



SIEBENQUELL

How Stories work ~

Do not Forget!



SOURCE: R. MÖNNERJAHN 2013

Sometime we visit places, landscapes, works of art or even people for a second time and are amazed that the emotion of the first encounter fails to appear. We like to justify this by appealing to the magic of the first encounter.

However, every once in awhile it happens that a renewed encounter - perhaps after a lengthier period of time - touches our heart more deeply than the first time.

That is how it was for me with the collection of »The Famished«, the so called »Famine Sculptures«, that I once again came upon in Dublin after many years. It was not a coincidental encounter; I can purposefully sought them out and found them. This time, unlike the first time, I approached them from the front: they are coming from the land and I from the harbor, towards which they are striving with their last strength. Their faces and bodies are so emancipated, their posture expresses so much weakness and need, that every observer is shaken and asks: What happened here? Where do these people still want to go?

The Irish Sculptor Rowan Gillespie has created a masterpiece. With his art he recounts one of the greatest tragedies of his homeland, and in such a way, that he draws us into this story. We see the suffering, we feel the hunger, we smell death, we sense the last shimmer of hope that still lingers in them and which shows them the way. And while contemplating them it becomes clear to us, that many of them did not make it this far.

The catastrophe of which we are here reminded is referred to in Ireland until this day as »The great Famine«, the »great hunger«. Ireland was poor for centuries. Yet, when potato disease caused complete crop failures between 1845 and 1849, the famine became so great that 2 million Irish immigrated - one million of the Irish died in their homeland.

The numbers are monstrous, but they do not strike the heart. The tragedy becomes experiential, painfully tangible, when I engage the figures in bronze on the banks of the Liffey. They challenge us. They demand: »Do not forget us!« Part of the challenge is where they stand: in the midst of the modern, partially futuristic harbor district, whose development began in the boom of 1990, in front of the gates of the financial district. »Do not forget us! Do not let yourselves be blinded and seduced!«

The Irish know how to keep the memory alive - through the stories that they tell. They do not forget it, because they repeatedly sing songs that tell of the hardship and sorrow of those years. Even without words, they warn us strangers, when we encounter the despairing figures cast in bronze.

How wisely the warning runs through the Torah, not to forget the suffering of the people, to repeatedly tell the tale of their rescue and, on this foundation, to sense the community and never allow that which is essential to be lost from sight.

Therefore, the Lord teaches his people to speak and to act:

» A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.« (Dtn 26,4ff)

May we be and become people who move within the great river of memory - telling our stories, praying, singing or fashioning life.

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