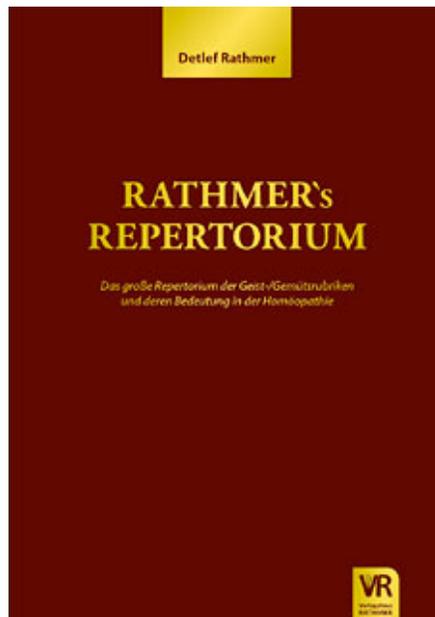


# Detlef Rathmer

## Rathmer's Repertorium - Mängelexemplar

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# SPECTRUM OF HOMEOPATHY



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**BURNOUT | PANIC | DEPRESSION**

# EDITORIAL

## Dear reader,

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that in just a few years depression will be the illness incurring the greatest costs, not just in the industrial countries but worldwide. The contemporary, socially acceptable gloss for this psycho-pandemic is “burnout”; a euphemism for a diffuse syndrome. Everybody has heard about it but no one really knows exactly what it is. This is partly due to the many facets of this paradigmatic illness of our time. It can manifest itself as physical weakness, pains, and sleeplessness, to which can be sometimes added panic, apathy, and depersonalization; everyone’s fuse burns out in a unique way. Just as diverse as the manifestations are the reasons for the human system to break down.

The range of variation found in burnout syndrome is clear from the numerous case histories in this edition. Thanks to its individualizing approach, homeopathy is not just an appropriate method of treatment but can also contribute greatly to our understanding of this type of illness. The miasmatic viewpoint, for example, can enable us to recognize the severe pathology underlying this fashionable diagnosis. The contributions from Rosina Sonnenschmidt, Willi Neuhold, and Jürgen Hansel show how closely related burnout is to the destructive cancer and syphilitic miasms.

The psychiatrist Christoph Schubert looks behind the overt pathology to find an underlying “fading of the life force and the constriction of the soul [as] a long-lived process that stretches over long periods of time and is not just an immediate reaction to difficult situations in life.” Overwork, tight deadlines, or bullying are just the triggers. Only comprehensive, biographical casetaking can shed light on the darkness of burnout; Jutta Gnaiger-Rathmanner presents three cases demonstrating this. Whether we follow Ana Lamaro in her psychoanalytic dissection of the dynamic by which this illness arises or whether we go with Beat Spring in viewing it as a meaningful process of compensation, our homeopathic understanding is encapsulated in the simile.

Each of the remedies in this edition shows a different facet of the topic. Even if there is barely a remedy that may not be used for depressive illness, we can still recognize some key themes. For Jonathan Hardy, it is the light minerals of the second row and the tried-and-trusted Natrium. For Judyth Reichenberg-Ullmann’s case study, it is Borax. Present, too, are the heavy minerals, classically represented by Aurum in Deborah Collins’ contribution, as well as the precious stones which, Peter Tumminello thinks, should be considered more often.

The remedies we associate with tireless work under pressure, with no regard for oneself, also have a special relationship to burnout, such as the remedies from stage 8 of the periodic table,

above all the Ferrum salts (case study by Christoph Schubert) and the Rutaceae, which resemble the dynamics of Iron. Deborah Collins presents the interesting rue family (Rutaceae) with case studies from Massimo Mangialavori. The vital sensation of the Loganiaceae family – “ruined and finished” – and the sense of blockage found in the Brassicaceae family also fit burnout, especially Ignatia and Thlaspi bursa pastoris, the relevant remedies from the cancer miasm. For particularly destructive states, Rosina Sonnenschmidt recommends the snake remedies and presents her experience with the venom of the Taipan, the most poisonous snake on the planet.

Then, a burnout of the most extraordinary kind: the centuries-old story of whales, whose blubber is melted down into oil, of whalers, who are fatally bound to their prey, and of a remedy that reflects the fate of both hunter and hunted. If there were a *Spectrum* literary prize, Franz Swoboda’s article on Ambra would win it hands down.

Finally, we should mention one important aspect of burnout – the fact that it particularly affects therapists and others in the helping professions. In fact, the original diagnosis, dating from the 1970s, was coined exclusively for overwork in a social capacity. So, how are we homeopaths doing when it comes to burnout? Are we protected because we do not work under the pressure of five-minute consultations but rather invest time and effort in our patients? Or are we particularly at risk because of the high expectations we place on ourselves?

**Christa Gebhardt & Dr. Jürgen Hansel**

Chief Editors





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# FRIENDS GOING DOWN IN FLAMES

Ambra grisea provides salvation from the trauma of extinction

AUTHOR | Franz Swoboda

SUMMARY: A depressed patient whose physical and psychological symptoms clearly point to the remedy Ambra – which Hahnemann himself proved – reveals through a nightmare the profound and moving message of the whale about the death of its fellow creatures. Drawing on the history of whaling, the author shows how the suffering in the remedy picture of Ambra resembles the misery inflicted on whales by humans over the last few hundred years.

KEY CONCEPTS: Ambra grisea, asthma, depression, fear of people, impotence, paresthesia, sperm whale, psychopharmaceutical, sleep disorder, dizziness, suicidal, death

Ambra grisea has been known since Samuel Hahnemann’s proving.<sup>4</sup> Hardly a single materia medica omits this remedy and the key symptoms are familiar. We have held talks or heard about this unique substance ambergris, have been astounded by the whale, this majestic animal, to whom we give thanks for this remedy, and have witnessed how effective it can be. So, why another article about Ambra? Because it captivated me, when a patient told me his dream; the kind of dream that you feel you have to get to the bottom of.

This young man, not quite nineteen years old, agreed to let us take his case during a homeopathy training course in 2003. As he began to talk, with twenty people listening to him, sadness descended on the room, remaining with us long after he had gone. He told us that the psychiatrists had sent him because he could not get rid of his suicidal thoughts, despite a week of intensive treatment, including psychopharmaceutical drugs, as an in-patient. He had been given two SSRIs\* and a neuroleptic, which did nothing to reduce his fears and sleep disorder. The pain in the

lower back had been unchanged for six months, despite NSAIDs\*\* and muscle relaxants. We asked him to tell us more about himself.

## PATIENT’S REPORT

“Last year, I lost my partner; he died of AIDS. Three other friends have died this year. My first boyfriend was also HIV-positive. So, he killed himself. I have the feeling of being the trigger for something tragic.” When asked about the suicidal thoughts, Phil says: “Jumping from a multi-story, but that’s no good because of my fear of heights.”

He has had no appetite for some time now. He eats when he feels weak. Then, he notices how long he has not been eating. Although HIV-negative himself, Phil has the feeling his days are numbered. He experiences his impending death as cold with lengthy suffering. Five years ago, Phil was diagnosed with asthma. Although he takes the sprays prescribed by the specialist\*\*\*, he still has fits of asthma during physical exertion, which he describes as dizziness with shortness of breath. Then, he has stitches in the lungs, he shakes, and at times, he becomes unconscious. Shaking has long been a problem. His strength often deserts him. He drops things because he no longer feels them. On another occasion, he suddenly felt weak as if his legs had gone.

Phil is once again living with his parents, since he can no longer pursue his career (which we shall not reveal to protect his privacy). His parents are “unhappy” about his homosexuality. Their contact is limited to “good morning” and the monthly rent payments. He has never had a great deal of contact with his family, except with his younger sister, whose school performance he feels responsible for. His parents were rarely at home during his childhood and his grandmother is an alcoholic. What is that like for him? “It’s my life. If they’re not interested, I don’t have to care about it.”

In the family, he was the one singled out as responsible for the poor communication. This started when he was breastfeeding, as he often bit his mother’s breast.<sup>3</sup> He has never found it easy meeting people: “I don’t like crowds.” In a full elevator, Phil breaks out in a sweat.

He is increasingly sensitive to changes in weather, and has noticed that he is more and more forgetful, sometimes forgetting who he met the previous day.



The photo shows an eighteenth century whaling station for the processing of whale oil. The whaling ships delivered huge lumps of fat in barrels. These were heated up in large copper vats, so that the fat could be scooped out with spoons and poured into the channels. There the fat was sieved and cooled in water troughs before used to fill up containers. One whale provided about 10 tons of fat.

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He loves riding, he has a license as a riding instructor, but his horse was shot last week. Although he mentions it briefly, it is clear that this further loss affected him.

Music is important to him. He plays three instruments. It is not much of a pleasure, however, but he always wants to play correctly: "If I can't play a piece properly, I have to repeat it until it sounds right."

He is most affected by the sleep disorder. First, he cannot get to sleep, although he is tired before going to bed. Later, he is woken up by dreams, bad dreams: "There's fire with people, friends of mine, going down in the flames. ... I have to watch how my boyfriend dies, how my friends die." Fire? Going down? What is the picture? "They're going down in the fire," is all he can say. What does he feel? "No anger – just sadness."

### AMBRA AND THE PATIENT'S DREAM

Here, we leave Phil in order to find his remedy from the group. First, we take good note of the impression left behind by the young

man. We describe him with the following terms: indescribable sadness, modesty, heavy burden, powerlessness, lonely, clear, brave, monotone.

We then had no problem finding a remedy. All Phil's complaints can be found in the symptoms listed under Ambra. Whether we start searching with "nervous" asthma, dropping objects, paresthesia, dizziness, sleep disorder, fear of people, or backache, which he experiences as stiffness – all routes lead to Ambra. The final certainty is given by the rubrics covering the triggers for Phil's complaints: death of close relatives / friends / parents, one after the other.

We can find all Phil's symptoms except this dream. Yet, the dream is the symptom with the "§153 quality" described in the Organon. Phil impressively describes how very disturbed he is by this recurring nightmare. If Ambra is really his remedy, should this dream not be the key to a deeper grasp of his suffering? Should this dream in particular be a unique indication for Ambra? But how can we make sense of it: friends who go down in a fire? Can someone go down in a fire? Either one goes down or one is burnt, but what does it really mean to go down in a fire?

### THE MESSAGE OF THE SPERM WHALE

*It's like they're living in these massive, multicultural undersea societies. It's sort of strange. Really the closest analogy we have for it would be ourselves.*

*Hal Whitehead*

The answer is provided by the sperm whale. We must take a look at its history, especially at the way it has been killed on a huge scale by humans. Euphemistically, we call what we do to these creatures "whaling," driven by purely commercial motives, since ambergris,

the substance that provides our remedy Ambra, is floating on the oceans. To obtain it, we need kill no whales: on the contrary, it smells dreadful when extracted from a slaughtered animal. Only when the whale itself has excreted it, can we make perfume from it.

Nathaniel Philbrick wrote an astonishing book about a dreadful chapter in the history of the relationship between humans and whales.<sup>6</sup> The leader of the whale museum in Nantucket, the center of the nineteenth-century American whaling industry, researched the history of the whale, which inspired Herman Melville to write his experimental novel *Moby Dick*.

This was happening at the time that Hahnemann introduced Ambra to homeopathy. One year before Hahnemann's *Materia Medica Pura* went to press, a powerful sperm whale sank a whaling ship. When a few years later a bull whale fitting the description of the culprit was killed, it became clear that the story had not been made up. The human-whale relationship had then reached a turning point. The whale's attack had been preceded by decades of systematic slaughter. Philbrick does not just talk about whaling, he brings the sperm whale so vividly to life that the homeopathically informed reader becomes more and more aware of similarities with the remedy picture Ambra.

What is the origin of the Ambra symptom "fear of smiling faces"? Why is someone afraid of smiling faces? It becomes clearer when we read about the early days of whaling. Whales once occupied the oceans right up to the shoreline. They had no fear of people. Both kinds of mammal nourish themselves from the sea. When people became aware of the value of whale oil, their smiling faces became a threat to the whale. Initially, the animals could be killed from rowing boats. It could hardly be called hunting because they did not even try to flee. They simply did not recognize the danger. Gradually, the schools of whales began to withdraw. People built ships to pursue them. The cross section of these ships looked like sperm whales, the most valuable of all whales since they "provided" the highest quality oil. People tracked the whales on their retreat into the Pacific, accepting the fact that they would be separated from their families for two or more years. Sperm whales live a similar life. Cows and calves live in warm seas and the bulls (males) in colder seas with more nourishment. The bulls cover several thousand kilometers to fulfill their task of propagating the species. The families of the whalers grew up in a similar rhythm. Nathaniel Philbrick noticed that, by making the hunting of sperm whales their livelihood, the people of Nantucket had in fact developed a set of social relationships corresponding to that of their prey.<sup>6</sup>

When a whale was sighted, the boats were lowered into the water in order to approach it. It was killed by stabbing it in the lungs. The animal died by suffocating on its own blood. "On one of the right ribs, an aching burning pain, aggravated by external pressure; then on the left side of the chest a similar pain. ... A stitch in the chest extending to the back. ... A violent obtuse stitch in the right side of the chest" is the description given in symptoms 278 to 280 in Hahnemann's proving of Ambra grisea.<sup>4</sup> Another twenty or so symptoms reflect the whale's demise.

## THE SUBSTANCE AMBERGRIS

Ambergris is a gray, waxy substance from the digestive tract of the sperm whale. It was formerly used to produce perfumes, although nowadays it has been almost completely replaced by synthetic products for the mass market. Nowadays, it is only used for luxury perfume.

Ambergris is produced when sperm whales feed. The indigestible remnants, such as the shells of sepia or octopus are embedded in it. The exact process by which it is produced remains unclear. Possibly the sperm whale suffers a metabolic disturbance when it forms ambergris. Another theory postulates that it is used as a natural antibiotic to seal wounds following damage to the gut wall. The substance reaches the sea by vomiting, as part of the fecal matter, or by the natural death of the animal.

When finally dead, it was dragged alongside the ship and skinned in strips. The thick fatty layer of the whale was heaved on board in chunks of one hundred kilograms (220 lb) or more, where it was melted down in huge vats before finally being stored in barrels. With a little imagination we can now envisage Phil's dream: the sperm whale sees its friends going down in the flames: they melt in the vats, they literally go down in the fire. I clearly recalled Nathaniel Philbrick's book as Phil related his dream. So, you can see why I was gripped: I immediately found myself caught up in the tragic history of the sperm whale.

**Follow-up after prescription of Ambra:** How did Phil get on with a daily dose of *Ambra* LM 6? He did not contact anyone, neither his psychiatrist nor me. I had to ring him six months later, before the next course, in order to be able to tell the participants what had happened. Phil said he was doing well. *Ambra* had a better effect than all previous medications, which he had then promptly stopped taking. He no longer even needs *Ambra*. He's fine. His career is "on the up". Asthma? Nope, no problem. Shaking? No, that's OK too. He will get back to me if he needs anything, which has not happened so far. This talk gave me the shudders, a feeling of profound thankfulness, common when patients relate their stories of exceptionally deep healing.

## DIVING DEEPER WITH AMBRA

Commercial whaling continues to this day. It came to an end in Nantucket because, due to the profit imperative, ever larger ships were being built, and eventually these mega-ships could no longer enter the harbor. Every year, whales are stranded as they hit low-lying areas of the ocean floor on the way to their families.



The sperm whale is a mammal from the order of the whales (Cetacea). Since 1982, there has been an internationally negotiated moratorium to stop commercial whaling. Yet, there is a bitter conflict in the International Whaling Commission (IWC) between those nations who support whaling and those who reject it.

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A stranded whale dies of overheating and dehydration. The animals have a body temperature of 36 °C (96.8 °F), which tends to rise since they do not have any sweat glands. Ambra patients are generally hot, suffer frequently from hot flashes, and Boenninghausen attributes “heat, dry, dry burning in skin” to the remedy. So, it is not surprising that Ambra patients like cold food and cold water.

Does it help us to understand the symptoms of Ambra when we know more about the sperm whale? If so, certain therapeutic aspects still remain to be discovered, such as skin complaints or sensory disturbances. As described by Jo Evans in her delightful book *Sea Remedies*, we know too little about the sensory skills of the sperm whale.<sup>2</sup> Hal Whitehead describes sperm whales as a multi-cultural society with diverse communication – we just do not know them: “Whales probably communicate in a lot of ways. ... They spend a lot of time in contact with each other and communicate

through touch and this is, presumably, really important.” The sensitivity to touch remains to be discovered for Ambra. We know paresthesia and dysesthesia. A patient said to me: “Strange, it’s as if the arm does not belong to me.” But with patients I have not come across the fact that the sperm whale’s skin has a far higher density of touch receptors than in humans.

Sperm whales avoid hectic bustle. They dive when a school of dolphins approaches.<sup>7</sup> In three of my Ambra (female) patients, the sleep disorders were connected to the restless, hectic partner, who set the tone. If it is not sufficiently quiet, they cannot dive deep enough into sleep.

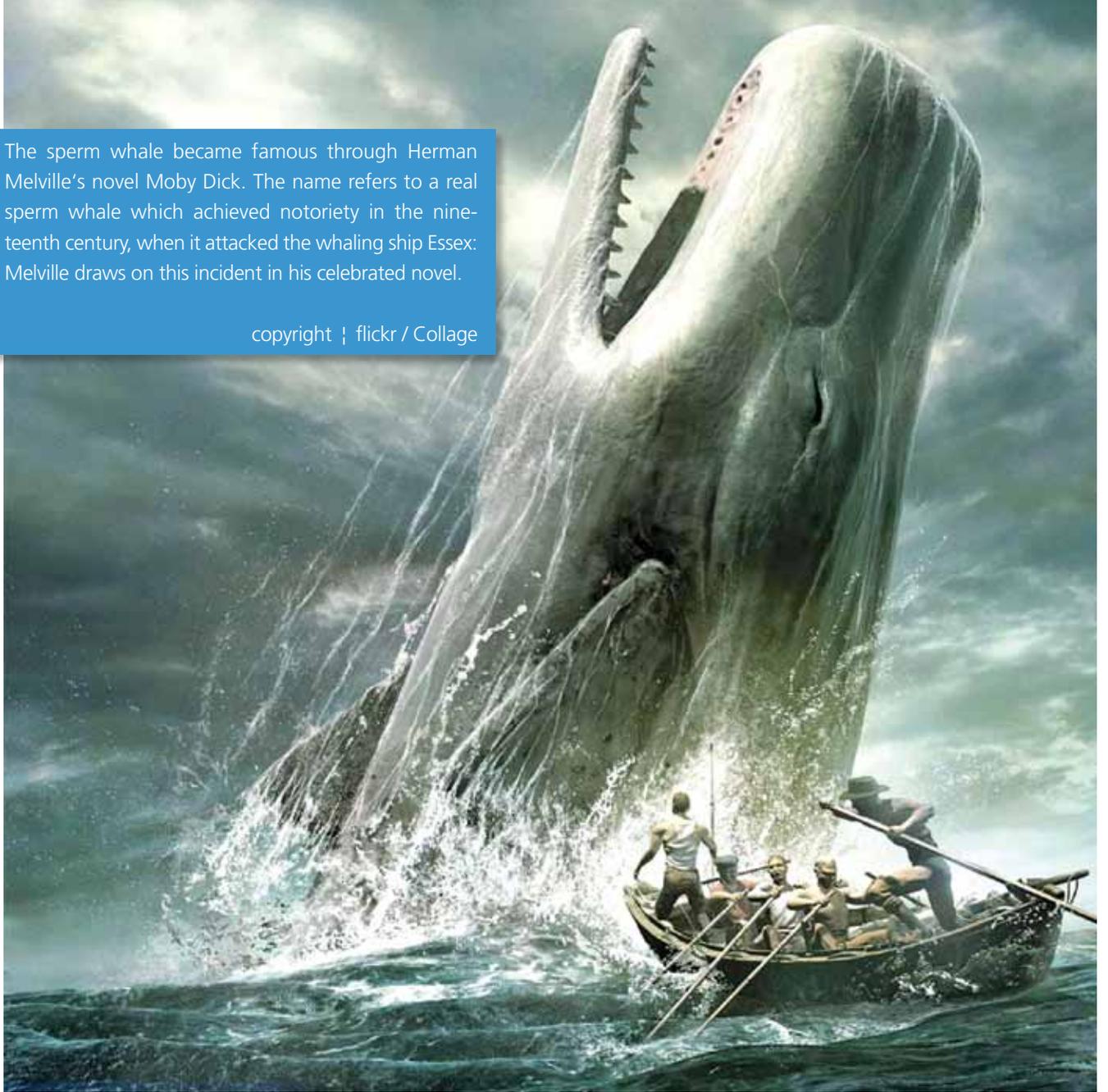
**Hahnemann’s Symptom 444:** “Starting up in fright in the evening, on going to sleep, with illusion as if there was too much light in the room; he sprang out of bed in some anxiety.”

Whales scarcely ever sleep, the least of all mammals. Like dolphins, they seem to sleep with just one side of the brain, vertically in the sea, head pointing up or down.<sup>7</sup> The corresponding effect on people is described by Hahnemann’s symptom 450: “After falling asleep late, anxious dreams, as if he was ill-used, and on account of weakness could not defend himself.”

One patient imagined immersing herself in silence during the case-taking. The idea of gliding or letting herself be pushed just under

The sperm whale became famous through Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*. The name refers to a real sperm whale which achieved notoriety in the nineteenth century, when it attacked the whaling ship *Essex*: Melville draws on this incident in his celebrated novel.

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the surface of the wide, silent, deep-blue sea before diving into the depths was something she found pleasant. She loved to have absolute silence around her. Those were her words, which led straight to the remedy *Ambra*, particularly as the profound sadness of this mother of two had deepened following a miscarriage and the near-death experiences of her two living children. The death of close relatives and friends, as in Phil's case, confirmed the remedy in the repertory\*\*\*\*. After the remedy, her experiences receded into the past and the sadness dissolved. The healing reaction of the remedy began with a wholly unusual outbreak of nocturnal sweating. This enabled the patient to also distance herself physically from the whale.

Another patient was worried that she saw her own death approaching prematurely. It is appalling, she said, "when you drift off

into the grave." She had recovered from a malignant tumor and was exhausted by the constant worries about her family, on whom she had become a financial burden. So, she waited until the age of seventy before retiring. Now, she was founding life simply tiresome, was taking antidepressants without noticing any improvement, and she found her dear ones unbearable. She said about her family, including her dog: "None of them are suitable for me, they just eat me up."<sup>3</sup> *Ambra* helped her so well and so quickly that she asked my assistant in all seriousness why I had not prescribed her this remedy from the start! Sulfur had brought about no improvement in the first few months.

Drifting into the grave is a good way of imagining the natural death of a whale. A sperm whale bull of about eighty years old sinks to the ocean floor on death, the thump of its body alerting the inhabitants of the sea to gather and finish off the remains.

**A correction to the symptom “shame” for Ambra:** I would like to correct a common depiction of Ambra. One of the first symptoms to be remembered is generally that the remedy is suitable for shy people, which can be seen in their stool behavior. So, then we might see something like: “They have a strong disinclination to use toilets other than their own. Embarrassed between defecation and urination.”<sup>10</sup> This interpretation originates from a misunderstanding of Hahnemann’s symptom 185: “A frequent call to stool, but no motion occurs, and this makes her very anxious, and then the propinquity of other people is intolerable to her.”<sup>4</sup> This symptom does not mean that someone cannot defecate when other people are nearby. Instead, it means that when anxious they cannot stand being near other people. This fits Ambra exactly, as we hear our patients confirm; it is nothing to do with embarrassment as such.

Susanne Diez recently published a rich trituration proving, in which she maintains that the feelings of embarrassment frequently mentioned in relation to Ambra do not occur.<sup>1</sup> I feel this confirms the quality of her proving, especially since she precisely confirms in other respects the physical and emotional details of Ambra.

**Closing remarks:** Finally, we must return to the history of the whale that sunk the Essex: the crew had saved themselves by taking to the lifeboats and had to decide which way to sail. A group of islands would have been close by. Yet, the sailors avoided this option because they presumed them to be populated by cannibals. They wanted to avoid such a nasty end. Yet, they inexorably found themselves victims of precisely this fate, as in a Greek tragedy. In the course of the journey of many weeks on the open sea, they began to eat one crew member after the next.<sup>6</sup> “People devour me,” is Didier Grandgeorge’s epithet, and that is exactly how one Ambra patient experienced and described it to me: “They all eat me up,” meaning her own family.<sup>3</sup>

Homo homini lupus – “man is a wolf to his [fellow] man” – do we understand the whale’s message?<sup>9</sup>

Gertrud Kolmar, the poet murdered in Auschwitz, brought forth the following image as she became aware that she would meet the same fate as her friends.<sup>5</sup>

*When the evening swims, I too will pass on,  
with the many moving murmuring in the ocean.  
Roll lightly thither in the gray lines  
weak thread strip, oh, I’m not so heavy.*

Apart from the amazement at the analogies we find with the whale, as with many animal remedies, one question still preoccupies me: Ambra is able to heal the suffering in people that resembles what people have been subjecting the whale to for several hundred years. How is this possible, since Ambra is an excretory product that is far older than the commercial whaling of recent centuries?

## FOOTNOTES

- \* SSRI: selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, a modern class of antidepressants including Prozac
- \*\* NSAID: Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug
- \*\*\* Non-homeopathic standard treatment: inhaled terbutaline and steroid
- \*\*\*\* My experience, in contrast to Michael Thompson, shows that Ambra for such a situation is a more similar remedy than Nat m. (see literature)

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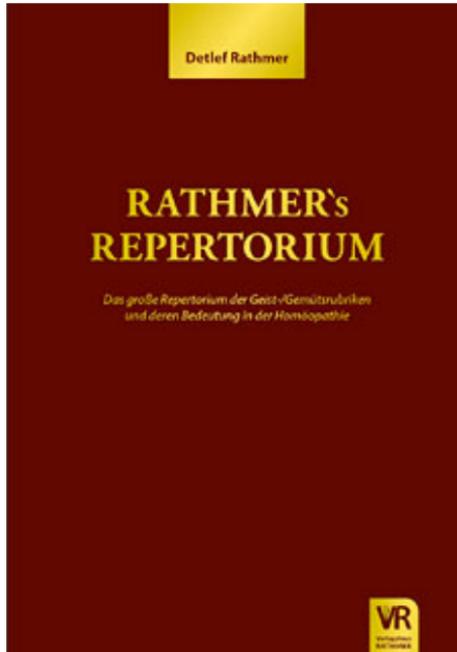
He is author and chief editor of

*Documenta Homoeopathica*, a series founded by Prof. Dr. Mathias Dorcsi with the aim of enriching the materia medica and providing reliable support for day-to-day homeopathic work.

Franz Swoboda uniquely combines extensive homeopathic experience with a special flair for storytelling.

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