark war, hatte den Muscheln einen rötlichen Glanz gegeben, *die Kette vergoldet* und die *Perlen* weiss gemacht und ein neues, klares Glas genommen, so dass ich höchst erstaunt war, meine Zeichnung in diesem Aufputze wiederzufinden. (II, 247-8)<sup>64</sup>

Heinrich's description of the frame connects this latter moment to the former. Just as the description of Meretlein's body evokes a certain fragility (it is described as "schlank," "zartgebaut," and "fein"), so too is the frame of Anna's portrait depicted using adjectives

<sup>62</sup> In "Painting Magic," Downing also takes into account the repetition of certain descriptors in those passages that recount Meretlein's attire and the frame of Anna's portrait. Downing argues, moreover, that "in the fine golden chain with square links...as well as in the 'string of pearls' that frames the chain itself, there are echoes of that other portrait of that other 'little witch,' Meretlein. So many key terms here...that originated in the portrait of Meretlein and became fractally dispersed throughout the text" (100).

<sup>63</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> My emphasis.

such as “fein,” “schmal,” and “zierlich.” The repetition of certain images is also imperative to underscore in this respect: each passage presents the image of a gold chain (“eine goldene Kette,” “die Kette vergoldet”), as well as “Perlen” (pearls) and “Schnüren” (strings). In this way, the properties of Meretlein’s physical body, together with those of the sartorial accoutrements that clothe it, are subtly transferred on to the image of the frame. Just as Meretlein’s body is adorned with the weight of a “goldene Kette,” her headdress ornamented with “Perlen” and “Schnüren,” Anna’s portrait is embellished with similar finery by means of its frame. Importantly, each passage is meant to evoke a sense of the weight, both literal and symbolic, that each female carries, the degree to which they are weighed down, “trapped by their trappings.”<sup>65</sup> Like Meretlein, who was framed once by her attire and later by the frame of her portrait (and then once again, many times over, by other equally restrictive frameworks), Anna’s symbolic body is also doubly framed in an effort to restrain her: not only is the frame of her portrait itself framed on its inner and outer edges (a fact that also bespeaks the object’s essentially artistic quality); as previously suggested, the “viereckig[e] Gelenken” situated on the frame’s interior border also represent frames in miniature (in other words, smaller frames that have been superimposed onto the larger frame).

Although the repetition of the original act of framing occurs first only at the symbolic level, it is subsequently accomplished in a literal sense as well. Here I would like to return to the scene that unfolds in the aftermath of Anna’s passing, to consider it this time from the vantage point of gender. As was the case with Meretlein, greater

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<sup>65</sup> Downing, “Binding Magic,” 162.

control of the female subject is achieved once more in death.<sup>66</sup> In framing her face and placing it behind glass, Anna's physical body is presented as portraiture. While it is still visible and thus still capable of eliciting a sense of pleasure in the male spectator, the glass enables a separation of the male subject from the object of his gaze. During Anna's burial, Heinrich reflects specifically on the "Glassscheibe" that has since been affixed to the opening of the girl's coffin, recalling that "die Glasscheibe tat es mir an, daß ich *das Gut*, was sie verschloß, gleich einem *hinter Glas und Rahmen gebrachten* Teil meiner Erfahrung, meines Lebens, in gehobener und feierlicher Stimmung, aber in vollkommener Ruhe begraben sah" (III, 60).<sup>67</sup> Importantly, Anna is no longer represented linguistically as a person; rather, she is referred to as "das Gut," as a commodity or possession. This specific word choice has two important effects: first, it reinforces the economic dimensions of the scene; second, presenting Anna as "das Gut" achieves the same effect as Meretlein's linguistic objectification, her representation as "Das Meretlein."

We should furthermore recall that what is "framed" in this scene is not only Anna's countenance; Heinrich's experiences, specifically his experiences with Anna, are likewise presented as "hinter Glas und Rahmen gebracht." This should remind us of Meretlein's story, which ultimately comes to be framed within an overwhelmingly male discourse (most notably by Heinrich and the priest). In much the same way, Anna is framed, in death, within the confines of a decidedly male narrative. Both stories – first

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<sup>66</sup> See Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, introduction to *Death and Representation*, ed. Goodwin and Bronfen (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 3-25. As Goodwin and Bronfen have suggested, "our culture posits death and the feminine as what is radically other to the norm, the living or surviving masculine subject; they represent the disruption and difference that ground a narcissistic sense of self and stability in a cultural system. But the system must also eliminate them or posit them as limit in order to survive" (13-14).

<sup>67</sup> My emphasis.

Meretlein's and later, Anna's – are ultimately appropriated by the male subject. Their stories, and with them their voices, are no longer their own, but his. It is a "framing" of experience that posits such female elements as radically "other," as disruptive to a certain male narrative of progressive formation, and as such, as expendable, as necessary casualties within the process of male *Bildung*.

#### Judith returns: gray areas and the "reframing" of gender relations

Apart from Meretlein and Anna, there is another female character that still warrants our consideration, one that is implicated in equal measure in the process of male *Bildung*, and yet no longer as an object, a casualty of his discursive and artistic constraints, but as a subject in her own right. Heinrich first encounters Judith (an older female cousin) during the time he spends in the country as a youth, and it is her unanticipated reappearance at the end of the novel that would seem to signal the culmination of his self-perceived maturation. Importantly, Judith is also "repurposed" in the course of Heinrich's tale: once an eroticized love object of the young protagonist, she ultimately transcends the limits of the framework imposed on her to become a loving, but by no means submissive companion to him in his later years. On the contrary, she liberates Heinrich, while also liberating herself from the confines of his own, presupposed position of power.

Importantly, Judith's function while abroad clearly resonates with the idea of moderation. At the same time, her role as an economic figure is also stressed. While in America, she purchased land with her own money, which she then used as "*eine Art Handelskontor für die verschiedenen Bedürfnisse der kleinen Kolonie*" (IV, 381).<sup>68</sup> Of her time abroad, Heinrich also recalls that "der Selbsterhaltungstrieb war mit einer

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<sup>68</sup> My emphasis.

grossen Opferfähigkeit *so glücklich in ihr gemischt*, dass sie die Leute und mit ihnen sich selbst so lange über Wasser hielt, bis ein bedeutender *Verbindungsweg* in die Nähe der Ansiedlung kam” (IV, 381).<sup>69</sup> Judith thus performs an important economic function within the new settlement. What is more, she also represents a figure of mediation between the extremes of self-preservation (“Selbsterhaltung”) and self-sacrifice (“Opferfähigkeit”) within what is itself an intermediary space, that is, with respect to the opportunities for trade and communication that her economic power ultimately enables within the community.

A wealthy, independent woman, Judith promptly returns to Switzerland from America after a long absence when she hears of Heinrich’s present circumstances, the death of his mother, and the responsibility he bears in connection to it. Upon returning, she is confronted with a man who himself now feels constricted by his professional circumstances, so much so that he is contemplating death. It is Judith who saves him from his existential crisis, and whose character is thus repurposed in another sense. Heinrich’s female cousin ultimately becomes what would appear to be a replacement for the original, now-deceased maternal figure, and this in a way that is no less stifling: framed, and restrained, by Judith’s embrace at the end of the novel, Heinrich recalls the intensity with which she enfolds him in her arms and breast: “Sie schloss mich heftig in die Arme und an ihre gute Brust; auch küsste sie mich zärtlich auf den Mund” (IV, 386). The circumstances surrounding Judith’s death (we should recall that she dies while trying to help children in the midst of a deadly epidemic) go hand in hand with my suggestion that she is ultimately repurposed as a maternal figure.

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<sup>69</sup> My emphasis.



Yet the tenderness with which she kisses Heinrich (“zärtlich auf den Mund”) in the aforementioned passage suggests that the couple’s relationship may be somewhat less platonic than that of a mother and son. In a manner that is similarly ambiguous, Judith’s pledge to Heinrich (made prior to their embrace) that she will be his in every sense – “ich sei dein, und will es auf jede Art, wie du es willst!” (IV, 386) – belies a remark made by her directly after their embrace: “Nun ist der Bund besiegelt, *aber für dich nur auf Zusehen hin*, du bist und sollst sein ein freier Mann in jedem Sinne!” (IV, 386).<sup>70</sup> Once again, the female erotic element is effectively moderated – will remain intact, but will also, presumably, be kept at a distance with respect to the male protagonist – and yet this time, it is because of the forcefulness with which she relegates him to the role of onlooker.

Judith’s character is important to consider not only as a repurposed maternal/erotic figure, but also in her ultimate function as a counterpoint to Meretlein and Anna. It is clearly significant, I would suggest, that her attire (as it is presented in the novel’s final scene) is unrestricted, particularly when compared to the constrictive articles of clothing (and those other, equally restrictive frameworks) that are imposed on the (symbolic) bodies of both Meretlein and Anna. Heinrich’s impression upon first recognizing Judith describes an image of free-moving, unconstrained femininity:

Statt der halbländlichen Tracht, in der ich sie zuletzt gesehen, trug sie jetzt ein Damenkleid *von leichtem, grauen Stoffe* und einen grauen Schleier um Hut und Hals gewickelt, *aber alles so ungezwungen, ja bequem*, dass man sah, *ihre ungebrochenen Bewegungen* hatten sich *in einem reichlicheren und breiteren Faltenwurfe von selbst Raum verschafft*, ohne dass sie im mindesten schlotterig oder auch *eckig* ausgesehen hätte. (IV, 379)<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> My emphasis.

The choice of the word “eckig” here strikes me as particularly significant: that Judith is presented precisely as *not* “eckig” (an adjective that most obviously denotes a sense of angularity) is interesting when considered in light of those other “Vierecke” that repeatedly emerge in connection with Anna’s character (and indeed, that are inflicted on her in an effort to contain her). Strengthening this sense of Judith’s essential difference, especially when compared to Anna or Meretlein, is the fact that she is dressed entirely in gray. Her character is first (re-)introduced (although Heinrich does not yet recognize her) as an indistinct, gray apparition that blends together quite seamlessly with the same-colored gray rock of the mountain on which it moves. Heinrich recounts:

Seufzer liess ich die Augen von ungefähr an der gegenüberliegenden Berghalde schweifen, an deren halber Höhe ein Felsband *von grauer Nagelfluhe* zutage trat. Ebenso von ungefähr sah ich *eine leichte Gestalt von der gleichen grauen Farbe* längs dem Felsbände *hingleiten oder schweben*, und da die Halde von der Abendsonne beleuchtet war, so sah man gleichzeitig auch *den Schatten der Gestalt an der Wand mitgleiten*. (IV, 378)<sup>72</sup>

Unlike Meretlein, whose ostensible presentation as a “Naturkind” belies the manner in which her body and its environment have been constructed (i.e., textualized) by a male discourse that seeks to control them, Judith’s character is presented here in its connection to nature. Indeed, it is only with difficulty that Heinrich is able to distinguish the “frame” or “Gestalt” of her body from the natural platform on which it “glides” and “floats.”

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Judith is also implicated in the artistic and economic processes that have served as a guide for my analysis of Keller’s novel. Not only does her death occasion the completion of Heinrich’s tale. What is more, the first part of Heinrich’s manuscript – once given to Judith as a gift “zu ihrem grossen Vergnügen” (IV, 387) – is recovered from her “Nachlass.” In this way, the once black-

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<sup>72</sup> My emphasis.

and-white power dynamics that informed *Der grüne Heinrich* with respect to gender relations take on a gray hue: not only is Judith's story appropriated by Heinrich in the telling of his own; his story, as part of her "Nachlass," also becomes *her* story, one which Heinrich initially relinquishes to her and which he is only able to take repossession of in accordance with her wishes ("Ihrem Willen gemäß" [IV, 387]).<sup>73</sup>

Lest we forget, Judith's reemergence in the final chapter also occasions a return to the glass metaphors that once delineated the intended course of Heinrich's *Bildung*, and this in ways that are highly consequential with respect to the novel's ideological agenda. Dining together one evening shortly after their initial reunion, the pair finds themselves in the presence of a stained-glass window, whereupon Heinrich recounts the following: "In einem der Fenster leuchtete eine zweihundertjährige gemalte Scheibe mit den Wappen eines Ehepaares, das nun schon lange zu Staub geworden. Über den beiden Wappen stand die Inschrift: 'Andreas Mayer, Vogt und Wirt zum gülden Stern, und *Emerentia Juditha* Hollenbergerin sind ehlich verbunden am 1. Mai 1650'" (IV, 384-5).<sup>74</sup> The inscription of the name "Juditha" clearly indicates that this image (the novel's final) is meant to function reflexively. Here, it is no longer only "woman," but also "man" who has been "framed" as an artistic product, thereby implicitly reinforcing the more equitable (if not still largely ill-defined) power dynamics that now inform the novel with respect to gender. Most importantly, however, Heinrich's first little witch also makes her own

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<sup>73</sup> Fittingly, the question of inheritance, of personal and artistic legacy, will carry over to an analysis of Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften* in the chapter that follows.

<sup>74</sup> My emphasis. Downing provides his own interpretation of this same scene in "Painting Magic." He argues, moreover, that "if there is a realism to be glimpsed in Heinrich's turn to Judith...at the end of the novel, it is to be found in the rejection of Judith as the embodiment of a disenchanted, despiritualized realism: this at any rate would seem the peculiar symbolic force of the emblem beneath which Heinrich and Judith are finally joined, the glass painting from 1650 in the Golden Star tavern featuring 'Emerentia Juditha' and her man – with Heinrich there as both lover and glass painter (*Glasmaler*), and with Meretlein and Judith joined in a single, encompassing figure and *Bild*" (108).

reappearance here, and this time no longer in the form of an object that has been (linguistically) deprived of its (that is, her) subjectivity. Instead, her full, proper appellation – “Emerentia” – has finally, undeniably, been restored to her.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Coming Together, Coming Apart:**

#### **Assimilation and Resistance in Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften***

“So bin ich unversehens ein Landschaftsmaler geworden”<sup>1</sup> – it is with these words that the narrator and protagonist of Adalbert Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften* (*Descendants*, 1864) begins the story of his life as a landscape painter. Most obviously meant to convey a sense of suddenness or unexpectedness, the German “unversehens” takes on an altogether different meaning when read in relation to its subsequent (albeit slightly altered) usage, likewise on the first page of the narrative: in pondering the vast number of landscape paintings currently in existence, the as-of-yet unnamed narrator reflects that “es sind der in Oelfarben gemalten und mit Goldrahmen versehenen Landschaften schon genug” (N, 25). A connection is thereby forged between painter and paintings via a thematic of framing: whereas the “Landschaften” are described as “mit Goldrahmen versehen,” the artist first introduces himself with the word “unversehens.” As a character not only lacking proper appellation, but also thoroughly decontextualized, the protagonist of Stifter's narrative is initially – if obliquely – presented as “unframed.”

The pages that follow present the self-narrated tale of this young landscape artist, whose name (Friedrich Roderer) is revealed only much later in the narrative.<sup>2</sup> The narrative present finds the protagonist at the Lüpff Inn, in the Lüpfinger Valley, where he is attempting to paint an image of the surrounding landscape, in particular the moorland

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<sup>1</sup> Adalbert Stifter, “Nachkommenschaften,” in *Adalbert Stifter Werke und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Alfred Doppler and Hartmut Laufhütte (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 3.2: 25. All parenthetical references to Stifter's novella are taken from this edition, henceforth abbreviated as “N.”

<sup>2</sup> The patrilineal name is clearly significant, as other scholars have also noted. See, for instance, Laurence Rickels, “Stifter's Nachkommenschaften: The Problem of the Surname, the Problem of Painting,” *MLN* 100, no .3 (1985): 577-598. My particular interpretation of the surname will follow at a later point in the chapter.

(his lofty artistic ideals have led him to burn all of his previous paintings). He seems to take pleasure in his monotonous daily routine, avoids social activities, and goes to great lengths to keep his work hidden from view. For the most part, he prefers his accustomed position “am Rande” (on the edge, at the periphery), as an observer of (but seldom full participant in) the world around him: tellingly, his living quarters, as well as his favored outdoor painting locations, are situated at various border spaces, “am Rande des Moores” (N, 39, 41) or “[am] Rand des Gehölzes” (N, 75), for example. As a literal instantiation of his position as a social outsider, Friedrich’s physical situation on the fringes of community life and its accompanying realities also reinforces his essential connection to the frame as border space.

The protagonist’s more or less reclusive lifestyle is soon interrupted when one evening he meets a regular patron of the Lüpff Inn, the wealthy owner of Firnberg Castle. It is this man, Friedrich quickly learns, who is responsible for slowly draining the moor. Daily conversations between the two ensue, and Friedrich soon discovers that he and the older man share the same patrilineal name, that being “Roderer.” On one evening in particular, the older man predicts the end of Friedrich’s career as an artist, after which he sees fit to tell his younger companion the history of his family. Its members, he tells Friedrich, have all succumbed to the same fate: “es lebt seit Jahrhunderten ein Geschlecht, das immer etwas Anderes erreicht hat, als es mit Heftigkeit angestrebt hat. Und je glühender das Bestreben eines dieses Geschlechtes war, desto sicherer konnte man sein, dass nichts daraus wird” (N, 49). Within the framework of this

*Familiengeschichte*, the older man chooses to disclose his name (Peter Roderer), but Friedrich does not do not reciprocate.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the older Roderer's initial prognosis that he will one day abandon art, Friedrich continues to work on his painting of the moorland (at least initially), orders a gilded frame for the still unfinished artwork, and finally constructs a gigantic "Blockhaus," which he designs specifically for the purpose of painting his intended masterpiece of the moorland. Eventually, however, he falls in love with Peter Roderer's daughter, Susanna, destroys his final painting (but spares the frame), renounces landscape painting (at least presumably), and marries the young woman, his distant cousin.

In comparison to other, better known works from Stifter's oeuvre, *Nachkommenschaften* has received relatively little critical attention. Of those analyses that do exist, few offer comprehensive interpretations. Critical encounters with this novella focus predominantly on the status of the artwork and, relatedly, the function of the artist.<sup>4</sup> The frame, on the other hand, has been largely neglected. Martin and Erika Swales' critical study presents *Nachkommenschaften* as a work in which "The futility, the deadening compulsion of art, finds richly comic expression."<sup>5</sup> Eric Blackall has argued that "young Roderer is not a true artist but a dilettante."<sup>6</sup> According to Blackall, Friedrich "is too prosaic and has his nose too close to the canvas to capture the Divine"; he does

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<sup>3</sup> As Rickels would have it, Friedrich "deliberately suppresses mention of his surname" (578).

<sup>4</sup> Because of the widely-known fact that Stifter was himself a landscape painter, some analyses also favor an understanding of the text in its autobiographical dimensions. See, for instance, Margaret Gump's monograph, *Adalbert Stifter* (New York: Twayne, 1974). In it, Gump argues that "The young painter is a slightly ironical self-portrait of the young Stifter, who, as we know from his letters, often relentlessly reworked his paintings and then destroyed them" (133). In this regard, see also Fritz Novotny, *Adalbert Stifter als Maler* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1941). Novotny contends that *Nachkommenschaften* is a text that "in jedem Wort, das Malerei betrifft, autobiographisch genommen werden darf" (8).

<sup>5</sup> Martin and Erika Swales, *Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Blackall, *Adalbert Stifter: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 344.

not have “a true sense of beauty.”<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, Blackall opines, the story “does not reach deeply, but forms a charming humoresque.”<sup>8</sup> Offering an entirely different interpretation, Helena Ragg-Kirkby suggests that Friedrich’s painting should be understood “as a frantic sublimational activity.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, “it is essentially a sexual dynamic driving him to paint.”<sup>10</sup> Rickels’ more recent, comparatively much more rigorous analysis of Stifter’s novella encourages readers to focus instead on the connection between the act of painting and the belated disclosure of the protagonist’s surname.<sup>11</sup>

With a similar focus on the status of the aesthetic in the narrative, Ursula Mahlendorf hones in on Friedrich’s supposed rejection of art at the end of the novella, asking us to consider, moreover, “wie ist die Absage an die Kunst in der Novelle zu verstehen? Wie skeptisch ist der alte Stifter der Kunst gegenüber, wie verzweifelt?...Handelt es sich um eine Absage an die Kunst?”<sup>12</sup> Analyzing the novella instead in terms of the protagonist’s narrative development, Mahlendorf concludes that

Die Frage <<was wird aus Friedrich?>> ist leicht zu beantworten, denn sie ist mit der Form der Novelle gegeben. Stifter wählt für die *Nachkommenschaften* die Form der autobiographischen Mitteilung, und er verwendet sie so, daß sie eine deutliche erzählerische Entwicklung Friedrichs abzeichnet. Indem er sein Leben selbst erzählt, wird Friedrich zum immer geschickteren und reiferen Erzähler. Friedrich wendet sich also einer anderer Kunstgattung zu, nämlich der Beschreibung bürgerlichen Lebens in bürgerlich novellistischer Form.<sup>13</sup>

Mahlendorf’s subsequent analysis presents cogent proof of the development of Friedrich’s narrative style throughout the course of the ensuing tale. Yet it is also

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>9</sup> Helena Ragg-Kirkby, *Adalbert Stifter’s Late Prose: The Mania for Moderation* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>11</sup> Rickels, “Stifter’s Nachkommenschaften.”

<sup>12</sup> Ursula Mahlendorf, “Stifters Absage an die Kunst?,” in *Goethezeit: Studien zur Erkenntnis und Rezeption Goethes und seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (Munich: Francke, 1981), 370.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 370-371.



reasonable to suggest that Friedrich's tale does not constitute *Nachkommenschaften's* main narrative force: as I will argue at a later point in this chapter, what is presumed to be Friedrich's tale is framed from the very beginning by a narrative voice that is not only more fully developed, but also far more powerful than his own.

Despite these and other critical engagements with Stifter's novella, which oftentimes favor a somewhat more superficial analysis of art and the artist, the frame has not gone entirely unnoticed. However, its treatment is typically anything but extensive. As an example of this, we might consider Fritz Novotny's work on Stifter as painter.<sup>14</sup> While Novotny does mention the frame (in particular the "Goldrahmen" ordered by Friedrich for his painting of the moorland), he does so to draw a parallel to Stifter's life, i.e., the author's own "Rahmenmacher." Rickels also touches on the specific significance of the frame in *Nachkommenschaften*: focusing on a scene of primary importance, namely the scene in which Friedrich destroys all painterly paraphernalia with the exception of the "Goldrahmen," Rickels contends that the protagonist spares "only the frame, the site of caption or name."<sup>15</sup>

Eric Downing's lengthier analysis of the status of the telescope within Stifter's body of work should also be taken into account as an important example of critical encounters with the frame.<sup>16</sup> Although Downing's primary focus is on the (self-reflexive) function of the telescope in Stifter's earlier work *Der Hochwald* (1842/1844), he also

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<sup>14</sup> Novotny, *Adalbert Stifter als Maler*.

<sup>15</sup> Rickels, "Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften*," 585.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Downing, "Adalbert Stifter and the Scope of Realism," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 74, no. 3 (1999): 229-241. Downing's argument centers largely on his understanding of "The association of telescopes with stasis, and stasis with realism" (235). Elisabeth Strowick will return to this point in her own analysis of the telescope within Stifter's oeuvre, maintaining that "It is surely remarkable that, of all things, the telescope – the same instrument that commonly vouches for the "stasis" of realism – distinguishes itself as a medium of *motion*" (279, my emphasis). See Elisabeth Strowick, "Poetological-Technical Operations: Representation of Motion in Adalbert Stifter," *Configurations* 18, no. 3 (2010): 273-289.

briefly discusses its related function in *Nachkommenschaften*. Downing's main interest is in the ways in which "telescopes...can be seen to incorporate many of the most critical aspects of Stifter's fictional program, in particular those aspects most important to an understanding of his realism."<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Downing argues that

telescopes seem to convey the same specific import of realist vision...vision as not about the simple objective recording of an empirical reality, but instead about the complex – and not *only* psychological – imposition of a meaning, law, and order behind that reality. For all Stifter's protagonists, telescopes become their means for mastering the world, for establishing that initially unperceived, and so also in a sense absent, order that transforms the view into something "real" for them.<sup>18</sup>

Within this context, Downing underscores "the close association of telescopes and pictorial representation that we see...in the late novella *Nachkommenschaften*, where the painter-protagonist carefully and repeatedly observes the landscape setting through his 'Fernrohr' in preparation for its definitive 'realist' reproduction."<sup>19</sup> Still more than this, the telescope's function, according to Downing, is also relevant to an understanding of gender relations in the novella: "the telescope that is first aimed at mastering the landscape for the projected realist painting soon becomes simultaneously focused on mastering the woman for what becomes the projected, and realized, marriage."<sup>20</sup> Downing's astute observations about the complex nature of vision that emerges throughout Stifter's prose help to lay the foundation for an exploration of *Nachkommenschaften* with regard to the frame. Still, we should remember that the telescope is but one of several framing devices encountered in the narrative. Accordingly, my goal will be to analyze its function within a particular nexus of connections.

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<sup>17</sup> Downing, "Adalbert Stifter and the Scope of Realism," 230.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

As one of the author's lesser known works, *Nachkommenschaften* has certainly retained a peripheral position within (*am Rande von*) Stifter's body of work, and hence also within the critical literature surrounding it. However, as I hope to elucidate, an analysis of the frame will reveal the novella's centrality with respect to its author's specific vision of realism. As we have seen, the significance of "framing" is programmatically introduced with the protagonist's opening words. Throughout the course of the ensuing tale, Stifter will use the motif in order to articulate certain key tenets of his aesthetic program, in particular those set forth in his 1852 *Vorrede* to the *Bunte Steine* collection (*Many-colored Stones*, 1853).<sup>21</sup> More specifically, tracing the story's trajectory vis-à-vis "the frame" will elucidate the figure's key function as a medium for transmitting Stifter's theory of "das sanfte Gesetz" (V, 12).

#### A sight unseen: Stifter's *Vorrede* to *Bunte Steine*

The significance of the 1852 *Vorrede* for poetic realism goes perhaps without saying. As Downing has noted, the *Vorrede* is largely regarded as an "early expression of poetic realism's aesthetic, a prophetic formulation of many of the principles, and problems, of the literary movement that would dominate German letters for the next forty years."<sup>22</sup> As expounded in the *Vorrede*, Stifter's specific conception of the realist agenda is intimately connected to his notion of "das sanfte Gesetz" (V, 12), a "gentle law" of ordering that structures both the natural and human worlds. It is a law (and very much also a specific

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<sup>21</sup> Adalbert Stifter, "Vorrede," in *Adalbert Stifter Werke und Briefe: Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Alfred Doppler and Wolfgang Frühwald (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 2.2: 9-16. All parenthetical references to the *Vorrede* are taken from this edition, henceforth abbreviated as "V."

<sup>22</sup> Eric Downing, "Real and Recurrent Problems: Stifter's Preface to 'Many-colored Stones' ('Bunte Steine')," in *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 24.

conception of realism and reality) that privileges “das Ganze und Allgemeine” (V, 10) over those individual, conspicuous phenomena, which are understood as exceptions to the typically “gentle” or “peaceful” order of “reality.”<sup>23</sup> In Stifter’s own words,

Das Wehen der Luft das Rieseln des Wassers das Wachsen der Getriede das Wogen des Meeres das Grünen der Erde das Glänzen des Himmels das Schimmern der Gestirne halte ich für groß: das prächtig einherziehende Gewitter, den Blitz, welcher Häuser spaltet, den Sturm, der die Brandung treibt, den feuerspeienden Berg, das Erdbeben, welches Länder verschüttet, halte ich nicht für größer als obige Erscheinungen, ja ich halte sie für kleiner, weil sie nur Wirkungen viel höherer Gesetze sind. (V, 10)<sup>24</sup>

According to David Martyn, the *Vorrede* presents a marked shift in a certain tradition of aesthetic representation, precisely because “The ‘sublime’ is now found in what had earlier seemed small.”<sup>25</sup> The realist artist’s goal, according to Stifter, is to arrive at an understanding of “das Ganze und Allgemeine” (V, 10), despite the fact that “wir auch in unseren Werkstätten immer nur das Einzelne darstellen können nie das Allgemeine, den dies wäre die Schöpfung” (V, 11).

Clearly, then, there is a religious dimension to this vision. Elsewhere, Stifter will refer to this element as “das Göttliche,” writing, for instance, that “Der Künstler hat jenes Ding in seiner Seele...das keiner nennen kann. Manche heißen es Schönheit Poesie Fantasie Gefühl Tiefe etc., etc....aber das sind all nur Namen, die das Ding nicht bezeichnen. ‘Nenn’s Jehova Liebe Gott’ sagt Göthe – ich möchte es wohl das Göttliche

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<sup>23</sup> Downing’s analysis of the preface offers a unique vantage point from which to understand its political dimensions. Downing is interested in exploring how the text “plainly registers Stifter’s political conservatism” in the wake of the failure of the 1848 revolutions (24). More specifically, his interest lies in examining how the text’s political program is explicitly presented as nonpolitical, in other words, how its political agenda is inscribed within a discourse on “nature” and “reality.”

<sup>24</sup> Downing aptly observes that “Besides the distinction between the general and the individual, the true issue seems plainly to be between a certain static or hypostatized peacefulness and an agitated violence” (27).

<sup>25</sup> David Martyn, “The Picturesque as Art of the Average: Stifter’s Statistical Poetics of Observation,” *Monatshefte* 105, no. 3 (2013): 426.

nennen....”<sup>26</sup> For Stifter, this unnamable element – to which he does in fact paradoxically ascribe a name – originates not in the world outside of the subject, but within the subject himself. The artistic representation of this element that originates within the subject – its transmission into the language of words or images – thus emerges not only as one of the central goals, but also as one of the fundamental dilemmas for the realist artist. According to Downing,

God supplies the general reality that realism itself cannot, but still needs: God supplies the missing unity, or rather Stifter supplies God to supply the missing unity and law – the law of unity – that guarantee that the pieces and fragments function as pieces and fragments, as signifiers of a common, but empirically absent, reality. It is, finally, faith in or obedience to this unseen order and general law that alone distinguishes the realist’s particulars from those of his nonrealist counterpart. Realism becomes not a matter of scientifically recording what is there but of religiously believing in what is not.<sup>27</sup>

Importantly, Stifter’s reflections in the *Vorrede* lead also to his exposition of two very different types of vision, one afforded by the “leibliche[s] Auge” or “bodily eye,” the other a type of vision that is only accessible by means of the “das geistige [Auge] der Wissenschaft” (“the spiritual eye of science”). The former perceives only individual phenomena, and thus “neither know[s] nor perceive[s] nature for what it really is.”<sup>28</sup> The latter is characterized by its ability to look beyond those phenomena in order to arrive at an appreciation of the whole and the general. In Stifter’s own words:

Wenn wir aber auch dieses leibliche Auge nicht haben, so haben wir dafür das geistige der Wissenschaft, und diese lehrt uns, daß die elektrische und magnetische Kraft auf einem ungeheuren Schauplatze wirke, daß sie auf der ganzen Erde und durch den ganzen Himmel verbreitet sei, daß sie alles umfließe, und sanft und unablässig verändernd bildend und lebenerzeugend sich darstelle. Der Blitz ist nur ein ganz kleines Merkmal dieser Kraft, sie selber aber ist ein Großes in der Natur. Weil aber die Wissenschaft nur Körnchen nach Körnchen

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<sup>26</sup> *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Gustav Wilhelm (Graz: Stiasny, 1960), 19: 199-200.

<sup>27</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

erringt, nur Beobachtung nach Beobachtung macht, nur aus Einzelem das Allgemeine zusammen trägt, und weil endlich die Menge der Erscheinungen und das Feld des Gegebenen unendlich groß ist, Gott also die Freude und die Glückseligkeit des Forschens unversieglich gemacht hat, wir auch in unseren Werkstätten immer nur das Einzelne darstellen können nie das Allgemeine, denn dies wäre die Schöpfung. (V, 11)

Realism, according to Stifter, is not so much about the perception of what is present. More precisely, it requires an acknowledgement of a connection that is, for all intents and purposes, *absent* from sight:

Da die Menschen in der Kindheit waren, ihr geistiges Auge von der Wissenschaft noch nicht berührt war, wurden sie von dem Nahestehenden und Auffälligen ergriffen, und zu Furcht und Bewunderung hingerissen: aber als ihr Sinn geöffnet wurde, da der Blick sich auf den Zusammenhang zu richten began, so sanken die einzelnen Erscheinungen immer tiefer, und es erhob sich das Gesetz immer höher, die Wunderbarkeiten hörten auf, das Wunder nahm zu. (V, 11-12)

Accordingly, the realist's vision has everything to do with a perception of a certain "Zusammenhang," an acute awareness of the connection between those individual phenomena that make up the world around us. It is a more general reality, we recall, that is essentially invisible, and which requires a different type of "vision."

This fundamental tension between what is able to be "seen" and what remains "unseen" is supported by Downing's own reflections on the *Vorrede*, which help to make explicit the paradoxical nature of the Stifterian "realist vision":

the preface presents an apparent tension between those who stay on the surface; who are restricted to the empirical, natural details that "the bodily eye" reveals, and those who penetrate beneath these appearances to "the whole and the general," who are in this case focused on the connection that "the spiritual eye of science"...alone perceives. That is, the Stifterian realist vision is not about the visual at all, or only in the second place. It too is about the imposition of law, order, and meaning behind or within the visual; it is about the unseen.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 32.

There are other scholars who have drawn attention to the paradoxical nature of realism in general, and to the realist tension highlighted by *Nachkommenschaften* in particular. In his own struggle to come to terms with the realist program, Robert Holub argues that “realism entails a tension or a paradox at its very basis. On the one hand, we read of the necessity to remain true to reality...On the other hand, we encounter the demand to construct a work of art, to exercise one’s fantasy and creativity, in short, to be ‘poetic.’”<sup>30</sup> Holub’s reflections on realism’s paradoxical nature elucidate the inherent contradiction that exists between the attempt to objectively imitate reality and the subjective, fantastic, or poetic element that is necessarily linked to any such attempt. Holub, like Downing, thereby foregrounds the fundamental importance of a deep-seated tension between presence and absence that lies at the heart of realism.

In much the same way, Margaret Gump’s discussion of *Nachkommenschaften* reveals that “The artist has to strive for ‘wirkliche Wirklichkeit’ (reality itself)...since he cannot surpass God, whose creation is his subject. God’s world is ‘real’ and, at the same time, full of poetry and unlimited power to move us. The task of the true artist is to portray nature faithfully, catching simultaneously the divine element it contains.”<sup>31</sup> The central crisis of representation faced by the realist artist thus revolves around his ability not only to accurately represent the visible world, but to visually demonstrate his awareness of an unseen, overarching force that orders that world. In the words of John

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Holub, *Reflections of Realism: Paradox, Norm, and Ideology in Nineteenth-century German Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 196.

<sup>31</sup> Gump, *Adalbert Stifter*, 133-134.

Lyon, “Realism must [...] convey an ideal, a sense of truth present in external reality, but not evident to the untrained eye [...].”<sup>32</sup>

For Stifter, this “sense of truth” also exerts its unseen force within the human world: the author’s theorization of the “Zusammenhang” that structures the natural world inevitably leads to his reflections on those connections that impose order “in der [inneren Natur] des menschlichen Geschlechtes” (V, 12). These connections find their ideal expression in the form of the family, understood by Stifter as the communal structure *par excellence*. Just as those individual, violent outbursts that present exceptions to the normally “gentle” order of reality in nature are mere effects of much higher laws, are guided and restricted by them, so too are those “Einzelkräfte” that find their expression in the human world restricted by the family. Stifter draws a clear parallel between such unsightly natural and human forces, writing that

mächtige Bewegungen des Gemüthes furchtbar einherrollenden Zorn die Begier nach Rache den entzündeten Geist, der nach Tätigkeit strebt, umreißt, ändert, zerstört, und in der Erregung oft das eigene Leben hinwirft, halte ich nicht für größer, sondern für kleiner, da diese Dinge so gut nur Hervorbringungen einzelner und einseitiger Kräfte sind, wie Stürme feuerspeiende Berge Erdbeben. (V, 12)

The family provides an important function in its limitation, constraint, or restriction – in short, its “Beschränkung” – of those “Einzelkräfte” that would otherwise have deleterious, if not disastrous consequences.<sup>33</sup> In his exposition of “das sanfte Gesetz” within the human world, Stifter maintains, moreover, that

Es gibt daher Kräfte, die nach dem Bestehen des gesamten Menschheit hinwirken, die durch die Einzelkräfte nicht beschränkt werden dürfen, ja im Gegenteile

<sup>32</sup> John B. Lyon, *Out of Place. German Realism, Displacement, and Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 16.

<sup>33</sup> Downing likewise notes that, for Stifter, “the family...is privileged as the truest locus of commonality...because it is the most forceful sphere of regulation” (36-7). In its ability to constrain and restrict dangerously violent individual forces, the family functions as a regulatory and preservative entity that embodies Stifter’s “sanfte Gesetz” as “das einzige Allgemeine das einzige Erhaltende und nie Endende” (V, 13).



beschränkend auf sie selber einwirken...Dieses Gesetz liegt überall, wo Menschen neben Menschen wohnen, und es zeigt sich, wenn Menschen gegen Menschen wirken. Es liegt in der Liebe der Ehegatten zu einander in der Liebe der Eltern zu den Kindern der Kinder zu den Eltern in der Liebe der Geschwister der Freunde zu einander...und endlich in der Ordnung und Gestalt, womit ganze Gesellschaften und Staaten ihr Dasein umgeben, und zum Abschlusse bringen. Darum haben alte und neue Dichter vielfach diese Gegenstände benützt, um ihre Dichtungen dem Mitgeföhle naher und ferner Geschlechter anheim zu geben. Darum sieht der Menschenforscher, wohin er seinen Fuß setzt, überall nur dieses Gesetz allein, weil es das einzige Allgemeine das einzige Erhaltende und nie Endende ist. (V, 12-13)

The family (and in particular the relations between individual family members, the love they share for one another) is fundamental to Stifter's philosophy of the gentle law as it articulates itself within human nature. It is that which sustains ("nach dem Bestehen des gesamten Menschheit hinwirk[t]"), and also, necessarily, restricts ("beschränkt") the individual subject.

The relevance of such notions to my specific inquiries will emerge as we proceed. Twelve years after penning the *Vorrede* to *Bunte Steine*, Stifter will return to many of these same ideas in *Nachkommenschaften*, and with particular recourse to the frame. In keeping with ideas presented in the 1852 *Vorrede*, Stifter's 1864 novella will ultimately underscore the importance of the general as opposed to the particular, thereby reinforcing the idea of a "sanftes Gesetz" that provides order within both the natural and human worlds.

#### Analytical frameworks: assimilation, resistance, and the power of absence

An appreciation of Stifter's novella in its relation to the *Vorrede* will require our examination of the narrative from two different vantages, namely vision and the family, and in particular, as these relate to the frame. Importantly, a survey of the text from both

angles will help to elucidate a fundamentally similar message: the power of absence. In this way, Peter Roderer's contention that "das Gegenwärtige [hat] immer mehr Kraft und Recht...als das Abwesende" (N, 56) is clearly brought into question: in a very real sense, *Nachkommenschaften* is a story about the power of what remains hidden, inaccessible to sight, even actively or deliberately suppressed. It is an absence, moreover, whose force will repeatedly assert itself throughout the course of the narrative. In this regard, it will prove necessary to examine the means by which the frame (both as a textual motif and structural device) is used to underscore the presence of a reality that is powerful despite – and perhaps even more so because of – its absence. Within this context, the novella's opening sentence allows for a different appreciation of the word "unversehens," foregrounding also the power of something that surfaces without warning, catching one unawares, and which affects one all the more forcefully as a result.

In the first section of my analysis, I explore how the narrative establishes a tension between presence and absence at a visual level (this tension, we recall, lies at the heart of Stifter's conception of realist vision as expounded in the *Vorrede*). In order to foreground this tension in *Nachkommenschaften*, Stifter utilizes various framing devices. The frame's particular ability to accentuate both presence (the particular field of vision it affords) and, more importantly, absence (the field obscured by it) makes it well-suited to a theory of literature whose aesthetic agenda, according to Stifter, relies both on the presentation of what is present *and* a belief in what is fundamentally absent from sight.

To explicate this more precisely, we will need to examine the different framing devices employed by the protagonist, and in particular, as they appear in chronological sequence. In so doing, it will become evident that a progressive narrowing of perspective

occurs. This movement toward an increasingly circumscribed field of vision is meant, I will argue, to allegorize the artist's maturation from one who perceives with the "leibliche[s] Auge" to one who ultimately learns how to see with "das geistige [Auge] der Wissenschaft" (V, 11). Realism, we are thereby told, is not simply about the representation of a present reality, in other words, a reality of particulars; more than this, it requires a belief in what cannot be seen, a belief, that is, in a more general reality. It is a visually absent reality, moreover, whose presence is able to be highlighted by means of the frame.

In the second part of my analysis, focus shifts to an exploration of the function of the Roderer family. According to the *Vorrede*, we recall, the family serves as an articulation of the gentle law within the human world, thereby serving as a regulatory force for the individual. In the particular case of *Nachkommenschaften*, it is the Roderer family that is presented as a regulatory force (or "frame," as I will argue) for Friedrich Roderer. Although Friedrich is initially presented as "unframed" ("unversehens"), there is throughout the course of the ensuing tale a consistent, conscious effort made to "frame" him within the confines of his patrilineal name and its accompanying realities. Despite the active suppression of the protagonist's patronym, the Roderer family (and Peter Roderer in particular) will continue to exert its unseen, but still powerful influence on the young protagonist.

Ultimately, the trajectory of Friedrich's tale will lead to a destruction of the particular (i.e., the individual) and, at the same time, to an acknowledgment of a more general reality (i.e., the family). The artist's literal destruction of his final painting must be understood as a symbolic destruction of the individual, precisely because of his

recognition that “das Ganze höher steht als der Theil” (V, 14). The painting is destroyed, and with it the individual, but the frame, as symbol of the family, and thus also as a symbolic instantiation of “das sanfte Gesetz” – “das einzige Allgemeine das einzige Erhaltende und nie Endende” (V, 13) – survives, albeit in parts, the reasons for which will become clearer in what follows.

What is more, Stifter means for us to understand the ultimate “destruction” of the individual and his incorporation into the collective familial structure as an essentially natural process. Here, it is imperative to underscore that natural processes of absorption are thematized throughout the narrative. In this respect, the moor emerges as a central symbol. We are told, for instance, that Peter Roderer’s laborers bring load after load of stones to the moor, throwing them “in den weichen Grund, der sie schlang” (N, 40). Stifter’s use of such metaphorical language is meant, I would suggest, to forge an implicit link between the natural and the human/social worlds: just as the stones are absorbed – literally *gobbled* – by the “weichen Grund” of the moor, so too is Friedrich finally (re-) absorbed into the Roderer familial structure; and so too is the reality of particulars – the reality of phenomena perceived by the “leibliche Auge” – ultimately subsumed under a more general reality, one that necessitates the use of “das geistige Auge.” What the trajectory of Stifter’s narrative ultimately describes is a process of absorption in the human/social world that, because of the metaphorical language used to describe the same processes at work in nature, is presented as “proper” or “natural.” Downing has argued along similar lines in his discussion of Stifter’s *Vorrede*, noting that “Nature will serve as a legitimizing power, as a ‘reality’ that, once established, will establish the reality of

Stifter's vision of human nature."<sup>34</sup> In Downing's words, "Stifter is not merely describing the objective, real workings of nature and humanity but is instead inscribing a specific set of subjective and ideological values onto the site of these phenomena and then presenting them as immanent natural laws."<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, despite the text's apparent insistence that such processes are "natural," there seems also to be a certain resistance to assimilation that is foregrounded throughout, a resistance that comes to a head at the very end of the narrative, one which is paramount with respect to the novella's exposition of its realist aesthetic program.

#### Shifting hierarchies: the privileged status of the frame

An appreciation of the frame with respect to vision will first require a brief discussion of the novella's various "Rahmen," whose status and function is nothing if not peculiar. From the very beginning of the narrative, our attention is directed not only to a multiplicity of landscape paintings. At the same time, the text also obsessively insists on the presence of the "Goldrahmen." Early on, the narrator reflects that "es sind der in Oelfarben gemalten und mit Goldrahmen versehenen Landschaften schon genug" (N, 25). When, shortly after this, he draws a comparison between books and landscape paintings, he evokes the image of the gilded frame once more, contending that "es [ist] mit einem Buche viel besser, als mit einer in Oel gemalten in einem Goldrahmen befindlichen Landschaft" (N, 27). Later in the same paragraph, Friedrich draws attention to the "Goldrahmen" once again, as he speaks of "die Landschaft, mit deren Goldrahmen die Menschen Mitleid haben" (N, 27).

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<sup>34</sup> Downing, "Real and Recurrent Problems," 27.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 25.

Clearly, Stifter means for his readers to understand the “Goldrahmen” as an indispensable component of the landscape painting. The “Goldrahmen” has significant implications for an analysis of the text with respect to the frame, not least of all because its presence occasions a marked shift in what Simmel will later refer to as “rank ordering.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, the repeated introduction of the “Goldrahmen” effects a subversion of the traditional image/frame hierarchy. Stifter’s novella relinquishes the conventional perception of the frame as a mere removable appendage or supplement to the image, affording it an “autonomous existence.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, *Nachkommenschaften* goes so far as to present the frame as the redeeming appendage of the painting. In the end, Friedrich’s destruction of the image, together with his choice to spare the frame, will attest to the privileging of the frame over the image. Still, as I have previously suggested, the protagonist’s decomposition (“Zerlegung”) of the frame into its constituent elements at the end of the narrative is also meant to foreground a resistance to the whole, a resistance to (narrative) closure that is fundamental to Stifter’s aesthetic program as expounded in *Nachkommenschaften*.

The protagonist’s comments about the frame in general, and the “Goldrahmen” in particular, furthermore suggest that the image depends on the frame both temporally and visually. After beginning his painting of the moorland, Friedrich orders the “Goldrahmen” at once so as not to delay the progress of his work, since, as he contends, “die letzten Striche an einem Bilde sollen und müssen in dem Rahmen gemacht werden”

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<sup>36</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study,” *Theory Culture & Society* 11 (1994): 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

(N, 44).<sup>38</sup> The peculiar relationship of the frame to the artwork is thereby established: as that which comes after – *kommt nach* – but without which the painting cannot be completed, the frame presents itself as an object on which the painting depends in a temporal sense.

The painted image would seem to depend not only temporally, but also visually on the frame. Later in the narrative, we discover that, in Friedrich's eyes, the "Goldrahmen" also possesses the rather uncanny ability to change the appearance of the image it contains: directly after Friedrich places his still unfinished painting into the "Goldrahmen" for the first time, he reflects that

Was mir immer geschah, wenn ich ein Bild zum ersten Male in einen Rahmen that, nämlich, daß es mir größer aber auch ansehnlicher erschien, geschah auch jetzt und zwar in höherem Maße. Das Bild erschien mir wirklich als ganz ungewöhnlich groß...Den Rahmen legte ich nicht mehr auseinander, sondern hüllte ihn in Linnentücher und stellte ihn an die Wand zur Bereitschaft, wenn ich ihn wieder brauchen würde. (N, 72)<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly, this is the only scene in which the painting appears within the limits of the frame. For most of the narrative, the frame exists independently of the image, serving as a constant reminder of its incompleteness. That Friedrich exercises caution in its safe-keeping is certainly noteworthy: left in its assembled state, covered in (that is, *concealed* by means of) "Linnentücher," and set against the wall of Friedrich's "Blockhaus," the frame functions in a certain sense as the painting's "Doppelgänger." That the frame remains hidden is an easily-overlooked fact, precisely given Friedrich's much more obvious

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<sup>38</sup> That Friedrich feels unable to finish his painting before it is mounted in the frame must necessarily also be read against the backdrop of the ritualism that surrounds the act of painting for the young artist: painting, cleaning, and eating, for instance, often appear as sequentially ordered activities in Friedrich's daily life.

<sup>39</sup> It is certainly important that the frame affects an "Ausdehnung" of sorts where the image is concerned ("es [erschien] mir größer," Friedrich tells us, referring to the image after having affixed the frame to it). In this way, the frame interacts with the narrative's overarching thematic of "Ausdehnung," particularly where Friedrich's individual family members are concerned. This idea will be given more precise consideration at a later point in my analysis.

efforts to conceal the image from view. As we shall see, however, Friedrich's concealment of the frame must necessarily be understood in its connection to the concealment of the family name (and with it, an initial reluctance to acknowledge the family as "frame").

The "Goldrahmen" appears one final time near the end of the tale, in a scene of upmost importance with respect to the privileging of the frame. Once again seemingly dissatisfied with his most recent attempt at an artistic rendering of the natural world, Friedrich decides to burn his unfinished painting of the moorland, a painting to which he has devoted months of life and an incredible amount of energy. He burns *everything* – the painting itself, the base frame, his sketches, paints, brushes, and palette – with the exception of the "Goldrahmen," which he subsequently disassembles ("zerlegt") and packages in its box. Friedrich's decision to spare the frame must be understood, in part, as a reflection of the independent status of the frame, its necessary survival in the wake of the destruction of the artwork. What the reader thus encounters in this final passage is a privileging of the frame over the image itself: the painting is replaceable, can be torn up and destroyed, but the frame is allowed to survive (again, not as a whole, but rather in a state of fragmentation).

When the frame is considered from this perspective, it becomes all the more evident that this privileged, independent status is wholly unique when compared to the status it is afforded in the other narratives I examine in this dissertation. While the frame is undeniably integral to an understanding of the deeper significance of each of these other stories, particularly as a means of self-reflection, it is often overshadowed by the power of the image. In Storm's novellas in particular, discussed in the following chapter,



the image repeatedly exerts a powerful effect on its beholder, creating narrative tension and influencing narrative trajectory. In *Nachkommenschaften*, the opposite could not be more true, for Friedrich denies nearly everyone – readers include – the opportunity to behold his painting. As I have suggested above, Stifter’s novella displays a marked shift from the power of presence to the power of absence. While the image is necessarily implicated in this process of concealment, we should remember that the “Goldrahmen,” too, is purposefully enshrouded in “Linnentücher,” and thus also remains inaccessible to sight. The protagonist’s choice to cover the frame with “Linnentücher” is likewise critical: the etymology of the word “Linnen” presents us with the image of a “leinenes gewebe” (as it were, another *texere*), which serves to reinforce the notion of the frame as text.<sup>40</sup> It is a “text,” moreover, whose meaning must be discerned, and which will have significant implications for an analysis of *Nachkommenschaften* with respect to the *Vorrede*.

#### Diminishing perspectives, widening vantages, or: the return of the unseen

While the “Goldrahmen” is the only picture frame presented within the narrative, there are other framing devices that are equally significant with respect to the narrative’s realist agenda. Analyzing the “Goldrahmen” together with these other “frames” will lead to a deeper appreciation of frame’s more general function. As I have previously suggested, the different “frames” employed by the protagonist throughout the course of the story bear witness to a progressive narrowing of perspective, resulting in an increasingly circumscribed field of vision for the artist. The novella first presents an image of virtually

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<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed account of the etymology of “Linnen,” see Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 6 (1885), 1051-2. The “Gewebe” evoked here in the image of the “Linnentücher” will also exert its influence in my analysis of Storm’s *Viola tricolor* in the chapter that follows.

uncircumscribed sight afforded by a glass wall; sight is subsequently focused into ever-narrower fields of vision through the introduction of windows, a telescopic lens and, later, a hole as “frames” through which Friedrich peers; ultimately, and metaphorically speaking, sight is rendered impossible as a result of Friedrich’s literal destruction of the painted image. To reiterate another point made previously: the trajectory that can be traced via these framing devices is meant to allegorize Friedrich’s development as an artist, i.e., his development from one who perceives with the “leibliche[s] Auge” to one who ultimately learns how to see with “das geistige [Auge] der Wissenschaft” (V, 11). As Stifter underscores in the *Vorrede*, the central crisis of representation faced by the realist artist revolves around his ability to accurately represent the visible world, and, at the same time, to visually render his awareness of an unseen, overarching force that orders that world. It is this representational crisis that is faced by *Nachkommenschaften*’s protagonist as realist artist, and which has significant implications for a reading of the narrative with regard to the figure of the frame. It is the frame that provides Stifter with an appropriate medium with which to present this tension between two realms of understanding: one presents itself to the naked eye; the other, essentially absent from sight, requires a different type of “sight.” The narrative’s movement from a virtually uncircumscribed sight to a vision that is increasingly restricted occasions a concomitant shift from the presentation of that which is present to that which can only be represented in its very absence. In the end, Stifter encourages us to understand that the reality that is most “real” is one that “is empirically not there.”<sup>41</sup> Because of its ability to define the limits of vision, the figure of the frame provides an appropriate medium for the representation of this unseen, empirically absent realm. When examined chronologically,

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<sup>41</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 30.

these “frames” illustrate the way in which Friedrich’s sight is increasingly restricted. At the same time, the *more* restricted the protagonist’s field of vision becomes – that is, the narrower his perception of what is present becomes – the *less* restricted it becomes as the field of the unseen grows ever larger.

Early on in the narrative, we learn of Friedrich’s multiple, “failed” attempts to paint the famous *Dachstein* landscape. The young artist wonders why everyone should paint the landscape so differently, which leads him to the following questions: “soll es denn gar nicht möglich sein, den Dachstein gerade so zu malen, wie ich ihn oft und stets vom vorderen Gosausee aus gesehen habe? Warum malen sie ihn alle anders? Was soll denn der Grund dieses Dinges sein? *Ich will es doch sehen*” (N, 28).<sup>42</sup> The irony inherent in Friedrich’s desire to *see* the reason why there is not one single, reproducible version of reality – “*Ich will es doch sehen*,” he tells us – is clear enough: what the young protagonist wants to see is something that cannot be seen, at least not in the traditional sense of sight afforded by the bodily eye. What is initially unaccounted for is that unnamable, imperceptible element that inheres in the realist artwork. As such, the shift in framing devices presented throughout the tale elucidates a shift in Friedrich’s own desire: that is, what begins as a desire to see – a desire for unrestricted, uncircumscribed vision – culminates in Friedrich’s realization that, for the realist artist, to see is actually *not* to see at all; rather, it is an unseen *belief* in another, more powerful, more “real” reality that characterizes the realist artistic endeavor. In fact, it is this belief, we are told, that sets the realist artist apart from “his nonrealist counterpart.”<sup>43</sup> According to Downing, “It is, finally, faith in or obedience to this unseen order and general law that alone distinguishes

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<sup>42</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 31.

the realist's particulars from those of his nonrealist counterpart. Realism becomes a matter not of scientifically recording what is there but of religiously believing in what is not."<sup>44</sup>

Still, in light of the protagonist's decision to burn his final painting – traditionally read as a gesture that signifies the ultimate abandonment of his chosen artistic trade – scholars have argued that *Nachkommenschaften* presents the story of “the deadening compulsion of art,”<sup>45</sup> that of a young “dilettante”<sup>46</sup> who fails to comprehend and thus represent “die wirkliche Wirklichkeit” in his painting. However, an understanding of the text with regard to the frame allows for a quite different interpretation of the story's ending. The specific way in which this figure is programmatically incorporated into the narrative structure ultimately suggests that Friedrich *has* understood the essence of artistic production within a realist program. As will be argued, the frame that remains at the end of the text demonstrates his acquired awareness of an unseen reality that is fundamental to realist artistic production.

Examining the sequential presentation of various “frames” throughout the tale shows the way in which vision is circumscribed to an ever greater degree. The first framing device encountered in the narrative presents the potential of a virtually unrestricted field of vision. Friedrich initially envisions the construction of a house with a glass wall, which will provide him with a clear, unobstructed view of the *Dachstein*:

So sehr war ich damals darauf erpicht, den Dachstein so treu und schön zu malen, als er ist, daß ich einmal sagte: ich möchte mir am Ufer des vorderen Gosauses dem Dachsteine gegenüber ein Häuschen mit einer sehr großen Glaswand gegen den Dachstein bauen, und nicht eher mehr das Häuschen verlassen, bis es mir

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>45</sup> Swales and Swales, *Adalbert Stifter*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Blackall. *Adalbert Stifter*, 344.

gelingen sei, den Dachstein so zu malen, daß man den gemalten und den wirklichen nicht mehr zu unterscheiden vermöge. (N, 29)

However, Friedrich never constructs his “Glashäuschen” (N, 66); rather, upon moving to the Lüpf Valley, the location in which we find him at the beginning of the narrative, he eventually decides to construct “ein Blockhaus im Angesichte des Lüfinger Moores” (N, 66). Inside this “Blockhaus,” Friedrich’s vision is further restricted: unlike the initially dreamed-of “Glashäuschen,” the “Blockhaus” severely delimits the field of the visible. Moreover, the sight afforded from within the “Blockhaus” is a fragmented or incomplete one, one which allows only for the perception of “Theile” as opposed to “das Ganze.” Shortly after he moves into the “Blockhaus,” Friedrich recalls that

Ich malte nun fast immer an dem Bilde, denn was ich an Entwürfen dazu von Außen her bedurfte, hatte ich mir schon größtentheils gemacht, nur selten mußte ich auf ein paar Stunden hinaus gehen und mir etwas aufnehmen. Öfter trat ich auf den Hügel vor meinem Hause, um einen Überblick über das Ganze zu machen. *Die Theile sah ich aus meinen Fenstern*, die nach der Richtung gingen, nach welcher das Bild gemalt wurde. (N, 72)<sup>47</sup>

We learn here (and also elsewhere from the extensive time he spends sketching images of the moorland from different perspectives and under different conditions) that Friedrich’s goal is to construct an image of “das Ganze” by first generating a multiplicity of sketches of those individual “Theile” that make up “das Ganze.”<sup>48</sup> Still, as the narrative progresses, the sight he affords himself with respect to his artwork becomes more and more restricted, as he sees ever smaller “Theile” and less and less of “das Ganze.” Although it may seem counterintuitive, this process of “framing” is, I believe, meant to

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<sup>47</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>48</sup> A discussion of “das Ganze” and its individual “Theile” will also be fundamental to my analysis in the following section, in which I discuss the function of the family as a regulatory force. Furthermore, it is important that the “Goldrahmen,” too, first arrives in a disassembled state. In other words, its “Theile” must also be pieced together in order to construct “das Ganze.” This, I believe, has significant implications for an understanding of the family with respect to the frame.

allegorize the process of poetic/artistic creation in the realist tradition, a process of making present that which is visually “not there.”

The protagonist’s vision is first delimited by the windows of his “Blockhaus”; sight is then further circumscribed by the telescope, an optical device that occupies a space within the newly-constructed house, and which Friedrich uses to get a closer glimpse of the “Theile” that make up the moorland. Both optical instrument and framing device, the telescope achieves a similar effect when compared to that of the windows of Friedrich’s “Blockhaus”: that is, it allows only for the perception of “Theile,” but never “das Ganze.” In Downing’s words, because “‘the whole and the general’ is empirically not there, is absent...as both scientist and realist artist the investigator sees only discrete, unconnected pieces and fragments without immanent, intrinsic meaning or connection...he is limited to the perception of the same mere particulars and phenomena.”<sup>49</sup> What distinguishes the realist “investigator” – in this case, Friedrich – from the nonrealist is his belief in the interrelatedness of these “unconnected pieces and fragments.” It is Friedrich’s growing belief in or awareness of this “other” reality that is allegorized with this movement toward the increasingly fragmented or circumscribed visual fields afforded by the windows and telescope of his “Blockhaus.” The greater Friedrich’s inability to see what is present, the more he must rely on a belief in what he is unable to see. In other words, the progressive failure of the bodily eye necessitates a new-found spiritual sight, a vision of the unseen, and indeed, the unseeable. At the same time, the “Blockhaus,” with its square-like façade, not only serves to delimit the field of the protagonist’s vision, but also reinforces the act of “framing” in which Friedrich himself is necessarily implicated.

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<sup>49</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems.” 30. My emphasis.

When compared to the “Fenster” and “Fernrohr” within the space of Friedrich’s newly-constructed domestic abode, the next frame encountered is still narrower yet. On his journey to Lüpfig on St. Bartholomew’s Day, Friedrich carefully chooses a vantage point from which to sketch a scene of the festival-goers,<sup>50</sup> reflecting that

Ich suchte auf meiner, nämlich der Waldseite der Mauer, eine gute Stelle zu gewinnen, an der ich nicht gesehen, mein Buch auf die Mauer stützen und zeichnen konnte. Ich hatte die Stelle bald gefunden. Ein trockner Rasen, von Haselnußgesträuchen überschattet, ging gegen die Mauer, die hier niedriger war, so daß ich mit dem Körper unter dem Haselnußgesträuche liegend, das Zeichnungsbuch auf eine Emporragung stützen und mit meinem Haupte durch eine Scharte der Mauer hinaussehen konnte. Ich begann nun zu zeichnen... (N, 76)

Deemed by Friedrich to be “eine gute Stelle,” the “Scharte” not only further delimits his vision; when compared to the telescope, the “Scharte” affords the protagonist no maneuverability of vantage point.<sup>51</sup>

The text engages in one final movement with regard to this narrowing of perspective: the final shift is from the already extremely circumscribed sight afforded by the “Scharte” to a vision that is not only still more restricted, but to a sight that is ultimately rendered impossible as a result of the destruction of the image. The last frame encountered in *Nachkommenschaften* is the most important, precisely because it

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<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that this is the first time the artist chooses to paint a scene of people, having hitherto attempted to paint only landscapes. Furthermore, what Friedrich sees when he peers through this hole in the wall is not just any image; importantly, it is an image of a family.

<sup>51</sup> See also Bethany Bowen-Wefuan, “Intersecting at the Real: Painting, Writing, and Human Community in Adalbert Stifter’s *Nachkommenschaften* (1864),” *New German Review* 27, no. 1 (2016): 21-36. Bowen-Wefuan has also observed that “Friedrich’s drawing violates his stated philosophy of art, because it celebrates human presence and subjectivity” (31). In addition, “Friedrich’s use of perspective and time differ here greatly from his early works. Whereas he usually creates a controlled location from which to observe and paint, whether by setting up his portable chair and umbrella or building a room in which to paint the moor, here he simply lies down on the ground on the far side of a stone wall to observe the scene through a hole. His willingness to release control over his environment exemplifies the loosening of the rigidly defined ideal, which dictated his earliest landscape paintings” (33). Bowen-Wefuan furthermore maintains that “Peter Roderer’s family interrupts...[Friedrich]...before he can complete...[the sketch]..., foreshadowing their role in permanently ending his painting career” (33).

symbolizes the culmination of Friedrich's visual development as realist artist. Left unscathed in the wake of Friedrich's decision to burn his final painting, the "Goldrahmen" is the narrowest frame of all, in a sense, for there is no image to behold within its edges. The only thing left to be seen is thus precisely that which *cannot* be seen, that which can only be felt or experienced in its very absence. We might argue, moreover, that this "Goldrahmen" – left in its assembled state, carefully covered in linen cloths, and set against the wall of Friedrich's "Blockhaus" at a much earlier point in the narrative – has functioned as a representation of an altogether different, absent reality all along. Thus, the void enclosed by the "Goldrahmen" may be understood as a negative mirror image of the painting itself. As such, it presents the possibility of an alternate reality that, despite its absence, is still more "real" than that which can be perceived with the bodily eye.

At this juncture, we might also consider Friedrich's much earlier characterization of a painting as specter (as "ihr eigenes Gespenst"), which not only serves to disassociate the painting from itself. A mirroring structure also emerges, whereby the painting is both present and represented as its own ghostly apparition. A similar structure emerges in the passage in which Friedrich chooses to cover the "Goldrahmen" with "Linnentücher" and set it against the wall of his room at the Lüpff Inn. An association is thereby forged between the painting and the frame, which serves not only as a constant reminder of the painting's incompleteness, but is also meant to function as a specter of sorts, precisely because it symbolizes both what is "there" and what is empirically "not there," what has been represented and what can never be represented. Covered with "Linnentücher," the



frame (as I have previously suggested) also represents a *texere*, one that is both “there” and “not there,” both revealed and concealed.

At the same time, the effect that such a shift in vantage points has on the perceiving subject/artist is also critical to underscore. As I would furthermore suggest, the progressive narrowing of perspective that takes place throughout the narrative is not only meant to allegorize the maturation of the artist, but also makes evident his necessary suppression in the process of artistic creation. Of course, Friedrich’s suppression (that is, the destruction of his individuality as a means of facilitating his incorporation into the Roderer family) will be highly consequential to my discussion of the function of the family as a regulatory force in the section that follows. This notwithstanding, the effacement of the subject is also particularly significant within the realist aesthetic program itself. In his reflections on Stifter’s *Vorrede*, Downing makes a crucial observation, namely that

The posited natural world seems not so much the noninscription of a subjectivity as the very definite inscription of a would-be nonsubjectivity, which is then reflected back, as reality, to deny the nature of the subject from which it nevertheless originates. The very reality the realist artist envisions seems both predicated on and aimed at *his own annihilation, his own self-effacement, his own self-denial*. Its law, its violence claims him as its foremost victim.<sup>52</sup>

In much the same way, Holub maintains that “for the sake of realism, the artist becomes a medium, a mediator between object and representation, word and sign. His own personality and wishes are reduced to nothing; he is taken up totally in faithful reproduction.”<sup>53</sup> Yet it is not quite as clear-cut as Holub’s argument would have us believe: as Downing notes, it is “not so much the noninscription of a subjectivity as the

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<sup>52</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 39. My emphasis.

<sup>53</sup> Holub, *Reflections of Realism*, 144.

very definite inscription of *a would-be nonsubjectivity*.”<sup>54</sup> Despite his best efforts, Friedrich’s attempts to “efface” himself as perceiving subject will lead, in the end, to his necessary acknowledgement of their futility, a futility that is also encapsulated in the figure of the remaining frame.

To more fully articulate what I mean by this, we should begin by considering the following: the “Glashäuschen” envisioned by the protagonist at the outset of the text presents the painting subject with a clear view of the outside world; at the same time, the glass house also provides the outside world with an unobstructed view of the painting subject. This is made explicit when we learn of a comment once made to Friedrich by a good friend: “‘Dann wirst du siebenundfünfzig Jahre in dem Häuschen gewesen sein und gemalt haben. Die Sache wird bekannt, die Zeitungen reden davon, Reisende kommen herzu, Engländer werden auf den Höhen herumsitzen, *und mit Ferngläsern auf dein Häuschen schauen*’” (N, 29).<sup>55</sup> Although the “Glashäuschen” provides the unrestricted view of the *Dachstein* Friedrich initially desires, it also brings with it the undesirable effect of exposing the subject to the outside world, which, so it is imagined, gazes with its binoculars *at him*.

As the narrative continues, Friedrich’s choice of vantage points provides for a decreased level of transparency surrounding the artistic process. This, we know, is something highly desirable for him: we learn, for instance, that Friedrich is uncomfortable painting in front of others and that he locks the door of his “Blockhaus” so as to remain “undisturbed” while painting. The secrecy and concealment that surrounds the act of painting should not only be understood as a testament to Friedrich’s oftentimes

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<sup>54</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 39. My emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> My emphasis.

extreme reclusiveness; it is also a gesture meant to conceal the very subject from whom the artwork originates.<sup>56</sup> Friedrich once again makes explicit his preference for remaining hidden when describing the care with which he searches for “eine gute Stelle” from which to sketch an image of the festival-goers in Lupfing: he tells readers, moreover, that “Ich suchte auf meiner, nämlich der Waldseite der Mauer, eine gute Stelle zu gewinnen, *an der ich nicht gesehen*, mein Buch auf die Mauer stützen und zeichnen konnte” (N, 76).<sup>57</sup> Time and again, the artist’s primary goal is not simply to conceal his artworks from view, but also, and perhaps even more so, to hide from view the subject from whom the artworks originate.

Try though he might, Friedrich is ultimately unable to escape his own subjectivity. This is clearly the crux of his bewilderment over the fact that painters of the *Dachstein* (whom he references at the beginning of the narrative) fail to agree on one single, reproducible version of reality. Even in the face of attempts to repress one’s subjectivity, it is “a reality that inevitably returns,” as Downing reminds us.<sup>58</sup> It is the void encompassed by the frame – the symbol of an absent reality, a subjectivity that eludes and deceives the bodily eye – that will always remain an integral, inextricable part of realism. In this sense, it is justifiable to argue that the frame – that which is not (and, importantly, cannot) be destroyed – is left behind as a symbolic reminder of the

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<sup>56</sup> In much the same way, Bowen-Wefuan argues that “As a landscape painter, Friedrich equates the complete exclusion of his subjective perception of nature with his ability to portray the Real. His (ostensibly) realist theory of art demands his own absence from his painting to achieve ‘maximum verisimilitude’ (Jakobson 20)...The exclusion of people as subjects in his paintings emphasizes his desire to empty his work of all human influence” (22).

<sup>57</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>58</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 39.

inescapability of another quite different, visually absent but immensely powerful reality that always and also “inevitably returns.”<sup>59</sup>

And yet as I have previously suggested, Friedrich’s pointed choice to dismantle the frame, to break it down into its constituent elements at the end of the narrative would also seem to bespeak a certain resistance to the whole – and with it, to narrative closure or completion – that is equally crucial to Stifter’s aesthetic program as expounded in *Nachkommenschaften*. In order to explain what I mean by this, it will first be important to examine the function of the Roderer family within Stifter’s novella.

#### Narrative power dynamics and the familial “frame”

In a story like *Nachkommenschaften*, which places such emphasis on the importance (that is, on the dissemination and preservation) of *Familiengeschichte*, the family is certainly a central theme. Read against the backdrop of Stifter’s *Vorrede*, the Roderer family’s function becomes all the more vital to an understanding of the theory of realism articulated in the novella. As I have suggested at the outset of this chapter, Friedrich is initially presented as “unframed” (“unversehens”) by means of an oblique connection to the “Goldrahmen.” Be that as it may, this lack of a proper “frame” (much like his initial lack of a proper name) does not preclude the largely unapparent, yet still hugely powerful influence of the Roderer family as “frame.”

An understanding of both the frame’s and the family’s function as ordering or regulatory entities is key: just as the frame provides an otherwise lacking structure where the work of art is concerned, so too does the Roderer family “frame” function as an ordering entity with respect to the individual. Both “frames” must also be understood as

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 39.

disrupters of a certain type of (artistic) continuity. As Friedrich maintains, “die letzten Striche an einem Bilde sollen und müssen in dem Rahmen gemacht werden” (N, 44). According to the protagonist, then, the process of artistic creation is not continuous, but is necessarily interrupted by the frame. The frame is not imposed on the artwork only after its completion; here, it becomes an integral element in its consummation. In much the same way, Friedrich’s artistic career will be punctuated by his reintroduction into the Roderer family. From the very beginning of the narrative, the family will act as an invisible “frame” for the individual, defining and controlling the trajectory of (what is only presumably) Friedrich’s tale.

To explicate this familial framing mechanism more precisely, we might begin with a meditation on the patronym. Needless to say, the patrilineal name remains undisclosed for much of the narrative, yet from the very beginning, it serves as an important (albeit retrospectively imposed) framework for understanding the specific trajectory of Friedrich’s life and narrative. This is especially true in the case of the protagonist’s peculiar artistic habits. Within this context, the process of “roden” (of clearing land in order to make it arable) is interesting not least of all because it relies first on the destruction of nature in order to create anew. In much the same way, Friedrich’s artistic creation is repeatedly born out destruction. It is, in other words, a cyclical process of destruction and creation that characterizes both activities. The fact that Friedrich paints landscapes is critical within this context: in destroying his paintings, the young artist invariably takes part in a symbolic destruction of nature that purposefully mirrors Peter Roderer’s physical destruction of the moorland. All this to say: despite its belated disclosure, the patronym clearly manifests itself in Friedrich’s conduct well in advance of

its official declaration. In much the same way as the “Goldrahmen” that has been deliberately covered with “Linnentücher,” the familial “frame” represents a *texere* that is both “there” and “not there.”

The etymology of “roden” as “urbar machen” (literally, to make arable) is also important from another perspective. The derivation of “urbar” suggests “aus dem vorhergehenden” (literally, from the preceding or foregoing). This clearly resonates within the context of a story such as *Nachkommenschaften*, which repeatedly underscores the importance of origins, one’s forefathers, one’s temporal precedents (one’s “Urväter”). At the same time, the narrative not only places emphasis on origins; as the title suggests, and as the text itself repeatedly underscores, a consideration of one’s “Nachkommen” or descendants is also crucial. In another very real sense, *Nachkommenschaften* is a story that deals with the issue of belatedness. This is clearly reflected in the story’s title: “Nachkommenschaften” as those people or things who, quite literally, come after. At the same time, it is also a tale of *nach-ahmen* (of imitation), and of *nach-schlagen* (of taking after). This is arguably one of the central tensions developed throughout Stifter’s tale: between what has *come before* and what *comes after*. Within this context, it is certainly of consequence that both the frame and the family name (as a symbolic framework) are imposed only belatedly onto the individual (artwork). However, their presence (albeit not always readily apparent) is nonetheless fundamental to their (i.e., the artwork’s and Friedrich’s) proposed “completion.” As Friedrich maintains, “die letzten Striche an einem Bilde sollen und müssen in dem Rahmen gemacht werden” (N, 44). In much the same way, his realization as an individual must necessarily occur within the Roderer family framework.

With respect to the patronym, a final point requires our attention: that is, the process of “roden” as a type of cultivation. Understood against this backdrop, it becomes evident that Peter Roderer serves as a cultivating force in two very different senses: on the one hand, the narrative clearly presents him as a cultivator of the moorland; on the other, his character also functions as a source of cultivation for the young Friedrich. As we shall see, just as his cultivation of the moorland is predicated on its destruction (and this in order to harness its unfulfilled potential so that something new might be created), so too does his cultivation of Friedrich require that Friedrich, as individual, be “destroyed.” Peter Roderer’s attempts to cultivate Friedrich may thus be understood in a double sense, one evoked by the etymological meaning of “roden” as “urbar machen”: not only is Friedrich “destroyed” in the process of his “cultivation,” but this also necessarily occasions a return to his familial origins (to his “Urspünge”).<sup>60</sup>

In a very real sense, *Nachkommenschaften* presents the story of the individual’s incorporation into the order of reality itself. Speaking specifically of the family, Downing reminds us that “it is only insofar as they display proper faith in or obedience to the conventions of this order that individuals partake of reality.”<sup>61</sup> For Stifter, then, the individual’s entrance into the order of the family, as that which represses his “Einzelkräfte,” is simultaneously an entrance into the order of “reality” itself. What is “real” for Stifter, moreover, is not that which is subject to caprice, volatility or erraticism; rather, what is “real” is that which sustains and provides a necessary order to the inherently disorderly, self-destructive state of the individual. For Stifter, this is the

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<sup>60</sup> For a more detailed account of the etymology of “roden,” see Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 8 (1893), 1108-9. For the etymology of the word “urbar,” Vol. 11.3 (1936), 2376-8.

<sup>61</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 36.

function of the family, a “reality” that – in order that one might enter it – is predicated on the suppression of the individual.<sup>62</sup>

Friedrich’s destruction as an individual makes immanent sense when read against the backdrop of Stifter’s *Vorrede*. As Stifter makes clear in the *Vorrede*, entrance into the communal structure of the family is predicated on a loss of individuality: “Es gibt daher Kräfte, die nach dem Bestehen des gesamten Menschheit hinwirken, die durch die Einzelkräfte nicht beschränkt werden dürfen, ja im Gegentheile *beschränkend auf sie selber einwirken*” (V, 12).<sup>63</sup> Downing’s reflections on the *Vorrede* effectively underscore the role of the family not only as a norm-inducing system, but as a system that is dependent on the “repression of the individual”:

the community...enforce[s] the law that guarantees that discrete individuals function as representatives of a single human reality. Reality itself becomes defined as an order of similitude, of ever-repeating, normed identities that *eliminate individual differences*....perhaps the most important site for the enforcement of these conventions and their concomitant *repression of the individual* is the family.<sup>64</sup>

Downing’s argument clearly resonates with the course of Friedrich’s “maturation” in *Nachkommenschaften*: the protagonist’s gradual (re-)incorporation into the Roderer family is paralleled by a progressive loss of his own individuality, an elimination of those “differences” that initially make him not only a highly distinct character, but also a threat to a “reality” that is conceived of as “an order of similitude, of ever-repeating, normed identities.”

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<sup>62</sup> See also Matthias Kamann, *Epigonalität als ästhetisches Vermögen. Untersuchungen zu Texten Grabbes und Immermanns, Platens und Raabes, zur Literaturkritik des 19. Jahrhunderts und zum Werk Adalbert Stifter* (Stuttgart: M & P, 1994). Kamann has noted that “Was also Roderer-Identität genannt werden kann, ist...ein...grundsätzlich mimetisch orientierter Energie: jeder lässt seine Kräfte zunächst zu einem scheinbar allerpersönlichsten Ziel walten, kann sich aber, da jene Energien statt auf Subjektivierung auf Mimesis zielen, darin nicht erfüllen und biegt aus solcher Entfernung von der Wirklichkeit seiner Kräfte auf jene zurück” (240).

<sup>63</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 36. My emphasis.



At the beginning of the narrative, Friedrich is clearly presented a character stubbornly content in his highly individualized existence. He shows no interest in marrying, nor does he want children. As the protagonist himself tells us,

Meine Großmutter sagt, daß unsere Vorfahren immer zahlreiche Nachkommenschaften gehabt haben, und daß das Geschlecht nie so zusammengeschmolzen gewesen wäre, wie eben jetzt: sich aber wieder auszudehnen beginne, indem ihre jüngeren Söhne schon so viele Kinder haben, und noch mehr zu bekommen hoffen dürfen...*Mögen sie sich ausdehnen, ich dehne mich nicht aus....* (N, 31-32)<sup>65</sup>

Not only is Friedrich satisfied in his “unausgedehnte” state; his character is also initially presented as an outsider largely disconnected from any social or familial context (in this sense, it certainly does make sense that he should present himself, initially, as “unversehens”). After listening to Peter Roderer’s *Familiengeschichte*, and in particular, when he learns of the marked tendency of its family members to be “zerstreut” or “scattered,” Friedrich ruminates on the following:

Ich selber bin noch gar kein Ansässiger, in dem ich seit der Zeit meiner Großjährigkeit oder eigentlich schon seit jener Zeit, als ich die Landschaftsmalerei zu betreiben begonnen habe, am wenigsten bei meinen Eltern in Wien, am häufigsten aber an verschiedenen Stellen gewesen bin, wie ich ja jetzt eben auf einem kargen graungrünen Hügel sitze. (N, 64)

As someone who for some time now has been “an verschiedenen Stellen” without putting down roots, Friedrich certainly conforms to the Roderer tendency to be “zerstreut.”

When contemplating the initial presentation of Friedrich’s character, we should also be reminded of Stifter’s disdain for “Einzelkräfte”: in the *Vorrede*, Stifter refers to “den entzündeten Geist, der nach Tätigkeit strebt, umreißt, ändert, zerstört, und in der Erregung oft das eigene Leben hinwirft” (V, 12). In this sense, Friedrich’s character might arguably be understood as an embodiment of this “entzündeten Geist” (V, 12). All

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<sup>65</sup> My emphasis.

of the verbs employed by Stifter in the aforementioned passage may likewise be applied to a description of his protagonist in *Nachkommenschaften*: at the outset of the tale, readers are presented with a character who we learn has spent years of his life wandering restlessly from one place to another; Friedrich's personality is also initially marked by erratic bursts of destruction as well as a lopsided striving for one thing in particular that precludes his physical or emotional investment in anything else.

As a means of underscoring the family's function as a regulatory structure, *Nachkommenschaften* presents readers with two outward symbols of the Roderer family as a norm-inducing system, those being the name – we learn that all male members of the Roderer family are named either Peter or Friedrich – and the “Vollbart” worn by all Roderer men. In fact, long before Friedrich reveals his surname, it is the beard that first signals Peter's and Friedrich's shared patrilineage. It is a familial relationship that Peter himself seems to intuit with recourse to the “Vollbart”: ““Seltsam ist es, daß alle...auch den vollen Bart trugen...Die zahlreichen Roderer...sah ich mit diesem Barte abgebildet, und die noch leben, kenne ich mit diesem Barte...Und haben Sie nicht auch, wie unser Geschlecht einen kurzen brauen Vollbart?”” (N, 55-56) The “Vollbart” thus presents one of the most conspicuous outward symbols of this shared patrilineage. At the same time, it supports the idea that the family – in this case, the Roderer family – functions as a norm-inducing system.

For Friedrich to be fully incorporated into the familial structure, his individuality must necessarily also be suppressed. The character's diminishing “Einzelkräfte” as he is slowly subsumed under the Roderer family name is evidenced in a move from ritualism

to increasingly conventionalized or normative behavioral patterns.<sup>66</sup> Within this context, Downing makes a crucial point: the community, he writes, is that which “guarantees that discrete individuals function as representatives of a single human reality. Reality itself becomes defined as an order of similitude, of ever-repeating, normed identities that eliminate individual differences, and it is only insofar as they display proper faith in or obedience to the conventions of this order that individuals partake of reality.”<sup>67</sup>

At the outset of the *Nachkommenschaften*, we are presented with an individual whose day-to-day life is structured by ritualistic behavioral patterns: we learn, for instance, that painting, cleaning, and eating often appear as sequentially ordered activities in the artist’s daily life. As the story develops, however, Friedrich’s aberrations from this accustomed ritualism become ever greater. The more fully he is incorporated into the Roderer family structure, the more these undesirable “Einzelkräfte” are suppressed. He paints less often, structuring his days less and less around ritual and to an ever increasing degree around his encounters with Peter Roderer’s daughter Susanna. After an unintentional, but nonetheless particularly significant encounter with Susanna and her family at a festival on St. Bartholomew’s Day, Friedrich reflects that “Ich schlief in der kommenden Nacht keinen Augenblick und malte des anderen Morgens nicht” (N, 79). Like her father, Susanna Roderer plays a critical role in Friedrich’s “cultivation”: it is her character, we should recall, who first disrupts Friedrich’s ritualistic lifestyle. After their encounter at the festival on St. Bartholomew’s Day, Friedrich’s daily routine no longer revolves around his painting of the moorland; rather, his days hinge on his desired-after encounters with Peter Roderer’s daughter.

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<sup>66</sup> Ragg-Kirkby is interested in the significance of ritualistic behavior in Stifter’s oeuvre, particularly the ritualism of collecting/collections, which she understands as inherently sublimational activities.

<sup>67</sup> Downing, “Real and Recurrent Problems,” 36.

At the same time, there are also far less obvious ways in which the Roderer family (and Peter Roderer in particular) “frames” the individual, subtly programming the course of (what is only apparently) his narrative. In this regard, the “Blockhaus” emerges as an important symbol. On one occasion in particular, we learn of the specific proprietor whose “Bauholz” has made possible the erection of the structure. As Friedrich tells us:

Der Herr Roderer erschien auch zuweilen, stand freundlich da, schaute zu, und war uns mit Rath und Anleitung behilflich. Bei einer solchen Gelegenheit erfuhr ich auch, daß die behauenen Stämme von ihm gekauft worden waren...Ich habe also, dachte ich, von dem Bauholze erhalten, von dem mir meine Wirthin erzählt hat, daß es dem Herrn Roderer übrig geblieben sei, weil jetzt Niemand abbrenne. (N, 66)

Peter Roderer’s influence in the process of “construction” clearly extends beyond his ability to proffer “Rath und Anleitung.” Much more interesting than this is that the wood used in the construction of Friedrich’s “Blockhaus” is none other than Peter Roderer’s (we are told that “die behauenen Stämme von ihm gekauft worden war”). The fact that Friedrich is ultimately “framed” within the box-like structure of his “Blockhaus,” and that this peculiar frame-like structure owes itself to Peter Roderer, serves to further reinforce the largely invisible, yet powerful influence of the Roderer family in its systematic “construction” of the subject.

The influence of the Roderer family “frame” extends to the structural level as well. In this regard, it is imperative to acknowledge the fact that *Nachkommenschaften* is also a frame narrative, although this is not immediately apparent. Peter Roderer’s *Familiengeschichte* is introduced approximately twenty-five pages after the commencement of “Friedrich’s” story. As Peter and Friedrich sit talking beneath the

apple tree<sup>68</sup> one evening, Peter tells the younger Roderer the story of the family history, which he begins as follows:

“es lebt seit Jahrhunderten ein Geschlecht, das immer etwas Anderes erreicht hat, als es mit Heftigkeit angestrebt hat. Und je glühender das Bestreben eines dieses Geschlechtes war, desto sicherer konnte man sein, daß nichts daraus wird...Sie waren Alle höchst begabte Leute, einen einzigen ausgenommen, welcher ein gewöhnlicher Mensch war...So merkwürdig ist aber das Geschick dieses Geschlechtes, daß selbst der gewöhnliche Mensch, der, wie ich Ihnen sagte, dazu gehörte, diesem Geschicke nicht entgehen konnte.” (N, 49-50)

That the Roderer family functions as a norm-inducing system in which differences are effectively eliminated is clearly evidenced in the older Roderer's description of the family “Geschick” or destiny. Clearly, then, the aforecited passage is also meant to prefigure Friedrich's own destiny as part of this “Geschlecht,” his ultimate reabsorption

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<sup>68</sup> The “Apfelbaum” beneath which Peter and Friedrich frequently find themselves is certainly meant as an oblique reference to the original family tree, which figures prominently within the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this way, it also resonates with the theme of returning to one's origins (and perhaps also to the site of original sin). The religious undertones that present themselves at the Lüpfinger Inn are further reinforced by the name chosen for the innkeeper (“Christian”). At the same time, there is sufficient reason to believe that a tension between Christianity and Judaism is developed throughout the text. For instance, the Roderer family in general, and Friedrich in particular, seem to conform to the trope of the Wandering Jew (they are repeatedly depicted as moving from place to place, having no roots, and being largely unsettled). The discussion of the family's distinguishing feature, the beard, arguably resonates within this context as well. In this respect, it also strikes me as significant that the trajectory of Peter Roderer's professional life takes him from a career as a businessman (a stereotypical Jewish profession) to that of a farmer (a traditionally “Christian” profession). For a more detailed account of anti-Semitic tropes in Stifter's prose, see Martha Helfer, “Natural Anti-Semitism: Adalbert Stifter's *Abdias*,” in *The Word Unheard: Legacies of Anti-Semitism in German Language and Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 113-141. Interestingly, the course of Peter's professional life is quite similar to Abdias's, as Helfer points out: “Abdias gradually begins to assimilate, turning from the ‘Jewish’ professions of trade, deal-making, and usury to the ‘Christian’ profession of farming” (119). *Nachkommenschaften*'s only explicit reference to a “Jüdin” comes near the end of the narrative: we are told that Friedrich's great-grandfather went to Russia “einer schönen Jüdin zu Lieb,” but that the Jewess “ist ein nichtnutziges Ding gewesen” (N, 90). Friedrich's great-grandfather, we furthermore learn, ultimately married another woman, yet this period in his life remains “etwas unklar” (N, 90). The Jewess is mentioned only once toward the close of the narrative and never again, and still I cannot help but feel that there is perhaps more to it than this, that, perhaps, Jewishness is also very much a part of what is being excluded from the narrative proper. Within this context, I find it all the more curious that Peter should at one point suggest to the younger Friedrich that “dieser einsame Hügel am Rande des Moores mit dem Apfelbaume etwas sehr Anziehendes hat” (N, 39).

into the Roderer family, which, because of the nature of this familial “Geschick,” will necessarily be accompanied by the cessation of his career as a painter.<sup>69</sup>

What also becomes evident, and only when one reads the story from start to finish, is that what was purportedly the “inner frame” has structured the “outer frame” all along. In other words: Friedrich’s story is not, nor has it ever been, his own. In fact, it has been Peter’s all along. In this story, it is no longer the outer frame that controls the inner frame, as is typically the case when the frame is employed as a structural device. Rather, *Nachkommenschaften* delineates a veritable shift in narrative power dynamics, whereby the inner frame exerts its control on the outer frame, programming the course of what is only apparently, but not actually the protagonist’s story from the very beginning. In slightly different terms, we might say that it is not Friedrich, but rather Peter, who is the true narrating subject. In the end, Friedrich is only a discursive construct of a framework that has been belatedly imposed on him *from the inside*.

As I have suggested in the preceding section, Friedrich’s artistic maturation is accompanied by an attempt to hide his involvement in the artistic process, to conceal his own traces as the subject from whom the artwork originates. It is in a similar sense that his choice to destroy his unfinished painting of the moorland at the end of the narrative must be understood as his own (symbolic) destruction, occasioned by his recognition of

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<sup>69</sup> Rickels argues that Stifter’s text “sets up an opposition between painting and narrating in terms of the disclosure of the surname” (578), thus linking, as the title of his essay suggests, the problem of painting with the problem of the surname. Rickels argues that “Whereas Friedrich’s suppression of his surname accompanies his pursuit of painting, his ultimate acknowledgement of his surname coincides with his renunciation of painting” (579). The author is correct to draw a connection between the act of painting and the belated disclosure of the protagonist’s surname. However appropriate such a reading of the text might be, Rickels does not fully articulate the reasons behind Friedrich’s delayed acknowledgment of his patrilineage. “Warum habe ich ihm nicht gesagt, daß ich Roderer heiße?” Friedrich wonders after hearing Peter Roderer’s story of the family history. It is because of the concomitant loss of individuality – which includes his work and life as a painter – that such an acknowledgement of the surname would necessarily entail.

that other, more general, “realer” reality that functions as a regulatory force within the human world.<sup>70</sup> The individual is destroyed, but the frame (as a symbolic instantiation of the Roderer family) is spared. It is the family, moreover, as a symbol of “das sanfte Gesetz” in the human world, which remains, which will always remain (as “das einzige Allgemeine das einzige Erhaltende und nie Endende”) in the wake of the destruction of the individual.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the text’s seeming insistence that such processes of absorption or incorporation into the family structure are natural, there seems also to be a certain resistance to assimilation that is foregrounded throughout the narrative, which comes to a head at its very end. The final pages of the narrative present two disparate images, one of a coming-apart, the other a coming-together. On the one hand, Friedrich’s destruction of his (presumably) final painting clearly involves a process of decomposition:

Im Blockhause nahm ich das Bild aus dem Rahmen *zerlegte* den Rahmen, und verpackte ihn in seine Kiste. Dann schnitt ich die Leinwand des Bildes aus ihren Hölzern, zerschnitt sie *in kleine Theile*, und verbrannte diese Theile langsam im Ofen. Dann *zerlegte* ich die Hölzer und verbrannte auch sie. Dann verbrannte ich

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<sup>70</sup> In some sense, then, I must agree with Rickels, who maintains that Friedrich spares the frame, precisely because it represents “the site of caption or name” (585).

<sup>71</sup> If the relationship between the painting and the individual should seem somewhat tenuous, we should consider several important points of commonality between the two that present themselves throughout the course of Stifter’s tale. We might recall, for instance, that it is not only Friedrich’s family members, but also his artworks, which are presented as being “zerstreut” (scattered) at various points throughout the narrative. Two movements – one of widening or expansion and one of narrowing or coming-together – are used to describe the historical development of the Roderer family. Throughout the narrative, variants of “Ausdehnung” and “Zusammenschmelzung” – e.g., “Zerstreutsein” (N, 64) and “Zusammenlaufe” (N, 93) – will be used to describe the relative proximity of the Roderer family members to one another. At the same time, Friedrich’s also imagines the afterlife of his artworks (his own “Nachkommenschaften”) with specific recourse to this metaphoric of “zerstreuen” and “zusammenschmelzen”: “Wo würden dann aber jene Bilder sein? Würde ich sie wirklich, wenn ich einmal gegen mein Lebensende im siebenundneunzigsten oder achtundneunzigsten Jahre in eine andere Stadt oder ein anders Haus übersiedelte, in den Wagen zu verfahren haben? Oder werden sie *zerstreut* sein?” (N, 30, my emphasis). At the same time, it is important to underscore that the beginning of the narrative presents readers with a multiplicity of landscape paintings, which Friedrich presents as essentially indistinguishable from one another. Readers will later encounter a multiplicity of Roderers, who share the same name(s) and many of the same physical attributes, and who are thus equally indistinguishable from one another.

alle meine Entwürfe, und zuletzt die Farben, die Pinsel und die Malerbrette. Was sonst noch an Gereäthen war, bestimmte ich späterer *Zertheilung*. (N, 92-93)<sup>72</sup>

In stark contrast to this image of “Zerlegung” and “Zertheilung” is another that follows directly after it. More specifically, Friedrich’s description of his marriage to Susanna repeatedly invokes images of “Bindung”:

Am Petrus-Paulustage war die Hochzeit. Sie wurde in Firnberg gefeiert. Alle Roderer, die im Frühlinge an dieser Stelle gewesen waren, kamen noch einmal, um diese Feier mit zu feiern, und die Stammesgefühle nur noch fester *zu binden*. Die Trauung geschah in Lüpfig *unter großen Zusammenlaufe* von Menschen. Meine Wirthin schlug die Hände *zusammen*, als sie sag, daß ich Susanna heirathe....Als wir bei dem Mahle sassen, stand Peter Roderer, mein Schwiegervater mit dem Rheinweinglase auf und sprach: “....heute haben wir beiede ehelich *zusammengefügt*.” (N, 93)<sup>73</sup>

It cannot be coincidence that such a powerful image of “Zertheilung” and “Zerlegung” directly precedes an equally powerful image of “Zusammenlaufe,” of “Bindung” and “Zusammenfügung.” Two diametrically opposed images thereby present themselves in the penultimate and final scenes of the narrative: one a coming-apart, the other a coming-together. Lest we overlook it, however, the very title of the novella already subtly bespeaks a certain resistance to assimilation, in particular where the family is concerned. Stifter could easily have decided in favor of the title “Nachkommenschaft,” but this would have effaced the latent individuality that inheres in the word. This point is crucial: the German neologism “Nachkommenschaften” (through the unconventional addition of the suffix “-en”) reinforces the notion that it is the individual “Theile” that make up the whole of one’s progeny, in other words, a multiplicity of descendants, a system of relationships, the connections between individuals from which the family derives its ultimate meaning. In this sense, Stifter’s novella leaves us with the message that it is not

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<sup>72</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>73</sup> My emphasis.



so much (or at least not simply) about assimilation; rather, the title also reinforces the significance of maintaining one's individuality, of resistance in the face of that assimilation.

In this sense, then, *Nachkommenschaften* leaves us not (or not only) with an image of narrative closure, but with one of resistance to the very idea of closure. That the frame is not left in its assembled state, but has instead been “zerlegt,” is of paramount importance. Here we should recall the beginning of the narrative, which broaches the important question of what one is willing or able to leave behind for one's descendants – one's “*Nachkommenschaften*” – and for posterity in general, as the meaning of the word also implies. Early on, Friedrich ruminates on the possible afterlife of his paintings (his own “*Nachkommenschaften*”):

...so habe ich eine Schwester, die Kinder hat; so haben meine zwei Oheime Kinder, diese Kinder bekommen einst Kinder, welche wieder Kinder bekommen, so daß ich bei dem hohen Alter, welches ich erreichen werde, Nichten, Neffen, Geschwisterkinder, Urnichten, Urneffen, Urgeschwisterkinder, Ururnichten, Ururneffen, Ururgeschwisterkinder, und so weiter, in großer Zahl haben werde, unter welche ich meine Bilder als Geschenke vertheilen kann. (N, 31)

However, the painting that may be presumed to be Friedrich's last is ultimately destroyed. The only relic left in the wake of its destruction is the “*Goldrahmen*,” devoid of the image it once contained, and in a state of fragmentation. It is this figure in particular, I believe, that Stifter means to bequeath to his own literary posterity – the fragment as a reminder not only of the impossibility of narrative closure, but also of the ultimate futility of attempts to impose a framework onto an aesthetic system that will always, inevitably resist clear definitions and conceptual resolution.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **Male Histories, Female Anti-Histories:**

##### **Theodor Storm's *Viola tricolor* and the (De-) Construction of Narrative Identity**

As the two preceding chapters have made clear, the frame lends itself to a theorization of one strand of the poetics that emerges in the latter half of the nineteenth century. More than simply a self-reflexive articulation of the disconnect between fiction and reality, the figure evokes an oftentimes complex set of issues central to the project of literary realism. The same holds true for a consideration of the motif as it presents itself within Theodor Storm's body of work. While Storm's 1874 novella *Viola tricolor* will be my primary focus in this final chapter, it is worth mentioning that the author's predilection for the frame extends well beyond this one text. Indeed, nowhere within the canon of German realism does the frame present itself so persistently as within Storm's prose. One might cite numerous works in this regard; *Im Nachbarhause links* (1875), *Aquis submersus* (1876), and *Eekenhof* (1879) are but several of the most salient examples. Yet despite its recurring presence throughout Storm's oeuvre, the frame has been largely ignored in the scholarship. While also true for Keller and Stifter, this is particularly surprising with respect to Storm's work, and not simply because of the regularity with which the motif appears throughout his prose: the author's general tendency to recycle a stock set of motifs across texts is by now axiomatic.<sup>1</sup> Even so, most who engage critically

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, see especially Hildegard Lorenz, *Varianz und Invarianz. Theodor Storms Erzählungen: Figurenkonstellation und Handlungsmuster* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1985). Lorenz's work marks the most notable and comprehensive attempt to elucidate certain character typologies, plot patterns, and motifs that recur across various texts within the author's corpus. For this reason, Lorenz's failure to implicate the frame within this pattern of repetition represents a particularly conspicuous oversight.

with Storm's work mention the figure only in passing and typically without acknowledging its potential significance.<sup>2</sup>

Understanding why this should be the case is not especially difficult: quite deliberately, I would suggest, realist literature seems to exploit its readers' presuppositions concerning the relationship between image and frame. In other words, these literary works tend repeatedly to foreground the image, a gesture that effectively overshadows the frame, relegating it to an apparently inferior position with respect to the image. This was also the case in Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich* and to a somewhat lesser degree in Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften*. In this regard, Storm's prose also tends to conform rather than deform. Lengthy, lingering moments of ekphrasis abound within the Stormian oeuvre, and, we might add, the vast number of images encountered are powerful, and often uncannily so. At times, they function as sources of recollection for the protagonist (e.g., in *Immensee*, *Im Nachbarhause links*, and *Viola tricolor*); they evoke fear and the threat of death (e.g., in *Eekenhof*, *Aquis submersus*, and *Viola tricolor*); they are even erotically charged (e.g., in *Im Nachbarhause links* and *Viola tricolor*). Crucially, Storm's images repeatedly play a central role in shaping narrative trajectory, and relatedly, the production of narrative tension (true in each of the aforementioned examples). The presence of certain images within these works proves overwhelming, and not only for the story's characters, but also for us as readers and critics. This being the

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<sup>2</sup> Still, to suggest that the frame has garnered no attention would not be true; there are also noteworthy exceptions to what itself has become a pattern of critical oversight. In this respect, see, for instance, Christiane Arndt, "On the Transgression of Frames in Theodor Storm's Novella *Aquis submersus*," *Monatshefte* 97, no. 4 (2005): 595-614. According to Arndt, such transgressions "express an aesthetic concept, a reflection upon the transitory nature of the individual life and the prevalence of art" (595). Arndt's essay furthermore endeavors "to show how the distinctions the text initially sets, such as past and present, private and public, life and death, are overcome, and how the transgressions are triggered by the seductive force of art" (595). "Ultimately," Arndt argues, "the narrative emerges through the trespassing of boundaries" (595).

case, the potential to overlook the frame is considerable, particularly given the conventional manner in which we have grown accustomed to understanding it, i.e., as subordinate to the image.

Of course, it is impossible to know with any certainty the part played by authorial intent in this regard. Still, it seems appropriate to consider once again the words of Robert Holub, who has argued that works of literary realism actively suppress or disguise instances of self-reflection in order to generate the intended realist effect.<sup>3</sup> If, as I am suggesting, the frame's function is largely self-reflexive, then the preponderance of images encountered in these texts – and particularly those countless, powerful, overpowering images within Storm's fiction – might be purposefully intended as a means of deflection, a diversion away from the frame and, with it, the possibility of an entirely different reading of the text. In what follows, my goal once more will be to direct critical focus to the figure of the frame. At the same time, it is precisely not my intention to disregard the image; here too, my aim is to develop an understanding of certain key images in their relation to the frame in order to arrive at a deeper appreciation of image and frame as mutually dependent signifiers.

The first section of my analysis examines the frame as a medium of self-reflection in Storm's *Viola tricolor*, a work praised by Theodor Fontane as a "Musterstück" of literary realism.<sup>4</sup> In particular, I am interested in Storm's use of the motif in order to articulate a self-reflexive theory of the realist novella. To this end, I rely heavily on

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Holub, *Reflections of Realism: Paradox, Norm, and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century German Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Fontane, cited by Peter Goldammer, ed., *Theodor Storm, Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1972), 2:749.

Andrew Webber's work on realism.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Webber's exposition of the realist novella in its relation to history forms a crucial basis for my own analysis. The realist novella, Webber maintains, is "in a key sense anti-historical."<sup>6</sup> Bearing this in mind, I argue that Storm's novella, in its presentation of various alterities, represents a narrative space in which official histories and ahistorical "outliers" exist side by side. Importantly, the official, accepted narrative is kept intact by means of a frame, which serves as an exclusory medium, thereby perpetuating a sense of order. In this regard also, I depend on Webber's critical voice. In particular, his work foregrounds a critical engagement with certain principles (i.e., exclusion, inclusion, order, and disorder) that not only define the literary project of the nineteenth century realist novella, but that also, as we shall see, determine the narrative landscape of *Viola tricolor* in significant ways.

The second part of my argument extends the function of the frame beyond the realm of self-reflection in order to consider its role in theorizing the nature of gendered identity. The latter section of my analysis allows for an interesting connection to the former if one considers both realism and gender, two seemingly disparate signifying systems, as essentially narrative constructions. Once again, I find it fitting to draw attention to Holub's contention that realism involves a conscious effort to maintain the impression of reality by deemphasizing the fictive quality of a literary work. Using this line of reasoning, we might say that the fictive nature of Storm's texts has been obscured as a means of producing the intended realist effect. At the same time, however, it is imperative that we acknowledge not only the realist novella itself as narrative, but also the narrative of gender presented therein. It is the narrative of gender as stable and

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Webber, "Double Agencies in the *Novelle* of Poetic Realism," in *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 232-316.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

enduring, a very specific narrative of “woman” that has been subtly inscribed into the textual fabric of *Viola tricolor*, one in which “woman” emerges as a constructed object of a specifically male imagination. Like the realist text itself, the fictive nature of this narrative has been and continues to be concealed.

In my analysis of Storm’s novella, it becomes evident that the emergence of both literary and gendered identity is the result of certain processes of exclusion, processes guided by an attempt to order an inherently disordered system. An analysis of the text from the vantage point of gender will furthermore require a deeper reflection on femininity both in and as narrative: how, we must ask ourselves, has femininity been – and how does it continue to be – narrativized within a well-oiled system of masculine, patriarchal, and heteronormative ideologies? How do narratives come to be written on the female body, whose body itself then takes on the function of narrative object? How, moreover, has “woman” been divested of her own narrative voice and, at the same time, transformed into the object of male narrative?

When one reflects on Storm’s corpus as a whole, it would seem that such issues are not entirely unique to *Viola tricolor*, but rather, that they present themselves in a good number of his works. Still more than this, the topic of gender is oftentimes thematized with recourse to the frame. In fact, the female portrait repeatedly encountered within Storm’s body of work frequently functions allegorically, as a visual instantiation of a certain male narrative of “woman” that, like the portrait, must be understood as constructed and not natural. In such instances, I would argue, the frame serves to reinforce the inherent disparity between two disparate images of “woman.” The final

section of this chapter will briefly explore such issues in three additional works, namely *Aquis submersus*, *Eekenhof*, and *Im Nachbarhause links*.

A broader consideration of the Stormian corpus will certainly help to elucidate the author's propensity for the frame, particularly where issues of gender are concerned. Yet it seems to me that no other work compares to *Viola tricolor* in terms of the richness of meaning elicited by the frame. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on this particular text. In the preceding analysis of Stifter's *Nachkommenschaften*, I showed how the frame serves in large part as a means of making an invisible world visible. The frame's ability to define the limits of "the seeable" (and as such, "the knowable") results in an illumination of an unseen reality, an "absent" reality whose presentation comes to define the scope of the realist literary project as conceived of by Stifter. When considered in this light, an interesting parallel emerges with respect to Stifter's and Storm's respective uses of the frame. Nearly a decade after Stifter pens his tale of the young Friedrich Roderer, Storm will use the frame to similar effect, in order to lay bare the residual traces of a narrative, a reality, that is also largely invisible, a narrative of "woman" that has been (nearly, but not entirely) effaced from the surface of the story. In Storm's novella, what is most "real" is once again precisely not what is able to be discerned with the naked eye; as was the case with Stifter, the realist project presents itself here too as inextricably bound to the elucidation of a certain unseen reality. As such, the task set to us as readers will be to decipher this other reality, to adopt a critical and discerning gaze that is able to peer beneath the surface, a sight that sees beyond what is seeable.

Framing *Viola tricolor*

Familiar to most ardent readers of Storm's work, *Viola tricolor* presents the story of the once widowed, now newly remarried *Altertumsforscher* Rudolf and his young daughter Agnes (nicknamed Nesi), a father and daughter who struggle to integrate a new wife and stepmother (Ines) into their family after the death of the first (Marie). The powerful and unsettling remnant of Marie's presence, a portrait of her that hangs in Rudolf's study, threatens to upset the potential for marital and maternal bliss that Ines so fervently desires. Nesi's refusal to call her new stepmother "Mutter" (preferring instead to refer to her as "Mama"), as well as Rudolf's apparent inability to let go of his past with Marie, sow seeds of self-doubt and despair within Ines's increasingly fragile personality. Unable to compete with Marie, Ines feels forlorn from the get-go, lashing out at her new stepdaughter and husband on multiple occasions for what she perceives as their inability or unwillingness to incorporate her presence into the family structure in the way that she desires.

That being said, Ines's yearning to become wife to Rudolf and mother to Nesi is not the only desire that drives narrative development. Storm's narrator also repeatedly emphasizes the young stepmother's wish to enter a garden belonging to the family, a space referred to most often as a "Gartenwildnis" (VT, 678), although it also, importantly, is called "ein Grab" (VT, 690) and "ein Garten der Vergangenheit" (VT, 691) at various points throughout the narrative.<sup>7</sup> On more than one occasion, Nesi will also refer to this garden as "Grossmutter's Garten" (VT, 678, 684), thereby underscoring not only the female gendering of the space, but also its historical dimension as a space of

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<sup>7</sup> Theodor Storm, "Viola tricolor," in *Sämtliche Werke in zwei Bänden*, vol. 1 (Munich: Winkler, 1967), 675-705. All parenthetical references to *Viola trioclor* are taken from this edition of the text, henceforth abbreviated as "VT."



matrilineal inheritance. To Ines's dismay, however, the gate that leads into this enchanting, unknown space remains locked until the end of the story, its only key in her husband's possession. The narrative climax occurs shortly after Ines gives birth to a daughter, her character briefly suspended between life and death. Still, she survives, and the novella concludes with an image of the entire "family" (Rudolf, Ines, Nesi, Annie the housekeeper, Nero the family dog, and the still unnamed child) as they enter into the newly reopened "Gartenwildnis."

The repeated appearance of the female portrait throughout Storm's narrative is striking, particularly given its ability to affect the thoughts and actions of certain characters and, relatedly, to disrupt marital/familial relationships. Because of this, it is unsurprising that, to date, criticism has chosen to focus so heavily on the image in discussions of the text. Eric Downing's analysis of the reproduction of Marie's image has certainly yielded a highly thought-provoking interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Downing's interest lies in developing an understanding of Marie's portrait as an instantiation of a common romantic motif, namely "the dead woman as portrait" or "the beloved as artifact."<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Downing argues that Storm's text and its characters must work to supersede this motif and overcome the related "impulse toward repetition" in order for a new realist poetics to emerge.<sup>10</sup>

Jennifer Cizik Marshall's reading of the text emphasizes Ines's desire to become image.<sup>11</sup> According to Marshall, Marie's portrait figures as the object of Ines's doubly

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<sup>8</sup> Eric Downing, "Second Wives, Second Lives: The 'Ligeia Impulse' in Theodor Storm's *Viola tricolor*," in *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 129-169.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 137-138.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Cizik Marshall, *Betrothal, Violence, and the "Beloved Sacrifice" in Nineteenth-Century German Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

“mimetic desire”<sup>12</sup>: she “desires to ‘mimic the mimesis,’ that is, to assume the status of the woman who is in actuality only a two-dimensional image.”<sup>13</sup> Of course, we must bear in mind that Storm’s work is deeply embedded within the greater nineteenth-century literary tradition of reproducing woman as image.<sup>14</sup> There is no getting around an analysis of the (female) image in Storm’s oeuvre, just as it is impossible to deny the important role played by Marie’s portrait in *Viola tricolor*. Again, my intention is not to disrupt or discredit such readings that choose to focus on the image. However, this should not detract from the likewise important role assumed by the frame throughout, which is, unfortunately, what has occurred to date.

In order to redirect our attention, we might begin by considering the various frames encountered throughout Storm’s novella. Of all of the frames that present themselves, the “Goldrahmen” that adorns Marie’s portrait is certainly one of the most conspicuous. Indeed, Nesi’s choice to affix a rose to this particular frame at the outset of the story will form an integral part of my analysis in what follows. Two additional frames will also be fundamentally important to my reading of Storm’s narrative: the first of these is the frame of a Venetian mirror that hangs in the family’s living room; the second is the frame (together with the glass) that encloses an image of the Madonna and Child, which presents itself during Ines’s recounting of a particularly significant moment in her childhood. Aside from such traditional frames, there is also the “Umfassungsmauer” that surrounds the “Gartenwildnis,” a framing device that effectively severs the garden from

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> In this respect, see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992). In her explorations of the intersections of femininity, death, and representation, Bronfen analyzes the long-standing “cultural convention of reproducing women as images” (110).

the rest of the family's property. Regarding the overarching significance of the novella's framing motif, it is crucial to consider this wall as a frame. Although the "Umfassungsmauer" is not a frame in any conventional sense, the text does forge purposeful connections between it and other frames.<sup>15</sup>

Also fundamental to my arguments about the frame motif in this chapter is that Storm's novella takes the form of a frame narrative. Approximately halfway through *Viola tricolor*, readers discover a second narrative embedded deep within the story's main narrative. This narrative commences with Ines's recollection of a picture of the Madonna and Child that once hung in her paternal home, a gift given to her as a child by her own mother. The child's desire to merge with the image of the Madonna, to be mother to the Christ Child, is so strong that she is discovered one morning in her bed, sleeping on top of the picture, the glass having been broken during the night while she was asleep.

Scholarship has shown that Ines's is a story worth considering. Its particular fixation on the image of the Madonna has given Downing cause to read the story as suggestive of the child's "desire to become Marie," a desire that finds its parallel in the narrative present as Ines struggles to fill the shoes of Rudolf's dead first wife, Marie.<sup>16</sup> Still, aside from these more obvious repetitive structures, Ines's story presents a further point of commonality with regard to the narrative present, a connection that has hitherto remained unnoticed. Ines's story expresses a fervent desire to become one with the image, that is, the child's wish to penetrate the painting's frame in order to merge with

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<sup>15</sup> As I hope to show in the final section of this chapter, connections between walls and other, more traditional frames appear elsewhere within Storm's work, most strikingly in the novella *Im Nachbarhause links*.

<sup>16</sup> Downing, "Second Wives," 147.

the image of the Madonna as “mother.” In this sense, it is justifiable to argue that the narrative trajectory of the narrative present and Ines’s childhood tale are both defined by a desired after, yet prohibited transgression of the boundary delineated by “the frame” – the “Umfassungsmauer” in the former instance, the glass frame in the latter. When considering the frame that structures Storm’s novella, it will also be important to consider the marginalization of the female protagonist’s story with respect to the main narrative. In this sense, an interesting parallel presents itself when Storm’s novella is considered at both the structural level and at the level of content: like the “Gartenwildnis,” a space excluded from the rest of the family’s property by the wall that surrounds it, a pointed attempt is made to exclude Ines’s childhood narrative from the story’s main narrative.<sup>17</sup>

Why this is the case becomes clearer, I believe, when one considers Storm’s novella in its presentation of a theory of literary and gendered identity that is the result of certain processes of exclusion, an idea whose realization relies, moreover, on the author’s calculated use of the frame motif. In both cases, identity materializes out of an attempt to maintain order. That is, the narrative subtext of *Viola tricolor* bespeaks a tale of the origins of an identity that emerges not out of a state of order, but of disorder. Again, both the realist text and gender must be understood as fundamentally narrative constructions. In both cases, the formation of identity is the result of a perceived or imagined, even actively constructed difference that attempts to control disorder.

To be sure, theories that formulate the nature and construction of identity in terms of negative self-definition constitute a long-standing tradition within Western critical

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<sup>17</sup> A similar process of exclusion is at work in Stifter’s *Nachkommenschaften*. As is the case with *Viola tricolor*, the embedded narrative of Stifter’s text – in which Peter Roderer recounts the Roderer *Familiengeschichte* – contains an element that is actively and intentionally excluded from the main narrative trajectory of the story, that being Friedrich’s paternal name.

thought. In the words of Bronfen and Goodwin, “Just as the mind defines itself in response to an imagined Other, cultures need images of alterity...to define their boundaries.”<sup>18</sup> Kristeva’s theory of “abjection” provides an iteration of this same idea. According to the author, it is by means of a process of expulsion or purging, termed “abjection,” that my understanding of “who I am” comes to be defined in terms of “who I am not.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, one’s identity or sense of a clearly defined self is inextricably connected to an expelled Other, an Other that was originally part of the subject. As Kristeva furthermore suggests, “the abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture...It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order.”<sup>20</sup> Generally speaking, such theories emphasize the idea that the physical and symbolic contours of individual, societal, and cultural identities are negatively defined in relation to a perceived Other, which, if not excluded, threatens to disrupt the internal stability of a seemingly ordered system. Mediated by the figure of the frame, Storm’s novella sets up a series of oppositions (between self and Other, interior and exterior, fiction and reality) whereby a similar notion of identity is presented. As a medium of delineation and exclusion, the frame functions as the symbolic boundary between self and Other, its presence providing a sense of security and stability in the face of an Otherness that threatens to upset the perception of (narrative) order.

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, eds., *Death and Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

Narrative identities: *Viola tricolor* and the realist novella

The connection between the narrative landscape that presents itself in *Viola tricolor* and those theories of identity formation mentioned above becomes still more interesting when one considers both in their relation to Andrew Webber's work on the realist novella. In each instance, there is a critical engagement with principles of ordering and disordering, as well as inclusion and exclusion, a connection that has significant implications for an analysis of Storm's novella with respect to the frame. At the outset of a chapter whose focus is the novella of poetic realism, Webber cites Storm, who in 1881 (seven years after *Viola tricolor* is published) famously described the novella as "die geschlossenste Form."<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, Webber suggests that Storm's characterization "reflects the high degree of inclusion and exclusion that characterizes the genre. Novellen at once typically depict the extraordinary and do so with the optimum of narrative economy, so that the content is condensed and the contextual significantly excluded."<sup>22</sup> Thus, the specific form of the novella results from (and is therefore inseparable from) certain narrative tensions; a tension between order and disorder presents itself, whereby inclusion and exclusion emerge as important dialectical forces. Such tensions help, moreover, to determine the narrative identity of the novella: a need for order and maximal inclusion (i.e. "narrative economy") necessarily encourages exclusion and, as such, precludes disorder. Webber continues, arguing that the novella

sacrifices the epic sweep of other forms of nineteenth century narrative to an economic account of personal crisis...it pits these against the more official narrative of the times recorded by the great novels and dramas of Realism...These are forms of narrative which treat the mysterious and antisocial, giving account to those stories which undermine or exceed the objective generality of a

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<sup>21</sup> Theodor Storm, "Eine zurückgezogene Vorrede aus dem Jahre 1881," in *Novelle*, ed. Josef Kunz, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 72.

<sup>22</sup> Webber, "Double Agencies," 232.

conventional history. Nineteenth-century *Novellen* provide a catalogue of such “strange cases”, supernatural, criminal, and pathological. All such cases accumulate into what might be called an anti-history or the antagonist double of the official version.<sup>23</sup>

In this respect, Friedrich Schlegel’s definition of the genre is also taken into account. According to Schlegel, the novella presents “Eine Geschichte also, die streng genommen, nicht zur Geschichte gehört” – a story or history that, strictly speaking, does not belong to history.<sup>24</sup>

The similarities between these theories of the novella and those of identity formation outlined previously become still more apparent when we consider Webber’s argument that the genre

tells[s] the unresolved story of history and its double. It seems that the *Novelle* served to depict for nineteenth-century culture forms of otherness against which to test the security it derived from the progress of science, democratic advances, and the institutions of domestic well-being. It perhaps needed to engage dialectically – that is, in a contradictory dialogue – with its fictional disorders, even as these threatened its very foundations.<sup>25</sup>

According to Webber, then, the genre highlights “the fractured parts of modern life,” the “fractures in the foundations...of social order.”<sup>26</sup> These “strange analytic cases” are “symptomatic of disorder at the heart and in the psyche of the bourgeois Realist order.”<sup>27</sup>

Bearing this in mind, I believe that Storm’s novella offers readers a visual representation and, as such, a self-reflexive articulation of precisely those tensions and processes that define the narrative character of the realist novella. In other words, *Viola tricolor* introduces a dialectical setting, a narrative landscape based on exclusion, one in

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, “Nachricht von den poetischen Werken des Johannes Boccaccio,” in *Novelle*, ed. Josef Kunz (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 41.

<sup>25</sup> Webber, “Double Agencies,” 235.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 243.

which the space of the “Gartenwildnis” functions as a “Gegenbild” to the image presented within the interior space of the home. What is more, both spaces are to be understood not only as spaces that exist within the narrative world of *Viola tricolor*, but also as spaces that themselves embody certain narratives. The interior space of the family’s home perpetuates the “official” version of a very specific narrative, and in keeping with this, a sense of rigidity and order (both domestic and narrative). This narrative stands in contrast to the narrative allegorized in the image of the wild, overgrown garden, a space of disorder intentionally excluded from the “official” narrative presented within the home. Whereas the interior space represents all that is included, that is, all that is “inside the text,” the “Gartenwildnis” represents an extratextual space. Depicted within the text, it also embodies a space “outside the text.” This is further developed by Storm’s superimposition of the issue of gender on to a theory of the realist novella. In other words, the “official” narrative sustained inside the family home reflects a very specific narrative of “woman.” At the same time, the “Gartenwildnis” presents a very different narrative of “woman,” thereby serving as the “antagonistic double” of the story’s “official” narrative. It is the frame’s presence that ultimately lays bare the processes of (narrative) exclusion that have taken and continue to take place. Its presence exposes the residual traces of another narrative, one that is very different from the story’s main narrative, revealing the remnants of another story that has been nearly (but not entirely) effaced (that is, suppressed) from the surface level of the narrative.

As we will see, Storm’s novella presents a deliberate attempt to order something inherently disorderly, and this by means of exclusion. Put somewhat differently, there is a consistent effort throughout the narrative to cover up disorder with order. In this respect,



the frame functions as a symbolic safeguard against an element that constitutes a perceived threat to narrative order. Thus, it helps to perpetuate the apparent sense of domestic/narrative order. Still, we should recall Webber's suggestion that attempts to exclude or contain disorderly narrative elements are not always successful, even (and sometimes especially) where the frame is concerned. In Webber's own words,

The extensive theorizing of the *Novelle* throughout the nineteenth century points up a perceived need for objective regulation of anarchic material, as if to compensate for this lack of conventional formality...the need for control is apparently answered above all by the various types of frameworking which characterize the genre...But the frame – as *parergon* – may also work “against the work”, failing in the strategy of containment.<sup>28</sup>

Yet whether *Viola tricolor*'s frame ultimately fails or succeeds in its intended “strategy of containment” seems to me somewhat beside the point. Rather, the frame's effectiveness is not as important as the fact that it exists at all, precisely because its presence introduces the idea of a narrative identity based on exclusion. Storm's writing, so Webber has also suggested, “exposes the ambiguous foundations of the sense of domestic order which is such a key plank in the ideological grounding of nineteenth-century culture.”<sup>29</sup> Yet it is not only “the ambiguous foundations of the sense of domestic order” that are exposed in *Viola tricolor*; it is the fragile underpinnings of (narrative) identity itself, the delicate boundary that must be kept intact lest the illusion of a stable, stagnant self be shattered along with it.

#### Exteriority, interiority, and the ordering of disorder

As I am suggesting, the particular narrative landscape that presents itself in Storm's novella should be understood self-reflexively, as a means of visualizing the tensions and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 285.

processes that define the project of the realist novella. If this is the case, then the space within the home must be understood as a space “inside the text.” Opposing this image of the domestic interior is the excluded “Gartenwildnis,” a domain that exists “outside the text.” In other words: the domestic interior reinforces the story’s main narrative (the “official,” but also superficial narrative of “woman” presented in Storm’s novella). What transpires within this space (i.e., instances of erasure and exclusion) mirrors the processes that determine the overarching narrative structure of *Viola tricolor*. That is, the specific structural identity of Storm’s novella is the direct result of those same processes that occur within the space of the home, at the level of the story’s content. At the same time, the image of the “Gartenwildnis” provides a visual representation of another, very different narrative of “woman,” one that remains pointedly excluded from “the text.” Not only is the garden excluded from the home’s interior; because it also functions as a narrative space, its positioning with regard to the interior space serves as a reminder of all that has been excluded from the story’s main narrative.

Bearing this in mind, it is reasonable to expect that the interior space of the family home (the space “inside the text”) will present an image of order. In fact, this is evident from the opening lines of *Viola tricolor*, which describe a quiet, pristine space untarnished by the unsightly appearance of dust, a well-ordered image of seeming domestic serenity:

Es war sehr still in dem großen Hause; *aber* selbst auf dem Flur spürte man den Duft von frischen Blumensträußen. Aus einer Flügeltür der breiten in das Oberhaus hinaufführenden Treppe gegenüber, trat eine alte sauber gekleidete Dienerin. Mit einer feierlichen Selbstzufriedenheit drückte sie hinter sich die Tür ins Schloß und ließ dann ihre grauen Augen an den Wänden entlangstreifen, als wolle sie auch hier jedes Stäubchen noch einer letzten Musterung unterziehen. (VT, 675)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> My emphasis.

The description of this space presents it as outwardly impeccable, placid, kept (nearly) free from any potential disrupters of its order and cleanliness. Still, important to consider is Storm's pointed choice of the conjunction "aber" in this first sentence, which subtly yet effectively conveys the potential of an underlying threat to the domestic order (i.e., to the narrative order).<sup>31</sup> While the author's choice of this particular conjunction in the above description might seem nonsensical, an analysis of the narrative with regard to the tension between order and disorder invests it with new meaning. That "den Duft von frischen Blumensträußen" has the potential to disrupt the stillness of the house (and, as such, of the narrative presented therein) is in fact highly relevant, precisely because the threat to the perceived sense of order in Storm's narrative appears most strikingly in the narrative's botanical dimensions. The threat, that is, emerges with the space of the "Gartenwildnis," a space "outside the text" and, as such, outside of the prescribed narrative of order.

Even though it is the scent of the "Blumensträußen" that first foreshadows this potential threat to narrative order, it is the young daughter of the household, Agnes, who functions as its initial disrupter. The young child first enters the scene after Annie (the "alte sauber gekleidete Dienerin" and first, most obvious maintainer of order) disappears. It is certainly not inconsequential that the female child is presented as immediately on edge, as if she is afraid of being caught; from the beginning, her actions are defined by what would at first appear to be an excessive vigilance and caution. We read, for instance, of her hesitant entrance into the living room: "Einen Augenblick stand sie horchend auf dem Flur; dann drückte sie leise die Tür des Zimmers auf und schlüpfte

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<sup>31</sup> The conjunction appears frequently throughout the story. Downing has also drawn attention to the word, albeit within a different context, writing that it functions "as much as a conjunctive as a disjunctive" (147).

durch die schweren Vorhänge hinein” (VT, 675-6). After entering, Agnes proceeds to “steal” a freshly cut rose – “die geraubte Rose” (VT, 676) – from the living room table, which she will later affix to the frame of her mother’s portrait that hangs in her father’s upstairs study. In the process, the child pricks herself on a rose thorn, and must exercise care so as not to let the blood drip from her arm: “Rasch – denn er wäre fast in das Muster der kostbaren Tischdecke gefallen – sog sie ihn mit ihren Lippen auf” (VT, 676). After adorning the frame of her mother’s portrait with the newly-acquired rose, Agnes is careful to cover her tracks, wiping away her footprints after climbing off of her father’s desk, above which the portrait hangs: “Als ihr das gelungen war, stieg sie rasch wieder zurück und wischte mit ihrem Schnupftuch sorgsam die Spuren ihrer Füßchen von der Tischplatte” (VT, 677). Such gestures, so I would argue, reveal an initial preoccupation with perpetuating the appearance of domestic order and cleanliness. In this respect, Storm’s choice of the word “Spuren” is important to consider. In its more literal meaning, the noun denotes “traces” or “tracks.” However, the figurative meaning of the verb form “spuren” (“to toe the line,” “to conform,” or “to obey”) also subtly conveys the emphasis being placed on heeding to an authoritative power or overarching order.

That the particular site of the child’s attempted order maintenance is in both instances a table (a “Tischdecke” in the former, a “Tischplatte” in the latter) is surely no coincidence. The implications here are significant: the female child removes the traces of her presence, in both cases, from an object associated with the act of writing. Her actions, in other words, reinforce the idea that the site of writing should remain untarnished. Additionally, we read that Agnes is careful not to sully the “Muster” of the “Tischdecke,”

meaning that the “pattern,” “model,” or “example” must remain devoid of any trace of the female child’s presence, her blood.

As I have already suggested, the maintenance of outwardly order that defines the interior space of the family home is strikingly different when compared to the disorderliness and decay of the wild garden, the so-called “Gartenwildnis,” which grows rampant in its unmaintained state. The narrator’s initial descriptions present the garden from the vantage point of the westward-facing window of Rudolf’s “Studierzimmer”:

Der Raum war freilich klein; denn wo das wuchernde Gebüsch sie nicht verdeckte, war von allen Seiten die hohe Umfassungsmauer sichtbar. An dieser, dem Fenster gegenüber, befand sich, in augenscheinlichem Verfall, eine offene Rohrhütte; davor, von dem grünen *Gespinnste einer Klematis* fast bedeckt, stand noch ein Gartenstuhl. Der Hütte gegenüber mußte einst eine Partie von hochstämmigen Rosen gewesen sein; aber sie hingen jetzt wie verdorrte Reiser an den entfärbten Blumenstöcken, während unter ihnen mit unzähligen Rosen bedeckte Zentifolien ihre fallenden Blätter auf Gras und Kraut umherstreuten. (VT, 678)<sup>32</sup>

Forgotten, neglected, in a state of dilapidation, the “Gartenwildnis” clearly functions as a counterpoint to the domestic interior space. Yet the presence of certain elements of domestic life within the garden’s walls (e.g., the “Rosen,” the “Rohrhütte” and the “Gartenstuhl”) forges important connections between these two apparently disparate spaces. In fact, the “Gartenwildnis” seems also to function in part as a foil for the interior space of the family home. From the outset of the novella, we are certainly meant to see the inherent disconnect between these two spaces. Yet Storm’s intent, I believe, is also that we understand them in their interrelatedness. It is Agnes’s character in particular whose actions subtly reinforce this relationship from the very beginning. The female child’s discreet, anxiety-ridden climbing establishes her connection to the image of the garden’s “Klematis,” the etymology of which denotes “a climbing plant.” However, one

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<sup>32</sup> My emphasis.

important difference remains: while the “Klematis” is able to grow, to climb out in the open and in a manner that is entirely unhindered, Agnes must be careful to efface the “Spuren” of her own “climbing.” In this regard, the image of the “Gespinnste” with which the “Klematis” is associated is likewise important to consider, for it alludes to the idea of spinning, of weaving, of *spinnen*, and with it, I believe, to the idea of spinning a yarn (*ein Garn spinnen*), of telling a story (*eine Geschichte erzählen*).<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as we shall soon see, the “Gartenwildnis” represents a veritable space of narration. What is more, the story presented within it could not be more different from that presented within the walls of the family’s home.

#### Male histories, female anti-histories

If the interior space of the home represents not only a space within the narrative, but also functions as narrative, then it is justifiable to argue that Agnes’s climbing (particularly because of the connection this establishes between the girl and the garden clematis) constitutes an (undesirable) infiltration of the narrative presented within the domestic interior. In order to better understand the nature of this particular narrative, and the reasons why the young girl’s actions should represent a threat to its order, I would like to consider once more Webber’s reflections on the novella in its relationship to history. According to Webber, we recall, the genre is “in a key sense anti-historical”; that is, it “counter[s] the sort of historical narrative which the nineteenth century might be expected to provide of its own development: a history of coherent progression.”<sup>34</sup> As I would suggest, it is precisely such an idea of history as “coherent progression” that is subtly

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<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed account of the etymology of the word “Gespinnst,” see Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 4.1.2 (1897), 4155-6.

<sup>34</sup> Webber, “Double Agencies,” 233.

emphasized within the interior space of the family's home. Juxtaposed to this is the exterior, "extratextual" space of the "Gartenwildnis," which functions as an anti-history of sorts, a counterpoint to the "official" narrative of (a very specific) history presented within the space of the home.

In this respect, we should first note Rudolf's occupation as "Altertumsforscher." Not only does the male protagonist's profession as antiquary allow for an association of the interior space of the home (and his "Studierzimmer" in particular) with the past and the traditionally masculine ideals of reason, science, and logic; the scientific practice of archaeology also stresses the idea of a narrativizable history. Still more than this, the antiquarian's study of past relics also subtly underscores the idea of a history based on progress. This specific idea of history – history as driven by reason and progress – is reinforced by the novella's repeated emphasis on both calendar and clock time, which determine the narrative trajectory of the interior setting in important ways. What presents itself within the space of the home is a notion of history as a narrative of logical, teleological progression. Furthermore, it is a notion of history that is grounded in the act of reproduction, a notion of history in which the main function of woman is inextricably tied to her capacity as reproductive agent. To enter into this history, woman must assume the role of mother. We see this reflected not only in Ines's fervent and incessant desire to be a mother, but also in her stepdaughter's repeated playacting as "mother." Indeed, Nesi's refusal to call her new stepmother "Mutter" would seem, at least in part, to betray the child's own maternal impulses. In general, it seems clear that what is repeatedly stressed within the domestic interior space is a teleological female sexuality, in other words, a female sexuality oriented toward reproduction.

Contrasted with this male narrative of coherent historical progression, or teleological female sexuality, is the narrative presented within the space of the “Gartenwildnis,” a space that exists outside of the historical/temporal categories that govern the interior realm of the home. Having been excluded from the rest of the property, and with it, from the male narrative of (female) history, the garden presents itself as anti-history, much like the realist novella, which, as Webber has noted, “might be called an anti-history or the antagonistic double of the official version.”<sup>35</sup> Importantly, the garden is coded as a feminine space (as opposed to the masculine aura of the interior space). Its strong association with certain female characters (most notably Nesi’s mother and grandmother, both of whom have also been excluded from the narrative) hints at the existence of an underlying female narrative that runs parallel to (yet is pointedly excluded from) the “official” historical narrative presented within the domestic interior. If we consider the space of the garden (as ahistorical space) in its relationship to Webber’s understanding of the realist novella (as a genre that is “in a key sense anti-historical”), then it is justifiable to argue that what is most “real” is not what has been included within, but rather what has been excluded from the “official” account of history.<sup>36</sup>

As ahistorical outlier, the “Gartenwildnis” constitutes a disordered, non-teleological counterpoint to the well-ordered and purpose-driven narrative of “woman” as reproductive agent that is perpetuated within the family home. Its association with unruly, overgrown, dynamic images of nature presents it as an undesirable reflection of a very different image of “woman,” one that must be contained (and excluded) so that the

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<sup>35</sup> Webber, “Double Agencies,” 234.

<sup>36</sup> Importantly, the “Gartenwildnis” is not only a space of untamed, non-teleological female sexuality, but also a shrine to Marie, a place that is intimately associated with (her) death (as “ein Grab” and “ein Garten der Vergangenheit”). Rudolf’s study also functions as a shrine to his deceased first wife, as Ines notes on one occasion, yet it is static and constructed, whereas the garden is dynamic and natural.



semblance of domestic order (i.e., the ordered integrity of the male narrative of “woman” foregrounded within the home) might be preserved.<sup>37</sup> The primary threat of the “Gartenwildnis” lies, moreover, in its pointedly non-teleological orientation, its descriptions foregrounding an aimless growth, one without pattern or direction. As the “wild” in the German word “Wildnis” makes explicit, it is an undomesticated and thus also a dangerous space, which embodies an altogether different narrative of non-teleological female sexuality, a female sexuality devoid of reproductive impulse.

In order to substantiate this argument, we might begin by looking at the competing images of “woman” presented in *Viola tricolor*, which display not only physical differences, but also present significant symbolic distinctions.<sup>38</sup> Lorenz’s attempt to develop a character typology across Storm’s oeuvre has shown that female figures within the author’s prose works fall into one of two categories with regard to the coloration of their physical attributes: on the one hand, there is the blond-haired, blue-eyed girl; on the other, the black-/brown-haired, black-/brown-eyed girl.<sup>39</sup> The reader encounters both female character types in *Viola tricolor*: Marie’s image is described as

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<sup>37</sup> Within the “Studierzimmer,” the frame serves a different yet related symbolic function: that is, it serves as a medium of inclusion, a container that allows for the male subject’s possession of the female as “object” and, as such, for the perpetuation of a narrative of “woman” in keeping with the ordered façade of the interior space.

<sup>38</sup> Competing images of femininity appear elsewhere within the author’s oeuvre, for instance in *Im Nachbarhause links*. Not only does a similar constellation of elements (the framed portrait, the wild, overgrown garden, and the wall) appear within this text; the reader also encounters two disparate visual representations of the text’s female protagonist (the “Nachbarin” of the “Nachbarhaus links”) that interact in significant ways with the novella’s frame motif. Introduced first is the reproduction of her youthful image as portrait, surrounded by a silver frame, which remains hidden away in the possession of her childhood companion, lusted after by his pubescent grandson years later. As in *Viola tricolor*, this static, constructed, even coveted image of woman is contrasted with another image of the same (now elderly) woman encountered in the narrative present, an image explicitly connected to the overgrown, weed-ridden garden that lies behind her present-day home, severed from her neighbor’s property by an exceedingly high wall. Principles of inclusion and exclusion function similarly: the first image is included within, the other excluded from a certain male narrative of “woman” whose very identity is based on exclusion.

<sup>39</sup> Lorenz, *Varianz und Invarianz*.

“goldblond” with “blaue Kinderaugen,” while both Nesi and Ines are ascribed darker, brunette features.

Lorenz’s suggestion that “Braune/schwarze Mädchen...sind stärker mit ‘Natur’ verbunden als blonde Mädchen” is compelling within the context of our present discussions, particularly if we consider Nesi’s association with roses and the clematis, as well as her stepmother’s fanatical desire to enter the “Gartenwildnis.”<sup>40</sup> The association of these two female figures with dynamic images of nature makes it all the more significant that the blond-haired, blue-eyed Marie is presented as a static, constructed image. Yet we should not forget that the space of the “Gartenwildnis” was once Marie’s space, one where she spent much of her time while alive. Indeed, it was the garden of her own childhood, having once belonged to the property of her paternal home. As such, the blond-haired, blue-eyed Marie was once also associated with (dynamic) images of nature; and it is her daughter’s decision to affix the rose to the now static image of her countenance that is meant, in part, to remind us of this fact.

Still, the image of the now deceased woman enshrined within the home of her husband and his new wife could not be more different. Quite the opposite of those dynamic images of nature with which she was once associated, Marie’s form has now been reduced to that of a static construction, suspended in a child-like state with her “blaue Kinderaugen.” The golden color of her portrait’s frame not only mirrors the “goldblond” color of her hair, but also reinforces her status as a secularized icon within the space of the domestic interior.<sup>41</sup> The iconoclastic power of the image is particularly

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>41</sup> In other texts by Storm, the particular color and material composition of the frame also functions symbolically. In *Aquis submersus*, for instance, the frames encountered are made predominantly of wood. As an organic material subject to natural processes of decay, one frame is even pointedly described as “von

evident in the case of the story's male protagonist, Rudolf, who chooses to arrange his "Studierzimmer," as we learn from Ines, "wie in einer Kapelle" (VT, 690). I would suggest, moreover, that the static, constructed reproduction of Marie's image is irrevocably tied to a male narrative of "woman" as both maternal *and* virginal – an idea reinforced in particular by Storm's pointed choice of the name "Marie."

The title of Storm's novella should also be considered with respect to this particular narrative of "woman." While it is certainly meant to focus readers' attention on the botanical dimensions of the text, also significant is the fact that the plant from which the story takes its title (the *Viola tricolor*) is hermaphroditic, or self-fertile, by nature. In this respect, a connection emerges between the *Viola tricolor* (as self-fertile plant) and Marie (as a famously "self-fertile" figure). Marie's status as a symbol of self-fertility (in other words, as a de-sexualized maternal figure) reinforces the male narrative of "woman" presented within the home, a narrative that includes the female in her capacity as reproductive object, but pointedly excludes the narrative of the female as sexual subject.

The inherent similarities between Marie's image and its associated narrative are also important to consider. In both cases, the act of reproduction should be emphasized. As reproduction, the female image corresponds to a certain narrative of "woman" that has likewise been reproduced. It is a male narrative that emphasizes woman's function in her reproductive capacity, yet also deemphasizes the sexual act, a narrative told in the service of perpetuating a set of patriarchal, heteronormative ideals in order to reinforce a notion

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den Würmern schon zerfressen" (965). I would suggest, moreover, that the physical features of the frames (in particular their being in a state of decay) is meant to parallel the decomposition of "the frame" that occurs at the symbolic level. In this respect, we might also consider Storm's *Eekenhof*, where the image of the dark, wooden frame strengthens the association of portraiture with death.

of ordered, teleological, historical progression/female reproduction. It is no coincidence, moreover, that the space in which the reproduction of Marie's image exists likewise promotes a notion of historical "progression" grounded in reproduction, and not only through its emphasis on female reproductive capacity, but also through the repeated introduction of a very specific narrative of "woman" in her capacity as reproductive object. The irony, however, is that neither the image nor the narrative that surrounds that image has anything at all to do with notions of progress. Rather, both exist as artifacts within the cultivated space of the erudite "Alterumsforscher," a space not unlike a museum, where objects and narratives alike exist in a frozen state of enduring sameness. The static environment of the domestic interior, accompanied by the likewise unchanging narrative of "woman" as virginal mother, must furthermore be understood in its pointed juxtaposition to the exterior (extratextual, ahistorical) space of the "Gartenwildnis." While the former is defined precisely by its lack of change and an omnipresence of human constructs, the "Gartenwildnis" changes and grows, and is thus very different from the constructed image/narrative of "woman" presented within the house, which is suspended in a state of perpetual stasis.

While it is clear that an inherent disconnect exists between these two spaces (a disconnect symbolized in large part by the frame), their interrelatedness is also foregrounded, as our discussion of Agnes's act of climbing and the novella's title has shown. Storm encourages readers, I believe, to understand these two spaces (and their associated narratives) not as mutually exclusive, but as interconnected. In this respect, one might consider the repeated introduction of certain elements throughout the novella, the most notable of which are the frame and the rose. The recurrence of these and other

objects across various narrative spaces is intended to forge an implicit connection not only between the “Gartenwildnis” and the interior space of the house, but also between three distinct tableaux – the “Gartenwildnis,” the living room, and Rudolf’s “Studierzimmer.” The most obvious point of commonality is the frame: in the space of the living room, it is the frame of the Venetian mirror; in the “Studierzimmer,” the gilded frame that adorns Marie’s portrait; finally, the “Gartenwildnis” is framed by the “Umfassungsmauer.” Additionally, roses appear in each space at various points throughout the narrative. In fact, I would argue that the red rose serves as the most important “roter Faden” in Storm’s attempt to connect these three spaces. The rose first appears within and is later taken (i.e., “stolen”) from the space of the living room, and yet it is also, importantly, associated with the space of the garden. For this reason, Agnes’s gesture of affixing the rose to the frame of her mother’s portrait is highly symbolic, for it reinforces the connection between these three spaces. More specifically, the rose establishes an important relationship between Marie and the “Gartenwildnis,” and in so doing, between two seemingly disparate narratives of “woman.”<sup>42</sup> Yet the rose is not the only red object encountered in the narrative. Shortly after the initial presentation of the roses, which take the form of a neatly ordered “Blumenstrauss” atop the living room table, the color presents itself once again with the image of Agnes’s bloody arm, which the young girl accidentally pricks on the thorn of a rose. Understood against the backdrop of an “ahistorical” narrative of “woman” that underlies the story’s main narrative, the young girl’s pricking of her arm (coupled with her subsequent efforts to conceal its traces) takes on new meaning. Lorenz has argued that, within Storm’s prose, “Rote

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<sup>42</sup> In this way, *Viola tricolor* provides an important counterexample to Lorenz’s theory that “die Farbe Rot [ist] fest an ‘braun/schwarz’ gebunden; rote Gegenstände kommen bei blonden Mädchen nie vor” (123).

Gegenstände...konnotieren den Bereich 'Erotik.'"<sup>43</sup> Against this critical backdrop, Downing has suggested in similar fashion that "the opening image of the pricked red blood and stolen rose mark [Nesi], too – even especially – as a sexually vital child."<sup>44</sup> It is an idea used by Downing to substantiate his theory that there is a "pattern of incest"<sup>45</sup> that lies beneath the story's superficial narrative, a pattern that has been effectively effaced, even repressed, from the main narrative of the story.<sup>46</sup>

#### Narrative effacement and the patriarchal writing surface

Like Downing's, my analysis has also shown that there is another narrative that has been and continues to be excluded, suppressed, even possibly repressed. Whether or not this untold narrative involves the act of incest is uncertain (although Downing certainly argues convincingly in favor of this). What is most important, I believe, is that there is something being excluded, and furthermore, that this exclusion (even active suppression or repression) is integral to preserving the ordered integrity of the main (male) narrative. Illuminating as Downing's analysis is, he does not take into account the importance of Nesi's subsequent, concerted efforts to maintain order. Also consequential to my analysis is that the site of the female child's attempted order maintenance occurs in both instances on surfaces associated with the act of writing. Storm's choice of these two specific and highly similar surfaces is nothing if not intentional; we are thereby told that Agnes must not let the traces of her presence tarnish the male apparatus of literary production. More

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<sup>43</sup> Lorenz, *Varianz und Invarianz*, 122.

<sup>44</sup> Downing, "Second Wives," 162.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The history of Rudolf's sexual interest in younger women (i.e., Marie and Ines), as well as "the complex (and often unrecognized, or repressed) pattern of mirrorings across generations that competes and colludes with the pattern of mirrorings between wives" (162), are likewise cited by Downing in support of this argument.

specifically, we learn that the female child must not tarnish the “Muster” (the pattern, model, or example) with her blood (the sign of menses and latent sexuality). Ultimately, female sexuality is the narrative that has remained untold, unincorporated. It is, moreover, what has remained (and must continue to remain) unwritten so that the main narrative, as “Muster” of ordered integrity, might remain unsullied.

Signs of narrative erasure leave their traces not only at the level of the story’s content, but also at its structural level. Here I would argue once again that Storm’s novella presents a narrative or structural frame, whose exclusory function with regard to the embedded narrative (i.e., Ines’s childhood story) is analogous to that of the “Umfassungsmauer.” In other words, *Viola tricolor* tells not one, but two narratives (one included, the other excluded). This is evident not only at the level of content, but also at the narrative’s structural level, where a perceived threat (in the form of seemingly innocent childhood story) is actively suppressed in order to preserve the purity of the main narrative.

To reiterate, the main narrative presented at the level of the story’s content foregrounds a constructed image of “woman,” one that not only emphasizes teleological sexuality (i.e., woman in her reproductive capacity), but also simultaneously erases the traces of non-teleological female sexuality in an effort to maintain its image of purity (i.e., in order to preserve the purity of “Marie”). At the structural level, too, this narrative of a non-teleological female sexuality – if it is not entirely suppressed or excluded – is, at the very least, presented in highly distorted form. The frame’s role is crucial with regard to the underlying symbolism of Ines’s story. In fact, the figure (in particular its

“breaking”) comes to encapsulate the very idea of a non-teleological (i.e. non-reproductive) female sexuality.

Ines’s story is the only extended narrative embedded within the narrative frame, and, we might add, the only story told by a female character. Hers is a tale that is finally told only with extreme apprehension and accompanied by intense feelings of shame – “ich schäme mich” (VT, 695), Ines tells Rudolf, and we might ask ourselves why. The following is subsequently recounted by Ines to her new husband:

“Es war, glaub ich, an meinem dreizehnten Geburtstag; ich hatte mich ganz in das Kind, in den kleinen Christus verliebt, ich mochte meine Puppen nicht mehr ansehen...meine Mutter hatte mir ein Bild geschenkt, eine Madonna mit dem Kinde; es hing hübsch eingerahmt über meinem Arbeitstischchen in der Wohnstube...Ich hatte an jenem Tage nur Augen für das Christkind; auch nachmittags, als meine Gespielinnen da waren; ich schlich mich heimlich hin und küßte das Glas vor seinem kleinen Munde — — es war mir ganz, als wenn's lebendig wäre — — hätte ich es nur auch wie die Mutter auf dem Bild in meine Arme nehmen können!... Aber — — in der Nacht, die darauf folgte, muß ich auch im Traume aufgestanden sein; denn am anderen Morgen fanden sie mich in meinem Bette, das Bild in beiden Armen, mit meinem Kopf auf dem zerdrückten Glase eingeschlafen.” (VT, 695-6)

I am certainly not the first to draw attention to Ines’s story. Others have noted its importance with regard to the narrative as a whole, but focus is not so much on the frame as it is on the picture of the Madonna, hardly surprising considering that “Marie” was the name of Rudolf’s first wife. Criticism’s general tendency, as I understand it, has been to read the story as a reflection of the present-day predicament faced by Ines. In other words, most have tended towards an understanding of Ines’s story as a literal instantiation of her present-day desire to “become Marie.” Marshall’s reading suggests, for instance, that “The desire to possess the child by merging physically with the image of Marie is faithfully reflected in Ines’s struggle to assume her role in the household through the



mediation and model of the dead first wife.”<sup>47</sup> In general, we might say that scholarship has viewed the story with a tunnel vision of sorts, blinded by the significance of the image and, in particular, the repetition of the name “Marie.” However accurate such readings may be, much still remains to be said about the importance of Ines’s story. In fact, the image is not the only point of commonality between the female protagonist’s story and the narrative present; importantly, the frame also appears in both. To be fair, in the latter instance, the frame takes the form of the “Umfassungsmauer” that surrounds the “Gartenwildnis,” arguably making it more difficult to recognize as such. Still, in both instances, the frame functions primarily as a medium of exclusion. In both instances, we might add, Ines is unable to merge with the object of her desire (whether the “Gartenwildnis” or the image of the Madonna and Child) because of the – at least initially, in one instance – impermeable nature of the frame.

An examination of the specific function of the frame in Ines’s childhood tale should help to further elucidate the story’s underlying meaning.<sup>48</sup> Foregrounded in Ines’s tale are images of kissing and a bed, which might seem innocuous enough were it not for the presence of the glass and frame. With it, we encounter the age-old representation of female virginity as an unbroken vessel. In the case of Ines’s story, the glass is not only broken; it is crushed (“zerdrückt”). Here, an iconic image of chastity, of female purity, has its “glass” broken. With this image of an arguably violent loss of female purity (brought about, importantly, through an act of female agency) surfaces once again the idea that what is being concealed, what is being actively and intentionally covered over,

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<sup>47</sup> Marshall, “Betrothal,” 41.

<sup>48</sup> Downing’s critical engagement with the text forges strong connections between the female protagonist’s story and the preceding dream sequence, both of which, he argues, foreground “the crucial constellation painting/mother/death” (147). While Downing notes “the unmistakably sexual nature” (145) of the dream sequence, his analysis does not take into account the likewise highly sexual nature of Ines’s tale.

is the presence of another, latent narrative that seeks to establish woman's innate sexuality. The "glass" is shattered, and with it, the purity of the narrative of "woman" herself as a sacred, pure, virginal object of the male imagination. Yet at the same time, we must underscore the fact that Ines does not become "mother" (at the symbolic level, we are told that she is unable to merge with the image of the Madonna and Child). In this way, a message of a different (i.e., non-teleological) type of female sexuality is presented. Here too, it is significant that the image of the first Marie originally hung above Ines's childhood desk, just as the image of the second Marie later hangs above Rudolf's own writing apparatus. The association of each image with the space of writing establishes clear parallels between the female image and its accompanying narrative; at the same time, it points to the idea of narrative voice and authorship. In the former instance (i.e., in Ines's story), it is the female voice (and with it, the notion of woman as authorial agent) that seeks to assert itself, albeit obscurely.

That any explicit indication of this "other" narrative is covered over by means of such vague allusions is reason enough to argue that its existence represents a veritable threat to the ordered integrity of the male narrative of "woman" that has been carefully established within the narrative frame. Just as Ines is unable to merge with an image of woman that functions as a discursive construct of the male imagination, so too is the story of the original loss of purity excluded from the story's main narrative, one which presents the same image of "woman" in its devotion to the new, secular icon of a second "Marie."<sup>49</sup> Yet as I have previously suggested, the traces of this other narrative are not

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<sup>49</sup> See also David A. Jackson, *Theodor Storm: The Life and Works of a Democratic Humanitarian* (New York: Berg, 1992). Jackson has suggested that, "From *Veronica* onwards Storm builds up a new iconography to replace the Christian one. Indeed, part of the challenge facing promoters of a post-Christian world view was to create a body of images and symbols that would command the same devotion as their

entirely absent. To discover them, one must look beneath the surface, to the image of the broken glass, and even and much earlier to the image of Nesi's bleeding arm, which as others, Downing in particular, have argued is indicative of the female child's latent sexuality.

A reading of Ines's childhood story as such seems to explain her consistent yearning, as an adult, to enter into the space of the "Gartenwildnis," symbolic of her (repressed) desire to reincorporate this unincorporated narrative, the traces of which have also been all but erased. As we will see, the family's entrance into the newly reopened garden at the end of the story marks another moment of violent penetration, thereby repeating the original moment of "loss."

#### Narrative subversions: writing on the body, writing with the body

As I would like to suggest, Ines's incessant desire to enter into the paradisiacal space of the "Gartenwildnis" is not only symbolic of her attempt to reincorporate this long-forgotten, virtually effaced narrative of female sexuality, but also reflects her growing need to take possession of and thus reestablish herself as a subject within her own history. A move toward the "Gartenwildnis" thus represents a symbolic departure from the female's status as object within the male-driven narrative of "woman" that has long been established within the walls of the family home. At the same time, it symbolizes the possibility of a newly rediscovered narrative voice for the female character.

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Christian counterparts. At the same time they had to destroy the awe attached to key Christian symbols and sacraments" (110-11). As Jackson furthermore suggests, Storm's "critique of Christian categories" (112) leads to his replacement of religious with secular iconography. In the case of *Viola tricolor*, the religious image of the Madonna that once hung in Ines's childhood home is replaced by the secular image of another "Marie" that now hangs in the house that Ines shares with her husband and stepdaughter. The symbolism, however, remains the same; religious and secular iconography is used to promote a notion of "woman" that reinforces a male narrative of "woman" as pure, virginal mother.

Yet Ines's desire to enter this space is repeatedly thwarted until the end of the novella, and even then the symbolism surrounding her entrance into the garden remains unclear at best. We have seen that the preservation of a certain male narrative of "woman" takes precedence within the space of the home. So deeply ingrained is it that the female characters themselves become active participants in its perpetuation: Nesi eradicates the traces of her presence from various writing surfaces, while her new stepmother conceals the true nature of her story by means of vague allusions to a pivotal sexual moment in her childhood. All that has been erased, all that has been and continues to be actively concealed and excluded is reflected in the image of the likewise excluded "Gartenwildnis," a disorderly, non-teleological, and for this reason dangerous counterpoint to the orderliness of the home and its accompanying narrative of "woman." That the gate to this garden should on one occasion be described as "verborgen" (VT, 688) is telling: it is concealed, but still more than this, Storm's choice of this particular word once again presents the possibility of a latent ("verborgen") narrative that lies beneath the story's superficial level. The descriptions of the garden itself (the author's repetitive use of adjectives such as "verdeckt" and "bedeckt") provide further evidence of the possibility that something is being concealed. The gate (that which is "verborgen") remains locked for nearly the entire story, and although there is a key, it remains, as one might expect, in Rudolf's – the male's – possession. During a moment of crucial importance, Rudolf puts this key in his new wife's hand, but she refuses to take it, preferring to wait, so she tells him, until "wir zusammen hingehen" (VT, 691), as if to suggest either her reluctance to disrupt the status quo or her own unwillingness to take possession of this other narrative.

However successful such efforts to maintain the appearance of order might seem, these do not preclude attempts at narrative subversion, moments, moreover, which elucidate the presence of another narrative that runs parallel to the story's main one. While Ines and Nesi both appear outwardly compliant with efforts geared toward maintaining the status quo, certain actions, Nesi's in particular, also reflect a critical stance with regard to the narrative "rules" that have been established within the patriarchal realm of the home.<sup>50</sup> The female child's actions foreground a refusal to repeat the patriarchal vision of "woman" that, although unspoken, nonetheless dominates the space of the home. In a sense, Nesi's act of erasure must be understood as acquiescence; however, it is not for naught that Storm chooses to foreground the initial presence of her tracks, a type of "female writing," a writing with the body, that also leaves its lasting imprint, as the meaning of the word "Spuren" suggests.

Other moments within the narrative present a similar repositioning of the female with regard to the act of writing. Such moments bear witness to a shift in narrative power structures, whereby the female emerges in her new role as literary subject and authorial agent. On one particularly significant occasion, Rudolf and Ines peer out of the westward-facing window of Rudolf's "Studierzimmer" down upon the other garden belonging to the family's property, that is, the larger, unenclosed garden. There they see Nesi, who is engaged in a game with Nero, the family's dog. What the couple sees is described as follows: "Drunten auf dem Steige, der um den grossen Rasen führte, sass ein schwarzer Neufundländer; vor ihm stand Nesi und beschrieb mit einer ihrer schwarzen

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<sup>50</sup> Downing also focuses on the subversive potential of the story's youngest female protagonist, albeit within the context of his own argument, writing that it is "Nesi, who initially and most insistently resists the impulse toward repetition and substitution" (137-8). Downing is of course correct to note that Nesi's actions foreground a resistance to repetition. However, I believe that it is the patriarchal narrative of "woman" that emerges as the main object of the child's critical opposition.

Flechten einen immer engeren Kreis um seine Nase. Dann warf der Hund den Kopf zurück und bellte und Nesi lachte und begann das Spiel vom neuem” (VT, 681). Elsewhere, “woman” is framed both literally and figurately, yet Nesi’s “game” positions the female child as an active “framer” with respect to her male companion, as she repeatedly tightens (“*beschrieb*”) her braid in a circular movement around the dog’s nose.

Although Nero certainly occupies a liminal role within the narrative, it is important to consider the dog’s particular function as the only other male character (aside from Rudolf) within the family structure. If it seems an overstatement to call the dog a family member, we should remember that Nero assumes the role of an “Ersatzvater” on more than one occasion, especially interesting considering the story’s presentation of so many “Ersatzfiguren.” We read, for instance, of the joy with which Nesi lets the canine pull her “Puppenwagen,” an image that presents an alternative family structure in which Nesi is cast as the mother, Nero as the father. In fact, it is justifiable to argue that the dog functions largely as a foil for Nesi’s own father: the etymology of the name “Rudolf,” the roots of which mean “fame” and “wolf,” highlights a connection between the man and the dog, both of whom, we might say, are presented as domesticated “wolves.” The respective characterization of each figure also presents one very important point of contrast: whereas Rudolf occupies the professional role of “Alttertumsforscher,” Nero is a “Neufundländer.” This semantic juxtaposition of the two male characters as “old” and “new” reinforces Rudolf’s association with the past. What is more, Nero’s character functions as a vehicle for the establishment of a new conception of “woman,” one that stands in opposition to the antiquated notion of “woman” that exists within the space of the antiquarian’s “Studierzimmer.”

In fact, what first appears to be a child's game with the family dog ultimately functions as an important gesture of narrative subversion. As the literal meaning of "Neufundländer" implies, new territory is being entered, one in which the female emerges in her newly (re-)found status as literary subject, as an authorial agent who engages in an act of textual production. Nesi's instrumentalization of her "Flechten" is crucial to consider in this regard, not least of all because the object appears elsewhere. We should remember, moreover, that the "Flechten" receives emphasis during an earlier, lengthier description of Marie's portrait, where we read that "die goldblonden Flechten [lagen] über der klaren Stirn" (VT, 677). The etymology of the German word "Flechten" (meaning "texere") shows how the subject of writing, of textual production or weaving, is subtly broached once again. Whereas Nesi's "Flechten" is actively instrumentalized for use in her "game" with Nero, Marie's "Flechten" simply lies on her forehead. In other words, Marie functions passively, her body a dead image on which a certain narrative (her "Flechten" as "texere") has been written, and in fact has been written for her, without her consent. That the female body serves as writing apparatus is made explicit when we are told, during one of Rudolf's recollections to Ines, that Marie's actual body was moved to his "Studierzimmer" postmortem, and that her body was laid in the place of his desk. Thus, the female body becomes synonymous with, serves as a substitute for, the male writing apparatus. In stark contrast to this, the child's game presents the female as an active agent of textual production. Traditional roles are reversed, power hierarchies shift, and the female child emerges as authorial subject. Importantly, she chooses to write her own "narrative" (her "Flechten" as "texere") on the body of a male character that functions as a foil for her father, whose own, very different narrative of "woman" is

written on the female body, a hardened relic of the past like so many others within the space of his study. Nesi's "writing" thus marks a shift from a *writing on* the female body to a *writing with* the female body, a corporeal script meant to sully the superficial cleanliness of the patriarchal writing apparatus.

This idea of the female as active narrative participant and authorial agent surfaces once again at a later point, in a scene in which Ines maintains her desire to narrate to Nesi the story of her mother. Toward the close of the narrative, shortly after giving birth, Ines cheerfully proposes the following to Rudolf: "Und Nesi! Ich erzähl ihr wieder von ihrer Mutter, was ich von dir gehört habe; - was für ihr Alter passt, Rudolf, nur das -" (VT, 702). Ines's desire to narrate reflects her aspiration to enter into the narrative as subject; what she seems to desire, that is, is a genuine narrative voice, which she has previously been denied. Yet what she tells her stepdaughter will be nothing more than a repetition of what she has heard from her husband ("was ich von dir gehört habe"), and as such, a repetition of the patriarchal notion of "woman" that has already been established. Importantly, this narrative will also be subject to an intentional process of exclusion (Nesi will only hear "was für ihr Alter passt...nur das"). Storm's pointed choice to end Ines's sentence with two hyphens presents visual evidence of what has been and will continue to be omitted from the constructed narrative of "Marie." Once again, the female is denied (and even, we might say, denies herself) a genuine narrative voice and a place as authorial agent. As becomes increasingly clear, it is Nesi, and not her stepmother, whose character presents the underlying potential for genuine narrative subversion. Although their names are linked anagrammatically, a fact to which Ines draws attention only at the very end of the story, these two figures are essentially different, particularly with respect



to their capacity for narrative destabilization. Their names, like the characters themselves, are outwardly very similar. Yet just as “Ines” and “Nesi” are not palindromes, neither are these two female figures meant to be understood as mirror images of one another.

We should recall, moreover, that it is the young girl’s actions that first elucidate the existence of another story that has been nearly effaced from the space within the home, and as such, the space “within the text.” As the initial disrupter of the domestic idyll, Nesi is cast as a figure of subversion from the very beginning. In a story defined by a consistent, yet prohibited desire to transgress “the frame,” the child is the first character to engage in an act of transgression. At the outset of the novella, we learn of the ease with which her mirror image crosses the threshold of the living room mirror frame: “über dem Sofa leuchtete wie Silber ein venezianischer Spiegel auf der dunkelgrünen Sammettapete. In dieser Einsamkeit schien er nur dazu bestimmt, das Bild eines frischen Rosenstraußes zurückzugeben, der in einer Marmorvase auf dem Sofatische stand. Bald aber erschien in seinem Rahmen auch das dunkle Kinderköpfchen” (VT, 676). Strengthening the latent significance of this scene is Storm’s purposeful ascription of the name “Agnes” to his young female protagonist. The etymology of her name – the Latin “agnus” meaning “lamb,” its Greek derivation denoting chastity, purity, and sacredness – certainly implies a connection between the girl and her mother, whose image functions as the epitome of “woman” as pure, chaste, and sacred. More importantly, however, the name also introduces the possibility that the female child functions as a Christ figure.<sup>51</sup> As her appellation suggests, Agnes is meant to represent a reincarnated “Agnus Dei,” a female

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<sup>51</sup> As others have noted, the combination of certain elements (i.e., the rose and the blood) strengthens the connection between the child and Christ.

savior whose “coming” effectively subverts a male narrative of female identity based on exclusion.

The female child’s synchronous presentation as both self and mirror image represents a crucial moment within the broader context of the narrative, the doubling of her figure functioning as a visual instantiation of the “ambiguous foundations” out of which identity originates.<sup>52</sup> The scene presents the idea that the female child exists both “inside” and “outside.” Presented both within edges of the frame and outside of them, Nesi appears simultaneously both inside the home and outside of it, that is, within the space of the garden, “framed” together with the image of the “Rosenstrauss.” By implication, she also exists both “inside the text” and “outside” of it; as a figure of subversion, she is both included within and necessarily excluded from the main narrative of the story. That the space outside the home (and “outside the text”) should appear inside the home (and “inside the text”) furthermore presents the idea that the border between “inside” and “outside” is not rigid; rather, it is permeable, perhaps even soluble. In this sense, the scene functions also as a prefiguration of the family’s joint transgression of the “Umfassungsmauer” at the end of the novella, in which what was once a rigid boundary ultimately becomes permeable.

That the border between “inside” and “outside” is not rigid, but permeable presents the possibility of a likewise more permeable relationship between “inside” and “outside” with regard to identity formation and self-definition. This casts doubt on the validity of a stable, abiding (female) identity, an identity that in Storm’s novella is based on the maintenance of rigid boundaries between “inside” and “outside.” If the fictional narrative perpetuated by Storm’s text centers on the existence of a certain unwavering

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<sup>52</sup> Webber, “Double Agencies,” 285.

female identity, then the underlying reality unearthed by Nesi's transgression is that this does not exist, precisely because that which is "outside" is always already "inside." Whether it is the "Umfassungsmauer" that severs the "Gartenwildnis" from rest of the family's property, or the gold frame that adorns Marie's portrait, or the frame of the "venezianischer Spiegel," the frame provides the residual evidence of certain processes of exclusion that have been undertaken in order to produce the appearance of a well-ordered identity. The figure symbolizes a divide, an internal rift, a lack of cohesion, pointing, moreover, to an absence of internal continuity, to the unstable foundations out of which identity emerges. In allowing "the outside in," Storm's novella presents the idea that such a divide is not natural but constructed; the idea that the constitution of the subject emerges out of a state of imagined, actively constructed difference, in opposition to an Other against which the (in this case female) subject is defined. Nesi's gesture of transgression thereby presents the idea that self-definition does not emerge out of a state of order. Rather, identity materializes out of a state of disorder in which seemingly disparate elements comeingle. What is more, the child's act of subversion points to the idea that the constitution of "the self" is the result of an unnatural process of expulsion and exclusion of certain elements that appear at variance with one another. As a result, the subject comes to exist both "inside" and "outside," or perhaps more accurately, she exists neither inside nor outside of a constructed discourse that has been imposed upon her.

Narrative “resolution” and the dissolution of boundaries

Still, the question remains as to whether these tensions between order and disorder, exclusion and inclusion, tensions that define the narrative from the very beginning, are ever ultimately resolved in any meaningful way. Nesi’s gesture hints at the possibility of such a resolution in the opening mirror scene, her transgression alluding to the potential of a (narrative) identity based not on exclusion or inclusion, but on the mutual penetration of interior and exterior spaces of (narrative) subjectivity. Moments such as this one serve to subvert the perception of narrative order, precisely because they elucidate the underpinnings of that order; they present the possibility of a more fluid conception not only of narrative, but also of gendered identity, the potential for a more permeable relationship between “inside” and “outside.” As I have argued, the child’s act of transgression also presents an image that foreshadows the family’s joint transgression of the “Umfassungsmauer” at the end of the story, a transgression that results in Ines’s long-desired-after entrance into the space of the “Gartenwildnis.”

At first glance, the family’s entrance into the wild garden would seem to yield a much-needed resolution of previous narrative tensions. The gate to the garden is unlocked, and a hitherto excluded space becomes accessible once again. The final passage of the text leaves us with the image of Rudolf and Ines, who, we are told, hear “Kinderstimmen von der Pforte her; kleine zum Herzen dringende Laute, die noch keine Worte waren, und ein helles ‘Hü!’ und ‘Hott!’ von Nesis kräftiger Stimme. Und unter dem Vorspann des getreuen Nero, behütet von der alten Dienerin, hielt die fröhliche Zukunft des Hauses ihren Einzug in den Garten der Vergangenheit” (VT, 705). One’s initial inclination is to understand this as an inherently optimistic moment, both forward-

looking and progressive in its outlook. As boundaries dissolve, “interior” and “exterior” become one, and the once latent narrative of female sexuality, a narrative that has been present all along, finally receives its voice. Before jumping too quickly to such conclusions, however, we should remind ourselves that it is Rudolf, and not Ines, who finally opens the door to the “Gartenwildnis,” for the narrator tells us the following:

Um eine Handbreit stand die Pforte offen; aber sie war an der Binnenseite *von blühendem Geranke* überstrickt; Ines wandte alle ihre Kräfte auf, es knisterte und knickte auch dahinter; aber die Pforte blieb gefangen. “Du musst!” sagte sie endlich, indem sie lächelnd und erschöpft zu ihrem Mann emporblickte. Die Männerhand erzwang den vollen Eingang; dann legte Rudolf das zerrissene Gesträuch sorgsam nach beiden Seiten zurück. (VT, 703)<sup>53</sup>

Against this backdrop, the final scene’s underlying symbolism now seems highly questionable at best. It is a moment of forceful and, in the end, highly destructive male penetration that precedes the family’s entrance into the garden, an image of violence reinforced in particular by the words “erzwang” und “zerrissen.” The choice of the noun “Geranke,” which derives from “Ranke” (indicating a “sich windender schosz”), is also decisive, for it strengthens the association of the space with the maternal body (in particular the “Schoß” or womb).<sup>54</sup> Significantly, the “Pforte” or “gate” that leads to this “flowering womb” – to this “blühendem Geranke” – is forced open (and in the process, torn asunder) by the male protagonist, thus leaving open the possibility that the violence evoked in this scene might also be sexual in nature.

The significance of this passage is of course open to some interpretation. On the one hand, we might say that this act of forceful penetration highlights the idea that a return to and, as such, a reincorporation of this previously unincorporated narrative of

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<sup>53</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the etymology of the word “Ranke,” see Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 8 (1893), 103-5.

female sexuality will not come easily or effortlessly. It may also suggest that a return to this more “natural” state is somehow not “natural” at all, as evidenced by the forceful efforts undertaken by Rudolf in order to enter into the garden. However, the passage also quite clearly suggests that the female is either incapable of accessing this other narrative without male aegis, or that this would be undesirable. In the end, the scene does not seem quite so progressive at all; rather, the couple’s entrance into the garden effectively reinscribes the female protagonist within a set of patriarchal ideals as these relate to “woman.”

As I have previously suggested, this image of violent male penetration seems also to repeat the original moment of “loss” to which Ines alludes in her childhood story, the glass that was once “zerdrückt” re-presented with the image of “das zerrissene Gesträuch.” Importantly, both the shattered glass and the torn shrubbery are the result of attempts to transgress certain boundary spaces. In this regard, too, the significance of the novella’s final scene is open to question. Ultimately, there does seem to be some acknowledgment of the wild, untamed garden as Other; in other words, the repetition of the original moment of “loss” seems to imply an acknowledgement of the presence of this other, latent narrative of female sexuality. In a sense, then, we might say that this narrative is ultimately (re-)incorporated into the story’s main narrative, although once again in highly distorted form. Still, we should bear in mind that Ines is unable to reenter this (narrative) space alone. Instead, she remains dependent on traditional power structures in which she, quite “erschöpft,” relies on her husband to force “den vollen Eingang.”

If Nesi's initial act of transgression first sheds light on the idea that the construction of narrative identity (and as such, the narrative of gendered identity presented within the home) depends on processes of exclusion, then it is plausible to argue that the family's collective entrance into the "Gartenwildnis" represents an attempt to (re-)include this other, previously excluded female narrative. At the same time, however, the scene also subtly, but effectively reinforces a notion of "woman" in keeping with patriarchal ideologies. As such, it would be too much to say that the scene serves as an instance of genuine, unadulterated transgression, whether for Ines or for the story's other female characters. As Rudolf tells Ines in this final scene, Marie's "Bild [soll mir] nicht übermalt werden" (VT, 704), a declaration that not only lays bare the residual traces of an unwillingness to relinquish control over his possession of "woman" in her objectified form, but also anticipates his continued devotion to this secular icon of female purity. And yet, there is hope: although Ines's efforts to harness "alle ihre Kräfte" (VT, 703) ultimately fail, we are left with the sound of "Nesis kräftiger Stimme" (VT, 705) as it rings out resiliently in the background, signaling, perhaps, a time – a female future – still to come.

#### Framing the Stormian corpus

When considering Storm's propensity for the frame, particularly where issues of gender are concerned, several other works come to mind as particularly illustrative examples, the first of which is *Aquis submersus*. In Storm's 1876 narrative, the frame elucidates both the inherent disparity between, as well as the male's desired dissolution of, the categories of "reality" and "fiction" where "woman" is concerned. The text attests, moreover, to the

male protagonist's increasing confusion (confusion understood etymologically as a fusing together) of "woman" as artistic representation, in other words, of "woman" as construct of the male imagination, and her more natural, real-to-life image.<sup>55</sup>

Presented as autobiographical manuscript, *Aquis submersus*'s interior narrative recounts the story of the young artist Johannes, his love for Katharina, the highborn daughter of his benefactor, and the ill-fated consequences of their romance. As the tale progresses, Johannes's superimposition of two very different images of his beloved becomes increasingly clear. This confusion of representation and reality alludes, I would suggest, to the dissolution of "the frame." Multiple moments throughout the narrative confirm the male protagonist's confusion. Early on, for instance, Johannes finds the young Katharina seated by her "Strickrahmen" (AS, 955), a positioning of the female with regard to the "Rahmen" that solidifies her status as artistic object of a specifically male gaze.<sup>56</sup> This idea is subsequently reinforced by Johannes's impression upon beholding his beloved: he reflects, moreover, that "ich mußte der Griechischen Helena gedenken, wie ich sie jüngst in einem Kupferwerk gesehen; so schön erschien mir der junge Nacken, den das Mädchen eben über ihre Arbeit neigte" (AS, 955-6).

Where his beloved is concerned, Johannes's confusion of art and reality becomes more overt throughout the course of the ensuing tale. After Katharina's brother and Johannes's nemesis, Junker Wulf, commissions the young artist to paint his sister's portrait, the pair meets for regular sessions in order to complete the desired portrait.

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<sup>55</sup> In this regard, see Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*. Citing Marina Warner's work, Bronfen discusses the cultural convention of confusing woman and art within the context of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Oval Portrait* (1850).

<sup>56</sup> Theodor Storm, "Aquis submersus," in *Sämtliche Werke in zwei Bänden*, vol. 1 (Munich: Winkler, 1967), 943-1015. All parenthetical references to *Aquis submersus* are taken from this edition of the text, henceforth abbreviated as "AS."



During one of their meetings, Johannes reflects that “Ich hatte den Pinsel sinken lassen; denn sie saß vor mir mit gesenkten Blicken; wenn nicht die kleine Hand sich leis aus ihrem Schoße auf ihr Herz gelegt, so wäre sie selber wie ein lebloses Bild gewesen” (AS, 971). This confusion culminates in a nearly complete dissolution of “the frame,” described in the penultimate scene of the inner narrative. In this scene, Johannes mistakes his own portrait of Katharina for the woman herself. Entering a room in Katharina’s new home many years later, this instance of misrecognition is staggering: Johannes recounts that “Indem ich aber eintrat, wäre ich vor Überraschung bald zurückgewichen; denn Katharina stund mir gegenüber...Ach, ich wusste es nur zu bald; was ich hier sahe, war nur ihr Bildniß, das ich selber einst gemalt” (AS, 1012).

At the heart of the male’s repeated conflation of these two disparate realms is his wish to return to a state of sameness.<sup>57</sup> As a symbol of the idealized, desired-after inscription of “woman” within a system of patriarchal ideologies, the young artist’s reproduction of his beloved’s image (an image that pointedly depicts her as a daughter in mourning) illustrates the specific way in which reality is envisioned vis-à-vis gender. Johannes’s reality is a veritable fiction in which the female exists in a perpetually child-like, innocent, even victimized state that requires male guardianship and protection. His momentary confusion of Katharina’s portrait for the flesh and blood woman (ultimately very different from this idealized image of pure, unadulterated femininity) presents viable evidence of the frame’s dissolution, thereby suggesting a desire for sameness and, as

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<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, a similar wish expresses itself in Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*, in particular where Heinrich’s two “beloveds,” Meretlein and Anna, are concerned. In this respect, see Bronfen, “Risky Resemblances.” According to Bronfen, the repetition of one death in another “constitutes a desire to foreclose difference” (111). What Heinrich’s desires, moreover, is not a return to the physical feminine body, but to the image, the first beloved. In much the same way, Johannes’s confusion suggests his longing not for the real-life Katharina, but for the female as image.

such, a return to an “ideal” state of perceived female purity that mirrors artistic representation.

Readers will encounter a set of fundamentally similar issues in Storm’s *Eekenhof*, published in 1879, just three years after *Aquis submersus*. Most apparent in this work is the frame’s association with images of death and dying, discernible on multiple occasions throughout the narrative.<sup>58</sup> At the outset of Storm’s tale, a man nearing death tells his daughter, the young heiress of *Eekenhof*’s eponymous mansion, that once her portrait has been painted and added to the house’s family portrait gallery, “wir sind dann alle wie in einer Gruft beisammen” (E, 38).<sup>59</sup> The woman later perishes after giving birth to a son. Yet prior to this, she imagines herself “nun für immer leblos in den dunkeln Rahmen des Bildes festgebannt” (E, 41). It is evident, moreover, that this “dunklen Rahmen” represents an immense source of fear and anxiety for the young woman.<sup>60</sup> Of course, this fear of the frame must be understood figuratively: the female’s acute feelings of fear reflect a terrifying prospect for her as “woman,” the prospect of merging with an image of “woman” (that is, her own reproduction as image, which the narrator tells us “wurde wie sie selber” [E, 38]) that is a product of male discourse and desire.

As concerns the figure of the frame, a comparison of *Viola tricolor*, *Aquis submersus*, and *Eekenhof* also elucidates interesting parallels. If one’s primary understanding of the frame is as a boundary between reality and its representation, then it is plausible to argue that the frame’s progressive failure becomes apparent when these

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<sup>58</sup> Certainly, the connection between death, portraiture, and the act of framing is also one that informs a reading of Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich* in interesting ways.

<sup>59</sup> Theodor Storm, “Eekenhof,” in *Sämtliche Werke in zwei Bänden*, vol. 2 (Munich: Winkler, 1967), 36-75. All parenthetical references to *Eekenhof* are taken from this edition of the text, henceforth abbreviated as “E.”

<sup>60</sup> See also Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*. Bronfen discusses the acute feelings of anxiety about imagery that formed an important part of the nineteenth-century cultural subconscious.

three works are considered chronologically. This begins in *Viola tricolor* with a child's unfulfilled desire to transgress the frame of a picture in order to merge with an image of the Madonna. In *Aquis submersus*, the protagonist's conflation of his beloved and her portrait suggests his increasing inability to maintain the distinction between representation and reality. Finally, in *Eekenhof*, the portrait of the deceased heiress regularly engages in a postmortem transgression of its frame. I would suggest, moreover, that these three narratives form a cohesive body of signification as concerns the gradual yet ultimate dissolution and subsequent transgression of "the frame." In all three instances, "woman" emerges as the subject of efforts geared toward dissolution and transgression: in *Viola tricolor*, the child desires to merge with a very specific representation of woman embodied in the image of the Madonna; *Aquis submersus* bears witness to the male protagonist's failure to uphold the distinction between woman as representation or construct of the male imagination and a more natural image; in *Eekenhof*, the heiress's fear of the frame – and the associated fear of becoming image – must be understood symbolically, as the fear of being reproduced as an image of woman that is nothing more than a product of the male imagination. In a gesture of intertextual reference, *Eekenhof* seems to bring to fruition what was once only a desire for the child in *Viola tricolor*. Yet contrary to *Viola tricolor*, *Eekenhof* presents the possibility of the frame's transgression not as something desirable, but rather as something to be feared. In this later narrative, what the female yearns for is precisely not a merging of "reality" and "representation," but a (re-)severing of the two, understood symbolically as a desire to reestablish her difference from the (male) narrative that has been subtly inscribed onto the (textual) fabric of her image.

Published in 1875, one year after *Viola tricolor*, Storm's *Im Nachbarhause links* also presents a theory of gender identity with recourse to the frame, one that is exceedingly similar to the one expounded in *Viola tricolor*. In this novella, various framing devices work together to highlight a tension between order and disorder, one that comes to define the narrative landscape in significant ways (and in a way that is highly similar to *Viola tricolor*). At the outset of the text, this tension is foregrounded in the narrator's lengthy descriptions of the two properties that stood on either side of a house in which he once lived:

‘Das derzeit von mir gemietete Wohnhaus stand zwischen zwei sehr ungleichen Nachbarn: an der Südseite ein saubergehaltenes Haus voll lustiger Kinderstimmen, mit hellpolierten Scheiben und blühenden Blumen dahinter; nach Norden ein hohes düsteres Gebäude; zwar auch mit großen Fenstern, aber die Scheiben derselben waren klein, zum Teil erblindet und nichts dahinter sichtbar, als hie und da *ein graues Spinngewebe*. Der einstige Ölanstrich an der Mauer und der mächtigen Haustür war gänzlich abgeblättert, die Klinke und der Messingklopfer mit dem Löwenkopf von Grünspan überzogen. Das Haus stand am hellen Tage und mitten in der belebten Straße wie in Todesschweigen; nur nachts, sagten die Leute, wenn es anderswo still geworden, dann werde es drinnen unruhig. Wie ich von meinem Steinhofe aus übersehen konnte, erstreckte sich dasselbe noch mit einem langen Flügel nach hinten zu. Auch hier war in dem oberen Stockwerke, das ich der hohen Zwischenmauer wegen allein gewahren konnte, eine stattliche Fensterreihe, vermutlich einem einstigen Festsaal angehörig; ja, als einmal die Sonne auf die trüben Scheiben fiel, ließen sich deutlich die schweren Falten seidener Vorhänge dahinter erkennen.’ (NL, 906-7)<sup>61</sup>

In this passage, the “Gespinnste” encountered in *Viola tricolor*'s “Gartenwildnis” has been replaced by “ein graues Spinngewebe”: the German verb “spinnen” together with the noun “Gewebe” help to reinforce the underlying textual dimensions of the image, alluding, once more, to the notion of spinning, of weaving, and indeed, of yarnning. As was also the case in *Viola tricolor*, a tripartite space emerges, seen here in the image of

<sup>61</sup> Theodor Storm, “Im Nachbarhause links,” in *Sämtliche Werke in zwei Bänden*, vol. 1 (Munich: Winkler, 1967), 906-935. My emphasis. All parenthetical references to *Im Nachbarhause links* are taken from this edition of the text, henceforth abbreviated as “NL.”

the three houses. The passage describes a tension between order and disorder, between “ein saubergehaltenes Haus” and “ein hohes düsteres Gebäude.” The two houses are furthermore juxtaposed in terms of light and darkness, transparency and opacity, life and death. The house that stands “an der Südseite” is described, for instance, using adjectives such as “hellpoliert” and “blühend” and, we are told, is “voll lustiger Kinderstimmen.” In sharp contrast to this, the house that lies to the north presents an image of opacity (its windows described as “erblindet” and “nichts dahinter sichtbar”). Whereas the one house is described using terms that connote order, light and transparency, and life, the old woman’s house – “die Nachbarin” of the “Nachbarhaus links” – comes to be associated with disorder and decay, darkness and opacity, and death (it stood, we read, “wie in Todesschweigen”). Undoubtedly, the house to the left is presented in much the same way as *Viola tricolor*’s “Gartenwildnis,” which is not only depicted as a disorderly counterpoint to a seemingly well-ordered domestic interior, but is also explicitly associated with death, being referred to as “ein Grab.” Yet it must be noted that it is the house to the left and the “Gartenwildnis” to which both protagonists feel themselves inexplicably drawn. As in *Viola tricolor*, there emerges within the narrator of Storm’s *Im Nachbarhause links* an immense curiosity surrounding what lies on the other side of the “Zwischenmauer” that divides his house from the property of his elderly neighbor.

This curiosity should be read in relation to a particularly significant moment in the narrator’s childhood, one in which his grandfather shows him a portrait of a young girl, his “Spielkamerad” (NL, 912) from the times of his own youth. First introduced as “ein Miniaturbild in silberner Fassung” (NL, 912), the image of the female child arouses feelings of lust and desire. Although the grandfather covetously shows the portrait to his

young grandson only once and never again, this portrait becomes a “verführerische[s] Bildchen” (NL, 913) for the narrator as a young boy. He recalls how he looked desirously – “begehrlich” (NL, 913) – at the cabinet that housed the portrait. Indeed, in the grandfather’s recounting of certain childhood memories, the girl herself is likewise associated with lust, an association developed most strikingly in the narrator’s extensive descriptions of the “Lusthäuschen” (NL, 912) in which she played as a child. It is the portrait of this girl, and indeed the girl herself, that program the narrative that follows: upon returning to his grandfather’s native town, the narrator begins to search for his grandfather’s childhood friend, ultimately discovering that she now lives in the house to the left of his own.

Although Storm’s focus on the frame in this novella is more peripheral when compared to other texts, its role is still, undeniably, important. As in *Viola tricolor*, the frame reinforces a tension between dynamic and static images, life and death, growth and decay or stagnation. In this respect, we should consider the story’s juxtaposition of the static, lifeless image of the grandfather’s young “Spielkamerad” contained by the “silberne Fassung” and those other dynamic, vital images with which she is associated throughout the course of the novella, for instance, the wild garden that lies behind her present-day house. Whereas the lusted-after image of her youth is essentially static and constructed, the elderly neighbor and her present-day home are repeatedly depicted using natural, oftentimes botanical metaphors, descriptions that function as a counterpoint to the static nature of the youthful image contained by the frame. Significant examples include Storm’s description of the woman as an “Alraun” (NL, 915) and, as a child, a “Vogel” (NL, 912), as well as the evocation of the image of “die traurige Wüstenei des

Zimmers" (NL, 919) in his descriptions of her domestic abode. Both the woman and her house are depicted in a state of decay and disorder. From the very first lines of the narrative, the "otherness" of the now elderly woman is foregrounded; she represents the "unknown" and is therefore seen as dangerous. As a danger to the status quo, she has been cast aside, forgotten, and cut off from society in her old age. A significant image here as in *Viola tricolor*, the wall serves as a container whereby something unwanted or undesirable – Storm tells us pointedly in his extensive descriptions of her garden that it is one filled with "Unkraut" (NL, 909) – is able to be sealed off and contained. Yet despite all of this, there is something alluring about that disorder for the narrator of Storm's text, something attractive about the "otherness" that his neighbor and her house represent. As in *Viola tricolor*, the "otherness" that lies on the opposite side of the "Mauer" comes to represent a narrative of "woman" that has been pointedly (yet not entirely) excluded from the tale's main narrative. It is a narrative, moreover, that presents "woman" as dynamic, as subject to the ebb and flow of time, as opposed to static, timeless, and perpetually youthful.

## CONCLUSION

### **Poetic Realism and Beyond**

When I began this research, now over three years ago, I was not immediately drawn to the work of poetic realism per se. Instead, this is a project whose process of germination began nearly fourteen years ago, with an undergraduate honors seminar at Rutgers University called *The Puzzle Novel*, which provided my initial exposure to the work of the Italian postmodernist Italo Calvino. It began, more specifically, with a promise, one I am still not sure Calvino ever made good on. It was the first time, I might add, that an author had expected my presence: I was told that I was (“You are”) “about to begin reading” a book that, in the end, never once began despite the two hundred and seventy fives pages of words that had been situated between the front and back covers of an object that quite looked like a book.<sup>1</sup> It was, after all, “a metafictional anti-novel made up entirely of first chapters.”<sup>2</sup>

Calvino’s 1979 novel *If on a winter’s night a traveler* begins by positioning itself not within the confines of any readily discernible literary tradition, but instead as a sort of how-to manual on the art of reading. Calvino speaks to “you” directly, calling on “you” to

Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room...Find the most comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up, or lying flat...Adjust the light so you won’t strain your eyes. Do it now, because once you’re absorbed in reading there will be no budging you.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Lethem (speaking of Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler*), “Italo for Beginners,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2005, [www.nytimes.com/2005/11/20/books/review/italo-for-beginners.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/20/books/review/italo-for-beginners.html).

<sup>3</sup> Calvino, *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, 3-4.



It is a text, moreover, into which the reader has already been inscribed in advance, and in which we, as readers, will be called on to play an active role in the construction of meaning. “Your” adventures will constitute the main plot of the frame narrative that follows: “you” begin Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveler*, only to come to the frustrating realization that this particular copy of the book is “defective,” that “What you thought was a stylistic subtlety on the author’s part is simply a printer’s mistake: they have inserted the same pages twice.”<sup>4</sup> The search for the missing pages of the novel leads “you” to read the beginnings of nine additional novels, each of which gets cut off for a variety of increasingly ludicrous reasons, and always at the moment of heightening climactic intensity.

Looking back, I believe that there was something in the work of Theodor Storm that later reminded me (and invariably still reminds me) of Calvino, a resonance that becomes particularly apparent when one reflects on the authors’ respective uses of the frame. Instances of both visual and temporal recursion abound within Calvino’s novel, allowing this level-crossing, boundary-blurring frame narrative to whimsically and mischievously engage with the border (or rather, the lack thereof) between “fiction” and “reality.” Indeed, the novel not only plays with this border; it itself is part of this nebulous threshold space. The book alternates between an overarching frame narrative and ten stories that are nested within it. But the distinction between “frame” and “framed” begins to disintegrate as the novel progresses: nesting and nested structures repeatedly collapse into “tangled hierarchies” that defy the logic of the traditional

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 25.

reality/fiction binary.<sup>5</sup> And while Calvino's novel might be seen by some as passé, a postmodern cliché that no longer induces the same wonderment as it once did, now nearly forty years after its publication, I cannot help but love it nonetheless.<sup>6</sup>

Like Calvino, Keller, Stifter, and Storm all seem to acknowledge the inherent potential of the frame to communicate meaning. In each work, the frame transcends its conventional status as a regulatory structure for the artwork, providing a crucial means for contemplating the nature of certain aesthetic and extra-aesthetic issues. In Keller's *Der grüne Heinrich*, the frame presents itself as a symbol of moderation, one which seeks to reconcile certain extremes relating to discourses that are only apparently at variance with one another: aesthetics, economics, and gender. In *Nachkommenschaften*, Stifter harnesses the frame's ability to represent absence in order to shed light on certain "invisible" realities that not only order our lives, but also provide them with immanent meaning.

To my mind, Storm is the author whose work most closely aligns with that of Calvino. For Storm, as for Calvino, the frame no longer functions as a rigid partition between two seemingly disparate, insurmountable realms, i.e., between "reality" and

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<sup>5</sup> I have borrowed the terminology "tangled hierarchy" from Douglas Hofstadter, who uses it to articulate his concept of the "strange loop." See Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979). Citing M. C. Escher's famous lithograph *Drawing Hands* as a visual example of a "strange loop" or "tangled hierarchy," Hofstadter provides a definition of a "strange loop" as that which occurs when "levels which ordinarily are seen as hierarchical...turn back on each other" (689). In the case of Escher's *Drawing Hands*, the strange loop results from the tangled hierarchy created between "that which draws, and that which is drawn" (689). That is, Escher presents viewers *not* with a picture of one hand that draws another, but rather with an image in which each hand is both *drawing* and *being drawn* by the other hand. Calvino's novel takes part in this same tradition, with its presentation of recursive structures of both a visual and temporal nature, as well as through the ultimate decomposition of such structures into "tangled hierarchies."

<sup>6</sup> In this regard, see David Mitchell, "Enter the maze," *The Guardian*, May 22, 2004, [www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/22/fiction.italocalvino](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/22/fiction.italocalvino). As Mitchell would have it, "Describing our world's unknowability in terms of labyrinths and mirrors no longer cuts the metaphysical mustard, somehow."

“fiction”; rather, Storm’s work evinces a certain playfulness, one that results when the inherently problematic nature of this supposed partition is ultimately realized. In Storm’s *Viola tricolor*, as in his other works that I have discussed in the preceding chapter, the programmatic confusion of “fiction” and “reality” takes on an unmistakably gendered hue.

Holub has argued that “the fiction [that realist texts] perpetrate is that they are not fiction at all,” and the same might well be said about gender, if one views it as a story that seeks to conceal its essentially fictive nature.<sup>7</sup> Modern theories have posited gender not as natural, but as a construction, an act whose genesis relies on “the tacit collective agreement to perform [it]”<sup>8</sup>; it is, moreover, a binary distinction between “inner” and “outer,” “male” and “female,” “myself” and “other” “that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject.”<sup>9</sup> Gender is not a fact, but a veritable fiction, one that is reinforced through the imposition of binary categories of understanding. Time and again, this idea seems to be anticipated in Storm’s body of work – “woman” as narrativized product of a particular set of masculine, patriarchal, and heteronormative ideologies that seek to control her, and thereby to impose order on an inherently disordered process of identity formation.

Yet to understand Storm’s texts as conscientious attempts to maintain the impression of reality through a concealment of their fictiveness seems to miss the point, precisely because the “fiction” that these texts purportedly seek to conceal is, in the end, what is most “real.” As Downing argues, the rupture points that manifest when realism

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Holub, *Reflections of Realism: Paradox, Norm, and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century German Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

reflects on itself are “actually conscious, inherent aspects of realism itself.”<sup>10</sup> It is precisely not “an ideological space that the text itself seeks to repress.”<sup>11</sup> Rather, it is a self-conscious and thus also subversive attempt to cover up the “reality” of gender with a particular fiction that characterizes Storm’s texts. That the frame is allowed to remain is crucial: in its various iterations, the figure provides compelling, residual evidence of the attempt to expunge certain realities from the narrative proper.

I do not believe it is a coincidence, moreover, that in the case of both Storm and Calvino, the frame – as the universally recognizable symbol of the divide between “reality” and “fiction” – is introduced so that it might be transgressed. It is this gesture in particular that reflects the undeniably postmodern element at work in Storm’s prose. In fact, Storm’s and Calvino’s respective uses of the frame seem intended to pose a similar set of questions: where does “fiction” begin and “reality” end? Does “reality” exist apart from “fiction,” or “fiction” apart from “reality”? Does “reality” exist *a priori*, or is “reality” always already conditioned by the (oftentimes intentional) perpetuation of certain “fictions” presented under the guise of “reality”?

In the end, it has been important to examine how the works of Gottfried Keller, Adalbert Stifter, and Theodor Storm frame the task of realist literature, as well as the ways in which each frames a reading of the others. Still, we should remember that the frame motif itself ultimately transgresses the historical limits of poetic realism, thereby opening up the possibility that Storm might also frame our understanding of Calvino, and vice versa. The precise nature of this connection remains to be discovered; suffice it to

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<sup>10</sup> Eric Downing, *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Holub, *Reflections of Realism*, 18.

say that Calvino's text ought to be understood as another in a long line of literary *Nachkommenschaften*.

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