DASKIND by MARIELLA MEHR

UNVEILING A SUBJUGATED HISTORY: A FIRST DRAFT OF AN ARCHAEO-GENEALOGICAL HISTORY OF WVHPKL/OHGFRI PEOPLE

by

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ABSTRACT

In German fiction, depictions of characters who are, or have been “wards of the state,” i.e., orphans, contracted-out, children and youth living in institutions such as residential schools, children’s homes or group homes, or foster children, are often drawn as asocial or antisocial characters. Many of these characters are seen by critics as metaphorical figures that have no foundation in the extra-literary world. They are perceived as being created to enhance readers’ understanding of social issues that are unrelated to these characters’ unique situation of growing up “without family.” Such a reading is problematic as it ignores centuries of marginalization, exploitation and other forms of abuse, most of which are particular to the status of “growing up in care.”

My point of departure is Mariella Mehr’s novel Daskind, whose main topic is the history of this large group of “un-familied” people, and the silencing of their history. Mehr creates a highly intertextual text full of historical, international, socio-cultural and literary allusions. This calls for a theoretical framework which combines notions of power structures, including their subversion on a societal as well as an individual level, with notions of intertextuality.

In order to investigate the historical context and plight of “un-familied” people, which has mostly been ignored in literary studies, I introduce the new acronyms WVHPKL (German), OHGFRI, (English) so as to accurately and respectfully address the literary representatives of this very diverse group of people, as listed in the first paragraph. Using the acronym/s does not deny the differences within this group, rather, the acronym/s highlights the differences without invisibilizing the common thread that runs through the different forms of state and community “care,” and deprived and in many cases continues to deprive children and youth from growing up in either any kind of family of origin or in a non-enforced adoptive family. I read Daskind as a
critique of the notion of “foster care” and as an autonomous, non-centralized Foucauldean kind of theoretical production.

This thesis hopes to provide the foundation to open up a broader interdisciplinary field of study dedicated to WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... ii
PREFACE ............................................................................................................................ iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................................... v
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................... ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................... x
1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................ 1
  1.1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT ............................................................................. 2
  1.2. HISTORY of RECOGNITIONS, APOLOGIES and RETRIBUTION PAYMENTS .... 4
  1.3. TERMINOLOGY: DISAMBIGUATION .................................................................. 11
    1.3.1. “Familienlos” (Family-Less) and “Un-Familied” ........................................ 14
    1.3.2. The Acronyms WVHPKL/OHGFRI ............................................................ 15
  1.4. TEXT SELECTION ................................................................................................. 18
    1.4.1. Daskind (1995) by Mariella Mehr ................................................................. 21
      1.4.1.1. Literary Allusions .................................................................................. 22
      1.4.1.2. Translations .......................................................................................... 23
  1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................. 25
    1.5.1. Michel Foucault: “A Return of Knowledge” .............................................. 27
      1.5.1.1. Theory as Method ................................................................................ 29
    1.5.2. Intertextuality .............................................................................................. 31
2. DASKIND BY MARIELLA MEHR (1995) .................................................................. 37
  2.1. GENESIS and RECEPTION .................................................................................. 39
    2.1.1. Until the First Edition .................................................................................. 39
    2.1.2. Early Reception and Editions ...................................................................... 43
    2.1.3. Reception in the Context of the Trilogy ..................................................... 44
    2.1.4. Awards, Recognition, Reprints and Translations ...................................... 47
    2.1.5. To this Day .................................................................................................. 49
    2.1.6. A Novel about Violence? .......................................................................... 50
  2.2. UNVEILING a SUBJUGATED HISTORY: HISTORICAL and SOCIO-CULTURAL
      ALLUSIONS ............................................................................................................. 52
    2.2.1. A Brief Summary ....................................................................................... 52
    2.2.2. Introductory Exposition .............................................................................. 53
    2.2.3. Armin Lacher - Omissions in Favour of Stereotypes .............................. 57
2.2.3.1. “Landfahrer” – Definition, Translation and a Nebulous Terminology............ 59
  2.2.3.1.1 A Brief History of “Landfahrer,” and of a Pathology.......................... 61
2.2.3.2. “Verdingung” - English Translations, and Definitions............................... 62
  2.2.3.2.1 “Verdingung” – Etymology, and a Brief History ................................ 64
  2.2.3.2.2 Terminology and Statistical Data.................................................... 69
  2.2.3.2.3 “Education” for a Life in Service.................................................... 70
2.2.3.3. Identifying Swiss Travelers and Un-Family-Ing their Children.................. 75
  2.2.3.3.1 The Disregarded Son of a Landfahrer.............................................. 76
2.2.3.4. “Immergrün” (Evergreen)........................................................................ 78
  2.2.3.4.1 Regulation of Love and Desire.................................................................. 81
  2.2.3.4.2 Mr. Right, the Church and Society’s Demands, and the Fallout............. 85
2.2.4. Daskind - the Protagonist............................................................................. 89
  2.2.4.1. Ancestry: “Karis Fluch,” a Euphemism that is None, and Illusionary Heavens ........................................................... 93
  2.2.4.1.1 Unforgiven Sins and the Recurrent Curse............................................ 95
  2.2.4.2. First Placement ..................................................................................... 97
    2.2.4.2.1 “Anstalt”.......................................................................................... 98
    2.2.4.2.2 “Anstalt” and “Heimleben,” and its Consequences.......................... 100
  2.2.4.3. “Anstaltskritik”.................................................................................... 109
  2.2.4.4. “Das Eigene Andere”........................................................................... 113
  2.2.4.5. Second Placement - “Verdingung” again: “Mindersteigerung”................. 117
    2.2.4.5.1 “Verdingkinder,” “Heimkinder,” “Pflegekinder”................................ 121
  2.2.4.6. Legal Development, Money, the Continuously Driving Force and Returnable Goods .................................................................................. 123
2.2.5. Violence: Social Order, Discipline and Violence, an Uncomfortable Relation ..... 127
  2.2.5.1. Un-Familying Children – A Generation Later ......................................... 129
  2.2.5.2. Structural and Personal Violence, a Tight Interconnection .................... 130
  2.2.5.3. “Socializing” the Uncanny .................................................................... 133
  2.2.5.4. To Not Belong, and its Consequences.................................................... 136
    2.2.5.4.1 Non-Permanency............................................................................... 142
  2.2.5.5. Violence Begets Violence...................................................................... 145
    2.2.5.5.1 Violence as Coping Mechanisms - from Hope to Hatred .................... 148
    2.2.5.5.2 The Ambach Boy ............................................................................ 152
2.5 Self-Harm ........................................................................................................ 154
2.5.5.4 The Killing ................................................................................................. 157
2.5.6. Lachter and Lancer ....................................................................................... 161
2.5.7. The Kellers – Conflating Large Discourses .................................................. 166
2.5.7.1. World War II .............................................................................................. 167
2.5.7.2. A Postcolonial Reading .......................................................................... 173
2.6. DASKIND AND MIGNON: UNVEILING A SUBJUGATED HISTORY: LITERARY
ALLUSION ........................................................................................................... 182
2.6.1. A Brief Summary ......................................................................................... 183
2.6.2. Mignon in the Reception ............................................................................ 187
2.6.2.1. Mignon as a Failed Lover ......................................................................... 190
2.6.3. To Not Belong - A Recurring Theme .......................................................... 196
2.6.3.1. From “Herr” to “Vater” ............................................................................ 198
2.6.3.2. From “Vater” to “Meister” ....................................................................... 201
2.6.3.3. Mignon, the “Verdingkind” ................................................................... 205
2.6.3.4. “Herz” versus “Vernunft” ....................................................................... 208
2.6.3.5. “Bildung” ................................................................................................. 211
2.6.3.6. Loss and to Not Belong .......................................................................... 214
2.6.3.7. Externalization: The “Zigeunermacher” (Making of “Gypsies”) .......... 217
2.6.4. Monster versus Role Model ....................................................................... 221
2.6. MEHR’S WRITING TECHNIQUES ................................................................. 224
2.6.1. Writing Devices ........................................................................................... 225
2.6.1.1. Literature Reviews .................................................................................... 225
2.6.1.2. Literary Devices ....................................................................................... 227
2.6.1.2.1 Literary Devices that Effect the Novel’s Structure ................................ 228
2.6.1.2.2 Other Literary Devices .......................................................................... 234
2.6.2. Dedication .................................................................................................... 243
2.6.3. Structure and Composition ........................................................................ 244
2.6.3.1. Chapters: Book of Revelation .................................................................. 246
2.6.4. Setting: Geographical Locations and Historical Moments in Time .......... 247
2.6.4.1. Timetable .................................................................................................. 250
3. CONCLUSION .................................................................................................... 253
BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................... 264
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Timeline .........................................................................................................................252
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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Es ist eine historische Katastrophe von unglaublichen Ausmassen.
(It is a historical disaster of staggering magnitude.)

*Reinhard Siedler*¹

But it also seems to me that over and above, and arising out of this thematic, there is something else to which we are witness, and which we might describe as an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*.

*Mишель Фуко*²

The in-depth and extensive examination of two world wars has made scholars of German literary studies highly sensitive to fictional characters who belong to minority groups, i.e. Jewish, Black, LGBT people as well as women, and to the history pertaining to these groups. The same level of awareness and socio-historical knowledge does, however, not yet exist when it comes to fictional characters who are, or have been, in the care of the state or community. Through the analysis of Mariella Mehr’s novel *Daskind*, this dissertation addresses that gap and aims to contribute to the international effort to recognize and acknowledge people who have grown up “in care,” and to the dissemination of their history.

For these reasons, I continue this introduction with an introductory statement which is followed by a brief overview of the more recent history of recognitions, apologies and retribution payments. This provides readers with a first insight into the history of people who are, or have been in care, but also into the increasing recognition taking place in the extra-literary world of that group of people. In addition, this shows how important it is to investigate fictional characters, who are, or have been, “in care” through the lens of “their” history. In a next step, I examine the

¹ Reinhard Siedler, Historikerkommission der Stadt Wien, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33yY3-xZmzk.
The way children and youth in extrafamilial care are and have been treated in the Western world is the focus of an increasing number of studies outside the field of social work. This growing interest in the history and socio-cultural situation of this particular population is currently not reflected in literary studies analysing fiction, which contain characters that experience, or experienced, out-of-home care. The argument that this topic is adequately addressed by literary scholars who employ poverty theories is untenable when considering, for example, studies investigating the impact of “permanency” or more aptly “non-permanency” on children and their development, or the recent history of the reconciliation process between states and their (former) child and youth wards. My dissertation proceeds on the assumption that a new social sciences variable characterizing the status of “foster child” needs to be a seminal part of scholarly work analyzing fiction with characters who are, or have been, in extrafamilial care. I argue that currently used terms such as “foster child” or “foster care” are insufficient as a signifier
of this new variable, as these terms do not accurately describe these people’s diverse experiences and histories. Furthermore, I argue that this particular group needs to be examined within a new theoretical framework in order to understand the nature and dimensions of inequality this population has experienced, and continues to experience.

There have always been, and in all likelihood will always be, children and youth who are not able or not allowed to grow up in either any kind of family of origin or in a non-enforced adoptive family. These children and youth rely on society’s generosity and goodwill. Common goals of child agencies are to provide safety, permanency and well being for all children, including those who are in care. While physical and sexual abuse as well as neglect have, in the West, increasingly become unacceptable and punishable by law, the abuse caused due to lack of permanency, in particular relational permanency but also physical and legal permanency, has not yet reached the same social and legal recognition. As early as the late nineteen sixties, psychological theorist John Bowlby developed the foundations of attachment theory to explain and understand human’s early social developments. Although a conservative with regard to whose responsibility it is to raise children, i.e. women’s, at the core of his findings lies the idea that children and adults need close social bonds for healthy development, and that child-care workers need to be trained accordingly. His research has since been confirmed beyond doubt and it is today recognized that children grow up best in nurturing and stable families. Despite the vast scientific evidence (in medicine and in neuroscience) of how vital relational permanency is for humans, most children in care are, to this day, exposed to repeated relational, physical and legal

non-permanency. This is one of the crucial differences between children and youth in out-of-home care and their peers from low-income families, and it is one of the reasons why poverty theories are not able to properly explore the function and meaning of fictional characters who are or were in state or community care.

1.2. HISTORY of RECOGNITIONS, APOLOGIES and RETRIBUTION PAYMENTS

A brief overview of the history of recognitions, apologies and retribution payments shows that this population has often been exploited, abused and been discriminated against beyond what the poor, as a socio-economic group made up of working poor and the underclass, or race and ethnicity based minorities, experienced. The following summary indicates furthermore that this treatment of children and youth in care took place in the entire Western world:

1980s

During the second half of the nineteen eighties, and in the spirit of the emerging cultural turn, the first official apologies unrelated to World War II were made to minorities, whose children had been removed from their families and been placed in state care. Moreover, during that time period the first large-scale sum for expansive research into what is today also known as

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5 And in some cases continue to experience.
“the stealing of children” was made available, and retribution payments were made to former children in state care:

1986: The president of the Swiss Federal Council Alphons Egli issues an official apology for the injustice and suffering the Swiss Yenish people experienced at the hands of the project “Kinder der Landstrasse” (Children of the Country Road), particularly the removal of several hundred children from their families. The same year, the United Church of Canada formally apologizes to Canada’s First Nations’ people for “the church’s role in imposing European culture” on them. While the residential schools were not mentioned in the apology, it was clear that they were integral to the country’s overall assimilation policy.

1987: The vice president of the Swiss charity organization Pro Juventute apologizes for the suffering the project “Kinder der Landstrasse” caused the children and their families.

1988: The Swiss parliament approves eleven million Swiss Francs for independent research into the removal of Yenish children and retribution payments, and grants a select group of researchers access to files and records documenting the process of assimilating the Yenish.

1990s and Early 2000s

During the nineteen nineties, several more Canadian church officials apologized for the churches’ role in the residential school system and for the abuse, pain, suffering and alienation that system caused Canada’s First Nations’ people. After this initial period of recognition,

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6 The Yenish are a minority group, a group of Travelers, living in central Europe including in Switzerland. I introduce the group in more depth in later chapters and chapter sections.


apologies, launching of research projects and allocation of retribution funds, the first apologies to
former wards of the state who do not belong to an ethnic or racial minority were made:

1999: The Irish government offers a formal apology to the tens of thousands of victims of child abuse in the country’s vast “industrial (residential) schools system.” This prompts a nine-year investigation into industrial schools, reformatories, orphanages and hostels that were run by the Irish Catholic church from the nineteen thirties to the nineteen nineties. 

1999 - 2006: Several Australian governments and religious authorities issue formal apologies for instances of past abuse and neglect to former state wards.

2007: Canada begins the implementation of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), which includes retribution payments, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, commemoration and extensive research into several aspects of the residential school system.

2008 to Present

The year 2008 marked the beginning of unprecedented numbers of official government apologies to former wards of states and their families:

2008: The Australian Prime Minister officially apologizes to Australian’s Indigenous people for the discrimination they suffered. Between 1909 and 1969/70

12 Mary Raftery, “Ireland’s Magdalene laundry scandal must be laid to rest – Church, family and state were all complicit in the abuse of thousands of women. The UN is right, Ireland must investigate,” The Guardian, June 8, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/08/ireland-magdalene-laundries-scandal-un.


The final report concludes, 30,000 children who were “deemed to be petty thieves, truants or from dysfunctional families – a category that often included unmarried mothers – were sent to Ireland’s austere network of industrial schools, reformatories, orphanages and hostels from the 1930 until the last facilities shut in the 1990s.”


In 2002, Stadträtin Monika Stocker issues an apology to the victims of compulsory state measures such as compulsory sterilization, detention without due process and removal of children.

15 Some sources set the end date to 1969, others to 1970.
approximately 20,000 to 25,000 aboriginal children were taken from their families and placed in government care.\(^\text{16}\)

The Canadian Prime Minister apologizes on behalf of Canadians to Canada’s Residential School survivors and their families for the Indian residential school system.\(^\text{17}\) Between 1870 and 1996,\(^\text{18}\) about 150,000 Aboriginal, Inuit and Métis children were removed from their families and sent to residential schools.\(^\text{19}\)

2009: Australian’s Prime Minister officially apologizes to the roughly 500,000 non-aboriginal former children and youth, who were removed from their families between the nineteen thirties and the nineteen seventies.\(^\text{20}\)

The University of Melbourne admits to having done medical research on children and youth in state care without their consent, and apologizes for these actions.\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^\text{20}\) This number includes the former migrant children shipped from Britain to Australia; some of them were taken out of the country without the parents’ consent. Wolfsburger Allgemeine, “Bewegende Entschuldigung für frühere Heimkinder in Australien,” November 16, 2009, accessed June 10, 2014, http://www.waz-online.de/Nachrichten/Politik/Deutschland-Welt/Bewegende-Entschuldigung-fuer-fruhere-Heimkinder-in-Australien.


2013: In January, the Swiss monastery “Ingenbohlen” asks for forgiveness for the suffering and abuse child and youth wards experienced while in their care between 1928 and 1970. In February, the city of Zurich apologizes to its own “Administrative Versorgten.” In April, Swiss Federal Council member Simonetta Sommaruga, national church representative Markus Büchel, the president of the farmers association and other cantonal and communal representatives issue an official apology to the victims of compulsory government measures. In October, Switzerland allocates victim compensation for those who were placed in psychiatric clinics and prisons without due process. Ireland’s Prime Minister apologizes to women, who as children and youth were, between 1758 and 1966, often under false pretense institutionalized in “Magdalene Laundries,” where they had to work for free.

2014: Germany increases the overall budget for former German Democratic Republic (GDR) “Heimkinder” (children in residential institutions), who experienced abuse and exploitation while in the state’s care. Switzerland establishes a “Soforthilfefonds” (Immediate-Aid-Fonds) for former “Verdingkinder.” Pope Francis asks victims of sexual abuse for forgiveness.

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32 This was Ireland’s means of taking care of their so called “fallen women,” no matter how old, and whether these young girls were acting up or ended up being pregnant because of abuse. They too had to give up their children, and they had to work for free in the laundries. The last Magdalene Asylum closed, in Ireland, in 1996. Raftery, “Ireland’s Magdalene laundry scandal must be laid to rest – Church, family and state were all complicit in the abuse of thousands of women. The UN is right, Ireland must investigate.”
Switzerland’s pharma industry recognizes its co-responsibility with financial contribution to a fund for former victims. Medical research was undertaken on children, youth and adults without their consent in psychiatric clinics, until the nineteen seventies.\(^{36}\)

In addition to these official recognitions, apologizes and retribution payments, other actions are taken to acknowledge what transpired and to prevent repeating past wrongs: Statute of limitations are discussed, trials dealing with abuse and exploitation are held,\(^ {37}\) retribution payments are being made or demanded, a broad range of research projects are underway and continue to be drawn up, files are being saved for future generations and made accessible to former children in state care, as well as to researchers, galleries and museums show exhibitions addressing aspects of “foster care,”\(^ {38}\) documentaries are made,\(^ {39}\) and permanent exhibitions, memorials\(^ {40}\) and mainstream movies dealing with the topic of past and current state care are created and well received.\(^ {41}\)


\(^{39}\)For example, Verdingkinder directed by Peter Neumann (Switzerland, 2003). Wards of the Crown directed by Andrée Cazamone (Canada, 2005).

\(^{40}\)For example, the Gedenkstätte in Mümliswil, Switzerland.

\(^{41}\)So for example: Philomena, directed by Stephen Frears (USA, 2013); Short Term 12, directed by Destin Daniel Cretton (2013, USA); the documentary Und alle haben geschwiegen, directed by Anja Kindler and Gesine Müller (Germany, 2013), which is based on journalist Peter Wensierski’s book Schläge im Namen des Herrn (München: Spiegel-Buchverlag, 2006); the documentary Forever Family, directed by Catherine Pope (Canada, 2012); Der Verdingbub, directed by Markus Imboden (Switzerland, 2011); Finding a Family, directed by Mark Jean (USA, 2011). As well as the British-Irish crime drama and TV miniseries Quirke.
The fact that governments, Churches and private organizations have taken such extensive responsibility for what happened to this group of people in the twentieth century and beyond is a testimony to the magnitude of past injustice inflicted on wards of states and communities.42

1.3. TERMINOLOGY: DISAMBIGUATION

The fictional characters discussed in this dissertation are not only children and youth figures, who are or were in care, their ascribed experiences, furthermore represent very diverse practices of out-of-home care. A term that accurately describes these characters’ experiences does currently not exist in either German or English language..

A clear distinction is today made in German-language Europe between child and youth wards who had to work for their keep and those who did not. Depending on the region and type of work, children who had to work were not only known as “Pflegekinder” (foster children) but also as “Verdingkinder,”43 “Haltekinder,”44 “Schwabenkinder,”45 “Tirolerkinder,”46 “Windekinder,”47 “Fabrikkinder” (factory children) and so on. Currently, the term “Pflegekind” (foster child) is used for children placed with foster families, and the term “Heimkind” (home-child) for children in state run institutions, which in English are also known as children and youth’s homes. In the last century48 Austria, Germany and Switzerland provided, in addition to foster families, a wide

43 This expression was used in Switzerland, and in “Mitteldhochdeutsch” (Middle High German) and “Althochdeutsch” (Old High German).
44 This expression was used in Austria, Italy, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.
45 This expression was used in Austria, Italy, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Germany; children from these alp regions wandered to Oberschwaben to work, or be sold as contracted-out children.
46 This expression was used in Austria, Italy, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Germany.
47 This expression was used in Switzerland and Germany.
48 Some of these types of children and youth’s homes existed already in previous centuries, some still exist today.
range of state-run institutions for child and youth wards. So, for example, “Waisenhäuser” (orphanages), “Säuglingsheime” (children’s homes for newborns and toddlers), “Kleinkinderheime” (children’s homes for pre-school children), “Kinderheime” (children’s homes for school-aged children), “Sonderheime” (special needs children’s homes), “Jugendheime” (youth’s homes), “Jugendgruppen” (group homes for youth), “Mädchengemeinde” (homes for girls), “Knabenheime” (homes for boys), “Heime für schwererziehbare Jugendliche” (reformatories), “Heime für gefallene Mädchen” (homes for fallen girls), and “Erziehungsanstalten” or “Erziehungsheime.” The latter were houses of correction and prison-like institutions for children and youth who could neither be placed in a reformatory nor in a regular children’s or youth’s home. The terms “Normalkinderheim” (regular children’s home) and “Spezialheim” (special children’s home) were another way institutions for children and youth were classified. Furthermore, “Kinderheime” as well as “Jugendheime” were, and still are, divided into those that are “geschlossen” (closed) and those that are not “closed.” Closed children and youth’s homes differ from regular ones in several ways. As the name suggests, residents of closed homes do not leave the premises to attend public school or kindergarten. Instead, they attend the institution’s own educational facilities. By contrast, children and youth placed in not closed children and youth’s homes attend public kindergarten and schools. To ensure that residents of closed children and youth’s homes comply with the house rules, the young charges are not allowed any contact with the outside world for a prolonged period of time. To a lesser degree, this is also the case in

49 “Erziehungsanstalten” or “Erziehungsheime” served, and still serve, furthermore, as overflow options if no suitable “Heim” placement was, and is, available.

regular children and youth’ homes.\textsuperscript{51} Closed children and youth’s homes are today classified as residential school institutions by many researchers.\textsuperscript{52}

English-language Canada, the United States and Britain currently use the term foster child as an umbrella term for all children and youth in state care, no matter whether they are in group homes or foster families.\textsuperscript{53} Regarding the institutions that house these children and youth, the Anglophone world categorizes them as “orphanages,” “residential schools,” “reformatories” and “homes for fallen girls.” In addition, studies have identified special groups of child and youth wards, such as the First Nations residential school children and the British Home Children. While the meaning of some of the English and the German terms overlap, many do not. The translation challenges between English and German terminology describing children and youth in state or community care become even more complex when analyzing German-language fiction that was written before the twentieth century. Therefore, in order to accurately convey in English what the German novel explores, through its many historical, international, socio-cultural and literary allusions, I would like to propose a new terminology.

\textsuperscript{51} In the nineteen eighties, for example, it was still common practice that children and youth in not closed homes were not allowed any outside contact for three months, including no contact with family members or former caregivers.
\textsuperscript{53} A Third World child, who is financially supported by somebody in the West, is also called a foster child.
1.3.1. “Familienlos” (Family-Less) and “Un-Familied”

In German, the term “familienlos” (family-less) describes children and youth whose parents are permanently or temporarily unable or not permitted to look after them. Current and former wards have reclaimed the word and describe themselves as “familienlos.” The term signifies that it does not matter whether the status family-less was reached by government intervention or by abandonment, by illness or death of one or both parents, by the unwillingness of relatives to take in a child, or for any other reason. The term “familienlos” acknowledges the existence and predicaments of social orphans, and is used by professionals working with and writing about children and youth in care. Furthermore, the term signifies the notion that “family” is more than being related by blood as, for example, successful adoptions show. By translating the term “familienlos” to English and by coining a new term, namely “family-less,” I am able to express more concisely and more exactly the experiences and contradictions that the analyzed characters navigate. There appears to exist no corollary in the English language that expresses these experiences and contradictions in one word.

54 Orphans are generally identified and named as such, and not as “familienlos.”
57 This contradiction is reflected in the German and English compound words, “familienlos” and “family-less.” Both the German and the English term share a common Latin root “familia,” whose original meanings includes a broadly defined family in the sense of kinship community, which includes household servants, hands and slaves. With the development of the nuclear family in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in central Europe, however, the notion of blood relation and the community of one or both parent(s) and at least one child came into use in both English and German. In regard to the suffixes, early Gothic, Old and Middle High German, Old Saxon and Old English meanings
When considering relational, physical and legal non-permanency, which are common experiences of child and youth wards, the expression “un-familied” proves to be fruitful. The experience of being un-familied can also be due to government actions, illness or death of caregivers, abandonment and so on.

The identity of family-less and un-familied children or youth characters are constituted by contradictions, which are not expressed in the same way by the term “foster child,” as they are by the expressions “familienlos,” “family-less” and “un-familied.” The child and youth ward figures exist in the analyzed text(s) without society’s acknowledgement of their particular losses and marginalization, and by the very simple fact that they are without family in communities where the family grouping is assumed – as do the real-life children and youth they represent. This is a further reason why poverty theories cannot adequately explain the reality of growing up in extrafamilial care.

1.3.2. The Acronyms WVHPKL/OHGFR

“Foster child,” the term most commonly used in English, and the German “Pflegekind” are prescriptive terms. When considered literally, they negate the negative experiences a child or youth may have while in care, as well as the potential long-term consequences such an upbringing may have for the individual. The terms “familienlos,” “family-less” and “un-familied” are to a

of the suffix “-los,” respectively “-less (-leas)” circle around the negative, such as, empty, vain, false, feigned, nothing, loose, weak, immoral, without, they also include the meaning “free,” “free from” and “happy.” In a modern understanding, both the German “-los” and the English “-less” lean towards the negative, indicating the “lack” or “loss” of something, signifying and connoting aspects such as “without,” “less,” “bad,” “little” etc.

58 Physical non-permanency includes, for example, displacement and new placements.

59 The interconnection between “Verdingkind,” “Heimkind” and “Pflegekind” is reflected in legislature and legal language. To this day, the term “Pflegekind” is in law used for any child and youth placed in any form of institutions, including children’s homes, group homes, residential schools, reformatories as well as children and youth placed with foster families.
certain degree “reactive” terms. They too are prescriptive. These terms describe the challenges and losses children and youth encounter while growing up outside of their family of origin or outside of a non-enforced adoptive families. However, these expressions negate positive care experiences.

Following the example of the LGBT community, I introduce the new acronym WVHPKL, which stands for “Waisenkind” (orphan), “Verdingkind” (contracted-out child), “Heimkind” (children and youth growing up in children and youth’s homes or institutions), “Pflegekind” (foster child), and “Kinder der Landstrasse” (children of the project *Children of the Country Road*). A comparable acronym in English would be OHGFRI, which stands for “orphans,” “British Home children,” “group home children,” “foster children,” “residential school children,” and children and youth in institutions. The acronyms offer several advantages to the German and English terms “Pflegekind” (foster child), “familienlos” (family-less) and “un-familied.” Most importantly, the acronyms are descriptive and therefore encompass negative as well as positive ward of the state experiences. Furthermore, they acknowledge a much broader range of lived experiences than the terms “Pflegekind” and “foster child.” A “Heimkind,” for example, does not have foster parents. Instead s/he has caretakers, who work in shifts and leave after their time is up. A “Verdingkind” did in most cases not have foster parents either. These children were, for a certain period of time, “owned” by their “masters” and had to work for their keep. In addition, the term “familienlos” has been used and continues to be used, as I will show, to represent the ideology that only certain types of families are considered “a family”: children from so-called “undesirable families” were taken from their parent/s, put into state care, and

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60 The acronym LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual. Most recently, an “A” has been added for “Asexual,” this expands the acronym to LGBT&A.
declared family-less. Moreover, in many cases, residents of “closed” and “not-closed” institutions were placed in state care against the will of their parent/s to ensure the children would follow the dominant culture’s way of life rather than their parent/s’ lifestyle. By not using an acronym that represents as many of the extrafamilial care experiences that are known, society denies WVHPKL/OHGFRI people their long and rich history, their personal experiences and their identity. In a similar way, the use of the term “gay” to describe all LGBT people denies the history and lived experience of lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. While it would be easier to use either the German or the English acronym throughout the dissertation, the two acronyms do not fully signify the same. I employ the combination of the German and the English acronyms WVHPKL/OHGFRI as main term in my research because this dissertation, which is written in English, analyzes a German-language novel, which has not yet been translated into English, and because the German novel contains allusions, which establish links to English “texts.” I use the terms “family-less” and “un-familied” when talking about more specific aspects of WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures’ experiences. When talking about how farmers and other families received a child to “care for,” I will employ the term “foster child” but will put this signifier inside quotation marks to underscore how inaccurate this expression is for the specific situation. The terms “foster” and “care,” and the combination “foster care,” after all, do imply positive and nourishing care taking, and not the reality this status held, and continues to hold for many WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth.

Consequently, I also propose that the simplifying, inaccurate and prescriptive term “foster care” is replaced with the acronym WVHPKL/OHGFRI care. In addition, although the acronyms are long, to shorten them to “VHP” in German and “HIF” in English would exclude experiences that are historically specifically linked to ethnic and racial groups. “VHP” would stand for children and youth that were, or are, in “Verdingung,” “Heimen und Institutionen,” and “Pflegefamilien.” HIF would stand for children and youth who were, or are, “Canada’s Home Children” and other contracted-out children, children and youth in various institutions including group homes, and children and youth in foster families.
Although neither the acronyms WVHPKL/OHGFRI nor the term “familienlos” are used in the main narrative I analyze, nor in the alluded to texts, my use thereof as well as of “un-familed” to name the experiences explored in Daskind and in texts that are relevant for the novel, does not constitute a reiterative appropriation of injurious speech in the Butlerian sense. On the contrary, my use of the acronyms, of “un-familed” and of “family-less” as the English translation of “familienlos” signifies a performative act that re-identifies these characters. Moreover, in doing so I argue that the analyzed text/s signify locations of radical openness and possibilities, in the sense of Bell Hooks’ writings about the margin.

1.4. TEXT SELECTION

Fictional texts as far back as Oedipus Rex, the Bible and the Norse and Icelandic Sagas are an indication that children who are not able or not allowed to grow up within their family or “house” of origin, and the reasons thereof, have long been part of society’s cultural reflection. A cursory review of German-language literature reveals that many authors include WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters in their texts. Among them are, for example, Hartmann von der Aue (1160/70-1210/20), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811), Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848), Jeremias Gotthelf (1797-1854), Adalbert Stifter (1805-1868), Bertold Auerbach (1812-1882), Georg Büchner (1813-1837), Louise von François (1817-1893), Theodor Fontane (1819-1898), Gottfried Keller (1819-1890), Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830-1916), Wilhelm Raabe (1831-

64 The story of Moses, Exodus 2:1-2.10.
1910), Frank Wedekind (1864-1918), Jakob Wassermann (1873-1934), Thomas Mann (1875-1955), Carl Albert Loosli (1877-1959), Lena Christ (1881-1920), Cécile Ines Loos (1883-1959), Friedrich Glauser (1896-1939), Emmy Moor (1900-1979), Max Frisch (1911-1991), Arthur Honegger (*1924), Siegfried Lenz (1926-2014), Peter Handke (*1942), Mariella Mehr (*1947), Patrick Süskind (*1949), Martina Borger (*1956) and Maria Elisabeth Straub (*1943), Aglaja Veteranyi (1962-2002), Mirijam Günter (*1972) and Zoë Jenny (*1974). This is by no means a complete list, and does not include fairy tales, children and youth books, as well as autobiographies. In fact, many previously forgotten texts with WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters continue to be rediscovered, and new narratives exploring the topic of growing up as a ward of the state or community are being written. Nevertheless, literary scholars have paid little attention to WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures as a group of their own with a unique social position and history.

An overview of texts by the above-mentioned authors reveals that the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child figure is overwhelmingly portrayed as an, in the literal sense, asocial as well as antisocial character. For example, some WVHPKL/OHGFRI child figures are not able to embrace the cultural codes and expectations of their foster environment,65 others are not treated as equal to the children related by blood,66 some are exploited as cheap labourers and maltreated,67 others lack proper speech and cognition,68 some commit suicide,69 die of illness,70 vanish71 or are

66 Norse and Icelandic Sagas (~1222); Frisch, *Andorra*; Keller, *Der grüne Heinrich*.
68 *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/97) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; Keller, *Der grüne Heinrich*; *Daskind* (1995) by Mariella Mehr; *Kaspar Hauser* (1908) by Jakob Wassermann; *Kaspar* (1967) by Peter Handke; Droste-
murdered, other are the bearer of malediction and bad luck, some commit sibling incest or mother-son incest, and others are portrayed as prostitutes, drunks, thieves, aggressors or murderers. In comparison, WVHPKL/OHGFRI child and youth characters who, as adults enter into non-incestuous marriage, or marry at all, are portrayed in only four of the reviewed texts. All four are from the nineteenth century. Three of the four characters are female. If WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters are not drawn up as representatives of negative outcomes, they are constructed as role models.

When looking at these texts diachronically, a diminishing social status can be traced. Starting with Oedipus and reading forward in time until the nineteenth century, there exists a change in the birth status of WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters, from children of kings, to children of the nobility, to bourgeois, to petit bourgeois. From the mid nineteenth century onward, WVHPKL/OHGFRI child figures are the offspring of the landless, the poor, the fallen, the whore and the criminal. In the second half of the twentieth century, literature depicting WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters focuses less on the child character’s class background and more on contemporary issues, such as “Verdingkinder,” war children, children of “Gypsies.”

Hülshoff, Die Judenbuche; Warum das Kind in der Polenta kocht (2000) by Aglaja Veteranyi; Das Parfum (1985) by Patrick Süskind; Der Ruf des Muschelhorns.
70 Ebner-Eschenbach, Das Gemeindekind; Keller, Der Grüne Heinrich; Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre; François, Die Letzte Reckenburgerin.
71 Droste-Hülshoff, Die Judenbuche, Katzensilber (1853) by Adalbert Stifter; Lenz, Arnes Nachlaß.
72 Stifter, Katzensilber; Lulu (1904/1913) by Frank Wedekind; Frisch, Andorra; Günter, Heim.
73 Der Findling (1811) by Heinrich von Kleist; Demetrius (1815) by Friedrich Schiller.
74 König Ödipus by Sophokles (~442BC); Gregorius (~1200) by Hartmann von der Aue; Der Erwählte (1951) by Thomas Mann.
75 Wedekind, Lulu.
76 François, Die letzte Reckenburgerin.
77 Mehr, Daskind; Süskind, Parfum; Günter, Heim.
78 Sophokles, Odipus; Wedekind, Lulu; Süskind, Das Parfum.
79 Vor dem Sturm (1878) by Theodor Fontane; Barfüssele (1856) by Berthold Auerbach; Hastenbeck (1899) by Wilhelm Raabe; François, Die letzte Reckenburgerin.
80 So for example in Ebner-Eschenbach, Das Gemeindekind; Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre; Auerbach, Barfüssele; Gotthelf, Bauernspiegel.
children of immigrants and children of single parents. Within the reviewed texts, some of the issues addressed are specific to a certain socio-historical environment, e.g. being a foundling of royal descent. Other themes are recurring, such as lack of cognitive and language abilities, identity, belonging, sibling incest, poverty, racialization of class, being orphaned, or being abandoned.

WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures, fictional as well as real world ones, permeate the boundaries implied in the terminology-complex “private and public,” and upset the “natural” and “normal” order of child rearing, that is, of being familied. Texts with WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters investigate norms, normality and alterity. In this regard, these texts investigate socio-political aspects and ponder ideas and ideologies.81

1.4.1.  *Daskind* (1995) by Mariella Mehr

Ever since I started thinking about WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters, Mariella Mehr’s novel *Daskind* stood out for me as a text that straddles genuinely literary narrative strategies and political activism. In addition to being able to explore the function of WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures in more depth within the field of German-language literature, Mariella Mehr’s *Daskind* allows me to present to English readers a stylistically interesting narrative, rich with allusions to other literary works and to history. The novel prompts readers to investigate expressions, historical references and allusions to other texts, and in doing so to uncover a complex and far-reaching  

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81 Many of them are, or were meant to be, part of a counter discourse.
history of neglect, prejudice and exploitation. These elements give *Daskind* a validity that transcends its author’s ethnicity and the book’s period of publication.

1.4.1.1. Literary Allusions

Mehr’s novel alludes to a number of literary works from preceding literary periods. Most prominently she refers to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) and this text’s child character Mignon. Referencing Mignon allows the author to expand her problematization of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people beyond the novel’s setting of two generations and a small region in central Europe to include the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people of previous centuries and non-Germanic countries. The allusions to Mignon help highlight how old practices such as “Verdingung” are, and for how long it has been known that non-permanency, in particular, relational non-permanency and lack of love and care can lead to the death of a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child. Furthermore, the allusions to Mignon provide the narrator with the opportunity to include aspects of being a WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl, and outcomes of being “in care,” that are otherwise not explored in *Daskind*. Thus the “Mignon allusions” are seminal to the understanding of the scope and breadth of Mehr’s *Daskind*. In addition, *Lehrjahre* helps map the function and perception of WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures in literary studies over a longer period of time.

In turn, a reading of Mignon through the lens of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies for the purpose of analysing Mehr’s *Daskind* reveals that the eighteenth century WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl character deserves consideration not only in relation to the male protagonist but in her own right.
1.4.1.2. Translations

All English translations of Daskind, and other German-language texts are my own, unless otherwise noted. As for Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, even though “translation” is not the topic of this dissertation, I consider several translations. I argue, as translations are part of the intercultural exchange of values, beliefs, social norms and notions of correctness, they, particularly those of an older, canonical text such as Lehrjahre, serve as historical sources to map change. The inclusion of a selection of Lehrjahre translations allows me to map changes in mainstream society’s attitude towards and perception of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults. The early English translations of Lehrjahre are of particular import to the analysis of Daskind, as they influence to this day how the figure Mignon, and in extension thereof WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls in general, are perceived by students and scholars reading the novel in English translation. In addition, as colonial topoi and tropes are in Daskind explored as part of the long lasting history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, Lehrjahre’s early translations provide insight into how certain ordering mechanisms and structures affected colonies as well as colonial and non-colonial Europe. Moreover, as more and more German texts are taught in translation at North American colleges and universities, older as well as more recent translations of these texts have to be considered as part of the reception of the original text. In order to understand the

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84 Norbert Greiner elaborates on translations as contributors to the intercultural communication. Norbert Greiner, Grundlagen der Übersetzungsforschung – Übersetzung und Literaturwissenschaft (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004).
values texts in translation convey\textsuperscript{85} translations have to be critically deconstructed within the context of their “source texts.”\textsuperscript{86} This is even more important if a text in translation does not come with an introduction that explains the intention and focus of the translation, or does not state that this particular translation is “nur eine [...] bestimme Erfahrung eines Rezeptionsverhältnisses”\textsuperscript{87} (only one specific experience of one interpretation) of the original.\textsuperscript{88}

The first translation I consider in my dissertation is Thomas Carlyle’s \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship}\textsuperscript{89} from 1824. Carlyle is the first to translate \textit{Lehrjahre} into English, and was in the early nineteenth century the main translator of this text and of other works of Goethe. Carlyle is known to have “cleaned up”\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Lehrjahre} to align it more with his own morals and his understanding of Goethe. As I will show, Carlyle’s changes to the Mignon character affect the understanding and reception of Mignon significantly. The second translation I use is William Allan Neilson’s \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship} for “The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction” from 1917.\textsuperscript{91} Neilson’s text passages concerning the figure Mignon follow Carlyle’s translation very closely. I include Neilson into my examination as his translation shows how ideologies are reiterated and passed on through various scholarly works. The third translation I employ is Eric A. Blackall’s \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship} from 1989. He sets out to make \textit{Lehrjahre} more accessible to a twentieth-century audience of English “non-specialist” readers, whom he calls

\textsuperscript{85} Hermans, “Translational Norms and Correct Translations,” 166.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. The original is in translation studies also known as “source text.”
\textsuperscript{87} Friedmar Apel, \textit{Literarische Übersetzung} (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1983), 35.
\textsuperscript{88} Hermans, “Translation Norms and Correct Translations,” 166.
“generalists.” His *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is part of a multivolume “paperback series that brings into modern English a representative portion of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s vast body of work.” Therefore, his translation is crucial when analyzing *Lehrjahre* as a text alluded to in *Daskind*. Blackall does not edit the sections pertaining to Mignon to fit moral ideologies the way Carlyle does. He does, however, uphold the idea that the female girl character is “hardly encompassable by realistic criteria.” The fourth translation I incorporate is H. M. Waidson’s translation of *Lehrjahre* from 2013. The publisher’s aim is to “redefine and enrich the classics canon by promoting unjustly neglected works of enduring significance.” Waidson’s translation stays closer to the German original than Blackall’s does. However Waidson, like Blackall, leans on Carlyle’s translation for translating some crucial elements concerning the figure Mignon. This has, as I will show, far reaching consequences for the understanding and perception of Mignon and the group of real-life people she represents. In addition, whenever the four selected translations do not do justice to the Mignon character of the original, I include my own translation.

1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature. The systems, codes and traditions

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93 Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, Blackall, back panel.
94 Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, Blackall, 381.
of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of a work of literature.

*Graham Allen*\(^\text{97}\)

[I]t is quite possible that the major mechanisms of power have been accompanied by ideological productions.

*Michel Foucault*\(^\text{98}\)

What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instant of your demand: ‘Is it science’? Which speaking, discoursing subjects – which subject of experience and knowledge – do you then want to ‘diminish’ when you say: ‘I who conduct this discourse am conducting a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist’? Which theoretical-political avant garde do you want to enthrone in order to isolate it from all the discontinuous forms of knowledge that circulate about it?

*Michel Foucault*\(^\text{99}\)

Mehr’s novel *Daskind* is by many scholars read as a novel about violence. In contrast, I read Mehr’s novel as a critique, i.e. a Foucauldian criticism, of the notion of “foster care” and as “an autonomous, non-centralised [Foucauldian] kind of theoretical production.”\(^\text{100}\) To that end, my reading of *Daskind* focuses on how Mehr unveils the often disqualified and subjugated knowledges and history pertaining to WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, and understands that history as an element of the Foucauldian power-knowledge network.

On the plot level, Mehr’s novel is about “family,” about the many different ways “family” is part of the Foucauldian power-knowledge network, and about that network’s implied notion that there exists no essential identity as ‘victim’ or ‘perpetrator.’ More precisely, *Daskind* is about family’s unnamed, its dangerous shadow-side, its other, that is, the novel is about the unfamilied, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. These people, who are to this day not recognized as a


\(^{98}\) Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 102.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 85.

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 81.
social minority group, differ from the general population insofar that they do not grow up in either any kind of family of origin or in a non-enforced adoptive family. If we agree, as I do, that family is an ideal construct “which is forcibly materialized through time,” then the same has to be accepted for society’s WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

In order to reveal and explore the long, international and diverse history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, Mehr created a highly intertextual text, full of historical, international, socio-cultural and literary allusions. This calls for a theoretical framework that combines notions of power structures, and their subversion on a societal as well as an individual level, with notions of intertextuality. I understand allusions in Gérard Genette’s sense, as one form of intertextuality. For the introduction of a theoretical concept for my reading of Daskind, I first focus on Foucault’s notion of “local criticism” engendered by “a return of knowledge.” In a next step, I introduce the concept of intertextuality, as theorized in structuralism and post-structuralism.

1.5.1. **Michel Foucault: “A Return of Knowledge”**

French philosopher, social theorist and historian Michel Foucault discusses in his lecture of January 7, 1976 his observations that since the early to mid nineteen sixties an “increasing vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices, discourses” is occurring. He attributes this sense of instability to, what he calls, the “amazing efficacy of discontinuous, particular and local criticism,” and points out that the combination of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘local

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102 Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 181.
criticism’ has led to an “inhibiting effect of global totalitarian theories.”

Foucault clarifies this claim and outlines not only the theoretical concept of what he calls the local character of criticism but also of what can be understood as a methodology of how to “do” this specific form of criticism. His explanations of the methodological part of this theory continues in his lecture from January 14, 1976, wherein he elaborates on what “power” is, and how it should be investigated.

A key element of the ‘local character of criticism’ is that it is an “an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production […] whose validity does not depend on the approval of the established régimes of thought.” This is made possible, Foucault posits, by what he calls “a return of knowledge.”

This return of knowledge happens through an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges,” because “only the historical contents allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematizing thought is designed to mask.” This notion of an insurrection of subjugated knowledges seems to me most fruitful for my reading of Mehr’s Daskind through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens.

Foucault defines subjugated knowledges as a) “those blocks of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory;” and b) as “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.”

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103 Ibid., 80.
104 Ibid., 81.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 82.
108 Ibid., 82.
109 Ibid.
“historical knowledge of struggles.”\textsuperscript{110} Therefore, he writes, “[critics] task will be to expose and specify the issue at stake in this opposition, this struggle, this insurrection of knowledges against the institutions and against effects of the knowledge and power that invests scientific discourse.”\textsuperscript{111} He believes it is through the immediate emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, which include, for example, the knowledges of the delinquent, of the “psychiatric patient, of the ill person, of the nurse, of the doctor, parallel and marginal as they are to the knowledge of medicine,” that criticism performs its work.\textsuperscript{112} I argue that the “immediate” emergence of the knowledge of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people and their history has to be included in this list of ‘subjugated knowledges.’

1.5.1.1. Theory as Method

Part of unveiling subjugated knowledges, Foucault states, is to locate “power at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in character.”\textsuperscript{113} Critics should be concerned, he explains, with power “in its more regional and local forms and institutions.”\textsuperscript{114} He names that process “Genealogy,” “or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches.”\textsuperscript{115} Genealogy, he explains is concerned

with the insurrection of knowledges that are opposed primarily not to the contents, methods or concepts of science, but to the effects of the centralising

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 83.
powers, which are linked, to the institution and functioning of an organized scientific discourse within a society such as ours.\textsuperscript{116}

Genealogy is not against science or scientific discourse, however it is “against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that the genealogy must wage its struggle.”\textsuperscript{117} Hence, in terms of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies, Genealogy challenges the notion of ‘family’ as it is used to create WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. Foucault calls the “painstaking rediscovery of struggles,”\textsuperscript{118} including the memory of their conflicts, when combined with erudite knowledge, Genealogy,” and explains further:

a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse. It is based on a reactivation of local knowledges – of minor knowledges, as Deleuze might call them – in opposition to the scientific hierarchisation of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power.\textsuperscript{119}

Foucault defines ‘archaelogy’ to be “the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities.”\textsuperscript{120} In comparison, he explains, “genealogy’ would be the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play.”\textsuperscript{121} For both, Foucault insists, different knowledge discourses, that is, the knowledges provided by different disciplines, have to be considered.\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 84.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., 83.
\item Ibid., 85
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 85.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Following Timothy Rayner’s lead, I combine the two terms (archaeology and genealogy) into one, namely, archae-genealogy, as Mehr does both with and through her novel *Daskind*.\(^{123}\)

I read Mehr’s *Daskind* as a literary implementation of a Foucauldian ‘local critic’ through the return and insurrection of subjugated knowledges. I argue that Mehr employs intertextuality, in the form of historical, socio-cultural and literary allusions, as a vital tool to write a first draft of an archae-genealogy of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. Her reader becomes in this process the researcher and critic who helps resurrect subjugated knowledges by following the text’s many allusions.

### 1.5.2. **Intertextuality**

The term intertextuality was coined by Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva in her writings introducing the work of Russian philosopher, literary critic and semiotician Mikhail Bakthin to French literary theorists in the nineteen sixties. However, the origin of intertextuality, Graham Allen underscores in his extensive research on intertextuality, can be traced back to the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure’s notion of the differential sign has influenced the “majority of theories of intertextuality.”\(^{124}\) At the core of these theories lies Saussure’s understanding of the linguistic sign as a non-unitary, non-stable, and relational unit.


The importance of the linguistic turn for literary theories is that if we agree with Saussure’s notion of the linguistic sign as in some way differential, and therefore not only as “non-referential in nature but also as shadowed by a vast number of possible relations,”\(^\text{125}\) then this is, as Allen puts it, “doubly true of the literary sign.”\(^\text{126}\) Saussure’s linguistics implies that all acts of communication stem from choices made within a pre-existing system.\(^\text{127}\) In other words, authors of literary works do not simply select words from a language system, they select “plots, generic features, aspects of characters, images, ways of narrating, even phrases and sentences from previous literary texts and from the literary tradition.”\(^\text{128}\) This understanding proposes a synchronic system of language constituted by “a vast network of relations, of similarity and difference.”\(^\text{129}\)

The notion of intertextuality emerged during the transitional time in modern literary and cultural theory from structuralism to poststructuralism.\(^\text{130}\) As Allen points out, structuralists employ intertextuality to “locate and even fix”\(^\text{131}\) literary meanings, as does, for example, French literary theorist and structuralist Genette, who defines ‘allusions,’ in his model of transtextuality,\(^\text{132}\) as one of three forms of intertextuality.\(^\text{133}\) Poststructuralists employ the term intertextuality to disrupt notions of meaning.\(^\text{134}\)

Kristeva incorporates in her account of Bakhtin’s work his understanding of language as being socially specific and embodying stratifications. Allen points out, for “Bakhtin, Medvedev

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{126}\) Ibid.
\(^{127}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{128}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{129}\) Ibid.
\(^{130}\) This centers on Julia Kristeva’s attempt to combine Saussure’s and Bakhtin’s theories of language and literature in the nineteen sixties.
\(^{131}\) Allen, *Intertextuality*, 4.
\(^{133}\) Genette subdivides the category ‘intertextuality’ into quotation, plagiarism and allusion.
\(^{134}\) Ibid.
and Volosinov, [words] are relational, […] not simply because of their place within an abstract system of language, but because of the nature of all language viewed in its concrete social situatedness. All utterances are responses and are addressed to specific addressees.”¹³⁵ In other words, while Saussurean linguistics, as discussed earlier, “seeks to explain language as a synchronic system,” and formalism seeks to explain the general ‘literariness,’¹³⁶ Bakhtin’s view of language is concerned with the social context, namely, with the world’s existence within “specific social sites, special social registers, and specific moments of utterances and receptions.”¹³⁷ Bakhtin and Volosinow argue against Saussure when stating that “‘there is no real moment in time when a synchronic system of language could be constructed,’”¹³⁸ because language is always in a “ceaseless flow of becoming.”¹³⁹ Allen summarizes, “Language, seen in its social dimension, is constantly reflecting and transforming class, institutional, national and group interests.”¹⁴⁰ That is, intertextual is the entire cultural code rather than a specific “intertextual” in the sense of other texts.¹⁴¹ These aspects make Bakhtin’s work concerning intertextuality so interesting for readers concerned with marginalized or oppressed groups. Bakhtin’s argument of language as dialogic and heteroglot is “threatening to any unitary, authoritarian and hierarchical conception of society, art and life.”¹⁴²

French critic, literary theorist, philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes is probably best known for his essay “The Death of the Author” (1968). This manifesto enhances the role of

¹³⁵ Allen, _Intertextuality_, 20.
¹³⁶ Ibid., 16.
¹³⁷ Bakhtin as discussed in Allen, _Intertextuality_, 11.
¹³⁹ Allen, _Intertextuality_, 18.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 74.
¹⁴² Ibid., 30.
the reader to taking on an active role in the production of “the anti-monologic text.”143 This happens at the cost of the white male, “Author God,”144 who releases a single, “‘theological’ meaning,”145 i.e. “‘message.’”146 In Barthes’s intertextual model, the text, is no longer a medium within which “meaning is secured and stabilized.” Instead, the text is now perceived as a web, a weave or garment, which is “woven from the threads of the ‘already written’ and the ‘already read.’”147 Therefore, Allen reiterates, “every text has its meaning in relation to other texts.”148 Barthes speaks of the text being experienced “in an activity of production,”149 wherein there are no more critics, just readers, who, if productive instead of being consumers, are also writers creating textual analysis.150 The modern author arranges and “compiles the always already written, spoken and read into a ‘multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.’”151 The text is further defined as “‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.’”152 Therefore, the modern scriptor (author) “when s/he writes, is always already in the process of reading and re-writing.”153 Allen reiterates that meaning then does not come from the author “but from language viewed intertextually.”154

The notion of intertextuality has been celebrated and challenged by feminist and post-structuralist critics. Their concerns are with the Barthesian “loss of the author,” in particular with

143 Ibid., 69.
144 Ibid., 73.
146 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 6.
150 Ibid., 70. I will continue to use the terms critic and scholar as the main focus of this dissertation is not an analysis of Mehr’s *Daskind* through the lens of Barthe’s work.
152 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
the loss of the female author’s identity, and with Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence.”

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar respond to Bloom by asserting that women suffer from an “anxiety of authorship” rather than from an “anxiety of influence.”

Therefore, and as women have traditionally been excluded from literary critic and writing, intertextuality is for women, when established, a matter of legitimation rather than, as Allen paraphrases it, of “emasculating belatedness.”

This statement can be rephrased to include members of other marginalized groups, for example, reader-authors-critics who are WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, such as the author Mariella Mehr.

The struggles reader-authors-critics from marginalized or oppressed groups have to undertake, in addition to “simply” write-read-critic, in order to get published, so their texts can be read-critiqued, enter university libraries, become part of university and other educational institution’s curricula, cannot be addressed within the notion of intertextuality as introduced at the beginning of this chapter section. Feminist critics have responded in different ways to the loss of authority. Catherine Belsey, for example, argues that women can locate their subjectivity in the “plural anonymity of Barthes’ poststructuralism.”

Peggy Kamuf argues similarly. She sees in Barthes’ plurality an opportunity for women to experience “their subjectivity as it is: fluid, individual, and, thus far, inadequately framed and explored.”

Cheryl Walker offers what Wilson calls a “situated poststructuralism” which considers the author’s gendered or raced


157 Allen, Intertextuality, 146.


identity but not as a defining factor to be “designated worthy of canonical status.”

Nancy K. Miller responds to the different voices by suggesting a postmodern authorial signature. That is, with “a historically specific configuration of gender, class, race, sexual preference, religion, and so forth,” which results in a political intertextuality. This notion, Sarah Wilson concludes, allows for fluidity and acknowledges “the inevitably plural nature of identity.”

Mehr responds to the Barthesian “loss of author” and Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” with a postmodern style of writing. Understanding herself as a political author of Yenish-WVHPKL/OHGFR descent, Mehr writes from the point of view that the literary form is part of a text’s political message, and therefore considers all that came “before” open to imitation and reinterpretation. She echoes and plays with texts, as well as with well-established genres and employs literary techniques and devices, such as historical, international, socio-cultural and literary allusions to convey her political message.

160 Ibid., 5.
163 Mehr, “Frauenmut,” in RückBlitze, ed. Mariella Mehr (Bern: Zytglogge, 1990), 176.
Mehr’s novel is a courageous and uncomfortable text that challenges readers to rethink and re-examine knowledges, preconceptions and deeply held beliefs. I begin my analysis of *Daskind* with a discussion of the novel’s genesis and reception. I then focus extensively on the narrative’s thematic analysis. The different chapters and chapter sections demonstrate how historical, socio-cultural and literary allusions are employed to unveil, explore and problematize the several centuries long and international history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults.

Studies of the novel typically focus entirely on the protagonist. There are, however, good reasons, as I will show, to include the figure of Armin Lacher in the thematic analysis and to start the interpretation with this character rather than with the protagonist. By including Lacher in my examination of the text, I am able to show that the novel is an exploration of WVHPKL/OHGFRI history, and to underscore the importance of considering WVHPKL/OHGFRI literary characters in their own right. The character Armin Lacher, furthermore, allows for a critical discussion of the dyad “perpetrator” versus “victim,” as well as the distinction between “Zigeuner” (Gypsy) and “Landfahrer” (Traveler), in the context of extrafamilial care.

After analyzing the figure Armin Lacher through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens, I turn my focus on the protagonist. In a first step, I problematize how and why this “own child” experiences extrafamilial care, and introduce socio-historical, socio-political and legal information pertaining to out-of-home care. In a next step I engage in a discussion of violence. In particular, I explore the interconnections between indirect, i.e. structural and cultural violence, and direct, i.e. personal violence as pertaining to WVHPKL/OHGFRI history. The narrative illustrates how violence
begets violence and highlights a new form of violence. That is, it is emphasized that “to not belong” has to be recognized not only as seminal for the violence WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth experience, but also as a form of violence of its own. I then juxtapose the two WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures in order to map the tight web of connections between these two characters.

The next section focuses on the text’s allusions to the dyad “light” versus “dark,” which engender a discussion on how notions and practices of “foster care” interconnect with discourses on WWII, Holocaust and colonialism. The last part of my analysis of Daskind’s allusions is dedicated to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Mignon. The novel’s allusions to Lehrjahre’s Mignon map the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people to include the late eighteenth century and other nationals. In addition, The “Mignon allusions” explore aspects of WVHPKL/OHGFRI “care” that are otherwise not explored in Daskind.

I end my analysis of Mehr’s Daskind with a structural and stylistic analysis to discuss other writing techniques the author employs to problematize and explore the long and international history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.
2.1. GENESIS and RECEPTION

2.1.1. Until the First Edition

By 1995, the year the novel *Daskind (Thechild)* was published, the “Yenish-Swiss” author Mariella Mehr was already known for her socially critical work, particularly her work concerning Switzerland’s treatment of its Yenish People. The Yenish, German “Jenisch,” also known as White Gipsies, are a sociocultural minority and Switzerland’s main group of “Travelers,” formerly called Gypsies. They live in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Today, historians and social scientists believe the Yenish to be descendants of the heterogeneous group of the marginalized vagrant poor, mainly of central Europe. In 1973, the then twenty-six year old Mehr was among the founders of the *Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse*, an umbrella organization of the Yenish. One year later, Mehr began her journalistic work for several Swiss newspapers and magazines, in particular for the *Wochenzeitung (WOZ)*, the *Berner Zeitung*, and the *Tagesanzeiger Magazin*. The politically

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164 I do employ this term to give readers an idea where Mehr was born and what her cultural heritage is. Mariella Mehr herself, however, sees the phrase “Yenish author” as a label created by the bourgeoisie. In a documentary about her work and life, the author introduces herself as follows: “Ich bin Mariella Mehr, nach bürgerlichen Einschätzungen eine sogenannte Jenische Schriftstellerin.” (I am Mariella Mehr, according to bourgeois assessment a so-called Yenish author). *Die Kraft aus Wut und Schmerz – Zum 60. Geburtstag von Mariella Mehr*, directed by Marianne Pletscher (SRF Wissen, March 13, 2008), http://www.srf.ch/player/tv/srf-wissen/video/die-kraft-aus-wut-und-schmerz?id=e6297378-fe75-4db4-9c77-a2e47c47fc10.

165 There are three main communities of “Gypsies” in Central Europe: the Sinti, the Roma and the Yenish.

166 There is evidence that some Roma, Sinti and Yenish are reclaiming the term “Gipsy,” so for example, in the British documentary series *Big Fat Gipsy Wedding* and its spinoff *My Big Fat American Gipsy Wedding*.

167 This is the conclusion made, for example, by Lev Tcherenkov and Stéphane Laederich. *Ibid., The Roma – Traditions and Texts* (Basel: Schwabe, 2004). As well as, Angus Bancroft, *Roma and Gipsy-Travellers in Europe - Modernity, Race, Space and Exclusion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). In earlier years, researchers claimed the Yenish to be an autonomous ethnic group, a sub-tribe of the Roma. So did, for example Huonker, *Fahrendes Volk – verfolgt und verfemt. Jenische Lebensläufe* (Zürich: Limmat, 1987).

168 The author works in the 1970s also for Migros’ newspaper *Die TAT*. Migros is Switzerland’s largest retail company and supermarket chain. It is a cooperative society with a mandate to support the arts and socially conscious
active author became known as an “gleichermassen scharfzüngige[...], wie scharfsinnige[...]."\textsuperscript{169} (equally tart-tongued and sagacious analyst of social affairs), and emerged as one of the most pronounced and empathic spokespersons for the rights and emancipation of the Yenish and other marginalized groups, for example, women and men who were detained in mental institutions and prisons without due process.\textsuperscript{170} Mehr made her debut as a fiction author in 1981 with the semi-autobiographical novel \textit{steinzeit (stonetime)}.\textsuperscript{171} She published five more books and wrote two dramas\textsuperscript{172} between her first novel and the publication of \textit{Daskind}. Her first publications, a book of poetry,\textsuperscript{173} was followed by a poetry prose letter-documentation,\textsuperscript{174} a drama,\textsuperscript{175} a collection of texts,\textsuperscript{176} and a second novel.\textsuperscript{177} The majority of these texts address the discrimination and persecution Switzerland’s “Gypsies” suffered as a result of the project “Kinder der Landstrasse” and established Mehr in the nineteen eighties as a strong, talented and prize and award winning writer.\textsuperscript{178}

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\textsuperscript{170} More than forty years later, this group of people is now recognized as being wrongfully detained.

\textsuperscript{171} Mariella Mehr, \textit{steinzeit} (Bern: Zytglogge, 1981). The German word \textit{steinzeit} means “stone age” as well as “stone time.” The English translation of “steinzeit” as “stonetime” is closer to the meaning of the German title, as “stonetime” alludes to the prehistoric period “stone age,” serves as a metaphor for a time when everything is hard, as well as an associative link to the expression “a heart of stone.” The novel \textit{steinzeit} became available in French translation in 1987.


\textsuperscript{173} Mariella Mehr, \textit{in diesem traum schlendert ein roter findling} (Gümlingen, D.: Zytglogge Verlag, 1983).

\textsuperscript{174} Mariella Mehr, \textit{Das Licht der Frau} (Gümlingen, D.: Zytglogge Verlag, 1984).

\textsuperscript{175} Mariella Mehr, \textit{Kinder der Landstrasse – Ein Hilfswerk, ein Theater und die Folgen} (Bern: Zytglogge, 1987).

\textsuperscript{176} Mariella Mehr, \textit{RückBlitze} (Gümlingen, D: Zytglogge Verlag, 1990).

\textsuperscript{177} Mariella Mehr, \textit{Zeus oder der Zwillingston} (Zürich: Edition R+F, 1994).

\textsuperscript{178} Mehr had already received numerous literary prizes and awards before the novel \textit{Daskind} was published. For example, from the cantons Bern, Grisons, Luzern and Zurich, as well as from the Ida Somazzi-Stiftung, the Migros-Genossenschafts-Bund and from Pro Helvetia.
The project “Kinder der Landstrasse” (Children of the Country Road) was founded in 1926 by the highly respected Swiss charitable foundation Pro Juventute. “Kinder der Landstrasse” was aimed at communities of “Landfahrer” (Vagrants) with a special focus on the Yenish. The declared goal was the extinction of itinerancy. Alfred Siegfried, the founder of the project, is known to have stated: “He who wants to fight vagrancy successfully, must try to break the bonds of the travelling community. As hard as this may sound, he has to tear the family apart. There is no other way.” In the course of almost half a century (1926 – 1973), “the project” removed 586 children from their parents. Together with the Catholic charity “Seraphisches Liebeswerk,” the Red Cross and the cantons’ guardianship authorities, a total of 612 Yenish children were removed from their families and communities and put into foster homes, orphanages and children’s homes while “the project” was active. Many of their parents and

179 “Kinder der Landstrasse” has formerly been translated as “Children of the Open Road”. This translation seems to appear first in the BBC TV documentary series 40 Minutes on March 17, 1988. The translation appears again in 1992 on actress Jasmin Tabatabai’s website in connection with the Swiss and German movie Kinder der Landstrasse by Urs Egger. “Children of the Open Road,” last modified July 9, 2014, http://jasmin-tabatabai.com/english/film_kinder_der_landstrasse.htm. The Swiss historian Thomas Meier employs “Children of the Open Road” as the English translation for Kinder der Landstrasse in his research article “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the Open Road’ campaign.” Thomas Meier, “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the Open Road’ campaign,” Romanie Studies 18, no. 2 (2008): 101-121. I diverge from this translation for the following reasons: The Oxford English Dictionary defines “open road” as “a country road or main road outside the urban areas, where unimpeded driving is possible. In addition, in a figurative context “open road” means “freedom of movement.” Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “open road”, accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/Entry/234980?redirectedFrom=open+road#eid. These definitions of “open road” stand in sharp contrast to the mission statement and actions of the Pro Juventute project “Kinder der Landstrasse.” In addition, I have not been able to substantiate a link between the expression “open road” and Yenish, Sinti or Roma in the Anglophone world beyond the 1988 BCC documentary. This means that the expression “the (the) Open Road” in the context of Sinti, Roman and Yenish is in all likelihood coined by non-Yenish, non-Sinti, and non-Roma. Furthermore, this expression is influenced by ideologies ranging from romantic notions to social-Darwinist and racial classifications. To better reflect the reality of people detained by the “Kinder der Landstrasse” as well as the “project’s” aim, I translate “Kinder der Landstrasse” simply as “Children of the Country Road.”


181 The Seraphische Liebeswerk is a Catholic organization that was founded in Koblenz in 1893 and soon afterward spread into the Catholic regions of German-speaking Switzerland.
relatives were thrown into prisons or locked away in psychiatric clinics. The children were to be refashioned according to the ideals of a sedentary society. They suffered humiliation, maltreatment, stigmatization and racism. Some were forced to undergo electroshock treatment and sterilization. The author Mariella Mehr was herself a ward of the Pro Juventute project.

Mehr’s upbringing, family background, her work as a political activist and her writing established her for many scholars as a “Roma” writer with one main subject matter, namely, the plight of the Yenish. The author, however, already revealed in her first novel that her interests were broader than the history of her own people. In the dedication in steinzeit she states:

dieses buch ist allen ungeliebten babys gewidmet, allen heimkindern, allen anstaltszöglingen, allen an unserer gesellschaft ver-rückt gemacht wordenen, allen stummgewordenen und all jenen, die wissen, dass nur liebe unsere zukunft rettet.

This book is dedicated to all unloved babies, all children’s home children, all wardens of institutions, to everybody who is made de-ranged in our society, to everybody who is silenced and to all those, who know that only love can save our future.

Mehr had met these children, youth, women and men on her “journey” through foster families, institutions for children and youth, reformatories, psychiatric clinics and prison, first as a ward

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182 This makes clear, that if family members are included when contemplating the effects of the Pro Juventute project “Kinder der Landstrasse,” the number of people directly affected by the “project” is much higher than 586 respectively 612.

183 Electroshock therapy is today called electroconvulsive therapy.


185 This assessment can be found in literature lexicons, for example in Killy Literaturlexikon were Pia Reinacher and Zygmunt Mielezarek state “Das literar. Werk von Mehr […] ist eigentlich monothematisch” (The literary work of Mehr […] is for all intents and purposes monothematic). Killy Literaturlexikon, by Pia Reinacher and Zygmunt Mielezarek, Bd. 8 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), s.v. “Mehr, Mariella., * 27.12.1947 Zürich. – Erzählerin, Lyrikerin, Dramatikerin. (95).”

186 Mehr, steinzeit, 5.
herself and later as an activist, and was well aware of their existence and experiences. *Daskind* is the first book of a trilogy, which extensively explores the conditions of these minorities and the society to which they belong.

### 2.1.2. Early Reception and Editions

The novel *Daskind* was first published in 1995, in a small edition of three thousand copies by the Swiss publishing house *Nagel & Kimche*. Two years later, the German publishing house *Ullstein* released the paperback edition. With a few exceptions, critics initially paid little attention to *Daskind*. The renowned Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* presented an excerpt from the novel in July 1995, and followed up a few month later with an article by Elisabeth Pulver, who praised Mehr’s precision of language and skill to speak from the characters’ inner most being while at the same time maintaining the overall perspective and critical narrative distance. Equally positive comments were offered by Hiltrud Häntzschel, who stressed a few days later in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* how Mehr succeeds in writing a “Dorfgeschichte” (village story) in which ill will, envy and negative passion reach monstrous dimensions. Katharina Döbler, the author of the epilogue to *Daskind*’s paperback edition of the publishing house *Ullstein*, underscored in 1996 in *Zeit Online* Mehr’s skill to create a language which gets close to the young protagonist and enables readers to finish the book without turning

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187 This information is provided by H.U. Ellenberger, Mariella Mehr’s life partner and web master. H.U. Ellenberger, e-mail message to author, February 28, 2013.
188 The number of copies is at this point unknown. H.U. Ellenberger, e-mail message to author, February 28, 2013. In addition, the publishing house *Ullstein* is unable to give out that information due to data protection laws. Dr. Christiane Stahl, e-mail message to author, March 4, 2013.
These early critics recognize Mehr’s ability to create a new language for each of her books. They emphasize that the author succeeds in writing a story of almost unimaginable isolation, and that the prolific use of literary devices prevents the explored violence from being at any point misused as entertainment.

### 2.1.3. Reception in the Context of the Trilogy

Initially, *Daskind* was understood and read by critics as a text dealing with child abuse and the bigotry and mendacity that engenders such circumstances. With a few exceptions, most importantly Döbler, who was one of the first to recognize that the victimized child protagonist internalizes violence and acts on it, the book was perceived as a novel about a victim. Mehr confirmed this interpretation in an interview in 1997 where she stated: “Angefangen mit ‘steinzeit’ bis zum Roman ‘Daskind,’ habe ich immer Opfer beschrieben und immer die Stimme von Opfern übernommen” (From ‘steinzeit’ up to ‘Daskind,’ I have always portrayed victims and always chose the victim’s voice). This reading of *Daskind* changed in 2002 when *Angeklagt* was published, and to a lesser degree already in 1998 with the publication of *Brandzauber*. From

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194 Häntzschel, “Im Kind denkt’s ans Töten. Mariella Mehrs düsterer Roman Daskind,” as well as, Döbler, “Silberherz stirbt.”
195 Ibid.
196 Pulver, “Steinkind; Mariella Mehrs neuer Roman.”
198 Bucheli, “Die Lust an der Selbstpreisgabe; Mariella Mehr im Werkstattgespräch.”
that moment on, reviewers and scholars identified *Daskind* as the first book of a trilogy that examines violence, its genesis and consequences. The novel was read anew and some scholars identified the young female protagonist from then on not only as a victim but also as a perpetrator. Literary critic Beatrice von Matt called her, for example, “einen steinschleudernden Racheengel” (a stone-throwing avenging angel). Cordelia Stilke went a step further and opined that the trilogy, and with it *Daskind*, probes violence and murder as “identitätsstiftende Akte” (acts that construct identity). Other critics identified the trilogy as texts that answer the underlying question, “wie werden Verletzungen in einem Opfer zum Willen, sich gewalttätig Luft zu verschaffen?” (how do traumas turn into a victim’s volition to release pressure by turning violent?). Sibylle Birrer, who named the three books the “Trilogie des Verletzens” (trilogy of causing harm) concluded that the victims strike out, hit, tantalize cruelly and kill.

The completion of the trilogy sparked an increased interest in Mehr’s work among scholars. However, despite the new interpretations in magazines and newspapers, the majority of academic investigations which include the novel *Daskind*, focused, like most of the pre-trilogy critics, on victimization. One exception is Filomena Jacovino’s dissertation *Wie das Opfer zum*...

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199 Mehr informs readers about this imminent change in the same interview mentioned above: Bucheli, “Die Lust an der Selbstpreisgabe; Mariella Mehr im Werkstattgespräch.”


202 Lerch, “Mariella Mehr: „Angeklagt.”


204 In the following, I am only looking at scholarly analyses that include the novel *Daskind*. 
*Täter wird* (How the victim becomes the perpetrator).\(^{205}\) Her research is to this day the most comprehensive analysis of Mariella Mehr’s writing from *Steinzeit* to *Angeklagt*. New to the after-trilogy studies, particularly to those published in English, was that many of these scholars choose to introduce Mehr’s literary work through the theoretical framework of ethnicity, i.e. the Yenish. Literary and cultural historian Carmel Finnan concluded, for example, in *The Roles of the Romanies*:

…Mehr gives literary expression to the unarticulated suffering of victims, describing events, emotions, impressions from the perspective of those persecuted. […] Her subversive literary strategies are a means of representing ethnic minority self in the master discourse…\(^{206}\)

Susann Tebbutt argued in similar fashion in her extensive analyses of Mehr’s work:

Mehr’s creative use of language […] offer insight not only into the oppression of Europe’s most marginalized minority group, the Yenish, […] but into the very essence of good and evil, …\(^{207}\)

Critical analyses of Mehr’s texts that use the ethnic lens allow a dissemination of a history of oppression and marginalization of the Yenish, which is mostly unknown in the Anglophone world. Furthermore, because ethnic and racial discrimination are a well-known part of the former colonies’ past, the history of the Yenish constitutes a shared reality and serves as a point of

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\(^{207}\) Susan Tebbutt, “‘Reisefertig, die Heimat im Arm’: Mariella Mehr and her distinctive delight in words,” in *From the Margins to the Centre – Irish Perspectives on Swiss Culture and Literature*, ed. Partrick Studer and Sabine Egger (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2007), 323.
connection, making Mehr’s writing more accessible for Australian, British, New Zealand and North American readers. The risk of the ethnic-racial approaches, however, is that these analyses can give the impression that all of Mehr’s texts are about the Yenish or other ethnic minorities. Elizabeth C. Hamilton, for example, stresses the history of the Yenish in her analysis of Mehr’s child figures. This leaves readers with the impression that all of Mehr’s child characters including Daskind are Yenish.208 Kim Fordham’s analysis of Daskind and other Mehr texts can also be misread as implying that the novel Daskind is about the history of the Yenish.209 As I will show, this is not the case. It is furthermore important to note that the assumption that all of Mehr’s characters are Yenish, or of another ethnic-racial minority, influences the larger narrative which is disseminated with respect to un-familied and family-less children and youth who are, or were, in state care.

2.1.4. Awards, Recognition, Reprints and Translations

Mehr received several literary prizes and awards for Daskind, most notably, the prestigious prize of the Schiller-Stiftung in 1996. The cantons Grisons and Luzern, as well as the organization Pro Helvetia and the Donald M. Hess Foundation awarded Mehr with “Werkbeiträge” (work grants and awards) for Daskind and other works, including the trilogy as a whole. In addition, in 1996, the municipality of Tomils in the canton Grisons (Switzerland)

bestowed on the author a medal of honour.\footnote{Please visit Mariella Mehr’s website for a complete list of awards and prizes: Mariella Mehr, “Ein Querschnitt durch das Werk von Mariella Mehr in 12 Lesungen,” “Willkommen auf der Website von Dr. phil. h.c. Mariella Mehr,” last modified March 23, 2012, accessed November 28, 2014, http://mariellamehr.com/oberlin.htm.} In 1998, Mehr received an honorary Doctorate of the Faculty of Philosophy and History from the University of Basel for her work against xenophobia and discrimination of minorities, as well as for her contribution to recovering the history of the Yenish. The author was the 2012 recipient of the \textit{ProLitteris Prize} for a Literary Lifetime Achievement Award. The prize is awarded for contributing “Herausragendes und Bleibendes”\footnote{ProLitteris, “Stiftung Kulturfonds der ProLitteris – ProLitteris Preis,” accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.prolitteris.ch/de/stiftung-kulturfonds-der-prolitteris/prolitteris-preis/} (outstanding and lasting) works in either literature, arts, photography, journalism or publishing.

Despite her publication record and the impressive public acclaim for Mehr’s social and political activism, the novel \textit{Daskind} is today out of print.\footnote{Ellenberger, e-mail message to author, February 28, 2013.} The hardcopy edition ran out of print before \textit{Angeklagt} was published in 2002, the paperback edition by 2004.\footnote{Dirk Vaihinger, management, Nagel & Kimche/Hanser Verlag, e-mail message to author, February 6, 2013.} For economic reasons, the publishing house Nagel & Kimche was unable to publish a further edition of either \textit{Daskind}, or the entire trilogy.\footnote{Mehr has to this day published seven novels, five books of poems and has contributed several shorter pieces to anthologies. Moreover, she has written three theater pieces, two pieces for music and collaborated on a movie-script.} In 1999, the Swiss publishing house \textit{Demoures} published \textit{Lamioche},\footnote{Mariella Mehr, \textit{Lamioche}, trans. Monique Laederach (Essertine-sur-Role au Closel: Edition Demoures, 1999).} the French translation of \textit{Daskind}. \textit{Lamioche} is currently out of print. Seven years later, in 2006, \textit{Labambina},\footnote{Mariella Mehr, \textit{Labambina}, trans. Anna Ruchat (Milano: Effigie Edizioni, 2006).} the Italian translation, was published by the Italian publishing house \textit{Effigie}. The Italian copy is still available. All publishing rights for \textit{Daskind} and the trilogy as a whole went...
back to the author between the years of 2004 and 2006. It is Mariella Mehr’s wish that the trilogy be kept together and published as an omnibus volume.\textsuperscript{217}

\section*{2.1.5. To this Day}

In 2001, H.U. Ellenberger, Mehr’s life partner and web master, launched a website documenting Mehr’s work.\textsuperscript{218} The site evolved quickly into an important multi-media platform for readers, students and scholars. It offered until 2014 up-to-date information in German, French, Italian and English, and is an excellent tool for reaching a broader audience. The author has a strong presence on the World Wide Web. In addition to countless hits linking websites to her name, there are also several uploaded videos on YouTube documenting her work and life. In 2005, just a few years after the website was launched, Mehr was the 37\textsuperscript{th} Max Kade writer-in-residence at Oberlin College in Ohio. The increased interest in the author’s work in the Anglophone world can be traced back to that stay.

In 2007, Mehr’s work and life was honored in the “Festschrift” \textit{Lieblebchen, sag – Vitamia, dimmi}.\textsuperscript{219} Moreover, Marianne Pletscher’s informative retrospective documentary “Die

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Kraft aus Wut und Schmerz” (Strength from Anger and Pain) celebrates Mehr’s sixtieth birthday and her life’s work. In January 2011, the drama group Cantadoras debuted a theatrical version of the novel at the Theater Rampe in Stuttgart.

Currently, the novel Daskind is considered a “Liebhaberwerk” (collector’s item), which is recognized by admirers as a piece of art as well as literature.

2.1.6. A Novel about Violence?

Daskind is full of abusive characters. The villagers are, in fact, interconnected through an intricate and mostly covert network of abuse. Nonetheless, analyses investigating Daskind through the lens of violence focus exclusively on the young protagonist. Critics mention, for example, only Daskind, the nameless female protagonist, when they point out that “the child victim” not only learns the lessons of cruelty by being a victim but also by applying them herself. Others mention only the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl, to the exclusion of other characters, when highlighting that the violence experienced has radical consequences. Even scholars who identify that Daskind shows the breaking of identity or suggest that the novel sheds light on the traumatized child’s inner world, consider solely the protagonist in their research. Von Matt

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222 So does, for example, Döbler, “Silberherz stirbt.”


224 As does Lerch, “Mariella Mehr: „Angeklagt.”

225 So do, for example, Lerch, “Mariella Mehr: „Angeklagt,” as well as Birrer, “Die Logik des Tötens – Mariella Mehrs neuer Roman ‘Angeklagt.’”
provides a potential explanation as to why neither Armin Lacher, nor any other of the books many abusive characters are considered victims in research analysing the text along the axis of violence, i.e. victim and perpetrator. Von Matt, who herself focuses in her examination on the female child protagonist, reads that character as a “steinschleudernden Racheengel”226 (a stone-throwing avenging angel), and by doing so suggests that Daskind turns violent to avenge herself. By focusing their research on the protagonist to the exclusion of any other figures, critics imply that other characters, and in particular Armin Lacher, have either no, or not a “good enough” reason, to seek vengeance and become perpetrators. This position implies a strong preconceived hierarchy of victims and mindsets that are still steeped in a binary system of who is a “victim” and who is a “perpetrator.” In Daskind, Mehr goes much further in her novelistic exploration of violence and in her attempt to understand this theme than has been acknowledged thus far. 227 The narrative subverts simplistic binaries and demonstrates through various writing techniques how hard it is to unveil hidden histories and to get to the bottom of things. In order to understand the novel’s complexity, historical aim and political importance it is vital to include the character Armin Lacher in an examination that reads the text through the lens of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults.

226 Matt von, “Die Sprache der Mutter, das Heimweh der Töchter / Kindheitsrecherchen von Autorinnen aus der deutschsprachigen Schweiz.”
227 Exact citation on p. 76ff.
2.2. UNVEILING a SUBJUGATED HISTORY: HISTORICAL and SOCIO-CULTURAL ALLUSIONS

2.2.1. A Brief Summary

The novel problematizes the circumstances of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults, and explores and unveils the long and intricate history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people as well as the welfare systems they encounter/ed. The novel’s children, who are official and unofficial wards of the state i.e. the village, depend on the goodwill of the community to be taken care of and to survive. The main story line evolves around the life of the nameless female protagonist “Daskind” (Thechild). Readers witness the girl’s experiences while she “migrates” from institutional care to foster family and subsequently into an uncertain future. Mehr takes the proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child” literally and explores the question: what happens when there is no “village” to raise a child? To answer this inquiry, the author probes in Daskind the childhoods of the two WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters. When considering how little information is given about the novel’s other characters, except when they cause harm and neglect, one might have the impression that there is only one story line. However, there are strong arguments for analyzing the other storylines separately, in particular, the one of the second WVHPKL/OHGFRI character. Since I read Daskind as a text recovering the subjugated knowledges, i.e. history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, I focus in my examination on the two WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters. Daskind’s story is on several levels tightly intertwined with the story line of Armin Lacher, the son of a “Landfahrer.” Therefore, Mehr’s literary experiment includes two, not just
one, inverted Kaspar Hauser stories. 228 In the case of the protagonist, the village does not want to take care of Daskind but instead wants to get rid of her. In the case of Armin, the village exploits him as a work force and keeps him marginalized, even as an adult. The nonlinear narrative, which is told in alternating person view, with the protagonist’s being the most prominent one, includes furthermore the stories of Leni, the protagonist’s mother, of Kari, Daskind’s father, and of Frieda and Kari Kenel, her foster parents. The novel begins in the middle of Daskind’s stay at the Kenels’. Her background story is revealed through flashbacks.

This inverted genre of “Dorfgeschichte” explores personal circumstances as well as societal and religious conditions that make abuse possible and help perpetuate it. The narrator describes, with shocking imagery, the consequences of how pressure, self-centeredness, the desire for status and revenge, as well as frustration, violence and abuse engendered by unhappy lives, based on blind obedience to Church and authority, are acted out downwards, towards those with less power. The main part of the story takes place in a nameless, generic and outwardly idyllic village in which men raise and breed roses, women have their own clubs and children and youth are exposed to imported cultural events, such as a foot artist and a taxidermied whale.

2.2.2. Introductory Exposition

The narrative begins with the statement “Hat keinen Namen, Daskind” 229 (Has no name, The child), which serves as an introduction of the protagonist. The compound Daskind, which is made up of an article and a noun, is not a name as some scholars suggest. On the contrary, the


229 Mariella Mehr, Daskind (Zürich: Nagel & Kimche, 1995), 5.
compound underscores that this story is not about just any child, but about those who are reduced by society to nameless children, boys as well as girls. The opening sentence’s structure alludes to Grimm’s fairy tales. Many of them begin with the phrase “Es war einmal [ein-Protagonist]” (Once upon a time, there was [a-protagonist]), wherein the introduced protagonist is a nameless type such as, a princess, a prince, a tailor, a shoemaker, or a boy or a girl, rather than a distinct character. However, the reading of Daskind as a fairy tale is immediately corrected through a long list of slurs and an explanation as to why the village’s women use violent language to talk with and about the female child protagonist. The child is not allowed to have a name because, the narrator explains, “she could otherwise not be addressed by the community with countless, often sexually charged slurs and derogatory terms such as [Hürchen]230 ‘little whore,’ [Saumädchen]231 ‘piggygirl,’ [Dreckigerbalg]232 ‘dirtybrat,’ and so on. Hence, she becomes in the text,”233 “Daskind” (The child). The protagonist’s namelessness signifies, according to sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, a lack of belonging to a family, a class, or a clan.234 For theorist Judith Butler,235 being without a name means to be unable to claim an identifying speech act for oneself.

“Notwithstanding the community’s professed Christian faith and its associated values, the [protagonist’s] namelessness opens a space wherein injurious speech characterizes her

230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
235 Butler, excitable speech – A Politics of the Performative.
Here, the function of “Butler’s notion of injurious naming as an act of violent identification is openly apparent in the text.” In addition, the reiteration of violent naming supports the exchange of shared experiences within this village. This repeated act constitutes and affirms the community at the expense of the most vulnerable among them, the WVHPKL/OHGFR1 child. Therefore, the protagonist’s namelessness “provides for the community a sanctioned location to reiterate its conventional and negotiated values and identity. As a whole, the novel’s opening alerts readers to a narrative in which the childhood described is anything but “a fairy tale.” As if that were not enough to clearly mark Daskind as a victim, here of emotional and verbal abuse, the reader also learns that the seven to eight year old protagonist is a foster child. On the following few pages it is further revealed that she is beaten almost daily by her foster-father, and regularly sexually abused by the boarder, who rents a room at the foster parents’ house. The information about the sexual abuse is woven with great caution into the text throughout the entire novel by revealing bits and pieces that only hint at sexual assault but assembled together like a jigsaw puzzle, attest to the repeated violation. The first piece is given on page one and by the end of the chapter the sexual abuse is for the first time confirmed. Mehr seeks to minimize the abuse that could occur through the act of writing and reading by employing the literary technique of fragmentation. In addition, the technique mirrors how much of a taboo sexual abuse was, and still is, and how that silence is often only broken through the revelation of fragmented pieces of information.

237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
239 The narrative begins on page number five and not on the book’s actual page number one.
240 Häntzschel, “Im Kind denkt’s ans Töten. Mariella Mehrs düsterer Roman Daskind.” See also Döbler, “Silberherz stirbt.”
In between the verbal onslaught of violent language directed against Daskind and the first indication that she is regularly sexually assaulted, lies another piece of vital information, which is easily passed over. It is here, in the last four lines of the novel’s first page that the second WVHPKL/OHGFRI “child character” is introduced, initially as a nameless, adult boarder, and the full scope and depth of Mehr’s novel is alluded to:

…und den Pensionisten im Pflegeelternhaus:
Mit immergrünem Gesicht im Grünenzimmer, [...] weil dort im Winter die Geranien lagern...

…and the boarder in the foster parent’s house:
Theboarder. A farmhand. At close quarters with a wealthy farmer “verdingt.”
With evergreen face in the greenroom, [...] because the geraniums are stored there for overwintering...

The information that the “Pensionist” (boarder) is at close quarters as a farmhand (with a wealthy farmer “verdingt”) (contracted-out) prompts a wide range of associative knowledges, indicates a second victim in the novel and connects this character thematically through a specific poor aid and early welfare practice with the protagonist.

A few pages after the nameless boarder is introduced, readers learn that the figures the “Pensionist” and Armin Lacher are one and the same. This disclosure, in combination with the continuously mounting evidence that Armin Lacher sexually abuses the young protagonist almost nightly, poses a conundrum for readers early in the text. They either identify this adult male character exclusively as a perpetrator and consequently disregard the questions prompted by the fact that Lacher is “verdingt,” or readers include this information in their analysis of this “novel

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241 Mehr, Daskind, 5.
about violence.”\textsuperscript{242} So far scholars have chosen to shy away from the challenges the connections between “verdingt,” Armin Lacher and sexual perpetrator pose. The argument that the multifaceted character “Pensionist-Armin Lacher” is absent from scholarly interpretations because the term “verdingt” is little known outside of a small group of specialists researching fringe topics is contested when considering that the omission does not end with the word “verdingt” but extends to include further crucial textual evidence, which indicate that the boarder is a victim too.

2.2.3. Armin Lacher - Omissions in Favour of Stereotypes

The arch of suspense that begins on the novel’s first page with the information that an adult boarder is “verdingt,” concludes three quarters into the novel, when Armin Lacher’s story of origin is revealed. Moments before he dies, readers learn in medias res the surprising news that little Armin once was left behind by his father, a “Landfahrer” (Traveler),\textsuperscript{243} who had emerged from nowhere and vanished again, leaving the boy behind for the community to care. As a result, young Armin is “verdingt” with a local farmer.

Die kurze Zeit, eingezwängt in eine zu enge Schulbank, reichte nicht aus, dem Buben das Einmaleins oder Schreiben und Lesen beizubringen. Während sich seine Schulkameraden mit Kreide und Schiefertafel abmühten, stand der kleine Armin am Schweinekoben und schrubbte die Futterrinnen, bevor ihm Schättis Alte das Mittagessen in den Stall brachte. In jenen Zeiten nahm man es noch nicht so genau mit der Schule, schon gar nicht beim Sohn eines Landfahrers, von dem niemand wusste, woher er kam und wem er den Balg zu verdanken hatte, den er auf seinen Wanderungen mit sich schleppte.\textsuperscript{244}

\textsuperscript{242} Tebbutt speaks of a “trilogy about violence.” In Tebutt, “’Reisefertig, die Heimat im Arm’: Mariella Mehr and her distinctive delight in words,” 314.

\textsuperscript{243} The term “Traveler” is a contemporary and more respectful English term for all non-sedentary people.

\textsuperscript{244} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 172.
The short time constrained in a too narrow desk was not enough to instil in the boy the multiplication tables or writing and reading. While his classmates struggled with chalk and slate, little Armin stood at the pigpen and cleaned the feed trough before Schätti’s old bitch brought him his lunch into the pigsty. In those days school was not yet taken too seriously, especially not when it came to the son of a Traveler of whom nobody knew where he came from and to whom he owned that bantling, which he schlepped with him on his wanderings.

Until he met Frieda Rüegger...

Although the term “verdingt” (contracted-out) is employed in relation to the adult Lacher and not in his story of childhood and ancestry, the description of how he lives while in the care of the village identifies him unambiguously as a “Verdingkind” (contracted-out child), and as such, as the novel’s second child. Lacher was placed with a local farmer at an age when he could still be called “kleine[r] Armin” (little Armin). During that time, he had to work and was “held” more like an animal than a human being. The narrative alludes in this excerpt with a few seminal words to the rampant abuse which is today known to have occurred in the welfare practice “Verdingung.” By creating a character that is the direct descendant of a “Landfahrer” and is “verdingt,” the novel stresses the point that so-called “Gypsies” and “non-Gypsies” shared the plight of being “verdingt.” Furthermore, the character Armin Lacher references the long line

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245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.
of people who have been “verdingt” and brings the history of all “Landfahrer” to the readers’ attention.

2.2.3.1. “Landfahrer” – Definition, Translation and a Nebulous Terminology

The term “Landfahrer” describes a person or a group, i.e. a folk, who does not have “einen festen Wohnsitz” (a permanent address) but instead lives a nomadic lifestyle and “travels” the land. By using the more neutral and respectful term “Landfahrer” (Traveler) to describe Armin Lacher’s ancestry, rather than one of its derogatory synonymic versions “Landstreicher” (vagrant), “Vagant” (vagrant) or “Zigeuner”\(^\text{248}\) (Gypsy), the narrator references the long history governing all Travelers. That history spans from the Middle Ages\(^\text{249}\) to contemporary times\(^\text{250}\) and includes laws regulating citizenship, poor aid and welfare, which in extension thereof include the infamous *Pro Juventute* project “Kinder der Landstrasse.” The history of central Europe’s Travelers is shaped by discourses about different ethnic groups, lifestyles and professions, as well as discourses on social economy, psychiatry and eugenics. Less than half a century ago, anybody traveling the land to find work could easily fall prey to the prescriptive and stigmatizing labels “Landstreicher,” “Vagant” and “Zigeuner.”

During the nineteenth and most of the twentieth-century, the German terms “Landfahrer” (Traveler), “Vaganten” (vagrant) and “Zigeuner” (Gypsy) described a diverse group of people

\(^{248}\) Given the history of abuse and prosecution, many members of the Roma, Sinti and Yenish consider the term “Zigeuner” derogatory.

\(^{249}\) Schubert, Ernst, *Fahrendes Volk im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1995).

which includes Europe’s three main groups of “Gypsies,” namely the Sinti, Roma, and Yenish, as well as non-settled members of the poor and of other marginalized groups such as “Betteljuden” (begging Jews), jugglers and other performers. Historian Thomas Huonker shows that until the late twentieth century even scientists and authors used the terms “Landfahrer,” “Vagant” and “Zigeuner” in an unreflective, colloquial and synonymic way. During the inter-war period, the scientific community, especially psychiatrists, employed the terms “vagrant” and “Gypsy” to describe anybody who lived a non-settled lifestyle. For example, psychiatrist Johann Josef Jörger, a key figure in shaping the Swiss vagrancy discourse from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, considered the Yenish simply as former homeless people of different origin.\(^{251}\)

As a result, he made no distinction between them and other Travelers. Alfred Siegfried, the director of the *Pro Juventute* project “Kinder der Landstrasse” (Children of the Country Road) campaign argued similarly and was convinced that it was completely irrelevant whether the Yenish were “Gypsies” or of another ethnic group.\(^{252}\) Social scientists, social workers, lawyers and private aid societies assisted the discourses on vagrancy and related eugenic measures.\(^{253}\)

\(^{251}\) Meier, “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the open road’ campaign,” 114. 
\(^{252}\) Ibid., 117. 
2.2.3.1.1 A Brief History of “Landfahrer,” and of a Pathology

Starting in the nineteenth century when massive social changes and overpopulation resulted in increased poverty and migratory movements in Europe, the question of nomadic and vagabonding lifestyle became a central topic and was pathologized. In its wake, the expression “pathologischer Wandertrieb” (pathological desire to travel) was conceived.²⁵⁴ The spirit of the time demanded that the pathology be fought. Consequently, laws were passed and institutions founded to counter the “pathological desire to travel.” The goal was to eradicate any lifestyle classified as deviant and delinquent, particularly any vagabonding lifestyle, and instead create sedentary, hard working and God-fearing citizens. All Travelers were to be assimilated. Switzerland’s response to vagrancy was manifold and reaches farther back than the nineteenth century. In 1514, for example, the country decreed that all “Zigeuner” “Gypsies” i.e. Travelers were to leave Switzerland. Later, in 1850, “das Bundesgesetz die Heimatlosigkeit betreffend” (The Homeless Law) was enacted. Consequently, all homeless Travelers were arrested. Some, namely local and indigenous Travelers, who are today recognized as the Yenish people, received Swiss citizenship and were allocated to a canton that in turn assigned them to different communities. These allotted communities were from then on the “Heimatgemeinde” (the original community of a family), or (community-of-origin) of these new Swiss Citizens. “Heimatgemeinde” entitled people in need to support from their community-of-origin. These actions are often referred to as the “Zwangseinbürgerung der Fahrenden” (forced naturalization of Travelers). Travelers who did not receive citizenship were expelled or forced to emigrate.

²⁵⁴ As an example for the term’s significance and far-reaching consequences see, for example, Rudolf Waltisbühl’s doctoral dissertation. Waltisbühl, Bekämpfung des Landstreicher- und Landfahrertums in der Schweiz – Eine Untersuchung der rechtlichen und soziologischen Stellung der Nichtseßhaften in der Schweiz (Aarau: Graphische Werkstätten H.R. Sauerländer & Co) 1944.
overseas. Expensive licenses for traveling professions and other regulations further aimed at assimilating all Travelers into mainstream society. The “Zwangseinburgerung der Fahrenden” meant the communities, which since 1520 were responsible for their own indigent people, were now also responsible for their Travelers. Over time, more and more people left their community-of-origin to work and live elsewhere. The law, however, entitled communities to deport a person, adults as well children, who became indigent in the community, to the indigent person’s community-of-origin, as that community was responsible for the person’s care. As I will show, by the time the forced naturalization of Travelers was implemented, the communities already had an economically and socially feasible method of poor aid and early welfare system in place, namely “Verdingung,” which could now also be applied to Travelers in need of community assistance.

2.2.3.2. “Verdingung” - English Translations, and Definitions

“Verdingung” is an early form of social welfare aid that was known in many parts of Europe. The model was more common in rural Protestant regions and was in some places of

255 Meier, “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the open road’ campaign,” 104. The character non-Traveler Daamiann in Auerbach’s Das Barfüssele shows another aspect of the changes which took place across Western and central Europe. In exchange for the community’s financial help to emigrate to the United States, Daamiann loses his citizenship and has to relinquish all future help from the community he was born into. This is another way how the “problem” of WVHPKL/OGFRI people was “externalized” and “solved.”

256 The “Heimatgemeinde” is inherited patrilineally if the child’s parents are married, or marry after the child is born. Otherwise, the child receives the mother’s community of origin.

257 Switzerland’s strong federalism prevented that the law’s implementation was organized on a federal level, leaving that responsibility to each canton, which resulted in different forms of applications. Although less and less applied, the law was in some cases still utilized in the twentieth century.

258 Orphanages were more common in catholic regions. Marco Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945” (Lizentiatarsarbeit, Universität Freiburg, Schweiz, 1991), 34, 58.
Switzerland practiced until the nineteen seventies.\(^{259}\) The last known “Verdingung” of a child ended in 1985.\(^{260}\) Currently, there exists no agreement on the translation of the nouns “Verdinung” and “Verding,” the verb “verdingen” and the adjective “verdingt.” The German word “verdingt” has been translated into English as “contracted-out,” “indentured,” “discarded” and “rejected.” These four English terms express different aspects of the slavery-like labour condition “Verdingung.” Out of the four possible translations, I chose “contracted-out” and its nouns “contract labour,” “contracted-out child” and “contracted-out person” as the English translation for “verdingen” (verb), “Verdingung” (noun), “Verdingkind” (contracted-out child) and “Verding” (contracted-out person). At times, I also employ the German terms. The reasoning behind my choice is that the expressions “contract labour” and “contracted-out” are in the Anglophone world used as umbrella terms for any labourer whose freedom is surrendered and as a result thereof unpaid labour force is generated for a certain period of time based on a contractual agreement. This contract can contain stipulations such as repayment of the costs of housing, transportation, training and other expenses.\(^{262}\) Furthermore, contract labour has been linked to poverty and to political and religious intolerance. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states, ...
“[d]eception, kidnapping and coercion have been used to ensure contract labourers.”  

Today, the conditions of contract labour are seen as a slavery-like practice in its severity. As I will show, the practice of “Verdingung” contains many of the elements covered by the English definition of contract labour. In comparison, “indentured labour” is defined as a form of contract labour and is associated with colonial times. The terms “discarded” and “rejected,” when used as translations for “verdingt,” express authors’ emotional responses to the practice of “Verdingung,” rather than the labour and legal aspects thereof.

2.2.3.2.1 “Verdingung” – Etymology, and a Brief History

The origin of the term “verdingen” goes back to Middle High German “der Verding” signifying a male orphan taken into care by “Pflegeeltern” (foster parents). The dictionary Schweizerisches Idiotikon is a bit more honest about the practice and defines a “Verdingkind” as...
“ein um bestimmten Lohn von der Armenbehörde in die Pflege gegebenes Waisenkind”\textsuperscript{266} (an orphan, who is given into care by the poor aid office, and for whose care the poor aid office pays a salary). The German dictionary \textit{Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm} (\textit{Grimms WB}) does not list the words “Verdingkind,” “Verdingbub” and “Verdingmädchen.” It does, however, provide explanations of the verb “verdingen.” In regard to people, “verdingen” means, according to \textit{Grimms WB}, to be given into service, for example, by the father or to give oneself and family members into service.\textsuperscript{267} The information these reference books provide about “Verdingung” is too conservative. To be “verdingt” had little to do with today’s understanding of foster care or paid work, it was the plight of the poor and affected orphans and non-orphans of both genders, as well as adults.\textsuperscript{268} To be “verdingt” meant that if neither parents nor relatives were there to care for the person in need, or to be drawn on for financial support, the destitute child or adult had to step in and work as much as s/he was able.\textsuperscript{269} To be “verdingt” meant to be given into service to do any kind of labour based on a legally binding contract. Mostly, the adult or child in need of community assistance was placed with farmers\textsuperscript{270} where the “Verdings” labour was

\textsuperscript{268} Boarding schools and rich relatives or family friends ensured that children of the upper classes who were in need of extrafamilial care were generally raised within their station. Equally, appropriate care and employment were found for adults and the elderly of the upper classes.
\textsuperscript{270} They were also placed in factories or with chimneysweepers. The latter is problematized in the young-adult novel \textit{Die schwarzen Brüder} (1941, \textit{The Black Brothers}) by Lisa Tetzner and Kurt Held/Kläber.
employed in exchange for food, lodging and clothing. Farmers did not have to fulfill any criteria to receive a “Verdingkind” save proving they needed the help of cheap labour.

“Verdingung” was the communities’ answer to the 1520 law, which required them to take care of their own indigent people, as well as to the subsequent sharp increase of people and families in need of support. Many rural communities did not have the means to care for their destitute citizens. To offset the costs associated with caring for their own people in need, communities employed “Verdingung” as a poor aid and early welfare practice. In different regions, the practice was variously known as “Umgang,” “Kehre schicken,” “Rod,” “in Kost geben,” “Verkostgeldung” or as “Verakkordierung.” Correspondingly, persons placed with farmers were also called “Umgänger,” “Kostkind” and “Kostgänger.” Historians have found evidence of “Verdingung” as far back as the sixteenth century and as late as the nineteen seventies.

A farmer’s economic situation determined the length of time he had to take in community members in need of charity. Sometimes taking in indigent community members was

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274 The most recently case was reported in the nineteen eighties. Regula Zürcher and Patric Schnitzer write, “Kinder wurden in verschiedenen Kantonen sogar bis weit ins 20. Jahrhundert de facto «verdingt», auch wenn dieser Begriff in der Behördenprache nicht verwendet wurde. Die offiziellen Quellen sprechen stets von Kost- oder Pflegekindern, die gegen entsprechende Unterhaltsbeiträge an Private übergeben wurden.” (Children were “de facto” contracted-out far into the twentieth century, even though this terminology was not used in the official government language. Those talk about foster children, who were given to private people, who were in turn compensated for taking the children in). Regula Zürcher and Patric Schnitzer, “Arm – rechtlos –verdingt: notleidende Erwachsene im 19. Jahrhundert,” Revue Suisse d’Histoire 58, no. 3 (2008): 270. Although “Verdingung” was for the first time forbidden in 1847, some regions upheld the practice far into the twentieth century.
seen as a farmer’s responsibility and as a contribution to the community. More often, farmers received a small amount of money from the community in exchange for their service. This financial support was called “Kostgeld” (board and lodging money). Even when these so-called foster parents received financial support for taking in a child it was understood that the destitute child’s labour would be utilized. In fact, the community paid less and less “Kostgeld” as a child grew older. The reasoning behind this was that farmers increasingly benefited from a contracted-out child’s work force once s/he has reached the age of ten. The benefit of taking in a “Verdingkind” was not, as Marco Leuenberger clarifies, the community’s “Kostgeld” payment but the utilization of the child’s unpaid labour.275

Strict guidelines about who is deserving of community support, and who is not, were a crucial element to determine who could receive the community’s support as a “Verding.” Initially communities mostly supported so-called “Notharme”276 (the destitute). This group encompassed orphans,277 the frail aged, the “crippled,” and heavily burdened families and households that police deemed necessary to dissolve.278 Later on, the so-called “Dürftigen”279 (the needy) were added to the persons considered deserving of community support. This group included families, who under ideal circumstances, i.e. good income and health, were able to support themselves. When faced with illness, unemployment and, “grosser Kinderlast”280 (a large flock of children), however, these families were temporarily unable to manage on their own.281 Hence, adults, like

277 Orphanages, as buildings and institutions, which are located separate from prisons and poor houses, were in Switzerland, as well as in Germany, built relatively late. The orphanage of Zurich, for example, opened its doors in 1771.
278 To dissolve families that did not meet society’s accepted lifestyle has a long history in Switzerland and beyond. I will explore this issue in more depth in later chapters.
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid.
children were “verdingt” for reasons of being indigent. By the nineteenth century it was common to place destitute children with farmers to save money, even though orphanages and other institutional placements became more and more available.282

To understand why children, youth and adults were “verdingt” in the first place, one has to remember that Switzerland was for many centuries an agricultural nation that was faced with extreme pauperism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, for example, many families could not survive without the additional income their children provided.283 Therefore, families felt impelled to exploit their children as cheap labourers or to give them, without a “Kostgeld” (board and lodging money), into the so-called “care” of farmers or chimneysweepers,284 who in turn utilized their labour. In the nineteenth century, as well as during the crisis of the nineteen thirties, overpopulation and little natural resources left many families in devastating poverty. In the nineteenth and far into twentieth century, Swiss children of poor families still had “bei den Feldarbeiten mitzuhelfen”285 (to help in the field) from as young as four or five years of age.286 When considering this long history of girls and boys who had to work to ensure their family’s survival, it is not surprising that children and youth in need of a community’s support were placed at a very young age with farmers where they had to work for their keep. Being placed on a farm was supposed to ensure that a “Verding” would receive enough food and adequate living quarters, and it was believed that it would offer plenty of excellent opportunities to raise a youngster into a life of work and obedience. In addition to proper food and lodging, farmers were supposed to provide their charges with adequate clothing. Little Lacher’s living situation, and the fact that

282 Ibid., 1.
283 Ibid., 136.
284 Children from the Swiss canton Tessin were commonly known to be sold to Italian chimneysweepers.
286 Child labour is not a phenomenon of the machine age as is often assumed.
nobody stood up for him or questioned how he was treated, references the social reality that it was well known that many farmers did neither but instead severely exploited and abused their “Verding.” Many of these children were not seen as part of the family but as maids and servants, or, like little Armin, as even less.

2.2.3.2.2 Terminology and Statistical Data

To prevent any romantic and idealist notions, Leuenberger points out that in the nineteenth-century “alle armengenössigen Pflegekinder” (all “foster children” in need of poor aid) were de facto “Verdingkinder” (contracted-out children). Today, the term “Verdingkind” is, for the twentieth century, used to distinguish “foster children,” who had to work for their keep and were placed through the practice of “Verdingung” from those who did not have to work for their keep. Many rural communities did not have the means or the desire to care for their destitute citizens, neither in the sixteenth, the nineteenth or the twentieth century.

How many children were contracted out in Switzerland alone, or in German-language Europe as a whole is unknown. For one, because the data was either not collected or not kept, but also because there were countless children who were contracted-out without the authority’s knowledge. These children need to be included in the number and history of contracted-out children. It is estimated that there were about 100,000 contracted-out children in Switzerland

288 The fact that the numbers of Swiss “Verdingkinder” is unknown was considered so shocking that it made the news, even in Canada. In 2011, The Globe and Mail cited Alexander Leumann, who stated: “In Switzerland we know exactly how many cows there are at any one time, because they are all tagged. But to this day nobody knows for sure how many children were sent away from their families.” Frank Jordans, “Swiss face anguish over stolen childhoods,” The Globe and Mail Friday, November 25, 2011.
alone. There existed significant cantonal differences. The canton Bern, for example, is known to have had the highest percentage of “Verdingkinder.” Leunberger states in an interview: “For years, the trade involved more than 10,000 children every year.”

2.2.3.2.3 “Education” for a Life in Service

The practice of “Verdingung” saved communities not only money but also ensured that “bedraggled” and “neglected” children did not receive a better education nor a better chance in life than the children of so-called virtuous poor. Leuenberger cites in his dissertation Johann Baptist Hirscher who wrote two centuries ago:

Viele hunderttausend Kinder von Bauersleuten, Handwerkern, Taglöhnern, etc., welche keineswegs verwahrlost, sondern von ihren Eltern mit Würde erzogen und rechtschaffen sind, haben kein andres Loos vor sich, als dienen, und vielleicht lebenslänglich dienen. Manche Knaben dieser Eltern würden gern einen besseren Stand wählen und z.B. ein Handwerk erlernen, aber sie haben die Mittel nicht dazu. Also werden sie in Stadt oder Land Knechte und Mägde, und treten damit in einen untergeordneten, übrigens nothwendigen und sehr achtbaren Stand. Warum sollen also verwahrloste und durch öffentliche Wohlthätigkeit gerettete Kinder sich über sie erheben wollen?

Many hundred of thousands of children of farmers, craftsmen, casual workers etc., are not neglected, but rather are raised by their parents in honour and are virtuous, have no other lot ahead of them, than to serve, and may have to serve their entire life. Many a boy of these parents would like to choose a better class and for example learn a trade, but they don’t have the means to do so. Therefore they become servants in the city or the countryside, and enter herewith a subordinate, by the way necessary, and very respectable class.

Thus, why should neglected children, rescued through public charity want to rise above them?

Hirscher’s statement is a testament to how society made a distinction between the virtuous and the non-virtuous poor. This ideology was part of dominant society’s power-knowledge network, and was enforced through social bodies such as the police, churche and welfare systems to ensure its “unquestionability,” The offspring of Travelers and children born out of wedlock, that is, WVHPKL/OHGFRl children, were perceived as “bedraggled” and “neglected,” i.e., as non-virtuous poor. As such, they were considered deserving of community support, but not of any support that would allow them to step out of their allocated social place. I will elaborate later on how strongly this affected their life chances.

To be accustomed to work at the earliest possible age was believed to be one of the most effective ways to prevent children in need of community assistance growing up to be a burden on society.\textsuperscript{292} This rationale concerning the “education” of contracted-out children was supposed to enable “Verdingkinder” to free themselves from poverty, which was seen as hereditary. Critical voices questioned early on how this could happen without proper schooling. Although regular school attendance was rare in the nineteenth century, especially among the poor, this was even more the case for “Verdingkinder.” These children and youth were in the nineteenth and twentieth century rarely given the chance to attend school during summer time,

enrol in the “Sekundarschule” (grade seven to nine) or to learn a trade. In some cases, farmers made sure that a “Verdingkind” could not attend higher classes when one of their own children was not selected by the teacher to attend those classes.\footnote{See for example, Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 123.} One reason why the concept of minimal schooling was upheld far into the twentieth-century was that farmers were used to filling their positions of serfs, maids and farmhands with children and adults from the group of the landless and poor. In other words, contracted-out children were seen by farmers and officials alike as a means to fill the positions of serfs. This was particularly the case during labour shortages of servants and domestics during the agrarian crisis of the eighteen seventies, as well as more than half a century later during World War II. Hence, the basic principles of ”education,” i.e. non-education for “Verdingkinder” fit perfectly with the intentions to fill the increasing demand for servants and domenstics. Consequently, boys like little Armin continued to be placed with farmers to fill the position of farmhands, and girls continued to be placed to work as domestics.\footnote{By mid twentieth century, many contracted-out children took their education into their own hands after their time as an indentured child and worker ended.}\footnote{Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 57. In addition, each “Verdingkind” was to receive a new outfit for his or her confirmation. This and other expenses were supposed to be covered by the “Kostgeld” farmers received in exchange of taking in a child. Many farmers recovered their costs for board, lodging and clothing later from the young adult by keeping her or him on without pay beyond the time the government had contracted them out. This practice was in some places upheld into the nineteen seventies. That neither the practice of “Verdingung,” nor the practice of having to pay back the community was limited to Switzerland is, for example, also attested through literary texts such as Ebner-Eschenbach’s Gemeindekind.}

The word “verdingt” in connection with an adult character problematizes further how society ensured contracted-out children could not get too far in life. Generally, as adults, “Verdingkinder” had to work off the “Kostgeld” (board and lodging money), as well as other costs farmers deemed were not covered by the child’s work and the community’s payment.\footnote{Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 57. In addition, each “Verdingkind” was to receive a new outfit for his or her confirmation. This and other expenses were supposed to be covered by the “Kostgeld” farmers received in exchange of taking in a child. Many farmers recovered their costs for board, lodging and clothing later from the young adult by keeping her or him on without pay beyond the time the government had contracted them out. This practice was in some places upheld into the nineteen seventies. That neither the practice of “Verdingung,” nor the practice of having to pay back the community was limited to Switzerland is, for example, also attested through literary texts such as Ebner-Eschenbach’s Gemeindekind.} This practise of having to pay back the “Kostgeld” affected all WVHPKL/OHGFI children and
was in some cases kept in place until 1961. There is no textual evidence that Lacher is disabled, was at some point unemployed or was a ward of the project “Kinder der Landstrasse,” which were along with being contracted-out as a child, as well as being poor common reasons for an adult to be “verdingt.” Therefore, having to pay off the “Kostgeld” and any other expenses the community and the farmers paid for him when he was a child is the most likely reason why the adult Armin Lacher is still “verdingt.”

In 1995, the year the novel Daskind was published, the topic “Verdingung” had already sporadically come to the public’s attention through autobiographies, fiction, as well as children and youth literature. At that time, the best-known texts about “Verdingkinder” in Switzerland were the fictionalized autobiography Die Fertigmacher by Arthur Honegger, the novel Der Bauernspiegel by Jeremias Gotthelf and the children’s book Die schwarzen Brüder by Lisa Tetzner and Kurt Held/Kläber. Overall, a strong associative link between “verdingt” and child

296 Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 91. This deterred many former WVHPKL/OHGFRI people from pursuing a financially successful career. Today, every, canton and country, handles this matter separately. Some treat the support a WVHPKL/OHGFRI person received as a child or youth the same as the support adults receive while on welfare. That means, if the person’s financial situation changes for the better within a certain period of time, that person, including former WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth, has to pay back a portion or all the state paid for him or her.

The practice of having to pay back the “Kostgeld” helped insure that these children could not get ahead in life. This practice was increasingly criticised in the twentieth century. Leuenberger cites, “Bei Eltern, die es mit der Aufziehung ihrer Kinder ernst nehmen, kosten diese mit zunehmendem Alter je länger je mehr; bei unserer Armenpflege ist es umgekehrt!” (Parents, who take child rearing serious, spend more and more money on them as their children grow; in our care system it is exactly the other way around!) Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 91.

297 Although Mehr explores in Daskind socio-political issues that go beyond the history of the Yenish, this group cannot be excluded in the novel’s analysis.


300 Further examples are: Kurt Held/Kläber, Mathias und seine Freunde (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1950). For additional literature on “Verdingkinder” see, for example, the website of the society “Verdingkinder suchen ihre Spuren,” accessed December 1, 2014, http://www.verdingkinder-suchen-ihre-spur.ch/literatur.html. See also, “Kinderheime in
existed. Scholarly research was rare, and like most non-academic texts, focused mainly on children who were “verdingt.” Marco Leuenberger’s thesis *Verdingkinder*[^301] (*Contracted-Out Children*) is one of the first historical analyses to unearth the long and at that time often obscured history of Switzerland’s contracted-out children[^302]. Regula Zürcher and Patric Schnitzer’s seminal article “Arm – rechtlos – verdingt”[^303] (Poor – without rights – contracted-out) investigates the topic of destitute adults in nineteenth century Switzerland, and gives readers an idea of how little attention contracted-out adults have received in research and literature. Their study is one of the very few analyses addressing this subject matter, showing clearly that there were always adults who were “verdingt.” The results of their research were first made public in 2008, twelve years after *Daskind* was first published[^304]. They found that in 1870, 2.25 percent of Switzerland’s population, that is, 37,378 people were “verdingt.” Of these, roughly 15,000 were adults.


[^304]: The character Armin Lacher and “Verdingung” are only one subject matter with which the text demonstrates that Mehr’s unearthing of Switzerland’s hidden past did not end with the recovery of the history of the Yenish. Mehr expresses already in 1990 her broader thematic interest explicitly: “Mein Hauptthema waren immer die sozial Benachteiligten, Frauen, Kinder und Jenische, Strafgegangene und die Opfer der Psychiatrie” (My main topic were always the socially disadvantaged, women, children and Yenish, imprisoned and the victims of psychiatry). Mehr, “Frauenmut,” 176.
2.2.3.3. Identifying Swiss Travelers and Un-Family-Ing their Children

When Armin Lacher’s father leaves his son in the village for strangers to care for him, the character seems to reaffirm the stereotypes of the irresponsible, asocial, dangerous, unpredictable and degenerate Traveler. However, rather than reiterating derogatory opinions and ideologies, the narrator alludes with this scene to the 1850 Homeless Law, which forbade “Landfahrer” to take their school-aged children on the road.305 This is one of the examples of how laws un-familied children, leaving them family-less, and how society justified these actions by blaming the parent/s with negligent and inappropriate childrearing, only to then expose those children to exploitation, and in many cases, also to other forms of abuse.

The general “refusal of entry”306 of 1906 for Travelers into Switzerland also prohibited “Gypsies” and any Travelers from being transported on railway trains and ships within Switzerland.307 The country was the first to impose such bills, which were incompatible with international treaties. 308 This is why, even though nobody in the novel knows where the “Landfahrer” Lacher and his son came from, it is clear to everybody in the community that the two had to be Swiss citizens as the country’s borders had been closed to all Travelers since 1906, and remained closed to them until 1972.309

305 Meier provides a brief overview of the history of discrimination of the Travelers in Switzerland. Meier, “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the open road’ campaign.”
306 Ibid., 104.
307 In 1887, cantons had already decided to pass a general refusal to entry for all travellers. Meier, “The fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the open road’ campaign,” 104ff.
308 Ibid.
309 Ibid., 105. The closure of the Swiss border had a devastating effect on the population Travelers during World War II.
2.2.3.3.1 The Disregarded Son of a Landfahrer

Considering that critics show a great level of familiarity with Mehr’s biography and writing and underscore her Yenish heritage, it is surprising that none of them addresses the historical and semantic connection between “Landfahrer” and “Gypsies,” i.e. Yenish. Having said that, literary scholars are not alone in excluding this novel from seminal discourses about Sinti, Roma and Yenish, as well as “Verdingung” and other WVHPKL/OHGFRI people and their history. Mehr’s novel Daskind is currently absent from any non-university catalogue of fiction specifically created to list fiction with Yenish, Sinti, Roma and “Verdingkinder” characters; so for example, from the sites Verdingkinder suchen ihre Spur310 (Contracted-out Children Search for their History), Thomas Huonker’s Alphabetische Literaturliste zu Kindswegnahmen und Fremdplatzierung in Heimen, Anstalten, als Verding- und Pflegekinder311 (Alphabetical List of Literature about the Removal of Children and Extra-familial Care in Homes, Institutions, as Contracted-out children as well as as Foster Children) and from Amazon.com.312

The reason the character Armin Lacher has continuously been omitted by scholars certainly lies in the textual fact that the adult Armin Lacher sexually abuses the seven to eight year old protagonist almost nightly. The critics’ omission of the figure Armin Lacher indicates that they are still firmly rooted in binaries, currently biased positively towards the Yenish. By comparison, by employing the term “Landfahrer” instead of “Gypsy” or Yenish, Mehr distances

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312 The novel cannot be found when entering the search terms “Verdingkind,” “Jenisch,” “Pflegekind” or “Heimkind” into “Amazon.de.” In addition, the novel is also not listed on sites created to list fiction dealing with the history and representation of other WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, such as “Pflegekinder” and “Heimkinder.”
herself with this novel from the simplifying binary concepts of the Yenish versus the non-Yenish and the “Gypsy” versus the non-“Gypsy,” wherein the Yenish and “Gypsy” equal the victim and the “good,” and the non-Yenish and non-“Gypsy” equal the perpetrator and the “bad.” Although on some level understandable, the critics’ exclusion of Armin Lacher is counterproductive for the interpretation of the text and stands in direct opposition to the author’s proclaimed thematic intention. Two years after the novel’s publication, Mehr stated in an interview with Roman Bucheli:

Gewalt ist so etwas Grossartiges und Unverständliches, dass ich 200 Jahre alt werden kann, und ich werde sie immer noch nicht begriffen haben und werde immer noch neue Sprachen erfinden und neue Bewusstseinsebenen erklättern müssen, um einen Schritt weiterzukommen im Verständnis von Gewalt.313

Violence is something so gigantic and incomprehensible that I can turn 200 years of age and I will still not have understood it, and I will still have to create new languages and climb new levels of consciousness to move a step forward in understanding violence.

Mehr’s interest in violence goes far beyond the sexual abuse of female children growing up in extrafamilial care. The lack of critical exploration of Armin Lacher’s character serves to obscure the breadth of Mehr’s interest in violence, and hinders the novel from being recognized as an unveiling, exploration and mapping of WVHPKL/OHGFRI history. Furthermore, to ignore Armin Lacher reiterates that WVHPKL/OHGFRI people and their history are too unimportant and at the same time too “dangerous” to be considered in literary investigations and theories. “Too dangerous” refers here not only to these characters’ antisocial behaviour but also to an understanding of texts as intertextual, and therefore as containing the potential to disrupt the notion of meaning. The recognition of WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures as such might result in the

313 Bucheli, “Die Lust an der Selbstpreisgabe; Mariella Mehr im Werkstattgespräch.”
contestation and disruption of today’s understanding and knowledge of who is a victim and who is a perpetrator, as well as of who is in contemporary’s power-knowledge network accepted as marginalized group, with all its socio-political and economic benefits, including the teaching and studying of their history. In contrast, to consider the figure Armin Lacher in research and to recognize him as a WVHPKL/OHGFRI character helps unveil subjugated, low-ranking and outside of the field of social work often disqualified knowledge and history, and sheds light on violence in scientific discourses and in a society that is generally known to be one of the most benign in the Western world, namely Switzerland’s countryside. The figure Armin Lacher, furthermore, problematizes the complexity of violence. In the following chapter sections, I address different aspects of violence as explored in Daskind.

2.2.3.4. “Immergrün” (Evergreen)

In the last paragraph of the novel’s first page, “De[r]ensionist” (Theboarder) is described as somebody “[m]it immergrünem Gesicht” (with evergreen face). To have a “green” face is known in the context of getting badly seasick. The color green is also used in the idioms “green with envy,” and “green behind the ears.” The latter describes an inexperienced and mostly young person. The expression “immergrün” is like its English translation (evergreen) used to describe conifers. These associations prompt the questions, what are the reasons that cause Theboarder to be forever sick to his stomach, full of envy, as well as “young” and “inexperienced”? Some elements of this second arc of suspense conclude in the reveal of Armin

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314 Mehr, Daskind, 5.
315 Ibid.
Lacher’s background story. Others come to fruition only when both Armin Lacher and Frieda Rüegger’s background stories are considered. This structure mirrors the proverb “In medio stat veritas” (The truth lies somewhere in the middle), and reflects how difficult it can be to untangle emotionally loaded issues and to overcome strongly founded opinions. By the time Armin Lacher’s origin is revealed, he is already firmly established as a sexual predator, which makes it challenging for readers to see him as anything but an offender. Nevertheless, the narrative stresses that this character was not born a “monster,” but is a socially made, i.e. a culturally constructed “monster.”

The reasons why Armin Lacher lives his life with an evergreen face all relate to how society treated and continued to treat this descendant of a Traveler, “Verdingkind” and former child in need of the community’s care. To reiterate, little Armin was not just motherless but also lost his father, which resulted in him becoming de facto a foundling. As if that were not enough loss and hardship to make him jealous of his familied peers, he was subsequently placed with a farmer where he had to work for his keep. As a “Verdingkind,” he was treated as less than human, received very little education, and was brought up to a life of poverty and in service with little chance of a better future:


... the Lacher, knew, he would always remain an underdog, a loser. Impotent with rage he cut strangers’ grass and sheaved it for strangers, milked strangers’ cows, danced with girls that were promised to others, received

316 Mehr, Daskind, 172.
beatings. A pile of shit, this life, a torment, had he been familiar with the word. But Lacher knew nothing of words, nothing of those of the heart, and nothing of those words one learned in school.

Debasement and beatings were cornerstones of Armin Lacher’s life as a “Verding.” Due to the system’s policy that WVHPKL/OHGFRI children had to pay back what was spent on their care, the boarder remains “verdingt” even as an adult. How much his lowly and transient status in the village and society permeates his entire life is also illustrated in his living arrangements. The room he rents from the Kenels is not recognized by Frieda as his room. Instead, she calls the room the “Grünenzimmer” (Greenroom). The narrator explains, “weil dort im Winter die Geranien lagern und die Wände des Zimmers lindengrün gestrichen sind” (because the geranium are placed there to overwinter and the room’s walls are painted in linden green). Bourdieu stresses in *Language and Symbolic Power* the importance and power of naming for the construction of social reality as well as for the constitution of class, and with that for a person’s social position. That the room the adult Armin Lacher pays rent for is by his landlords utilized for their own storage needs, and is not considered his room and consequently not identified by his landlady as “the boarder’s room,” or later when the boarder is identified as Armin Lacher as “Lacher’s,” “Armin’s” or “Armin Lacher’s room,” signifies a severe lack of power and implies that he is likely to have little control over his life in general.

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317 That the room he rents is not named after him reminds readers of hotel guests; and of those seasonal workers who do not even have a room of their own but inhabit the room they rent and the bed in it in shifts with other seasonal workers.
318 Mehr, *Daskind*, 5.
319 Ibid., 6.
320 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. 
2.2.3.4.1 Regulation of Love and Desire

The description of the “incident under the beech tree” and the circumstances leading up to it provide further seminal information as to why Armin Lacher lives with a evergreen face. At first glance, what happened seems to be clear. When they were young, Armin fell in love with Frieda Rüegger, who is better known as Kari’s wife Frieda Kenel and as the protagonist’s foster-mother. Apparently, Armin was not willing to wait until they were married to be intimate with Frieda. Frieda, on the other hand, was not willing, so it seems, to give herself to him before their union was official through marriage. Their conflicting needs clashed when Armin made a forceful advance under the beech tree. This appears to have ended any chance of marriage between him and Frieda. When the flashbacks of the incident, which are narrated from Frieda and Armin’s point of view, are read in juxtaposition, however, readers discover textual oddities and conflicting information, all of which indicate that something is amiss in what initially appeared to be a neat and tidy storyline:
Exposition: Frieda

Hat erst die Geschwister versorgt und dann mit der Näharbeit die Eltern ernährt.

Hat nie einen Burschen geküßt, die nicht. Sitzt ihrem Leben gegenüber, ein Zaungast in der letzten Reihe, der nicht zum Mitspielen aufgefordert worden ist.³²¹

[...]

“...unters Turmfenster, wo Haare herabgelassen wurden, um den Liebsten zu empfangen. Armin Lachers Stimme, die sagt, laß dein Haar herunter, dein Feuerraar. Lang ist’s her. Wolltest das Sakrament nicht abwarten, hast’s oben am Berg versucht, an der Stelle, wo statt des Turms eine Buche stand [...]. Hast über dem Verwehren die Lust zu warten verloren, Lacher, und meine habe ich dem Herrgott empfohlen, wie’s der Pfarrer verlangt hat, und drei Vaterunser für mein Seelenheil gebetet.³²²

[...]

Gebetet. Daß sie nicht über sie komme, die Sünde. Ihr nicht in den Schoß fahre, den willigen. Aber der brannte noch lange, das nutzte kein Gebet und keine Andacht. Der brannte noch lange und wollte gefüllt werden, wurde hart und härter von dem Brennen, bis endlich, nach Jahren, alle Begierde erlosch.³²³

Exposition: Lacher

Das hat ja soweit kommen müssen, [...], daß auch einen wie ihn die Verzweiflung wegen einer Frau niederstreckt. [...] Nie zuvor hat er versucht, in seinem Leben Ordnung zu schaffen, in dem es nur einen Höhepunkt gegeben hat. Eine Himmelfahrt, die sich unmerklich in eine Höllenfahrt verwandelte.³²⁴

[...]

Bis er Frieda Rüegger begegnete, die, einen Restposten Stoffe unter dem Arm, Schättis Obstgarten durchschritt.³²⁵

Und Lacher widerfuhr, was jedem Liebenden widerfährt, wenn sich die Liebe am falschen Gegenstand abmüht. Lacher mochte bitten und betteln, der Frieda war nicht beizukommen. Die wartete auf den Richtigen, und das konnte nur einer sein, der ihre Verbindung fürs Leben durch das gemeinsam empfangene Sakrament der Ehe besiegeln ließ.³²⁶

[...]

Nur einmal hatte er sie an sich gerissen und Friedas Leib an sich gepreßt, laut stöhndend und grob, unter einer Buche am Vorderberg. Sein Gesicht brannte von der Ohrfeige und vor Scham, als sich der klebrige Samen in seine Hose ergoß.³²⁷

³²¹ Mehr, Daskind, 161.
³²² Ibid., 162.
³²³ Ibid.
³²⁴ Ibid., 171, 172.
### Exposition: Frieda

Had first looked after her siblings and then supported the parents, with sewing work.

Had never kissed a fellow, not that one. Sits opposite to her life, an onlooker in the last row, who has not been invited to join the game.

\[\ldots\]

…under the tower window, where hair was let down to welcome the lover. Armin Lacher’s voice, which says, let down your hair, your fire hair. Long ago. You did not want to await the sacrament, you tried it on the mountain, at the location, where instead of a tower a beech tree stood […] You have over the refusal lost the lust to wait, Lacher, and mine I surrendered to God, the way the priest demanded, and I prayed three Lord’s Prayers for my salvation.

\[\ldots\]

Prayed. That it may not overcome her, the sin. Not go to her womb, the willing. But it was on fire for a long time, there helped no prayer and no devotions, turned harder and harder over being on fire, until at last, after years, all desire ceased to exist.

### Exposition: Lacher

Well, it had to come so far, […] that someone like him too is struck down by despair over a woman. […] Never before has he tried to make order in his life, which has had only one high point. An Ascension that turned imperceptibly into a descent into Hell.

\[\ldots\]

Until he met Frieda Rüegger, who, leftover fabric under her arm, crossed Schätti’s orchard.

And Lacher experienced, what every lover experiences when love falls on the wrong object. Lacher could plead and beg, there was no way of changing her mind. She waited for Mr. Right, and that could only be one, who let their union for life be sealed through the sacrament of marriage.

\[\ldots\]

Only once did he grab her and pressed Frieda’s body against him, moaning and rough. Under a beech tree on the mountain called ‘Vorderberg.’ His face burned from the slap on the face and from shame, while the sticky sperm ejaculated into his pants.

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325 Ibid., 172, 173.
326 Ibid., 173.
327 Ibid.
The narrator describes Frieda in her background story as “ein Zaungast in der letzten Reihe, der nicht zum Mitspielen aufgefordert worden ist”\(^{328}\) (an onlooker in the last row, who has not been invited to join the [dating] game) but contests that statement just a few pages later, where readers learn from Frieda’s point of view, how young Lacher revealed his feelings for her to her, and invited her repeatedly, as indicated by his pleas, to let her hair down, her fire-hair. Furthermore, the narrator portrays Frieda also as an overworked and underappreciated young woman, who “hat nie einen Burschen geküßt,...”\(^{329}\) ([h]ad never kissed a fellow, ...) and implies herewith that she had never felt a desire to do so, nor a stirring of lust. Curiously, readers learn only a page later, and again through Frieda’s point of view that Lacher in fact did stir lust and desire in her, but that she chose to surrender those feelings to God, “wie’s der Pfarrer verlangt hat”\(^{330}\) (the way the priest demanded). Her desire and feelings for Lacher were, however, never fully extinguished. Years later, and long since married to Kari, Frieda still remembers him longingly:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{…wenn einem das Rot des Haars abhanden gekommen und sonst einer wie Lacher,} \\
\text{ach Lacher, in seinen Armen.}\quad\text{\(331\)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{… when one lost the red hair as well as otherwise one like Lacher,} \\
\text{ach Lacher, in his arms.}
\end{align*}
\]

The differences between the accounts narrating the actual “incident under the beech tree,” when told from Frieda’s point of view compared to how the “incident” is relayed in Lacher’s background story, are striking and prompt readers to investigate the intratextual signs more
closely. For example, were Frieda’s character to simply represent the female coping mechanism of her time, that is, to explain away and rationalize the male transgression, as one might conclude when considering the phrase ([y]ou have over the refusal lost the lust to wait, Lacher), then Lacher’s point of view should reflect the corresponding male attitude. That is, he should be described as feeling entitled to “have” Frieda. Interestingly though, this is not the case. Instead, the account narrating the transgression “under the beech tree” from Lacher’s point of view judges his actions harshly and even speaks of the shame he experienced. In other words, young Armin Lacher was fully aware that he had crossed a line. In addition, Frieda stood her ground and was able to deflect Lacher’s forceful advance by slapping him across the face, which put him in his place.

2.2.3.4.2 Mr. Right, the Church and Society’s Demands, and the Fallout

In Lacher’s background story it is revealed that Frieda waited for Mr. Right and that “das konnte nur einer sein, der ihre Verbindung fürs Leben durch das gemeinsam empfangene Sakrament der Ehe besiegeln ließ”332 (that could only be one, who let their union for life be sealed through the sacrament of marriage). At first glance, this phrase implies that Armin just wanted a sexual “union” with Frieda but was not interested in marrying her. However, at this point, readers already know that Armin was in love with Frieda and wanted nothing more than to go out and dance with a girl that was promised to him and not to somebody else. In other words, Lacher would have loved to marry Frieda. Since young Frieda and young Armin clearly had feelings for each other, the question arises, why was Frieda waiting for Mr. Right, i.e. why was Armin, who

332 Ibid., 173.
was in love with the young “Störschneiderin“ Frieda, and who kindled feelings and lust in her, not her Mr. Right?

The passive form in the statement “das konnte nur einer sein, der ihre Verbindung fürs Leben durch das gemeinsam empfangene Sakrament der Ehe besiegen ließ” signifies that marriage was readily available to Mr. Right but could not be effected by Armin, or only after a long period of time, as alluded to in “[h]ast [...] die Lust zu warten verloren” ([y]ou have [...] lost the lust to wait). This comment makes sense when considering the historical fact that there was a time when it was almost impossible for anybody receiving any form of poor aid to acquire the necessary documents to get married. Consequently, this severely impacted anybody who was “verdingt.” Scholars of German literature will here likely recall Jeremias Gotthelf’s Der Bauernspiegel. In this fictive autobiography, the protagonist Jeremia’s plan to marry his love Anneli is thwarted when he learns that as a former “Verdingkind” he owes the community the “Kostgeld” they advanced for him, and that he cannot marry before that debt is paid off. Frieda and Armin found themselves in a similar situation. Unlike Frieda, however, Anneli, does not refuse her young and indebted suitor and the couple consummates their love long before Jeremias is able to marry. Tragically, Anneli and their newborn die in childbirth. The account of Lacher’s apparently unrequited love for Frieda alludes to that time in the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and people when a person who was “verdingt,” as well as his or her beloved, could easily die before the “Verding” was able to work off the alleged debts to society and could therefore marry.

333 Ibid., 13. “Stör” is an old term describing the journey of artisans and craftspeople, who worked in their customers’ homes. In other words, Frieda was a migrant worker, more aptly, she was a migrant seamstress.
334 Ibid., 173.
335 Ibid., 162.
336 Gotthelf’s novel further explores the issue of how the prohibition of marriage for any person receiving poor aid-welfare resulted in a vicious circle of illegitimacy and poverty.
Knowing that Frieda and Armin had feelings for each other, the words “fürs Leben” (for life) appear to be unnecessary over-information. When considering Mehr’s precision with language, then the entire sentence “[d]ie wartete auf den Richtigen, und das konnte nur einer sein, der ihre Verbindung fürs Leben durch das gemeinsam empfangene Sakrament der Ehe besiege ließ” has to be read literally. The narrator’s choice of words bring to the fore that Frieda and Armin do have a “union for life.” Although their relationship never attains the legal status of a marriage, their lives are linked through elements generally associated with matrimony: e.g. love, passion, living together, and a child. So do Lacher’s last thoughts reveal that he never stopped loving Frieda. Furthermore, like a married couple, the adult Armin and Frieda live together under one roof. And most troubling, their lifelong union and their repressed feelings are acted out in inappropriate, immature, hence “green” and severely damaging ways upon the female child protagonist. That is, Lacher replaces the unattainable Frieda by a proxy-lover, namely, Daskind, and Frieda transposes her refusal of the “Verding” Armin Lacher onto her foster child by refusing to engage in any loving or caring exchange with her. In contrast, after denying her feelings for Lacher, Frieda chooses a marriage of convenience with Kari Kenel to fulfill her duty to society as a woman and wife, and so Kari can be seen by society as a “real” man. The narrator elaborates on some of this society’s gender norms for males:

Der, dem keiner das Hemd wäscht, ist kein ganzer Mann. Zum Gespött wird einer ohne Frau [...]. Drum kocht und wäscht die Frieda weiter, wie sie es von Kindsbeinen an gelernt hat.

The one, whom nobody washes his shirts, is not a full man. Somebody without a wife is the laughing stock [...]. That is the reason why Frieda continues to cook and wash, the way she has learned to since she was a child.

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337 Mehr, Daskind, 173.
338 Ibid., 161.
To ensure that Frieda’s actions cannot be construed as one person’s bad choices or that what happens to Daskind is perceived as the result of the breakdown of one family, Mehr’s narrative highlights the church’ and society’s complicity in the tragedies of these lives through the character of a nameless “Pfarrer”339 (Father). By demanding that the young and at that time apparently healthy340 Frieda surrender her lust and desire to God and pray, rather than marry the young suitor she clearly has feelings for, the Father mirrors the church and society’s attitude towards “Landfahrer” and “Verdingte,” a mindset that did not change until the last quarter of the twentieth century. Meier, for example, stresses that any actions against “Landfahrer” was strongly supported by the general population, and that the negative attitude against them only started to change once the Swiss borders were reopened to Travelers in 1972. Furthermore, the various forms of stigmatizations surrounding “Verdingkinder” have only in recent years begun to be addressed and, as a result thereof, to abate. Burdened by shame and discrimination, most former “Verding” have kept their past a secret even from their spouses and children until the last decade when more and more historians started to research the topic. The social stigma attached to being a “Landfahrer” or a “Verding” resulted in discrimination and made a marriage with anybody from these groups an “undesirable” union that had to be stopped from happening.341 Although a ban of Traveler marriages was legally not feasible, the notion, though, was considered in the last

339 Ibid., 162.
340 There is no textual evidence that Frieda had any love interests other than Armin Lacher and Kari Kenel. Hence, Frieda did not know, nor did anybody else, that she could not have children until she was married to Kari Kenel.
The character Armin Lacher represents a large group of men and women, who were considered by society and law neither “full men” nor full citizens. He and his plight illustrate the problems that plagued “Landfahrer” and “Verding,” as well as the social repercussions resulting from belonging to one or both of these groups.

2.2.4. Daskind - the Protagonist

After this initial exploration of the WVHPKL/OHGFRI character Armin Lacher, of the welfare practices he experiences and of the diverse group of people this figure represents, I now turn my focus to the novel’s main character, Daskind. The protagonist’s story of origin and how she becomes a foster child with Kari and Frieda Kenel is revealed in two separate accounts, and like Armin Lacher’s background story, in the last quarter of the novel. The first one is primarily told as a flashback from her biological father’s point of view. Kari remembers:

Sieht sich, ein paar Jahre jünger, […] Mit der Frau im Rücken, […] sein Kind, von dem sie nichts weiß. […] Bis Kari Kenel vor seinem Kind stehenbleibt.343

 […] und daß man dem Paar Zeit gönnen müsse, sein Kind zu finden. Sie sagt: sein Kind.344

Sees himself, a few years younger, […]. With the woman in the back, […], his child, of whom she knows nothing. […] Until Kari stops in front of his child.

 […] and that the couple is granted the time, to find their345 child. She says: his child.

342 Johann Josef Jörger “promoted the fight against vagrancy by taking away the children” because “resettlement or a ban on gypsy marriages was not feasible legally.” Meier, “The Fight against the Swiss Yenish and the ‘Children of the Open Road’ campaign,” 115.
343 Ibid., 177, 178.
344 Ibid., 179.
In this excerpt, readers learn the surprising news that Daskind might be Kari’s child. In an initial reading, and especially when distracted by the description of how and why the children are presented to the Kenel couple, the phrase “sein Kind”346 (his child) could easily mean that Kari searches the row of children to find the one he wants to take home as his foster child. The narrator’s statement that Kari’s wife Frieda knows nothing about “his child”, that “it” [the child]347 is also declared by a nun as “his child” and that the narrator repeats this statement as a two word sentence, signifies however, that there is more to this child, and that “it” could literally be his biological child. Less than ten pages after Daskind’s paternity is revealed, readers are confronted with the disclosure, from her biological mother’s point of view, that her mother is Kari’s sister, Leni:

Die Verzweiflung hatte sie aneinandergekettet, Bruder und Schwester, mit Worten, die kein Trost sein konnten, diese Verstrickung nicht lösen konnten, sie in noch schwäzere Tiefen stürzten, sie aus dem Himmel verstießen. Dem Himmel, von dem sie glaubten, daß er Bestand haben würde, dem Dorf und dem Herrgott zum Trotz. Da hatte er ausgesprochen, daß das Ungeborene weg mußte. Das Kind muß weg, hatte er geschrien, während Tränen des Abscheus und des Ekels über sein Gesicht liefen. Um sich geschlagen hatte er, in hilflosem Zorn, und dann hatte er auch Leni geschlagen, seine Hände hinterließen häßliche rote Male auf ihrem Gesicht, er hatte sie in den Bauch getreten und geschrien, daß sie etwas sagen solle, nur ein Wort solle sie sagen, ihm Trost spenden, sie, die selbst untröstlich war. Er hatte gewütet, bis er erschöpft in sich zusammengesunken war.348

[...]

Es ist deins, sagte Kari [...]. Wie damals, denkt Kari Kenel, ist kein Trost und kein gütiger Gott in Reichweite, die Sünde zu verzeihen. Da hätte man wieder

345 The German possessive pronoun “sein” means in English “their,” “its” as well “his.” This is an example of the author’s play on words to expand interpretative possibilities and achieve the most impact.

346 Mehr, Daskind, 179.

347 German has three grammatical genders, namely masculine, feminine and neuter. The translations of the respective pronouns are: he (m), she (f) and it (n). The grammatical gender of the German noun “Kind” is neuter. Therefore, “the child” when referred to via a pronoun becomes an “it.”

348 Mehr, Daskind, 188, 189.
Lust, dreinzuschlagen, sie zu schlagen, die Leni, von der kein Wort zu erwarten ist, die schweigt. Kari will das Leid in ihrem Gesicht nicht sehen, nicht die verkrampften Hände, über dem unförmigen Bauch, als wäre Daskind noch ungeboren. [...] Sitzt da, seine Leni, etwas Störrisches im Blick, die verschränkten Finger über dem unförmigen Bauch, ergeben, als wäre dies die Strafe für das armselige Glück, aus dem Daskind geboren wurde.³⁴⁹

Desperation had chained them together, brother and sister, with words, which could not offer solace, could not solve this enmeshment, pushed them into even darker abysses, expelled them from Heaven. The Heaven, they believed would endure despite the village and the Lord. So he had declared, that the unborn needed to go. The child must go, he had shouted, while tears of abhorrence and disgust ran down his face. Striking out wildly he did, in helpless anger, and then he hit Leni too, his hands left ugly red marks on her face, he did hit her in the belly, and yelled, she should say something, only one word should she say, give solace to him, she, who herself was inconsolable. He raged on until he sank down exhausted.

[...] “It” is yours, said Kari [...]. Like back then, thinks Kari Kenel, there is no solace and no benevolent God within reach, to forgive the sin. One feels again like hitting hard, hitting her, the Leni, from whom no word can be expected, who remains silent. Kari does not want to see the suffering showing on her face, not the tense hands, above the bulky belly, as if the baby were still unborn. [...] Sits, his Leni, something stubborn in her gaze, the interlaced fingers above the bulky belly, resigned, as if this were the punishment for the pathetic happiness, from which Daskind was born.

These excerpts establish the protagonist Daskind as the offspring of sibling incest. The content and how this information is revealed, is reminiscent of Goethe’s Mignon. Unlike in Lehrjahre, however, there is no textual evidence that Kari and Leni did not grow up together or were unaware of their sibling relatedness. In addition, readers are given information, which appear to be contradictory: the phrases, “aus dem Himmel verstießen. Dem Himmel, von dem sie glaubten, daß er Bestand haben würde, dem Dorf und dem Herrgott zum Trotz”³⁵⁰ (expelled them from Heaven. The Heaven, they believed would last, despite the village and the Lord), not only

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 189, 190.
³⁵⁰ Ibid., 188.
suggest that Kari and Leni were in love with each other, but also that the siblings knew these feelings were a taboo and in conflict with social and religious laws, but still hoped against all odds that they would be the exception and live “happily ever after.” These assertions stand, however, in stark contrast to Kari’s recurrent violent behaviour, and with Leni’s repeated attempts to ban “Karis Fluch”\textsuperscript{351} (Kari’s curse). These statements attest to a very different relationship between the siblings, wherein Kari seems to have been carried away by his desire for Leni and resorted to force to get what he wanted from his younger sister. While Leni loved her brother, textual evidence indicates that she did not share his feelings of sexual desire and instead repeatedly tried to stop his advances and was, in fact, raped by him.\textsuperscript{352} The answer to these apparent contradictions lies in Mehr’s commitment to convey exactly what she wants to say with the least amount of words, and without reproducing and repeating the trauma or trigger memories thereof. The terms “Himmel” (Heaven), “Sünde” (sin) and “Fluch” (curse) attest to how masterfully Mehr employs in Daskind allusions to evade “loaded”\textsuperscript{353} signifiers such as “rape” and “sibling incest,” and assures that readers who have been traumatized in this particular way, are not violated again. In addition, the narrative contains also allusions to texts that most comprehensively clarify the affair at hand.

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{352} She treasures the photographs and postcards she received from Kari while he was in Idaho, despite the violent sexual and physical assault Leni experienced at his hands. This illustrates how challenging some of the relationships between abuser and abused are.
\textsuperscript{353} Kali Tal uses this expression to emphasize that certain terms and descriptions can trigger memories of traumatic events and potentially re-assault and therefore re-injure a reader, as each reader brings his and her own life experiences to a text. Therefore, Tal argues, authors have to be particularly diligent when writing about traumatic events. Kali Tal, \textit{Worlds of Hurt – Reading the Literatures of Trauma} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
2.2.4.1. Ancestry: “Karis Fluch,” a Euphemism that is None, and Illusionary Heavens

The function of a “Fluch” (curse) is punishment, generally for breaking a sacred law, for example, the incest taboo or the law of hospitality. What distinguishes the curse from other forms of punishment is that a curse can be passed on to descendants. That is, an innocent member of a family can suffer a curse engendered by the actions of a forefather. When considering sibling rape and incest within the context of the novel as an unveiling of WVHPKL/OHGFRI history, the term “Fluch” reveals itself as an allusion to one of the most prominent examples of family curses in Western literature, namely, Sophocles’ tragedy *Oedipus*. The curse that destroys Oedipus’ family does not originate with Oedipus but with his father Laius, son of the Theban king Labdacus. Laius is orphaned as a child and taken in by king Pelops of Elis. Subsequently, Laius abducts Chrysippus, the son of Pelops and rapes him, and by doing so breaks the sacred law of hospitality. Thereupon, Pelops curses Laius and his descendants. The oracle of Delphi reveals to Laius the well known punishment for his actions: should he ever have a son, Laius will be killed by his son’s hand and the son will afterwards mate with his mother and Laius’ wife Jocasta. It is the curse cast on Laius and his descendants that lies at the roots of Oedipus being abandoned. Like Oedipus, Daskind is innocent pertaining to the curse. In fact, the narrator stresses that the curse started with Kari when s/he names it as “Karis Fluch.” Nevertheless, as a descendant, Daskind is severely affected by the curse. Like Oedipus, the female child protagonist is unwanted and to be disposed of. 354 Kari demands from his pregnant sister, as does Laius, “Daskind muß weg” 355 (The child must go) and underscores his intentions by hitting Leni in the face and the belly before he abandons her and the child in a village and canton steeped in Catholicism and with little

354 Both Oedius’s father and mother want him “gone.”
355 Mehr, *Daskind*, 189.
Although Switzerland legalized abortion for health reasons in 1942, the interpretation of what “for health reasons” meant differed greatly between cantons. Women had much less access to legal abortions in Catholic cantons, than in protestant ones. The village the narrative takes place in is steeped in old traditions and Catholicism, leaving Leni very few options. Instead of trying to abort the pregnancy herself or killing the newborn, she brings her baby daughter “aufs Amt” (to a government office) in the nearest city. While Oedipus ends up being rescued by a shepherd and subsequently being raised as a royal by king Polypus of Corinth, Daskind becomes a nameless foundling and ward of the state, who is never adopted and therefore grows up as a “Heimkind” (Home-child) and intermittently as a “Pflegekind” (foster child). Daskind tells the story of those who are not descendants of kings, and do not have the good fortune of being taken in and raised as their own, destined to become kings, or queens.

Given the textual evidence that “Karis Fluch” is indeed his unrequited sexual attraction to his younger sister and that he not only acts on it, but acts on it by using violence, the so-called “Himmel” (Heaven) the narrator evokes, cannot be read as a metaphor for the consummation of the siblings’ love and desire for each other, whether conscious or unwitting, as the allusion to Lehrjahre may prompt some to conjecture. Since the siblings were aware of the incest taboo, the term “Himmel,” which is the German noun’s singular and plural form, signifies that both characters believed in the Christian God, and underscores that the siblings believed in different aspects of the teachings associated with that God. When considering that Leni believed in a

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356 Switzerland was among the last countries of the (Western) world to grant its women equal rights to men. The first Swiss women to receive the right to vote in provincial matters were those of the French speaking “Kanton” (canton) Waadtland in 1959. The German-speaking canton Appenzell had to be forced by Federal Court in 1990 to give their women the right to vote in cantonal matters. Swiss women were given the right to vote in federal matters in 1971. However, women were not considered equal in the Swiss Constitution until 1981. And it was not until 1986 that the new marriage law (civil code) finally caught up with the changes taking place all over the country and granted a married woman the right to work, rent an apartment and open a bank account without her husband’s written consent. These legal milestones provide information on the novel’s setting.

357 Mehr, Daskind, 190.
Heaven where incest, rape and violence do not exist and where proper actions, such as for example banning “Karis Fluch” are rewarded, then it makes sense that she would attribute experiencing the opposite reality as being expelled from Heaven. Similarly, if Kari believed in a Heaven where negative actions have no consequences because a “gütiger Gott”\(^{358}\) (benevolent God) washes away all sins, then he would experience coming face-to-face with the consequences of his sinful actions, i.e. with Leni’s pregnancy and the birth of the child, as an expulsion from Heaven. Therefore, the term “Himmel,” highlights in the given context that Leni and Kari’s Heavens\(^{359}\) reveal themselves as personal beliefs that are unfounded in their lived reality. This results for Leni in a profound disenchantment with the church and her village community.

### 2.2.4.1.1 Unforgiven Sins and the Recurrent Curse

The novel conveys how far-reaching and grave Leni’s adjustment from illusion to reality is by alluding to Heinrich von Kleist’s *Das Erdbeben in Chili*. In this novella, Kleist repeatedly employs the expression “als ob”\(^{360}\) (as if) to highlight Josephe Asteron and Jeromino Rugera’s belief in Heaven, namely in the goodness and graciousness of people and in a benevolent God. The young couple, and most importantly Josephe, “reasons” that theirs’ and their illegitimate son’s survival of the natural catastrophe, an earthquake, must be understood by them and the community as a sign of God’s approval of their love.\(^{361}\) The outcome of the novella proves them

\(^{358}\) Ibid., 189.
\(^{359}\) The singular and plural forms of the German noun “Himmel” are the same. This allows Mehr to insinuate “Heaven,” as well as a belief in different “Heavens.” Furthermore, the German “Himmel” means also “sky.”
\(^{360}\) Heinrich von Kleist, *Das Erdbeben in Chili* (1806).
\(^{361}\) *Das Erdbeben in Chili* has also been read as a reference to the Holy Family. I thank Gaby Pailer for bringing this to my attention.
wrong. Most members of their community interpret the devastating earthquake as God’s punishment of the young couple’s forbidden love. In contrast to Kleist, Mehr’s narrator repeatedly employs the phrases “[a]ls hätte sie nie” (as if she had never) and “[a]ls hätte sie nicht” (as if she had not) to highlight Leni’s accurate assessment of her fellow village members and to tell how and why conception, birth and the giving away of the protagonist really happened.\footnote{As if she had never pushed “it” out in pain, alone in the hut, desperately struggling for air, soaked in sweat. As if she had not cut the baby’s umbilical cord with unskilled hands, washed the small body and wrapped “it” in rags, burned the afterbirth behind the hut. As if she had never put “it” onto the painful breast and nursed, protected and hidden “it” from the villagers’ greedy eyes. As if she had never tried to ban the curse, Kari’s curse, before the brother shaking with rage ran away, leaving her and the child behind. As if she had never secretly taken a train, had not travelled to the city, with the child in her arm gone to the government office, to there drop “it” off.

To protect herself and the child, she ostensibly abandons her parents by moving out and into an old wooden hut in the forest. Alone and discredited as a lazy and witch-like “Waldfrau”\footnote{To protect herself and the child, she ostensibly abandons her parents by moving out and into an old wooden hut in the forest. Alone and discredited as a lazy and witch-like “Waldfrau” (forest-woman), Leni gives birth to Daskind, and ensures the baby is cleaned, nourished and protected.} (forest-woman), Leni gives birth to Daskind, and ensures the baby is cleaned, nourished and protected.
from the “gierigen Augen der Dörfler”365 (villagers’ greedy eyes). Abandoned by her brother, and acutely aware that her community would never accept and help support her and the child, Leni does what mothers in need have done for centuries: she drops the newborn off at the appropriate place, here at a government office.

Unlike Leni, who responds to her expulsion from her Heaven by protecting the weakest, Kari responds to the loss of his illusionary Heaven with violence towards the weaker. This character trait is part of his “Fluch.” Employing the word “Fluch” stresses, furthermore, the severity, longevity and social prevalence of Kari’s actions. “Karis Fluch” could never have reached its full potential were it not for the combination of his cowardice to rather have his offspring “disappear” at the hands of her mother than facing the consequences of his actions, and the lies and denial of both Daskind’s parents and foster parents, real as well as cultural ones, such as, for example, the village’s sexton and the pastor.

The use of the term “Fluch” instead of “incest,” “rape,” or “sexual abuse,” as well as the use of literary allusions signify Mehr’s vigilant and economic writing and answers the questions that ultimately lie at the heart of narrating and commemorating any trauma: “How can it not be said? And how can it be said?”366

2.2.4.2. First Placement

Like many other themes that are profoundly important for the understanding of the text, the information about the protagonist’s early years is revealed in seemingly unrelated bits and

365 Ibid., 190.
pieces which are scattered throughout the book. When perceived separately, these fragments mirror how the world sees and judges Daskind. For example, Daskind is on the novel’s first page introduced as a child who does not speak, has never spoken, but instead “[s]chweigt düster. Schreit und tobt gelegentlich, anstatt zu sprechen”\textsuperscript{367} (keeps gloomily silent. Occasionally screams and has outbursts of violent temper in lieu of words). The world, here represented by the people living in the village, sees a child that does not speak but instead acts out, avoids eye contact, skips school, is a loner and deviant. The WVHPKL/OHGFR\textsuperscript{i} girl is judged by the people based on these actions, even though the villagers don’t have any knowledge, neither of Daskind’s past, nor of what she continues to experience when not in the public’s eye. In contrast, when these fragmented elements are put together in the context of WVHPKL/OHGFR\textsuperscript{i} studies, a different story emerges. The narrative problematizes here how the world perceives WVHPKL/OHGFR\textsuperscript{i} children and youth, and that in order to understand these snapshots of a WVHPKL/OHGFR\textsuperscript{i} child’s life a commitment to engagement with the youngster is needed. Similarly, readers are asked to commit to and engage with the text in order to understand the narrative.

2.2.4.2.1 “Anstalt”

The day the protagonist becomes Kari and Frieda Kenel’s foster child, Daskind is described as somebody with a “flachem Gesicht”\textsuperscript{368} (flat face), with hair that sticks to her scalp, and with a facial expression of utter disinterest that seems to be founded in incomprehension about what is happening to her. This picture engenders visions of a mentally challenged child,

\textsuperscript{367} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 5.
\textsuperscript{368} Ibid., 178.
possibly a Down syndrome child. These interpretations are contested by another piece of information: shortly after Kari brought Daskind home, he had her thoroughly checked out by doctors and learned that she is not mute and that there is nothing wrong with her that would prohibit Daskind from speaking on the level of any other child her age. The narrator alludes with this contradiction to the history and knowledges associated with Church- and state-run “Anstalten” (institutions) for children and youth. I elaborate on this in the following paragraphs and chapter sections.

The German word “Anstalt” and the older form “Angestalt” signify in the broadest sense any kind of facility, i.e. economic, social or other. Legally, an “Anstalt” defines an organization or concept, which possesses not only finances but also visible facilities and things that are employed to realize the “Anstalt’s” purpose, for example, a “Krankenanstalt” (hospital, medical institution). The examples listed in various dictionaries are predominantly institutions for children, youth and adults, who in one form or other deviate from what is considered normal and are therefore separated from the general population and placed in enclosed and formally administered facilities. These places are since the late nineteen fifties also known as “total institutions.” They include “Armen- und Erziehungsanstalten” (poor houses and reformatories), care facilities for orphans, as well as “Blindenanstalt” (institution for the blind), “Taubstummenanstalt” (institution for the deaf and mute), “Nervenheilanstalt” (psychiatric

369 The “flat face” alludes to Down syndrome.
371 The “Armenanstalt” is also known as “Armenhaus.”
clinic), but also “Zuchthaus” (jail). Since the nineteenth-century, the *Schweizer Idiotikon* furthermore lists “Schule” (school) and “Internat” (boarding school) as examples of “Anstalt.”

By the time the novel was published, residential institutions for children were in German most commonly known as “Kinderheime” (children’s homes) or by its shorter name “Heime” (Homes), which is by some also translated as asylums. Choosing the term “Anstalt” instead of “Kinderheim” or “Heim,” signifies a distancing from the untranslatable and at times romanticized term “Heim,” and its onetime synonym “Heimat,” which evoke in non-WVHPKL/OHGFRI people primarily notions of home and residency, father-house, birthplace, family, friends, community, community-of-origin, countryside, land, fatherland and homeland. By contrast, the term “Anstalt” functions as a conflation alluding to: Hospitalism, also known as Kaspar Hauser syndrome, “Anstaltskritik” (critique of institutions), the interrelation of order and violence, as well as the nineteenth century, the “Jahrhundert der Anstalten” (century of institutions), and the work of Foucault, whom Mehr cites loosely as an introduction to the trilogy’s last book.

2.2.4.2.2 “Anstalt-” and “Heimleben,” and its Consequences

In the scene where Kari picks the protagonist up from an “Anstalt” run by nuns, Daskind is identified as a “Heimkind” (home-child) and “Anstaltskind” (institution child). As a

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373 The singular of the terms “Kinderheime” and “Heime” are “Kinderheim” and “Heim.”


“Heimkind,” she does not live with a foster family but instead in a “Heim” i.e. an institution. There, as mentioned earlier, Daskind is cared for by staff working shifts. The protagonist’s pervasive silence, her occasional tantrums, general non-responsiveness and disinterest at an age when most children are eager to learn and to please adults, all imply that she was not given to a foster family after Leni dropped her off at an “Amt” (government office) in the city but instead was immediately placed in an “Anstalt.” This reading is further supported by the information that Daskind “[h]at sich lange vorher ausgeschrien”\(^{376}\) (has screamed herself empty long before) she comes to the Kenels. This statement implies that Daskind lacked loving human care and interactions, and experienced neglect and abuse for a prolonged period of time. The narrative references here what is today recognized in research on institutional care for small children, namely, that neglect and abuse were common in these institutions far into the second half of the twentieth century, and that these living conditions resulted in Hospitalism i.e. Kaspar Hauser syndrome. The syndrome is named after the historical figure Kaspar Hauser.\(^{377}\) In medical and psychological science, Hospitalism is defined as a syndrome of abusive deprivation, neglect, torture and tyranny.\(^{378}\) Children, who are placed as infants into institutions often fail to thrive physically, emotionally and mentally. In other words, they suffer from Hospitalism, i.e. Kaspar

\(^{376}\) Mehr, *Daskind*, 9.

\(^{377}\) Kaspar Hauser was a sixteen year old foundling, who appeared out of nowhere in 1828 Nurnberg carrying a letter claiming that he was given into care as an infant, and was instructed in reading, writing and Christianity but was never allowed to step out of the house. An initial investigation revealed that the youth could barely read, had a limited vocabulary but knew some prayers. Kaspar himself claimed that he has spent his years in total isolation, in a half laying position in a dark room and was fed mainly bred and water. Research on feral children and children growing up without any human interaction reveal his claims as lies. Nevertheless, the figure has become a foil and metaphor for authors to explore many of society’s ills. Ulrich Struve put together a collection of articles investigating texts that are inspired by Kaspar Hauser. Ulrich Struve, *Der Findling – Kaspar Hauser in der Literatur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992). Monika Schmitz-Emans analyzes in her research the different functions “Kaspar Hauser” has had in fiction. Monika Schmitz-Emans, *Fragen nach Kaspar Hauser – Entwürfe des Menschen, der Sprache und der Dichtung* (Würzburg: Königshause & Neumann, 2009).

Hauser syndrome. As readers follow Daskind on her strolls through the village, the nearby forest and fields, learn how she creates the slingshot, becomes an expert shot and consider the doctor’s findings concerning her speech ability, it becomes clear that she is neither physically nor mentally disabled but suffers from Hospitalism and what is today acknowledged as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Building on the well-known critiques of institutions from the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies, Mehr’s narrator conveys with a few select words seminal elements of “Anstaltsleben” (institution-life). Namely, discipline and order which were particularly in Church run institutions colored by Christian doctrines of sin, obedience and punishment:

Eine lange Reihe sauber geschrubbter Kinder, […], die betteln, daß man sie mitnehmen möge. 379

[...]


[...]

..., Friedas kalte Augen suchen im Hof nach den Nonnen, die dem allem ein Ende setzen sollen. [...] Also ertönt die schneidende Stimme einer Nonne, verlangt Ruhe ...

[...]

..., die auf neue Eltern warten und darauf, daß man sie heraushole aus ihrer eintönigen Anstaltswelt. 381

A long row of cleanly scrubbed children, […] who beg, to be the one taken along.

[...]

Stay straight, […]. Once in a while a nun homes in on a child, who interrupts with its inattentive stance the long row’s symmetry. Reaches with her hands for the child’s body and straightens it, so that the child has to lift his/her head.

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379 Mehr, Daskind, 177.
380 Ibid., 178.
381 Ibid., 179.
Barely suppressed anger in the eyes of the child and in the nun’s eyes. Waiting. Silence. 

[...] 

…, Frieda’s cold eyes search the courtyard for nuns, who shall put an end to all of this. [...] Thus sounds a nun’s piercing voice, demands silence… 

[...] 

…, who wait for new parents and to be taken away from this monotonous institution-life.

The text references here the mass-care in institutions for children. Their doors closed in Switzerland in 1970 after research repeatedly showed the devastating effects this “care” has on children. It took a few more years before similar care systems were phased out in Germany and Austria.

The way the nuns line up the children and intervene physically to ensure the long row’s symmetry is maintained, and that the children stand at attention and remain quiet, reminds readers of Foucault’s research on discipline and order in the context of institutions. Like mentally ill people or prisoners, “Heimkinder” were, and in some cases still are, isolated and kept away from the rest of society. Their bodies were managed and their souls and spirits were to be educated so they would eventually turn into productive members of society. The allusion to prison is underscored by the children’s silent plea “daß man sie mitnehmen möge” (to be the one taken) away from this “eintönigen Anstaltswelt” (monotonous institution-life). Expressions such as “home in,” “standing at attention,” “waiting,” “silence,” as well as “cleanly scrubbed” bodies remind readers of the military and the drill associated with it, rather than of a place where children live and thrive. How little actual fostering happened in these institutions is further conveyed by the nuns’ thinly veiled anger and their harsh judgment when a child’s body tires and

382 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison*.
383 Mehr, *Daskind*, 177.
384 Ibid., 179.
literally “breaks ranks,” and by the child’s anger when “its” body is manhandled and straightened. These excerpts allude to a time when obedience and order were enforced through any means possible. The practices used included emotional, physical and sexual abuse, withholding of food, isolation and torture-like treatments, such as holding a child’s head under water until s/he faints or worse.\footnote{David Brill documents some of the ways children and youth were treated. David Brill, “Switzerland’s Stolen Generation,” \textit{Dateline}, YouTube video, 16:41, posted May 21, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1eRj0fOSDY. Hostettler, Otto, Markus Föh, and Christoph Schilling, “Kinderheime – Düstere Jahre - Die Gesellschaft wollte sie ‘erziehen’, doch die Kinder wurden systematisch verprügelt, missbraucht,” \textit{Beobachter}, May 12, 2010, last modified September 28, 2010, http://www.beobachter.ch/dossiers/administrativ-versorgte/artikel/kinderheime_duestere-jahre/.} Since 1977 these methods are known as “Schwarze Pädagogik” (Black Pedagogy), which is known in English translation as Poisonous Pedagogy.\footnote{The term was coined by German sociologist, educationalist and author Katharina Rutschky in 1977. Katharina Rutschky, \textit{Schwarze Pädagogik – Quellen der Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung} (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997).} These practices can be traced back to the belief that children with so called “undesirable” ancestry, e.g. illegitimate children, like Daskind, or children of Travelers such as little Armin Lacher, are spoiled with “seeds of evil” that have to be exorcized. Thus, corporal punishment of infant, child and juvenile wards was commonly used. Recent research reveals that “Schwarze Pädagogik” served primarily as a release valve for caretakers’ own aggression and not, as has often been
claimed, to “educate” the children.\textsuperscript{387} Although best known to have occurred between the nineteen forties and nineteen sixties, the practices lingered in many institutions for children and youth until the nineteen seventies.\textsuperscript{388}

By referencing institutional mass childcare and “Schwarze Pädagogik,” the narrative establishes associative links to related discourses and enables readers to understand why these institutions were a breeding ground for extensive abuse. For example, “Schwarze Pädagogik” in orphanages, factory schools and in all forms of “Kinderheime,” often went hand in hand with severely overworked and underpaid caretakers.\textsuperscript{389} Moreover, the majority of these caregivers were non-professionals and qualifications other than being female, and being willing to do the charity work most people “did not line up for.”\textsuperscript{390}

Switzerland’s professionalization of social work starts in 1908, when the first courses in “Kindererziehung” (childdearing) were offered. The first school for social work opened its doors to women in 1918.\textsuperscript{391} After World War II, men were for the first time allowed to enter “social schools.”. In 1970, the University of Zurich opened a Department of Pedagogy with specialization in social pedagogy. However, it was not until the nineteen eighties that a three to four year

\textsuperscript{390} The original states: “Hinzu kam, dass sich niemand um diese Arbeit in Heimen riss.” Hostetter, “Remo Largo, ‘Wer überfordert ist schlägt irgendwann zu.’”
\textsuperscript{391} The idea behind this gender segregation was that women’s “mother instinct” predestined them for social work. In addition, these schools were a means for women of the “bürgerliche Oberschicht” (the upper bourgeoisie) to take first emancipatory steps. Schoch, Tuggener and Wehrli, Aufwachsen ohne Eltern – Zur ausserfamiliären Erziehung in der deutschsprachigen Schweiz, 18-35.
program in education for “ErzieherInnen”\(^\text{392}\) (social pedagogue) became the norm across all social schools, including those that were not affiliated with an university.\(^\text{393}\) The rest of German-language Europe underwent an equally slow professionalization of caretakers for children in institutions. This late professionalization of social pedagogues for “Heimkinder” went, as mentioned above, hand in hand with a severe lack of caretakers for these children. In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, institutions for infants, children and youth were profoundly understaffed. This resulted in infants and children being treated like objects on an assembly line. Children in these mass-care institutions spent most of their time without human interaction and with nothing to do. Research into such institutions showed that as early as the nineteen fifties infants and children were in some institutions “ruhiggestellt” (immobilized), for example, by being tied up to beds, fastened onto potties, or by having their feet and hands bound and were left on their own for prolonged periods of time. In some institutions, caretakers placed milk bottles in the crib beside a child’s head. If a child was not able to latch on to the bottle, then s/he had to wait until a caretaker made her next round.\(^\text{394}\)

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\(^{392}\) As German is a gendered language, nouns describing professions have a male and a female form. “Erzieher” is the male form of the noun, and used to describe a male Erzieher. “Erzieherin” is the female form of the noun, and used to describe a female Erzieher. “Erzieherinnen” is the plural of the noun’s female form. “ErzieherInnen” is the writing used to include both the male and female plural in one form, and to save time and space in a document. The term is most commonly translated as “educator,” “child care worker,” or “nursery school teacher.” The German verb “erziehen” means to raise and educate a child or youth. The term has also been translated into English as “parenting.” None of these really express what an “ErzieherIn” does. ErzieherInnen work in children’s homes and group homes and are meant to ensure that a ward is raised according to contemporary societies’ ideas and ideologies about these children’s and youth’s places in society. Most importantly, they do not take on the role of a parent or other permanent caretaker. After a child or youth leaves, the contact to an “ErzieherIn” is severed, so they have “room” for the next ward.


Mehr explores in *Daskind* several reasons why a child might not be adopted and instead becomes a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child. The figure Daskind references through her features and darker complexion mental and physical disability as well as coloring as reasons why she was not adopted immediately after being dropped off at the government office. Furthermore, after a child spent a prolonged time in institutional mass-care, s/he was at risk of showing signs of Hospitalism. When that occurred, a child’s chances of ever being adopted or fostered in a family decreased dramatically. This is alluded to in the narrative through Daskind’s lack of response when she is mustered and chosen from the line of children by Kari.

Far into the twentieth century, infants and children who, like the protagonist, showed signs of Hospitalism, were generally written off as mentally retarded and physically challenged and were therefore left in institutions.\(^\text{395}\) This attitude and practice is in the novel explored in the following passage:

\[\text{Die Nonnen schütteln kaum merklich den Kopf, mißbilligen Kari Kenels Wahl, fixieren hoffnungsvoll die Frau, daß die ein Machtwort spreche und}\]

\[\text{---}\]


\[\text{These practices too, were not unique to Switzerland. This knowledge has in recent years reached the media: “Säuglingsheime,” Report Mainz, Vorschau NDR, YouTube video, 1:07, April 11, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBO8ab1RKtY.}\]

\[\text{395 This was true for Yenish as well as non-Yenish children. Psychoanalyst René À. Spitz developed a scale identifying different stages of “maternal” and emotional deprivation. His observation lead him to conclude that if the child’s “love object,” i.e. primary caretaker is withheld longer than three to five months, total deprivation, that is, Hospitalism occurs. René À. Spitz First Year of Life; a psychoanalytic study of normal and deviant development of object relations (New York: International University Press, 1965). Some of his research documentaries have in recent years been posted on YouTube. They are testaments to and example of the language and convictions guiding research on WVHPKL/OHGFRI children during that time. René À. Spitz, “Psychogenic Diseases in Infancy (An Attempt at their Classification, copy right 1952), Part II, Emotional Deficiency Diseases, YouTube video, 7:18, April 22, 2010, copy right 1952, posted April 22, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvdOe10vsr4.}\]
anders wähle, eins nehme, das besser in die Welt einer gottesfürchtigen Familie paßt. 396

Hardly noticeable, the nuns shake their heads, disapprove of Kari Kenel’s choice, stare hopefully at the wife, that she may lay down the law and chooses differently, and takes one that fits better into the world of a God-fearing family.

This account alludes, furthermore, to a tradition that can be traced back to the first foundling homes in eighteenth century Italy: Catholic institutions treated all infants and children dropped there as abandoned and, unlike Protestant children’s institutions, did not generally investigate a foundling’s paternity. 397 Nevertheless, a child who was dropped off could later be reclaimed. However, since there existed no proof of paternity, parents were able and, as the nun’s disapproval of Kari’s choice and the narrator’s comment imply, even encouraged to replace their child, if “necessary” with a more desirable offspring. This refers to a hierarchy of WVHPKL/OHGFR children, whereby good-looking, smart and socially well-adjusted children had, and continue to have, a much better chance of being selected for adoption and foster care. 398

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396 Mehr, Daskind, 179.
398 How deeply ingrained these ideas still are, is not only reflected in the children who are adopted, and those who are not, but is also shown in recent interviews with women, who were in state care as children and youth. Some moderators find it appropriate and important to point out that they each are “eine schöne Frau in gehobenen Alter” (a beautiful woman of mature age). These comments are not only highly sexist and sexualize female WVHPKL/OHGFR people once more, they imply that good-looking people are not part of the history of growing up in state care. This is a problem I address in later chapters and chapter sections. For an example of contemporary sexualisation of WVHPKL/OHGFR women see, Norbert Brakenwagen, “Verdingt, Versorgt, Verwahrt” Time To Do SchweizLife 5, YouTube video, 54:57, posted May 24, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcQ-NmHTGW4.
2.2.4.3. “Anstaltskritik”

Society’s treatment of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth has long attracted critical voices. By investigating and unveiling the history of extrafamilial care through a child and an adult “Verding,” as well as a “Heimkind” and a “Pflegekind,” the narrative helps disseminate salient points of “Anstaltskritik” (critique of institutions) among readers who are not familiar with the history of the extrafamilial care system. By the time the novel was published, the history of “Anstaltskritik” was already divided into three main waves.\(^{399}\) The first took place in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and is known as “Waisenhausstreit” (Orphanage Controversy). The debate centered around the failure of large-scale orphanages in cities, on “Verdingung” and pauperism.\(^{400}\) This criticism showed that, in accordance with the spirit of the time, children worked hard in orphanages, penitentiaries and workhouses, which differed little from each other in regard to workload and the form and severity of punishments.\(^{401}\) These institutions were in the end not cost effective.\(^{402}\) In addition, the bourgeoisie became aware of the inadequate sanitary conditions and the physical and sexual abuse that occurred in these places. This resulted in the closure of many of these institutions and in children being placed with farmers in exchange for a very small board and lodging money. The new pedagogy focused on

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\(^{399}\) So for example: Schoch, Tuggener and Wehrli, *Aufwachsen ohne Eltern – Zur ausserfamiliären Erziehung in der deutschsprachigen Schweiz*.

\(^{400}\) Gotthelf provides an analysis of pauperism in *Armennot* (1840).


\(^{402}\) Josef Martin Niederberger, *Kinder in Heimen und Pflegefamilien – Fremdplatzierung in Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (Grünwald: Kleine Verlag, 1997), 71ff, 84ff.
agricultural work and family. The children were now to be raised to “Arbeit, Ackerbau und Landhaushalt” (work, farming and farm-household). Subsequently, the early nineteenth century saw a proliferation of privately initiated “Armenerziehungsanstalten” (Reformatories for the Poor) and “Rettungshäuser” (Rescue Homes). These institutions took the place of waning public resources and were built to rescue poor and neglected children in danger of hunger and of corruption from the alleged negative role models their parents provided. Like their twentieth century peers, these so called “Sozialwaisen” (social orphans) were to be saved from a life of poverty and to be freed from “äusseren und inneren Schmutz” (outer and inner foulness), particularly from the “seed of evil.” Since the nineteenth century, children of the destitute and impoverished bourgeoisie and farmers, as well as children of Travelers, like the character Armin Lacher, were side-by-side “verdingt” or placed in “Arbeitserziehungsanstalten” (Work-Reformatories) where they were raised to a life of hard work.

The second wave of “Anstaltskritik” took place between 1920 and 1945, and centered in Switzerland on journalist and author Carl Albert Loosli, journalist Peter Surava and photographer Paul Senn. Surava’s article “Die unbekannte Schweiz: Ein gewisser Josef Brunner – Unhaltbare Zustände in einer Erziehungsanstalt für Knaben” (The unknown Switzerland: A certain Josef Brunner – Unhaltbare Zustände in einer Erziehungsanstalt für Knaben)

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404 The term “social orphans” distinguishes children from families who are either not able, not willing or not allowed to take care of their children from those children who have lost their parents and are therefore orphaned, i.e. orphans.
Brunner – untenable conditions in a reformatory for boys) was seminal in this new wave of critique and resulted in the head of the institution being fired. Loosli, a former WVHPKL/OHGFRI child himself, became one of the most outspoken critics of institutions for children and youth. He published in 1924 Anstaltsleben and other biting critiques of Switzerland’s extrafamilial care system. In 1950, Joseph Hilpertshausen launched the organization “Pflegekinder-Aktion Zürich” (Action Foster Care Children, Zurich) to increase the rights of children in care. The narrator’s usage of the term “Anstalt” and the phrase “daß man sie heraushole aus ihrer eintönigen Anstaltswelt” (to be taken away from the monotonous institution-life) references the second wave of “Anstaltskritik” and Loosli’s extensive oeuvre.

The nineteenth century, the “Anstaltsjahrhundert” (century of institutions) saw a general increase in institutions. The twentieth century saw an unprecedented increase in the specialization of institutions that opened their doors to receive the seemingly never-ending stream of children and youth in need of extrafamilial care. Today, both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries are recognized as “Anstaltsjahrhunderte.” The specialisation of institutions for children and youth in combination with the 1912 Swiss Civic Code resulted in a sharp increase of children in Swiss state care.

The third wave of “Anstaltskritik” is in German-language Europe known as “Heimkampagne” (Home-Campaign) and started in Frankfurt Rhine-Main during the student movement.

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409 Mehr, Daskind, 179.

410 This term is used in research and texts analyzing the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults, for example by Urs Hafner. Heimkinder - Eine Geschichte des Aufwachsens in der Anstalt (Baden: hier + jetzt, 2011).

411 I elaborate on this aspect of the Swiss Civic Code in the following chapter section.
revolution of 1969. It has been said that it is stark irony, although not really surprising, that the future *Rote Armeefraktion* (RAF)\(^{412}\) founders Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Astrid Proll and Ulrike Meinhof participated in the first massive public protests against the so called “Heimknäste” (Home-Slammers). In Switzerland, the “Heimkampagne” made its debut in April 1970 with a reportage in the Swiss magazine *Sie+Er* about the inhumane and debasing situation in Swiss “Erziehungsanstalten” (Reformatories).\(^{413}\) The “Heimkampagne” disclosed work-camp-like conditions in “Kinder- und Jugendheimen” where malnutrition, beatings, isolation and degradation were the daily fare. These “Heimerziehungsanstalten” tie in almost seamlessly with some of the practices and ideologies known from Nazi times. The third wave of “Anstaltskritik” questioned not only what went on in these institutions but also society’s reasons for placing children and youth in extrafamilial care. This line of questioning continues in *Daskind* through the portrayal of both WVHPKL/OHGFRi characters as well as these characters’ parents. “Anstaltskritik” has to be understood within the larger context of the civil rights movement and social justice movements. Since the third wave, the “Anstaltskritik” has never fully rested. In Switzerland alone, the exposure of the *Pro Juventute* project “Kinder der Landstrasse” in the nineteen seventies and the “coming out” of the Yenish has been followed by the official recognition of the “Zwangssterilisierten” (Compulsory Sterilized), the “Administrative Versorgten” (institutionalized without due process), the “Verdingkinder” and the “Heimkinder.” This development mirrors a movement that is increasingly taking place all around the Western world, and may one day be understood as a social movement in its own right. Mehr’s novel has to

\(^{412}\) English: *Red Army Faction.*

be understood in these larger discourses.

In 1995, at a time when most of the West had just started to embrace its responsibility concerning anti-Semitism, anti-Ciganism, racism and colonialism, Mehr was already forging ahead, addressing how society deals with its unwanted and “undesirable” children, foreshadowing the coming out of the next cluster of minority groups, namely the WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. Through *Daskind*, Mehr unveils, explores and maps the history of those who have been slated to live their lives on the margin, with little chance of an education that would allow them to step out of poverty and dependence, and who therefore are condemned to be “Getreten[e]”\(^{414}\) (underdogs) and “Verlierer”\(^{415}\) (losers), as the “Verding” Lacher judges his life moments before he dies. Many members of this diverse group, the narrative stresses, were robbed of their childhood: they were abused and maltreated to such a degree that they were weighted down by layers of fear, anger and despair, which led them already as children to believe that they would never grow up to be “groß”\(^{416}\) (tall) and “stark”\(^{417}\) (strong) and able to escape the various levels of abuse, as Daskind finally comes to believe.

2.2.4.4. “Das Eigene Andere”

The information that Kari\(^{418}\) and Leni are Daskind’s parents, finally also settles the question as to whether the protagonist is an “Other” in terms of race, ethnicity or nationality. More precisely, whether she is Yenish and as such a ward of the project “Kinder der Landstrasse”

\(^{414}\) Mehr, *Daskind*, 172.  
\(^{415}\) Ibid.  
\(^{416}\) Ibid., 165.  
\(^{417}\) Ibid.  
\(^{418}\) Kari’s paternity is a few pages before the novel ends confirmed. Mehr, *Daskind*, 208ff.
or not. Like the character Armin Lacher, the protagonist challenges readers’ beliefs about minorities, particularly since the cultural turn. Despite many readers’ initial assumption that Mehr revisits in Daskind Switzerland’s challenging history with the Yenish and despite the many associative links to the Yenish that the text provides, the young female protagonist Daskind is, as her ancestry shows, a local child, an own child and not an “Other” in terms of race, ethnicity and nationality.

The narrator continually provides elements which function as allusions to the history of the Swiss Yenish. In doing so, s/he argues that there exists a history of WVHPKL/OHGFR people which transcends ethnic and racial boundaries and goes beyond the already existing poverty discourse.\(^{419}\) The description of how Leni moved into a hut in the forest to protect her child and how she was subsequently discredited as a crazy “forest-woman,” shows, for example, remarkable similarities with the story of the Yenish Theres Huser. Pregnant with her third child, Huser hid in the forest to prevent the newborn and her other children from being taken away and placed “in care” under the Pro Juventute project “Kinder der Landstrasse.”\(^{420}\) Her attempt was to no avail. She lost five children to the “project.” In 1971, Ms Huser walked into Hans Caprez’s

\(^{419}\) Literature and critics have explored the issue of poverty, for example, in the literary epochs “Vormärz,” “Realism,” and “literary Modernity.” More recently, the journal Der Deutsch Unterricht Beiträge zu seiner Praxis und Wissenschaftlichen Grundlegung devoted an entire issue to “Arm und Reich” (poor and rich). Franziska Schößler, “Arm und Reich in der Literatur,” Der DeutschUnterricht – Beiträge zu seiner Praxis und Wissenschaftlichen Grundlegung 5 (2012). Furthermore, Day, Dworsky, Fogarty and Damasheck show that the college drop out rate of former WVHPKL/OHGFR students higher than that of low-income and first generation students. A. Day et al., “An examination of post-secondary retention and graduation among foster care youth enrolled in a four-year university,” Children and Youth Services Review 33, no. 11 (2011): 2338.

office at the magazine Beobachter and told her story, and by doing so made it possible for Caprez and the Beobachter to expose the unjust and inhumane treatment of the Swiss Yenish.\footnote{Grossrieder, “Hans Caprez: ‘Das war haarsträubend.’”}

The character Leni references, furthermore, the thousands of young women, and men, who were in Switzerland between 1942 and 1981 “administrativ versorgt.” That is, they were put into prisons or psychiatric clinics without due process, simply because they led, according to contemporary society’s thinking, a so-called “sittlich verdorbens Leben” (morally debauched life), or were seen to be in danger of leading a “liederliches Leben”\footnote{Ursula Biondi speaks about that time and the reasons for being unlawfully detained. Ursula Biondi, “Ein lebenslang bestraft – Das Leiden der administrativ Versorgten,” filmed April 15, 2009, YouTube video, 26:43, posted March 21, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBsnD3HV--0.} (loose life). Dating at all, dating the wrong person, teenage pregnancy, and opposing a parent’s wish and will fell under these categories. Young and unmarried pregnant women were forced to give birth in these institutions, and to give the child up for adoption or into state care. It did not matter whether the young mother wanted to keep their child, whether a parent was willing to provide for and parent her or his child, or whether the young parents planned to marry.\footnote{Homes for so called “fallen women” all across the western world are testaments to similar attitudes and stories all across the West.} The possibility that the young woman was raped was often given no consideration.\footnote{The possibility that the young woman was raped was often given no consideration. These actions were partly made possible due to the Swiss Civil Code of 1912. While the law was officially aimed at children whose parents were too poor to care for them, recent research into the project “Kinder der Landstrasse,” “Verdingkinder,” “Heimkinder” and “Pflegekinder” shows that the children of many Yenish people, single mothers and other “undesirable” parents, including artists, alcoholics and unmarried couples, were taken away. Ruedi Weidmann, a Zurich historian summarizes, “[i]f a family didn’t meet society’s expectations then they quickly ran the risk that their children would}
be taken away, [...] unmarried, divorced or widowed mothers could rarely keep their children."\(^{425}\)

This had far reaching consequences, and led to an increase of un-familied children and youth in extrafamilial care. Many of these children lost in the process all family connections and ended up family-less.\(^{426}\) Taking children away from so-called “undesirable” parents or encouraging them to give their children up “freely” while threatening parents that they would otherwise lose guardianship over their children has a long tradition, and was practiced in Switzerland into the late nineteen sixties and in some cases into the early nineteen seventies. Tis practice is referenced in the text when the community decides in a town hall meeting “Daskind müsse weg”\(^{427}\) (Daskind has to go):

Entweder trenne er sich freiwillig vom Kind, oder die Armenfürsorge werde gegen seinen Willen ein Vormundschaftsverfahren einleiten und sich von Amtes wegen um eine Heimunterbringung bemühen.\(^{428}\)

[...]
Kari habe keine andere Wahl, er müsse handeln, wenn er nicht wolle, daß ihm der Gemeinderat das Heft aus der Hand nehme.\(^{429}\)

He either be willing to separate freely from the child, or the poor relief office will start the guardianship process and revoke his guardianship against his will, and strive to find a placement in an institution.

[...]
Kari has no other option, he has to act, if he does not want that the municipal council take over from him.


\(^{426}\) In Switzerland of the nineteen seventies, children as young as ten who had no criminal record were placed without court order in closed residential institutions for youth, even though the admission to closed children’s and youth’ homes requires a court order, and that the child or youth had a run-in with the law. Interviews with family members, 1983. Interview with family member 1989.

\(^{427}\) Mehr, Daskind, 198

\(^{428}\) Ibid., 202.

\(^{429}\) Ibid., 208.
These excerpts underscore the intense social pressure parents were under, and that children could be taken against their parent/s will at any time, over as little as neighbors’ hearsay, dislike and superstitions. By having Kari being threatened to lose control and guardianship over his daughter, the narrator alludes to the thousands of so called “undesirable” men and fathers, who lost their children and were like the female “Administrativ Versorgten,” put into prisons and psychiatric clinics, without due process. The excerpts further highlight WVHPKL/OHGFR children’s vulnerability to experiencing non-permanency. At this point in the story, the protagonist is in danger of being moved again, and of becoming once more a “Heimkind.”

2.2.4.5. Second Placement - “Verdingung” again: “Mindersteigerung”

Daskind is written in an elliptical style, i.e. some things are left out out, others obscured, some elements are narrated indirectly, in fragments or through transpositions. These techniques are not employed for fear of telling the story, but deliberately and skilfully to develop suspense, heighten dramatic effects and to keep readers at an emotional distance so they can reflect critically on what is being presented. An example of transpositions is, for example, the placing of socio-historical elements which belong to Lacher’s story, into the sphere of Daskind: as I have shown, it is Lacher, who is as an adult, as well as a child “verdingt.” However, it is in the background story of how Daskind comes to Kenels that the practice of “Mindersteigerung” is explored and its longevity addressed:

…, vor dem Portal der Anstalt stehen. An einem Tag wie dem heutige, kalt und abweisend. ⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 177.
Kari Kenel wanders down the row, lingers here and there on some face. They are reddened from the cold, the faces, and Kari Kenel notices that none of the children wears a coat. As if they were part of a meat-market, deliberately dressed incompletely, to make it easier for his gaze to assess the state of their bodies. The children hide their shame behind brisk, abrupt motions, but they are quiet. Stay straight, while they are inspected by the married couple. Goods, given free for viewing and sale.

This excerpt, which is told in an analepsis, wherein one element, here the weather at Lacher’s funeral, functions as a hinge between present and past as well as a socio-cultural link, alludes to the practice of “Mindersteigerung,” which is in today’s colloquialism used synonymously for “Verdingung.” The fact that “Mindersteigerung,” which is also known as “Absteigerung,” existed in Switzerland into the second half of the twentieth century, has in recent years made the world news. As early as the nineteenth century, opponents of the practice considered “Verdingung” “dem überseeischen Handel mit den Schwarzen nicht unähnlich” (similar to the overseas trade with Black people) and called the system “Weisse Sklavenmärkte” (white slave markets). “Mindersteigerung” consists of two main steps and took place during the cold season “um’s

431 Ibid., 178.
434 Ibid.
Neujahr herum” (around New Year). In a first step, the children were dressed in clean clothes to be inspected for physical health and strength. The term “Fleischschau” (meat-market), the insufficiently dressed children and the description of how the Kenels muster the lined up charges expresses vividly how children’s bodies were examined for their quality as helpers, maids and serfs. In a second step, children in need of community support were auctioned off in public markets to the lowest bidder. That is, children were placed with the farmer who asked for the smallest “Kostgeld” (board and lodging money) from the community in exchange for taking in the child. This practice was developed over decades. The guiding principle hereby was to decrease the costs of “Verdingung” even further, and for the communities to pay as little support as possible for their destitute children and adults, whom they perceived as an inconvenience and an unnecessary burden. The physical assessment, the under-bidding and the fact that many children were “weiterverkostet” (contracted-out further) to poorer people so farmers did not have to care for them, reminded many people of slavery. Especially, since “Verdingkinder” were, like slaves, traded like goods. Although forbidden as early as 1847, the practice was upheld in some places to the mid twentieth century.

435 Ibid., 53.
437 Mehr, Daskind, 178. Mehr uses here a comparison, which was commonly made by critics of “Mindersteigerung.” Leuenberger cites, for example, E. Fawer who stated in 1913: “Die ganzen Verhandlungen bei den Verdinggemeinden gemahnen stark an einen Menschenmarkt und das gewöhnlichen Vorführen und Berühren der Kinder noch viel mehr an einen Viehmart.” Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 58. In addition, the term “Fleischschau” creates an associative link to child prostitution and sex trade. WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth are known to be at an increased risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.
438 Children as well as adults were “verdingt” through “Mindersteigerung.” Like other “Verding,” children and adults placed via “Mindersteigerung” had to work off the “Kostgeld” the community paid for them.
439 To be traded like goods is an element missing by “Leibeigenen.” In comparison to “Mindersteigerung” which was still practiced in the twentieth century, slavery, as a legal institution ended in the United States with the passage of the “Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution” in 1865. This does not mean the slave trade ended then. My reason for including this information here is to highlight the lack of public’s awareness and scholarly discussion of “Mindersteigerung” and “Verdingung.”
This type of slavery, namely, the selling and buying of children as an economic phenomenon did not arise from traditional colonialism but has long been part of European history. Children in need of community support i.e. orphans, half orphans, abandoned children, such as Daskind, children of the poor, children of divorce and those born out of wedlock, as well as children of “Landfahrer” like “der kleine Armin” (the little Armin), were most at risk of being contracted-out through “Mindersteigerung.” One of the reasons for this is that until the second half of the nineteenth century, WVHPKL/OhGFRI children and the children of the poor were seen as a source of labour that needed to be harvested at as early an age as possible. These children were “verdingt” with farmers, or placed in workhouses and factories where they had to work for their keep. But even when the ideas of enlightenment thrived, many communities chose to “verding” their WVHPKL/OhGFRI children instead of sending them to orphanages and “Kinderheimen” (children’s homes) to save money. The history of the “Verdingkinderzüge”

Gotthelf criticized the practice of “Mindersteigerung” in Der Bauernspiegel. Interestingly, Gotthelf was a co-founder of the infamous “Erziehungsanstalt” Trachselwald, the reformatory where Loosli spent his formative years, and where children and youth experienced a hard way of life. Prior to Gotthelf, the Swiss humanist scholar and writer Thomas Platter (1499-1582) criticises the “Verdingwesen” in Lebensbeschreibung, a text commemorating his youth. “Mindersteigerung” was in the Bernese region practiced until the nineteen sixties and in some cases even longer.


Mehr, Daskind, 172.

Marjatta Rahikainen, for example, concludes in Centuries of Child Labour that Europe has a long history of placing orphaned, abandoned and destitute children with private households, farmers and factories, where they had to work. Marjatta Rahikainen, Centuries of Child Labor – European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 94. Boswell finds trough his research that while “the sale of children by parents” (430) was common in ancient as well as medieval Europe, and that foundlings were regularly sold, it was in the Middle Ages and High Middle Ages when it was more and more openly accepted to use foundlings “as servants or second class members of households” (430). Boswell, The Kindness of Strangers.

A brief look into the history of the Poor Laws and the welfare state shows that as far back as the medieval welfare system, orphans, foundlings, depraved and abandoned children, as well as children of the poor, children out of wedlock and foreign begging children were either “verdingt,” or detained in “Hospitals” adjoining orphanages or workhouses.

These poor or family-less children from the Swiss Alps, Vorarlberg, Tirol and Südtirol, who annually walked to the children markets mainly in Oberschwaben to be hired on as seasonal labourers by farmers, were called
(children migrating on foot to locations where they were auctioned off), which includes Austria’s “Tirolerkinder,” Germany’s “Schwabenkinder,” as well as Switzerland’s and Italy’s “Spazzacamini,” shows that “Verdingkinder” were in many cases forced to migrate across national and language borders, and that this practice was common beyond Switzerland. The associative link to “Mindersteigerung” and “Verdingung” serves, furthermore, as an allusion to the famous children book Die Schwarzen Brüder by Lisa Tetzner and Kurt Kläber/Held, and expands the scope of Mehr’s novel beyond Swiss borders.

2.2.4.5.1 “Verdingkinder,” “Heimkinder,” “Pflegekinder”

When the foster-mother tells the young female protagonist that she was not picked out of a line in the children’s home to “Faulenzen” (laze about) and therefore should come and help with the household chores, the narrative problematizes how much has stayed the same in extrafamilial care and that even a generation after Lacher, even when a “Pflegekind” was no longer supposed to be a “Verdingkind,” a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child could not count on not being exploited and treated as a serf or maid. “In addition to her domestic duties, the protagonist becomes a legitimizing presence with regard to society’s traditional family construct since, in this

“Schwabengänger,” “Tirolerkinder” or “Hüetekinder.” In the Italian part of Switzerland, these children were called “Spazzacamini”: Itl. pl. for „spazzacamino“ – chimneysweeper.


447 Mehr, Daskind, 17.
particular case, the couple is unable to conceive.” Although the former “Heimkind” sleeps in her own bed, and eats with Frieda and Kari, something Lacher and many “Verdingkinder” did not experience, the foster child Daskind is like “its” “Verding”-siblings” never really considered a part of the family, neither by Frieda nor by the village members, and consequently does not receive fostering and a family in the true sense of the word.

The depiction of how the Kenels, who have no more qualifications than being “ehrbar” (honorable) and “gottesfürchtig” (God-fearing), are able to walk into a institution for children, select a child and walk out with “it” as their foster child, suggest a tight interconnection, not only between “Pflegekind” and “Verdingkind,” but also between “Heimkind” and “Verdingkind.” The third wave of “Anstaltskritik” has shown that being placed in a twentieth century institution for children and youth did not automatically protect these wards from being severely exploited and abused. Furthermore, recent oral history generated by former “Heimkinder” in the care, for example, of “Ingenbohler” nuns, and other “Heime” and “Anstalten” all over Europe reveals that “Heimkinder” were indeed lined up, as described in the narrative, to be selected by farmers as their “Verding.” The description of how Daskind is picked up from the “Anstalt” by unqualified strangers functions, in addition, as an allusion to Switzerland’s, and other countries opaque and unregulated foster care system, which offered for the longest time little to no legal protection for children or youth in any form of extrafamilial care.

449 Mehr, Daskind, 183.
450 Ibid., 179.
2.2.4.6. Legal Development, Money, the Continuously Driving Force and Returnable Goods

Before the Swiss Civil Code was enacted, children were placed with any person willing to take them in. Despite its negative consequences, the 1912 law did offer WVHPKL/OHGFRI children some legal protection. This law’s stipulations were mainly concerned with the charges’ physical wellbeing. Foster parents had, for example, to be able to provide adequate food, a bed and clothing. Furthermore, communities were from then on required to supervise children in their care. However, the supervision and control relied on non-professionals such as pastors, teachers, doctors and neighbours, who provided character references on community members wanting a “foster child.” The novel captures this poignantly. How problematic this was is explored in how Daskind ends up with the Kenels, and in why and how the decision is made to replace her.

In addition, to reduce the spreading of infectious diseases, in particular tuberculosis, Swiss cantons started to pass bills in the first quarter of the twentieth century making the receiving of a foster child contingent upon a health permit. This should have ensured, for example, that the children did not have to eat their meals in the pigsty, as little Armin had to. Research has shown that these laws were often not effective. Nevertheless, attempts were made to increase the rights of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth. Since 1942, for example, WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth experienced, de jure, some crucial protection, as crimes

\footnote{Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 80ff.}

\footnote{Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,” 102. Tuberculosis ravaged Europe in the first quarter of the twentieth century.}
against a child or youth in “Fremdplatzierung” (extrafamilial care) could from now on be brought
to court. The effectiveness of the laws was questioned. It was believed that they offered better
protection only on paper since their implementation, as well as the development of further and
stronger protection for WVHPKL/OHGFR children was left to the communities.454 The doubts
were justified. Loosli wrote in 1945 a biting commentary about what legal protection for children
in community and state care really meant. He described a case where a highly esteemed official
sexually abused a twelve-year-old foster boy. When charges were finally pressed, the perpetrator
was sentenced to ten days in prison and let go on probation. When the boy’s parents were asked
by Loosli and others why they did not act as plaintiff, they revealed that authorities had threatened
them that if they did, the boy would again be taken from them and “versorgt“455 (given into
“orderly care”) somewhere else. Not surprising, very few WVHPKL/OHGFR children and youth
reported any form of transgressions. In addition, it was not until the mid nineteen forties that most
cantons had implemented laws stipulating that a written contract of foster care placement had to
be drawn up and that each foster care placement had to be regulated through the community’s
poor office. Despite the good intensions, these laws were implemented in rural regions with
significant delays and did not include the large group of children placed privately. Those children
and youth remained without legal protection.456

Switzerland signed the European Human Rights Convention in 1975. This eventually
resulted in a law that forbids the placement of a person can in an “Erziehungs- and
Zwangsarbeitsanstalt” and a psychiatric clinic without due process. Though, it was not until 1978

454 Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945,”
100.
Fredi Lerch and Erwin Marti (Zürich: Rotpunkt, 2006), 383.
that the term “Pflegekind” (foster child) was included in the Swiss Civil Code and effective protective measures for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth were implemented as a result of the 1977 “Pflegekinderverordnung (PAVO)”\(^{457}\) (Foster Child Regulation). At the same time, the right to perform corporal punishment was suspended from the Swiss law. However, it was not until 1993 that teachers and any caregivers of children and youth had the “Gewohnheitsrecht zur körperlichen Züchtigung” (customary right to corporal punishment) withdrawn. The ratifying and implementation of the UN “Kinderrechtskonvention” (Convention on the Rights of the Child) in 1997 reinforced the 1978 laws and shed light on shortcomings.\(^{458}\) In 2006, the Swiss Federal Council started a revision of the 1977 PAVO regulations. Six years later, in February 2012, the Federal Council decided to forgo a comprehensive regulation of all extrafamilial care and instead planned on regulating organizations that arrange placements “um die schwerwiegendsten Mängel des aktuellen Rechts zu beseitigen”\(^{459}\) (to correct the most serious deficiencies of the current law). The new law, based on the smaller revision, was enacted on January 1\(^{st}\), 2013. There is no doubt that Switzerland’s PAVO of 1979 changed the situation of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth for the better, and this latest revision will too. Nevertheless, abuse and neglect continue to be detailed in research reports, media and personal accounts. The delays in the development and implementation of legal protection for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth, which is paralleled by the late development of professionalization of their caregivers, demonstrate how little this group of people counted in society for how long.


\(^{458}\) Germany and Austria ratified and implemented the UN Child Right Convention in 1992, Switzerland in 1997.

Until the enactment of the late nineteen seventies laws, keeping the monetary costs of placement and education of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth as low as possible was the driving concern for most communities. In most cases, the communities would choose free, or almost free placements over considerations of the child’s welfare. One of the reasons why foster parents were barely compensated for their work until the nineteen seventies was that one wanted to prevent that just anybody could take in a child. Instead, only citizens who had a good reputation, who were hard working and able to support themselves financially could receive a child. Though this practice was meant to protect the children in question, when considering the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, and in particular of those who were placed with farmers or with families that wanted a maid, it becomes apparent how badly the idea failed. Moreover, it was often well known who were good foster parents, and who were not. However, particularly in the context of “Mindersteigerung” and “Verdingung,” but also in cases such as the Kenels, known bad “foster parents” kept receiving or were allowed to keep children as these placements saved the community money.\textsuperscript{460} How strong a role money plays even in non-“Verding” placements is explored in the all-male town hall meeting when villagers vote to remove Daskind from the community:

\ldots, [Daskind] das immerhin ohne Kostenfolge für die Armenbehörde in Kari Kenels Haus aufgenommen worden sei, und ob sich die Gemeinde eine Anstaltsunterbringung überhaupt leisten könne.\textsuperscript{461}

\ldots, Daskind who was after all taken in in Kari’s house without any costs for the poor office, and whether the community could even afford a placement in an institution at all.

\textsuperscript{460} Leuenberger, “Verdingkinder – Geschichte der armenrechtlichen Kinderfürsorge im Kanton Bern 1847-1945.”
\textsuperscript{461} Mehr, Daskind, 202.
This excerpt shows how pastor Knobel, representing the non-professional foster care administration, is mainly concerned with the financial question and highlights how important free placement is. The town-hall meeting, illustrates poignantly the conflicting interests the protagonist, representing foster children, is trapped by. Because placements in institutions are much more expensive than placements in foster families, the administration prefers that Daskind be placed privately within the very community that does not want her. The attitude expressed through Knobel’s thoughts follows the same logic, which motivated “Verdingung” and “Mindersteigerung.” The narrative makes herewith the argument, that although the protagonist is a “Heimkind,” who becomes a “Pflegekind,” she is trapped in a welfare system that is still strongly informed by the same guiding principles as “Verdingung” and “Mindersteigerung.” Hence, Daskind is therefore at a high risk of exploitation, neglect and other forms of abuse. The community’s attempt to remove her signifies furthermore that she, like “Verdingkinder,” is not treated as a child but handled as a commodity that can be returned as easily as “it” was picked up if “it” does not satisfy the customer. The customer is in this case primarily the community and the foster-mother. This in turn puts the protagonist at risk of non-permanency.

2.2.5. Violence: Social Order, Discipline and Violence, an Uncomfortable Relation

In the following chapter sections, I engage in an examination of violence in Mehr’s narrative. In a first step, I analyze how the un-familying of children is problematized and then show how the interconnection of indirect, i.e. structural and cultural violence, and direct, i.e. personal violence are explored and stressed. The novel explores and exposes the violent nature of the structures and notions, which I read as being part of a Foucauldian power-knowledge
network, that un-family children and youth in the first place. Moreover, the narrative illustrates how violence begets violence and highlights a new form of violence, namely, “to not belong.” The recognition of “not belonging” as a distinct type of violence is vital as it is a form of violence WVHPKL/OHGFRi children and youth experience to this day.

The second part of my analysis of violence in Daskind focuses on violence the protagonist inflicts. I examine the relationship between the protagonist’s experiences of abuse and her own violent behaviours, and discuss her violent behaviour’s progression from inanimate to animate objects to more serious forms of abuse. Daskind not only struggles against the violence she experiences but also exercises violence and with that power as defined by Foucault. Foucault suggests in “Lecture One” that power is “above all a relation of force” and that it is exercised through “a net-like organization” wherein individuals are “always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.” However, this does in no way mean that the power the protagonist exercises, when she acts violently, has the same weight as the power and domination she is exposed to. Foucault is very clear in that matter, and stresses that power is not “the best distributed thing in the world.”

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462 Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 89.
463 Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 98.
464 Ibid.
2.2.5.1. Un-Familying Children – A Generation Later

When Leni drops her newborn off at an “Amt”\(^\text{466}\) (government department) and ostensibly abandons her, she follows a set of customary rules on what unmarried women ought to do if they find themselves pregnant and giving birth to a child. Leni’s repeated positive behaviour towards the protagonist indicates that she would likely never have given up her daughter in the first place had society offered another avenue. Unwritten social laws are one way societies ensure that undesired and unacceptable behaviour is corrected, and the “evidence” i.e. “proof” of any disorderly behaviour, for example an illegitimate child, is removed from the community. Social laws and customs are supported by the more official structures of science, church and law, as well as their institutions and representatives. The narrator stresses herewith how customs and laws continue to un-family children. Mehr illustrates in this narrative how the portrayed society, representing Western societies, ensures and maintains order, which is perceived as a form and expression of power and knowledge as theorized by Foucault. This discursive network, which constitutes subjects through discipline, permeates all levels of society.\(^\text{467}\) The system functions thanks to a combination of self- and outside discipline. Leni who drops off her newborn child without the influence of any apparent outside force, illustrates the element of self-discipline. The town hall meeting, on the other hand, signifies how discipline is enforced from outside. This power-knowledge network has structures in place to integrate the “un-orderly,” so he or she will eventually be accepted into society’s fold and take her or his prescribed position. The “Amt” where Daskind was dropped off, for example, functions as society’s backup system and serves as a gatekeeper in the sense that those who are passed through enter a program that legitimizes their

\(^{466}\) Ibid., 190.

existence and allocates them a place in the very state (society, community), which does not tolerate them otherwise. In the protagonist’s case, the government places her in an institution for WVHPKL/OHGFR1 children. The history of “‘Anstalten” shows that institutions were a pivotal place where order in its various dimensions was enforced and taught, and were it was ensured that those growing up in them, or living there for a period of time, turned into orderly and hardworking people.468 Mehr highlights through Leni and Daskind that these social structures resulted in indirect and direct violence and harmed the mother as well as the child.

2.2.5.2. Structural and Personal Violence, a Tight Interconnection

The author exposes in this novel how society’s structural and cultural violence is driven by and conveyed through worldviews and ways of thinking that perceive and accept violence as “natural.”469 Kari, for example, ostensibly beats Daskind almost daily because she does not respond to his attempts to teach her to read and speak, and justifies his actions by referring to the collection of one of the first social laws of Western society, namely, the Bible. He paraphrases the Biblical adage “Wen der Herr liebt, den züchtigt er / er schlägt mit der Rute jeden Sohn den er gern hat”470 (For those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son he

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468 Foucault’s research into institutions such as the prison, but also psychiatry does not deal with WVHPKL/OHGFR1 people per se. However, it provides fruitful insight for WVHPKL/OHGFR1 studies.
470 Brief an die Hebräer: 12.6.
receives), \(^{471}\) with “Wer sein Fleisch liebt, züchtigt es” \(^{472}\) (Those who love their flesh, discipline it) and replaces the rod with his leather belt. Here, Kari puts into practice specific elements of society’s spiritual and intellectual foundation that allows and even calls for beating somebody into Christian society’s fold. Similarly argues sexton Jakob Gingg, who filled with conviction that he is “das Schwert Gottes, da um deine Sünde zu rächen vor den Augen des Herrn” \(^{473}\) (the sword of God, here to avenge your [Daskind’s] sins before the Lord’s eyes), beats the protagonist bloody. Frieda too abides by social and cultural orders when she insists that the foster child’s hair is cut painfully short. The symbolic power of hair can be traced back to the ancient belief that a person’s life force and soul is stored in hair. Long hair was in many cultures seen as a symbol of power and freedom. \(^{474}\) Long hair has, furthermore, a long tradition of symbolizing sexuality, health, vitality and seduction. If unbound, long hair signifies sexual permissiveness. In contrast, short hair stands for restrained sexuality, and shorn off hair for celibacy. Monks and nuns cut or shave off their hair voluntarily as a sign of submission to God. However, when the hair of slaves, prisoners, enemies or charges is shorn off, it is done to humiliate them, to “cut” them down to an easier manageable “size” and to force their submission. It thus reflects an existing power imbalance. In the context of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, the cutting and shaving off of hair has multiple functions. Throughout history, hair is one of the few things WVHPKL/OHGFRI children have always “owned” and could take with them, even if they themselves were moved multiple times, even if they lost toys, clothes, friends, relatives, siblings, parents, caretakers, etc. Their hair is a signifier of their uniqueness, personality, and in some cases a visible sign of their origin. To

\(^{471}\) Epistle to the Hebrews: 12.6.
\(^{472}\) Mehr, Daskind, 20.
\(^{473}\) Ibid., 115.
\(^{474}\) For example, Gods and heroes of Greek mythology had long hair. Samson from the Old Testament lost his superhuman strength as soon as his hair was shorn off.
cut it off, or cut it painfully short symbolizes the breaking of the child’s spirit and identity. In the case of girls, it furthermore defeminizes them, makes them gender neutral and appear younger than they are, and therefore puts them into more malleable and manageable age group, i.e. a child rather than a potentially headstrong and outspoken teenager. Frieda’s demand to cut Daskind’s hair extra short, is meant to ensure that the girl does not awaken sexual desire in men, or in the girl herself. In addition, cutting off the protagonist’s hair alludes to a time when these children were to receive the least amount of care to keep costs low. Caring for shorn hair is less time consuming, overall easier and therefore much cheaper than caring for long hair.

Cutting WVHPKL/OHGFRI children’s hair was further motivated by beliefs that these children are dirty, uncivilized and sickly. Cutting off their hair was a way to ensure that they would, for example, not bring lice into the house or institution. The practice of shaving off or cutting WVHPKL/OHGFRI children’s hair very short can be traced back to the earliest orphanages and was practiced, for example, in Switzerland until the nineteen seventies.

The description of Daskind’s time in the institution highlights how tightly interrelated institutions, order and violence are, and underscores the polymorph techniques of power. The nuns represent society’s deep-seated beliefs that these “sin-full” children need forceful discipline and order, not only to be picked out by potential foster parents but for life in general. To be inconspicuous and to follow orders were important character traits for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and people to succeed within their station, far into the second half of the twentieth century. Mental, spiritual and corporal disciplining, as executed by the nuns and later by foster parents and villagers, were ways of how order and power were instilled, internalized and

475 This was particularly important in mass-care institutions.
inscribed into the body. The text makes it unambiguously clear that rather than being moved to a better situation, the protagonist comes out of the frying pan into the fire. It is therefore not surprising that Daskind’s symptoms of Hospitalism do not diminish once she is taken out of the “Anstalt” and placed in foster care. As Kenels’ foster child, Daskind lives in a permanent “Gefahrenzone” (danger zone) where sexual abuse, corporal punishment and emotional coldness are the normal course of life.

2.2.5.3. “Socializing” the Uncanny

The villagers perceive Daskind as “das fremde” (the foreigner, the other) in the sense of Freud’s recurring repressed. She is the uncanny. She represents for society a constant reminder of events in the past that ought to have stayed hidden from the public eye, and is for some a daily reminder of what they have lost. For example, Daskind’s silent presence, her apparent incomprehension, and her refusal to connect and speak, is interpreted by Kari as a sign of punishment for his transgression and a constant reminder of his sin and fall from grace. The ritual-like beating he bestows upon her almost every evening before bed and justifies with Biblical words, is a twisted form of self-chastising in which he does not flog himself but his “sinful flesh,” the child born of sibling incest.” For Frieda, Daskind’s very existence underscores that following society’s moral code and rules does not automatically result in a desired reward.

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477 Mehr, Daskind, 96.
478 Ibid., 92.
479 Sigmund Freud, Das Unheimliche (1919).
480 Freud traces this concept back to Schelling which he credits of having said: “everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.” Quoted in Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, 183.
such as being blessed with fertility. In fact, the child of unknown origin is for her a daily reminder that some of those who break these rules are actually rewarded i.e. blessed with a child. Frieda never wanted Daskind in the first place and treats her accordingly as a misfit. Although she is aware that the way she tend to the “foster daughter” is wrong, Frieda, who had to suppress any desire and emotion to fulfill the role the Church demanded from a barren woman, is determined to fight any tender and positive emotion. It is not until it is too late that she realizes she has lost all ability to feel and experience joy, and wishes she could start over, “diesmal weniger rabiat” (this time less ruthless). Similarly, Daskind’s presence is for the sexton Jakob Gingg a repeated reminder of his destroyed life plans. Before Daskind was conceived, he thought of marrying Leni. Caught in a wrongly understood sense of masculinity, society’s prejudice and a strict moral code, he was appalled by the idea of bringing home “eine Geschändete” (a deviled) or of adopting and caring for a friend’s “bastard.” Instead he abandoned his plan to marry and focused on revenge. Unable to break free from society’s rules, to recognize their projections and to be “with” their own other, as elaborated on by Julia Kristeva, these characters take action against the one they can, the WVHPKL/OHGFR child Daskind and punish her for not having “stayed hidden.” Both male figures resort to physical violence, and Frieda’s character, who authorizes Kari’s nightly beatings of Daskind, exposes women’s contribution to society’s misogyny and their complicity in violence against children.

But not only those with a personal investment feel authorized to “socialize” the protagonist back into “hiding.” In fact, the entire village perceives the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child’s presence as a threat to social norms and orders, and therefore feels entitled to discipline

481 Mehr, Daskind, 212.
482 Ibid., 211.
483 Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, 192, 191-2.
her: “Alle hatten sie eine Strafe für Daskind”\(^{484}\) (They all had a punishment for Daskind) even the children “die es von ihren Eltern lernten”\(^{485}\) (who learned it from their parents). Calling her names and chasing her through the streets are some of the more benign things the local children picked up from the adults in their lives. The openly accepted maltreatment of the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl makes it, for example, possible that Lacher can instruct three village boys to sexually assault the protagonist, and that the boys follow his coaching without questioning it. The narrative shows here how deeply entrenched this society is in violence and misogyny and how little WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls count when women’s and WVHPKL/OHGFRI rights are lacking.\(^{486}\)

The villagers subjugate Daskind using superstition, label her with a mixture of repulsion, fear, hatred and greed and utter slurs indicating that she is a child “dem Teufel ab dem Karren”\(^{487}\) (off the devil’s cart), a “Sündenbalg”\(^{488}\) (a bantling of sin) and so on. Like the Freudian scapegoat, she is claimed as the site of all the villagers’ bad luck. The irrational fear and anger the protagonist engenders in the community is poignantly expressed through the figure Frieda, who perceives Daskind as a dangerous automation, “eine häßliche Puppe mit Drehschlüssel im Rücken”\(^{489}\) (an ugly doll with a key in the back) and as “ein tückisches Kirmesgeschenk”\(^{490}\) (a treacherous kermes gift) that once wound up “wird’s zuschlagen”\(^{491}\) (will strike). Deeply triggered by Daskind’s fears, which resonate with her own like the double, Frieda fosters extremely violent thoughts. She wants to execute her “foster daughter” by quartering. The novel shows that

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\(^{484}\) Mehr, *Daskind*, 91ff.
\(^{485}\) Ibid., 92.
\(^{486}\) Mehr underscores this message with the sexton’s reaction to finding the Ambach boy. The narrator recounts, “[d]as hat er noch nie gesehen, […] ein Bub, an Händen und Füßen gefesselt” (He has never encountered that before, […] a boy, bound on hands and feet). Mehr, *Daskind*, 79. Mehr’s choice of words can be read as implying that it is not that uncommon to encounter tied up girls.
\(^{487}\) Ibid.,12.
\(^{488}\) Ibid., 209.
\(^{489}\) Ibid., 161. This is, furthermore, an allusion to E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* (1816).
\(^{490}\) Ibid.
\(^{491}\) Ibid.
however uncanny WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth may appear to society, the real “unheimlich” in the sense of “eerie,” “scary” and “uncanny” lies in what is done to the children, in how society treats them.

Freud’s etymological elaboration reveals “unheimlich” as the antonym of “heimlich” (hidden, secret), “heimisch” (domestic, home, native) and “vertraut” (familiar). Following this semantic trail, a meaning that goes beyond the Freudian analysis emerges: Daskind and any WVHPKL/OHGFRI child or youth is literally “un-heimlich” in the sense of “un-heimisch” (un-homed) i.e. uprooted and un-familied. 492

2.2.5.4. To Not Belong, and its Consequences

When the stream of maliciously and eagerly proposed myriad of magical spells on how to free Daskind from being possessed comes to an abrupt halt and embarrassment arises because “niemand so recht wußte, wessen Kind denn Daskind nun eigentlich sei”493 (nobody really knew whose child Daskind really was), the narrative illustrates a rarely talked about form of cultural and structural violence, namely, to not belong. The long list of parenting advice of how mothers of the region should care for their crying children signifies how much a society invests into child rearing of familied children and how that knowledge, whether filled with superstition or not, is passed on from generation to generation. Juxtaposing the familied with the un-familied child, the narrator concludes:

492 Despite the many allusions to Freud’s “Das Unheimliche,”492 Daskind expresses a strong criticism of Freud’s later theory of penis envy and the Oedipus complex. The protagonist does experience trauma on multiple levels, but she never has any feelings of desire for any of the men, or women, in her life.

493 Mehr, Daskind, 118.
Dem Kind hilft keine Mutter. Wenn ein Kind wie Daskind nachts weint, hängt höchstens ein gleichgültiger Mond am Himmel, vielleicht schreit ein Kauz. 494

No mother helps the child. When a child like Thechild cries at night, at most an indifferent moon hangs in the sky, perhaps an owl cries.

This means, further, that Daskind cannot allow herself to dream or feel homesick, as:

Dort sein zu wollen, wo man gerade nicht war, hätte für Daskind den sichern Tod bedeutet, denn in seiner Welt hieß träumen einen Augenblick vergessen, daß man sich immer und überall vorzusehen hat, weil immer und überall Gefahr droht. 495

To want to be where one is not, would have meant certain death for Daskind, because in her world, dreaming meant to forget for an instant that one has to be careful always and everywhere, because there is always and everywhere danger.

The novel leaves no doubt that there exists a direct correlation between the status of being a WVHPKL/OHGFR child or youth, and neglect and abuse. The author argues in Daskind that to be un-familied multiplies the risk of experiencing violence and augments the duration and severity of occurring violence. 496 In fact, the vacuum created by the status of not-belonging leaves a space behind wherein any form of violence can run its course unchecked for a long time. The

494 Ibid., 104.
495 Ibid., 22.
496 Georgina Hobbs, Christopher Hobbs and Jane Wynne investigated 191 incidents of alleged physical and/or sexual abuse reported by paediatricians from 1990 to 1995. The English research team found in their study, “Foster children were seven to eight times and children in residential care six times more likely to be assessed by a paediatrician for abuse than a child in the general population.” They concluded, “Children in foster or residential care form an at risk group for maltreatment. Their special needs include additional measures to protect them from abuse.” Georgina F. Hobbs et al., “Abuse of children in residential care,” Child Abuse & Neglect 23, no. 12 (1999): 1239. It is important to note that not all of the abuse happens at the hands of non-family caretakers. However, when no, or little, long-term and trusting relationship develop between caretakers and a child or youth in care, that young person is unlikely to ask for help or to relay early warning signs of imminent abuse. More recent research across Western Europe reveals similar findings. It is generally assumed that the percentage of abuse incidences increases as one moves further back in the history WVHPKL/OHGFR people.
reasons for this is that WVHPKL/OHGFRI children do not really belong to anybody, and therefore nobody feels fully responsible for them and hence nobody takes full responsibility for their past, present and future.\textsuperscript{497} This is extensively illustrated in this text. So is Daskind, for example, easily forgotten even by those who are officially responsible for her. Frieda, readers learn, forgets Daskind every afternoon, and Kari forgets her when he takes her for a walk in the forest. This lack of involvement, which is due to not considering Daskind as the “own child,” has more severe consequences. This is problematized when the narrator states, “[n]achts scheinen die Pflegeeltern schwerhörig zu sein”\textsuperscript{498} (at night the foster parents seem to be hard of hearing). Not only do they not hear Daskind leave the house, they also seem not to hear Lacher entering her bedroom. The word “scheinen”\textsuperscript{499} (seem), implies that what was just said is not the case. Indeed, Kari was aware of what Lacher did to Daskind. This becomes clear at the boarder’s funeral where Kari admits to himself:

\begin{quote}
Lachers Tod hatte Fragen aufgeworfen, denen er sich nur ungern stellte. Plötzlich fühlte er sich als Komplize des Pensionisten, der in seinem Chalet zwei Jahre lange ein- und ausgegangen war und häßliche Spuren hinterlassen hatte.\textsuperscript{500}
\end{quote}

Lacher’s death prompted questions, which he only faced reluctantly. Suddenly, he felt like an accomplice of the boarder, who came and went in his Chalet for two years and had left behind ugly marks.

To not belong, which is in itself for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth a severe form of

\textsuperscript{497} This is increasingly recognized as a mistake of the foster care system. This is, for example, the case at the University of Siegen: Reimer and Rhode, “Interview zur ‘Siegener Erklärung.’” In Austria: “Im Namen der Ordnung – Heimerziehung in Tirol – Buchpräsentation am 14.12.2010 in Innsbruck,” December 14, 2012. YouTube video, 1:35:49, posted November 4, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIbmlsqrG8I. Horst Schreiber, \textit{Im Namen der Ordnung – Heimerziehung in Tirol} (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2010). As well as in British Columbia, Canada: Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, “Belonging 4 Ever: Creating Permanency for Youth in and from Care.”

\textsuperscript{498} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 42.

\textsuperscript{499} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{500} Ibid., 177.
abuse, means that Daskind does not matter enough to receive safety, empathy, love, reassurance, respect, support, understanding, warmth, community, acceptance, protection, appreciation, closeness, consideration and peace, and that she has to live without the lasting protection, love and guidance of parents.\textsuperscript{501}

But not only the foster parents or the villagers fail Daskind. Mehr illustrates how the entire system falls short, and problematizes how different professions that represent positions of authority, are complicit in institutionalizing WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults, and in labeling them as sick. The portrayal of how the nameless psychologist assesses Daskind with Dr. Karl Koch’s “Baumtest” (Baum test), leaves readers pondering definitions of sickness and of lack of intelligence. The psychologist is full of contempt and dismisses Daskind’s drawing of a fir tree with the words “das sei eine Tanne, er habe einen Laubbaum gewollt”\textsuperscript{502} (this is a fir tree, he wanted a leaf tree), even though he did not specify that in his initial request. His violent interactions do not end there. He slaps Daskind’s face after she draws him an “Eibe”\textsuperscript{503} (a yew tree). Finally, the protagonist draws him the “tree” that allows the psychiatrist to put Daskind through a treatment, which requires her being fastened to a bed with leather straps and leaves her to stare “mit nackten Augen ins Nichts”\textsuperscript{504} (with naked eyes into emptiness). The narrative alludes here to the shock and insulin treatment many WVHPKL/OHGFRI people were forced to undergo, as well as to the pharmaceutical experiments that were done on them.\textsuperscript{505} How tightly intertwined

\textsuperscript{501} This list of needs is taken from: Marshall B. Rosenberg, \textit{Non-Violent Communication – A Language of Life} (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2003), 54-5.
\textsuperscript{502} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 66.
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{504} Ib., 67.
\textsuperscript{505} Inge Staub, “Medikamente getestet: Kuhns Nachlass ist Basis für Unersuchung,” \textit{Thurgauer Zeitung}, November 21, 2014, http://www.thurgauerzeitung.ch/ostschweiz/thurgau/kantonthurgau/tz-tg/Medikamente-getestet-Kuhns-Nachlass-ist-Basis-fuer-Untersuchung; art123841,4030149. The organisation \textit{Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe}, concludes in the “Abschlussbericht des Runden Tisches ‘Heimerziehung in den 50er und 60er Jahren,’” that former “Heimkinder” report having been “given something,” that it has to be assumed that this “medication” of
power and knowledge are and how “science” can be subverted by socio-political considerations, is explored through the village’s medical doctor Mächler. He gives Daskind multiple physical exams, which would have revealed that she is physically abused and at high risk of being sexually abused. However, rather than following up on this information he makes some patronizing gestures towards the WVHPKL/OHGFR child and leaves. He justifies turning a blind eye and his lack of moral courage to stand up to a well-respected community member with the words “auch nur ein Mensch. Es ist ihm nicht leicht ums Herz. Beileibe nicht, [...] die Pflicht rufe“\(^{506}\) (only human too. This does not weigh lightly on his heart. Certainly not, [...] duty calls). Pastor Knobel, who represents Church authorities, too remains silent because he does not want to lose his job due to some “unvorsichtige Worte in der Gemeindeversammlung“\(^{507}\) (incautious words at the town hall meeting). His behaviour, furthermore, alludes to the Catholic Church’s responses and position on what happened in their institutions for WVHPKL/OHGFR children and youth all around the world. That authorities were often aware of the bad state of affairs has long been

\(^{506}\) Mehr, Daskind, 64.

\(^{507}\) Ibid., 202.
known and is today no longer contested in studies analyzing foster care and institutional care up to the nineteenth sixties, and in some cases into the nineteenth seventies.508

By juxtaposing the WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters with those of well established citizens, the narrative exposes the absurdity of laws that require children and youth who have barely any social capital to report transgressions and do the right thing in a society where influential community members back away from doing their civic duty due to social pressure, or simply to secure their own position or for a free meal. Country doctor Mächler is fully aware of the severe emotional neglect Daskind experiences at Kenels’, and knows exactly what the protagonist needs. This is made clear when he reminds Frieda that “Daskind brauche Ruhe. Sicherheit. Einen Ort des Vertrauens. Freude”509 (Daskind needs rest. Safety and security. A place of trust. Joy). Nevertheless, he does not have the backbone to stand up against Frieda’s “Eisaugen”510 (ice-eyes). Pastor Knobel, another apparent role model of this society, lives and works in accord with the same principles. While he personally dismisses as nonsense the villagers’ superstitions that the protagonist is responsible for the death of people and livestock, as well as for bad weather and the ensuing loss of crops, he does not voice this opinion for fear of losing his job. Job loss is apparently a fate many pastors endured if they went against the backwards thinking of a rural parish. Jakob Gingg is the only person besides Leni and Kari who knows who Daskind’s parents are. Instead of acting like the role model and pillar of society he is supposed to be as the sexton, Gingg holds his knowledge as a threat against Kari and to garner a

509 Mehr, *Daskind*, 64.
510 Ibid.
free home cooked meal at the Kenels’ every Sunday. These characters’ actions and non-actions illustrate society’s double standard, and wherein that behaviour is rooted. This underscores, furthermore, how isolated WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth were and how little help was available to them. Pre-World Wide Web and pre-social media, there existed very few places where WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth could turn to safely. The narrative’s message is clear: charity and social obligation are not a real loving embracing of a child and do not provide the long term and continuous care and love a child or youth needs. Instead they leave WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth vulnerable to multiple levels of abuse, and render many of them “krank [...] vor Lieblosigkeit”\(^{511}\) (sick for lack of love).

\subsection*{2.2.5.4.1 Non-Permanency}

Tightly intertwined with not-belonging is non-permanency. Daskind, like “Verdingkinder” a generation earlier and like any WVHPKL/OHGFRI child or youth, can be removed at any time from her current foster family. This structure benefits the child if the new placement meets her/his needs better than the previous one. The narrative explores, however, a more sinister aspect of this practice: the all-male town hall meeting votes, with an overwhelming majority, that Daskind has to leave.\(^{512}\) The idea is to place her somewhere else, likely “in a “Heim”\(^{513}\) (in a children’s home) even though it is unclear how the community will pay for that placement. The reason for re-moving Daskind is not concern for her wellbeing. The primary goal

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\(^{511}\) Ibid., 102.

\(^{512}\) This is a further historical reference. Switzerland was one of the last Europe countries to grant women the right to vote.

is to get rid of “ein[en] Fremdkörper”\textsuperscript{514} (a foreign body) and “ein[en] Schandfleck”\textsuperscript{515} (a stain on the reputation). Her presence is for the village an uncomfortable and embarrassing reminder “daß manch ehrbarer Bürger Daskind gequält hatte”\textsuperscript{516} (that many an honourable citizen tormented Daskind).\textsuperscript{517} In removing her, the village sweeps the evidence under the carpet that the community looked away, made up excuses for her fainting spells and wounds, joined in the laughter when she acted strange but never questioned its own behaviour or what lied at the root of Daskind’s behaviour. The narrator alludes here to the fact that in the last centuries, WVHPKL/OHGFR I children and youth did live in fear of non-permanency and many of them in fear of abuse. Moreover, these children and youth knew that if they did not behave as asked, they would not only be placed in another “Heim” or foster family but might instead be moved to a “closed home,” i.e. a residential school, a psychiatric clinic or if fourteen or older, they could end up in a “Erziehungsheim” (house of correction) and other prison-like institutions. Running away from a foster family or a “Heim,” for example, could result in being placed in these “closed institutions.” In the nineteen sixties, girls as young as fourteen were placed in Hindelbank,\textsuperscript{518} which served as a prison and house of correction for women. This practice lasted into the late nineteen seventies.\textsuperscript{519} These incarcerations without due process resulted in criminal records, which defined these youth’ future lives, private as well as professional.

\textsuperscript{514} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{515} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{516} Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{517} This statement, however, does not imply that the villagers knew that Daskind was sexually abused. Rather, the phrase underscores the fact of how “everyone” in the village treated her badly and with little regard.
\textsuperscript{518} The request to place a thirteen year old was refused by the institution. Dominique Strebel, \textit{Weggesperrt – warum Tausende in der Schweiz unschuldig hinter Gittern sassen} (Zürich: Beobachter, 2010). Strebel’s research shows that boys as young as sixteen could be detained simply because they did not fit Switzerland’s working world. Foulkes, “The trauma of Switzerland’s morality detention,” \textit{BBC News Europe}, September 14, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11295538.
\textsuperscript{519} In 1979, for example, a fifteen year old WVHPKL/OHGFR I girl was placed in Hindelbank.
When considering not-belonging and non-permanency, it is important to note that if Daskind is indeed moved to a “Heim,” this would mean that she will have experienced three out-of-family placements by the age of nine. Because age and behaviour play a crucial part in placements, the protagonist will likely experience a few more changes of living sites and caregivers before leaving the “care system.” In other words, she will continue to experience the abuse of not-belonging and the heightened risk of abuse and neglect that go with it. The narrative alludes here to the reality that WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, who are in the system for a longer period of time are likely to experience multiple placements. When WVHPKL/OHGFRI children are moved to a new foster family or institution, they lose once more their caretakers, their social network and with that their own history. This means they have to adjust to a new team of adults whom for the time being are in charge of their lives and partially responsible for them. In addition to the emotional and physical effects children experience with every change of placement, they face similar challenges as immigrant children. They lose their familiar surroundings, friends, caretakers, classmates, school, sports or arts club, and if they haven’t already through previous placements, their siblings.

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520 In the end it is left open whether the community’s plans to re-place Daskind will be implemented or not.
521 Reimer and Rhode, “Interview zur ‘Siegener Erklärung.’” Amy Salazar concludes in her research on college success in foster care alumni that children in care experience on average four to seven placements. Amy Salazar, “Supporting College Success in Foster Care Alumni, - Salient Factors related to Post-Secondary Retention,” Child Welfare 91 no. 5 (2012). It is further important to note that the number of placements is not automatically identical to the number of caregivers. Children and youth in children’s, youth and group homes experience frequent changes in caregivers while residing in these places.
522 In addition, the transfer often results in loss of school attendance, sometimes over a prolonged period of time, depending on whether the new placement is within the same school district, or not. The consequences of being in the WVHPKL/OHGFRI system on the education of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth is addressed in: Renae D. Duncan, “Childhood Maltreatment and College Drop-Out Rates: Implications for Child Abuse Researchers,” Journal of Interpersonal Violence 15, no. 9 (2000). Peter J. Pecora, “Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success,” Children and Youth Services Review 32, no. 4 (2012). 1121-1129.
2.2.5.5. Violence Begets Violence

The longevity and severity of “Karis Fluch,” that is, the “father’s sins” are impressed on readers not only when considering Daskind’s journey from being an unacknowledged and abandoned child,\(^523\) to being a foundling, a “Heimkind” and an abused, ostracized, unwanted and potentially returned “foster child,” or when learning how the “Fluch” affects the four adults Leni, Frieda, Jakob and Kari, but also when considering the protagonist as a perpetrator. In that sense the term “Fluch” underscores that in this narrative any negative and violent act is bound to engender another negative and violent act.\(^524\) The narrator introduces this concept early in the text through a poetry insert that isolates and therefore highlights Daskind’s twin feelings of hope and retaliation. This creates an additional arc of suspense of what might come to pass:

\[1\] Warten. Auf was denn?
\[2\] Vielleicht einmal anders.
\[3\] Ohne Angst.
\[4\] Einmal zuschlagen.
\[5\] Bescheiden, verstohlen, vorsichtig.
\[6\] Zum Beispiel die Freudenstau.\(^525\)

\[1\] Waiting. For what then?
\[2\] Maybe one day differently.
\[3\] Without fear.
\[4\] Hitting once.
\[5\] Modestly, covertly, careful.
\[6\] For example the Freudenstau.

These lines disrupt the process of reading, catch readers’ attention, bring them closer to the text and in doing so prompt them to descry the multiple layers of meaning conveyed through these

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\(^{523}\) She is an abandoned child and a foundling the same way as any baby, who is dropped off at the door steps of a church, hospital, fire department or put into a “Baby Klappe” (baby hatch).

\(^{524}\) This concept alludes to Schiller’s *Die Piccolomini* (1799). There the figure Octavio says to his son Max: “Das ist eben der Fluch der bösen Tat, daß sie fortzeugend immer Böses muss gebären” (This is precisely the curse of every evil deed, that propagating still it brings forth evil). Schiller, *Die Piccolomini* (1799), 5. Aufzug, 1. Auftritt.

\(^{525}\) Mehr, *Daskind*, 7.
few words. The first three lines imply that the protagonist hopes for different times, when she would able to live without constant fear. This alludes to children’s resilience and their desire for a peaceful and prosperous life. Line four changes this reading and brings to the fore that the young girl may actually be waiting for a time when she can hit somebody without having to fear the consequences. The portrayed contradictory feelings separate the poetry insert with regard to content into two stanzas. The second half of the insert, lines four, five and six, introduces the element of deliberate and careful planning of a violent act, including the selection of a victim at the hands of the young female protagonist.

When considering that the word “Bescheiden” in line five follows “Einmal zuschlagen,” then the idea emerges that the protagonist’s desire to and wish for hitting once rather than erupting in uncontrolled rage is a “modest” wish. This in turn highlights early in the novel that Daskind is exposed to immense violence, which affects her severely, and stresses that the abuse started long before the narrative begins. This does not only emphasize how badly she was “cared for” while in the “Anstalt,” but also that the foster care placement does not offer positive and loving care. The poetry insert underscores that the protagonist lives a life full of fear and that she is on the constant lookout for danger, in the village as well as in the foster home. In fact, the foster home is later described from her point of view as a “besondere[] Gefahrenzone[] innerhalb der großen Gefahrenzone” (special danger-zone within the bigger danger-zone) she lives in. The will, desire and hope to hit, whether once somebody specific, or anybody at any point, is highlighted when one reads only alternating lines, starting with line two followed by the stanza consisting of line one, three and five:

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526 Ms Freudenstau is a community member who debases and harasses Daskind every Monday.
527 This is later confirmed in the passages revealing Daskind’s background story.
528 Mehr, Daskind, 96.
As a whole, the poetry insert mirrors Daskind’s fragmented emotional state and how her emotions oscillate between hope for a more positive life, and loss of hope resulting in a desire for revenge. Furthermore, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child’s twin feelings signify that she, like any child, has the capacity to develop into a loving human being, or into somebody filled with rage and hatred. The outcome, the narrator stresses, depends on what examples her immediate environment and society as a whole set for her. In addition, the insert’s structure alludes to society’s twin feelings about WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, especially WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls. On the one hand, they are perceived as dangerous. Daskind is in the end feared as “eine Gefahr für den Rest der Jugend im Dorf”529 (a danger for the [familied] village youth) and as the destroyer of the village.530 On the other hand, like many WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls, Daskind is perceived as stupid, and consequently she should be unable to ponder and plot. Being seen as slow or dumb was not only a reason to not be adopted or taken into a foster family in the first

529 Ibid., 200.
530 Ibid., 182ff. The passage reads, “wie es das Dorf zugrunde richtet” (how “it” ruins the village).
place, or to be re-moved and re-placed in a “Heim,” it was, and in some cases still is, also a reason for not receiving a good education.

2.2.5.5.1 Violence as Coping Mechanisms - from Hope to Hatred

Daskind lives in a world she does not understand. To cope with her life, she internalizes, step by step, the abuse she is exposed to. She starts, for example, to blame herself for what is happening to her, and calls herself “Kind Selberschuld” \(^{531}\) (child yourownfault) and “Schandbalg”\(^{532}\) (shame-brat). She uses a rag doll as part of her “Überlebensstrategie” (strategy of survival). The protagonist re-enacts through the doll the sexual and physical abuse she experiences, and uses the toy as a site of projection for her anger and hopelessness:

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Dann riß es der Puppe die baumeligen Beine in den Spagat und bohrte mit dem Zeigefinder ein Loch in den brüchigen Stoff.\(^{533}\)
[...]
Wenn mich [...] jetzt schlägt, werde ich der Puppe Nadeln ins Gesicht stecken, [...] Ich werde keine Stelle auslassen, [...] auch nicht die Stelle mit dem Loch.
[...]
Und auf dem Stuhl im Grünenzimmer werde ich an die Puppe denken, denkt Daskind, und nachts, wenn der Immergrün … Dann auch.\(^{534}\)
[...]
Das hat es von den Wölfen gelernt, daß da kein Erbarment ist, wo Blut fließt. Schlägt jetzt schneller, Daskind, verbeißt sich im Stoff, zerreißt den Fetzen Stoffleib,\(^{535}\)
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“It” then ripped the doll’s soft legs into the split and drilled with the index finger a hole into the fragile fabric.

\(^{531}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{532}\) Ibid., 212.
\(^{533}\) Ibid., 33.
\(^{534}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{535}\) Ibid., 36.
If [...] hits me now, I will pin needles into the doll’s face. [...] I will leave out no spot, [...] not even the spot with the hole.

And on the chair in the greenroom, I will think of the doll, thinks Daskind, and at night, when the Evergreen ... Then too.

“It” has learned that from the wolves, that there is no mercy, where blood flows.
Beats faster now, Daskind, jaws locked in the fabric, tears apart the shred of fabric-body,

The narrator introduces the doll to make the abuse Daskind experiences explicit, and to convey the extensive damage the assault causes and how the abuse diminishes Daskind as a person:

Carefully “it” losens the black thread from the fabric, on which presumably one eye was attached. Then “it” scratches off the red color, which once marked a pair of lips. The mouth, now only a delicate, barely visible groove in the lower half of the round face-disc, smiles vacantly.

..., until one can no longer tell what it was.

Furthermore, the doll, thrown into the river by Frieda once it is so mutilated that the fabric is torn at its back, symbolizes how easily Daskind is discarded once she does not fulfill the promise of the “perfect child.”

To make sense of the abuse and neglect she suffers and to turn these traumatic experiences into “justified disciplining,” Daskind does things that, in her understanding of the

536 Ibid., 33.
537 Ibid., 36.
world she lives in, “warrant” punishment. This is illustrated when she, for example, breaks a cup or kills an “Amsel”\(^{538}\) (black bird) in anticipation of the almost daily physical and sexual abuse and to bring contemporary “Christian” order into her world. However, “Rechtzeitigkeit”\(^{539}\) (right timing), is not always possible. The relationship between the protagonist’s experiences of violence and her own violent behaviours, which is portrayed as a progression from the inanimate to the animate, from destroying “Becher”\(^{540}\) (cups) and the last surviving bud of Kari’s beloved roses to kicking the tomcat Fritz and shooting down black birds to more serious forms of abuse, can easily be traced. Daskind’s violent behaviours include self-harm and violent assaults. In this regard, this novel is also a story about how a child is pushed to the point of self-mutilation and suicide.

Tightly intertwined with the abuse she experiences and her violent responses are the protagonist’s journeys from hope to hatred and from fear to the absence of fear. The narrator conveys this transformation in gut-wrenching detail, like close-ups, and distributes them throughout the book. The process of installing hatred and violence in Daskind is not an easy undertaking, neither for for the protagonist, nor for the community. It takes the combined “effort” of foster parents, Lacher, the villagers and the authorities to teach Daskind to hate and act violently. To protect herself, for example, against the violent communication in Frieda’s sewing room Daskind has to learn, the narrator reveals, to block out sadness and devastation, in order to not descend into “Bereiche, die dem Haß verschlossen bleiben”\(^{541}\) (realms that remain locked to hatred). The protagonist makes an attempt to run away from the Chalet Idaho and the village to break free from abuse and rejection. When loving strangers find Daskind, she is, however, already

\(^{538}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^{539}\) Ibid.
\(^{540}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{541}\) Ibid., 12.
too traumatized to connect, speak up and ask for help.\textsuperscript{542} The narrator conveys here that Daskind clearly no longer expects anything positive from humankind. Faced with the continuous assault from “upstanding” citizens, who, as a group, signify how inescapable the network of violence is for the child “in care,” the protagonist moves step by step beyond fear and towards hatred. The electroshock treatment leaves her dreaming of a punishing God who crushes everybody except for her, and instead would allow her “die Erde allein zu bewohnen”\textsuperscript{543} (to inhabit the world alone). She is eventually pushed to the brink of hatred, when Bruno Keller, representing the business world, takes once more sadistic pleasure in accusing Daskind of stealing and in touching her inappropriately. Daskind’s strong will “nicht unterzugehen”\textsuperscript{544} (to not perish) gives her enough strength to scream “die Angst weg”\textsuperscript{545} (the fear out of the way) to the point of feeling “warmen Haß”\textsuperscript{546} (warm hatred) and of thinking “Wennichgroßbinwerdeicheinenvoneuch”\textsuperscript{547} (onceIamtallIwilloneofyou), when he pins her between his protruding belly and the store’s entrance doorframe. The conflated phrase draws readers close to the protagonist’s experiences and emotions. The writing style signifies how inescapable the violence is and that Daskind’s feelings of hopelessness, rage and hatred have reached a stage where her emotions are so tightly bottled up in her that they could erupt any moment and spill over into the world. Nevertheless, it is not until the simple task of bringing a bouquet of Kari’s roses to the sexton turns into an incessant sequence of abuse, wherein Daskind is “handed” from one male abuser to the next, from Kari to Keller to the sexton, that the protagonist notices “das plötzliche Fehlen der Angst”\textsuperscript{548} (the

\textsuperscript{542} Ibid., 104, 105.
\textsuperscript{543} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{544} Ibid., 62. Mehr references here children’s resilience.
\textsuperscript{545} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{546} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{547} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{548} Ibid., 116.
sudden lack of fear) and finds an order “mit den Fühlern des Hasses” (through the tentacles of hatred). This pivotal scene starts with Keller intercepting her on her way to the sexton. He penetrates her mouth with his cheroot, which triggers in Daskind memories of sexual abuse and causes her to throw up all over the bouquet. Enraged by the sight of Daskind and of the destroyed roses, the sexton subsequently beats Daskind bloody, under the non-responsive gaze of the Holy Mother in the sacristy. The epitome of parent and child love, “die heilige Mutter mit dem Kind” (the Holy Mother with the child) is a recurring motif in the novel and stresses that Daskind has to live without that love and protection. Moreover, she has to live without that love and protection in a society that professes to uphold and worship these traits and values. This nonsensical contradiction pushes her repeatedly to the brink of insanity. The “broken” roses, when following another chain of thoughts, serve as a metaphor for sexual violence. This image establishes a link to the Chalet Idaho where she is repeatedly sexually abused, and functions as an allusion to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s play Emilia Galotti, underscoring the protagonist’s sexual innocence.

2.2.5.5.2 The Ambach Boy

Mehr goes to great lengths to ensure that the abuse of the girl is not repeated in reading or writing. In contrast, when Daskind takes revenge on one of the boys who sexually assaulted her, the author uses that boy’s character as a foil to show the real meaning and brutality of the words “physical abuse” and “sexual abuse.” The narrator gives a detailed account of how the

549 Ibid.
550 Mehr, Daskind, 101.
551 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Emilia Galotti (1772).
protagonist captures, physically and sexually abuses the Ambach boy, and how she leaves him bound, blind-folded and gagged behind in the charnel house. The depiction of how the boy is abused references, furthermore, that boys as well do get sexually abused and highlights that Daskind has learned the behaviour “kicking the dog:” she attacks one of the boys, and not one of the adults who hurt her regularly.

The villagers’ reactions, representing society’s reaction, to the familied boy’s abuse stand in sharp contrast to how Daskind is treated by the very same people. To begin, the boy’s father searches for him “einen Tag und eine Nachte”\(^552\) (one day and one night). The boy’s post-traumatic reactions to the one-time abuse, he never heals from this attack, evoke concern and pity in the villagers. They assume that the boy is an innocent victim and are dismayed that something like that could happen to one of their own. The community responds with moral outrage to the familied boy’s assault and threatens, “[d]en wird man lehren unschuldige Buben zugrunde zu richten”\(^553\) (one will teach the one to ruin innocent boys). The villagers label the unknown perpetrator a beast and a child abuser, and the police search for the child molester. In contrast, nobody comes looking for Daskind when she disappears at night or during the day, or to check on her when she sleeps or when Kari and Frieda hear something from her room. This girl, for whom nobody takes full responsibility, is physically and sexually abused by adults and children on an almost daily basis. Her post-traumatic reactions are not recognized as such but are instead used to justify further punishment and ostracism. Most villagers assume that Daskind is responsible for how she is treated, and dismiss any signs of abuse, for example, as the result of Daskind’s cockiness: “Keiner fragt Daskind nach der Ursache seiner Wunden. Ist im Übermut in die

\(^{552}\) Ibid., 80.
\(^{553}\) Ibid.
Dornenhecke gefallen”\textsuperscript{554} (Nobody asks for the reason of “its” wounds. Is full off cockiness fallen into the thorn hedge). The narrator reiterates that the villagers respond in this way because Daskind is not considered anybody’s own child: “Im Übermut, im hergelaufenen, ins Haus geholte”\textsuperscript{555} (In cockiness, in a perfect stranger’s, the one brought into the house). As nobody takes full responsibility for the un-familied girl, and everybody turns a blind eye to what happens to Daskind, there is no perceived crime against her, and consequently nobody searches for a perpetrator on her behalf. By juxtaposing the familied boy with the family-less girl, the narrator underscores that this society’s value system allows for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth to be treated as unimportant, second-class citizens, i.e. as unworthy, and therefore unprotected, “Others.”

2.2.5.5.3 Self-Harm

The protagonist’s hopes that striking out and retaliating would bring her peace are not fulfilled. After doing to the boy what has been done to her, she is stricken by despair:

…, von einer plötzlichen Verzweiflung erfaßt, vergräbt Daskind den Kopf im Kissen, reibt sich am Bettzeug die blutigen Hände sauber.\textsuperscript{556}

…, gripped by a sudden despair, Daskind buries her head in the pillow, rubs her bloody hands clean on the bedding.

Not even killing birds helps her any longer to endure the world she lives in. As a result, she shies away from consolation for fear that she would no longer sense “die Gefahr”\textsuperscript{557} (the danger). This

\textsuperscript{554} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{555} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{556} Ibid., 79.
allusion to a wild animal’s ability to sense danger in order to survive underscores how dangerous the environment is in which Daskind lives. The protagonist suffers, for example, reoccurring unbearable grief “wenn dem Kind die Welt eindringt”\textsuperscript{558} (when the world enters the child) and “das Gift”\textsuperscript{559} (the poison) penetrates her pores and all body orifices. To cope with her life, Daskind’s acts of harm now take on the form of self-injury, such as cutting or clogging her mouth with soil “[um] jeden Schrei im Keim [zu] ersticken”\textsuperscript{560} (to nip every scream in the bud). Self-harm is known to be a coping mechanism, for example, of sexual abuse victims “to deal with the emotional distress or [to] stop the painful memory.”\textsuperscript{561} The protagonist’s despair is so deep that she eventually resorts to suicide attempts to escape her situation. Daskind tries everything she can think of including alcohol, hitting her head bloody on the church wall, walking with closed eyes across an intersection and swallowing snail poison. She also “versucht’s mit dem eiskalten See”\textsuperscript{562} (tries it with the ice-cold lake) and lets “sich von der Kirchenmauer fallen”\textsuperscript{563} (herself drop from the church wall), but to no avail.\textsuperscript{564} The protagonist’s young body does not die and the girl feels not only betrayed by society, but also by her own body and by death itself.\textsuperscript{565} Daskind, whose self-injuries are ignored by her environment, feels trapped in a “Krieg”\textsuperscript{566} (war) between herself and the world, and that open season has been declared on her.\textsuperscript{567} The narrative explores

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{557} Ibid., 184. \\
\textsuperscript{558} Ibid., 96. \\
\textsuperscript{559} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{560} Ibid., 165. \\
\textsuperscript{562} Ibid., 198. \\
\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., 197. \\
\textsuperscript{564} The list of how Daskind attempts to commit suicide reads like an official government and welfare agency report compiling reasons for suicide among children and youth in care. \\
\textsuperscript{565} Daskind hopes at some point in the story that she can “den Tod zum Sklaven machen” (turn death into her slave) to save herself. Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 92. \\
\textsuperscript{566} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 115. \\
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid., 198. The German original reads, “zum Abschluß frei.”
\end{flushright}
herewith the incredible suffering WVHPKL/OHGFRI children go through if the abuse and neglect continue on in the foster family and community. The narrator asks readers to examine what society does, or does not do to help these children and young people, as well as to question the still widely held belief that WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth are innately dangerous and violent.

Research shows a clear correlation between experienced abuse and self-harm, including suicide, as well as between experienced violence and antisocial delinquency. Furthermore, children in foster care have a higher mortality rate than those in the general population. Their suicide risk is the highest while living in a violent and neglectful environment. To make matters even more challenging for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth, it is known that children are more vulnerable to trauma than adults, and that the impact of living in a violent environment is in children generally longer lasting than in adults. In comparison to family children from poor and therefore socially disadvantaged family backgrounds, WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth suffer three to seven times more chronic health issues,

568 In the USA, for example, it is estimated that six times more children die while in foster care, then in the general public. Documentary on the Child Protection Industry, YouTube video, 55:51, posted February 11, 2011, \://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7horT_3Vy0.

569 Daniel Pilowsky and Li-Tzy Wu conclude from their research, “Adolescents involved with foster care were about four times more likely to have attempted suicide in the preceding twelve months.” Daniel J. Pilowsky and Li-Tzy Wu, “Psychiatric symptoms and substance use disorders in a nationally representative sample of American adolescents involved with foster care,” Journal of Adolescent Health 38 (2006): 351.

570 Pilowsky and Wu, “Psychiatric symptoms and substance use disorders in a nationally representative sample of American adolescents involved with foster care.” Eva-Maria G. Groh comes to similar results. She confirms that the currently existing data are similar across studies from the western world. She provides a fruitful overview of research to this topic. Eva-Maria G. Groh, “Die Psychische Belastung bei Pflegekinder: Vorhersage ihrer posttraumatischen Symptomatik und Adaption eines neuen Instruments zur Erfassung ihrer allgemeinen psychischen Belastung” (PhD diss. Ludwig Maximilians Universität, 2010), 46ff, http://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/12333/1/Groh_Eva-Maria_G.pdf. Children who have experienced mass care as infants show, however, some increased challenges and needs. These findings have recently been re-confirmed. Dene Moore, “Romanian orphans: B.C. researchers find that the scars of early childhood neglect run deep,” The Vancouver Sun February 27, 2014, http://www.vancouversun.com/life /Romanian+orphans+researchers+find+that+scars+early+neglect+deep/9557899/story.html.
developmental problems and delays, as well as struggles with emotional adjustments.\textsuperscript{571} However, research also shows that with appropriate support most WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth, even those who experienced considerable abuse, neglect and trauma are able to recover, and to develop like non-WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth.\textsuperscript{572}

\textbf{2.2.5.5.4 The Killing}

The initial transition from killing birds to hurting humans happens accidentally on one of Kari and the protagonist’s walk in the forest. Like often before, Kari forgets Daskind and strides ahead. In an effort to connect with him, she reaches for him. This gesture turns into a thrust on his back that causes him to slip on the wet ground and to almost plummet down the mountain: “Greift nach dem Rücken des Mannes vor ihr, der, auf den Stoß nicht gefaßt”\textsuperscript{573} (reaches for the man’s back, who, not expecting the shove). Kari’s fall shows the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl that adults, including those who hurt her, are not invincible. Seeing his fright and sensing his fear, readers learn, allows Daskind to breathe easier. The protagonist further realizes that if Kari fell to the bottom there would be “Ordnung für lange im Kind”\textsuperscript{574} (order for a long time in the child). The narrator illustrates here that Daskind has at this point in the story internalized the interconnection of order and violence, which is deeply ingrained in the portrayed society. In addition, the

\textsuperscript{573} Mehr, Daskind, 25.
\textsuperscript{574} Ibid., 26.
juxtaposition of the words “reaching for” and “shove” highlights how easy it is to interpret the clumsiness or ineptness of a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child or youth as a deliberate act of violence.

Daskind’s violent act most frequently referred to in the secondary literature to the novel, is the shooting of the sexton. The protagonist’s cool-headed attack on the sexton is part self-preservation to prevent her forced removal from the community, part retaliation for the beating, and part revenge for what Jakob Gingg is doing to Kari. The girl overhears the whispered conversation between the sexton and Kari in which Gingg uses the handkerchief, with which she blindfolded the Ambach boy, to finally take revenge on Kari for defiling Leni. The sexton threatens to reveal the protagonist’s parentage and his knowledge of the link between the Kenel household and the assault on the Ambach boy, if Kari does not “freely” give up Daskind into government care.\textsuperscript{575} Despite the abuse the girl experiences at her foster-father’s hands, and despite the fact that he took her in as “eine selbst auferlegte Buße”\textsuperscript{576} (a self-imposed penance) and not out of love, which is reflected in many of the ways he treats her, Kari is one of the few people who gives the protagonist some positive attention and care. And although Daskind is clearly physically, emotionally and spiritually wounded, enough of her has at this point survived “intact” to want to “help” the person who seems to oppose her removal. Furthermore, the sexton manages, from Daskind’s point of view, to turn Kari against her, as he gives in under Gingg and the town hall meetings’ threats and agrees to contact the “Armenfürsorge”\textsuperscript{577} (poor relief) the next business day to instigate her re-placement.

The connections the narrator draws between the foster parents and how the hunted turns into the huntress underscores how closely the protagonist watched her caretakers and learned __________

\textsuperscript{575} Mehr highlights here that not only women but also men lost their children and were forced to give them up “freely” into government care.
\textsuperscript{576} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 209.
\textsuperscript{577} Ibid., 210.
from them: “So wie Kari mit der Königin verschmilzt, die er selten opfert, Dame nennt, so will Daskind eins mit der Schleuder werden”\textsuperscript{578} (The way Kari merges with the queen, whom he calls dame, that is how Daskind wants to become one with the slingshot). How Daskind shoots the sexton down with her slingshot is depicted over the course of seven pages. Readers are as captured by the minute description leading up to the act, as the protagonist is absorbed in the preparations of it. The detailed account of how she created the slingshot in the first place, her reflections and the precision of her body positioning in preparation for the shot evoke in readers admiration for Daskind’s skills.\textsuperscript{579} Consequently, the boundary between reader and protagonist is weakened, and readers are prompted to examine their own relationship to violence. The latter becomes particularly salient when considering critics who state that Daskind kills the sexton.\textsuperscript{580} Their assertion reveals more about their own emotional reactions to the abuse the protagonist experiences than about what really happens in the text. The passage in question reads: “das Sigristengesicht vom Sigristenblut überströmt, die Hände tasten blind nach der Stelle knapp neben dem Auge, der Mund, aufgerissen zum Schrei, bleibt stumm”\textsuperscript{581} (the sextonface running with sextonblood, the hands fumble blindly for the spot right beside the eye, the mouth, wide open to scream, remains silent). The sexton’s clumsily moving hands clearly indicate that Jakob Gingg is

\textsuperscript{578} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 220.
\textsuperscript{579} Mehr highlights here the child’s intelligence in the face of living in a deprived and degrading environment, and alludes to the definition of intelligence as established by psychologists Lloyd Humphreys and Reuven Feuerstein. Both define intelligence as a process that is not contingent on knowledge acquired at school or university. Lloyd G. Humphreys defines intelligence in 1979 as “the resultant of the process of acquiring, storing in memory, retrieving, combining, comparing and using in new contexts information and conceptual skills.” Lloyd G. Humphreys, “The Construct of General Intelligence,” \textit{Intelligence} 3, no. 2 (1979): 115. Around the same time, Reuven Feuerstein defines intelligence as the ability to learn. Reuven Feuerstein et al., \textit{Dynamic assessments of cognitive modifiability} (Jerusalem: ICELP press, 1979) 2002.
\textsuperscript{580} As do, for example, Döbler and Häntschel. Döbler, “Silberherz stirbt.” Häntschel, “Im Kind denkt’s ans Töten. Mariella Mehrs düsterer Roman Daskind.”
\textsuperscript{581} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 223.
alive after the protagonist shot him with the slingshot. The novel ends without revealing any further information about the outcome of the attack.

When read in the larger context of Daskind’s life, the shooting of the sexton and Kari’s hesitation to hand her over to the authorities, can be read as a last attempt of these two characters to connect with each other. Their long line of failed attempts to connect is paralleled by increasingly violent behaviour on both sides. As has already been discussed, Kari’s efforts to teach Daskind to speak and read, and Daskind’s attempt to connect with him on one of their walks fail and result in violent actions and thoughts. Furthermore, Kari’s endeavour to create some positive memories by bringing her to his workplace ends in a terrible accident and in him hitting her so hard that she flies across the room. Daskind’s yearning to be just once “im Bunde mit Karis Sehnsucht nach anderen Welten, weitab der Enge. Damit einmal Heimat entstünde, [...] zwischen ihm und dem Kind”\textsuperscript{582} (in league with Kari’s yearning for other worlds, far away from the narrowness. So that for once Heimat could occur [...] between him and the child) prompts Daskind to wrap herself into Kari’s wolf fur. Unfortunately, Kari is not able to recognizing the child’s positive intent, and beats her bloody. To make matters worse, the villagers see the wolf fur incident as reason to go forward with the proposed exorcism.\textsuperscript{583}

\textsuperscript{582} Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{583} The narrator describes the scene calling Daskind as “Wolfskind. In der Wolfswüste” (wolf child in the wolf desert). Mehr, 156. This expresses the community’s superstitions and fears, alludes to feral children such as Romulus and Remus, and to neglected and abuse, as told in Kaspar Hauser. The added information “In der Wolfswüste” underscores that the problem lies in the protagonist’s environment, not in Daskind.
2.2.6. Daskind and Lacher

The narrator creates a tight web of connections between the two WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters. By transposing elements belonging to Lacher to Daskind and vice versa, and by employing other literary techniques to interweave their stories into one complex piece of narrative, Mehr stresses in Daskind the interconnection between “Verdingung,” “Anstalt,” “Heim” and “Pflegefamilie” and suggests through the narrative that these two figures have a shared experience and history even though they are a generation apart, from different ethnic backgrounds and of different gender. In this fictionalization of the history and study of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, the figure Lacher represents child, youth and adult “Verding” and “Fahrende,” and the protagonist represents the diverse group of “Heimkinder,” including those from foundling homes and orphanages, as well as the privately or by governments placed “Pflegekinder.” Furthermore, the female child character, which evokes allusions to the project “Kinder der Landstrasse,” serves in the narrative, as does the son of a “Fahrende,” as a hinge between different ethnicities, and underscores that the non-Yenish poor were equally victims of the state’s policy of assimilation of marginalized people. In the twentieth century, this meant that non-Yenish “undesirable” members of society (adults, youth and children) were “verdingt” and otherwise “versorgt” (put into “proper” “care”) the same as Yenish children and adults, who were wards of the Pro Juventute project “Kinder der Landstrasse.”

The sequence of Lacher and Daskind’s background stories, which are only six pages apart, signifies that the social order and gender hierarchy persist also in the treatment of

WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, that is, the male antecedes the female, and the adult the child. In addition, the order mirrors the historical development wherein “Verdingung” antedates “Anstalten,” which in turn precede the practice of placing a child or youth in what we today understand as “foster family.” By revealing Lacher’s ancestry before Kari and Leni “speak” about Daskind’s, the narrator underscores once more that this novel is not primarily a story about violence but more precisely, about the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and people. Violence, in all its various manifestations is, as discussed, an intrinsic part of that history.

The protagonist and Lacher are at the beginning of the narrative projected to appear, in an initial reading, as clear opposites, namely, as victim respectively perpetrator. As the narrative unfolds, these unambiguous boundaries blur when Lacher emerges more and more as a victim, and Daskind metamorphoses into a perpetrator: the two WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters develop towards each other, cross paths and switch roles on some level.

The juxtaposition of Lacher, who represents the past and Daskind, who represents in the novel the present, serves to convey the idea that the past is not only alive in the present but also that some aspects of state and community care have not changed. The narrator illustrates this by showing that the two WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters are dealing with similar challenges. Both WVHPK characters are, for example, made family-less by laws that break families apart and un-family children, sometimes even before they can become a family, as is the case with Leni and Daskind. The placements of both WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures, not only little Armin’s, are motivated by monetary concerns. Neither of the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters’ “caretakers” have any qualifications for raising children who are traumatized by loss, displacement and abuse. Moreover, these WVHPKL/OHGFRI child figures were never meant to be cared for as one would care for one’s own child: little Lacher was meant to be an unskilled
farmhand the minute he became a “Verdingkind,” and Frieda expresses very clearly that, in her opinion, Daskind was taken in to be a little servant. This also puts Daskind’s weekly task to bring fresh meat to the “Freudenstau” into a different perspective. The protagonist is not asked to do a children’s chore, instead she is ordered to do a weekly task that puts her in harms way, “wöchentlich einmal wird dem Kind befohlen” (once a week the child is ordered) to do it. The description of how she walks bare-foot up the mountain functions as a strong and deliberate allusion to “Verdingung.” Both WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters experience non-permanency: nobody was bound to keep a “Verding” longer than one year and nobody is bound to keep a foster child. Both child figures experience violence on multiple levels. Neither has a place s/he could go to and raise a grievance. Both are “Getretene” (underdogs). Moreover, the neologism “Daskind,” which is made up of the article and noun, “das Kind,” and the compound noun “Verdingkind” share the same grammatical gender, namely neuter. So does the noun “Ding” (thing), which is part of the word “Verdingkind.” Hence, these terms’ grammatical gender signify yet another interconnection between the “Heim-,” “Pflege-,” and “Verdingkind” characters and suggests that there is little difference between those three forms of “foster care” placements. Echoing the reason for, and consequences of Daskind’s namelessness, the grammatical gender and the term “Ding” stress that it is much easier to abuse, exploit and replace “a thing” and an “it,” than a gendered human child. Furthermore, female “Verdingkinder” were often simply called “Meitschi” (girl, also little girl), male “Verdingkinder” “Bub” (boy). While the grammatical gender of “Bub” reflects the “natural” gender of the noun, “Bub” is masculine, the

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585 Mehr, Daskind, 8.
586 Ibid., 172.
587 As mentioned earlier, the text states that she does not have a name because she could otherwise not be called all the derogatory slurs. The pronoun “es” (“it”) for “das Kind” (the child) can be a benefit to a child, as “it” offers a stage of being where a child does not yet have to be either female or male. However, in the context of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies the meaning of “it” referencing “thing” is prevalent.
grammatical gender of “Meitschi” does not. “Meitschi” is neuter. WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls were insofar doubly prescribed as a child and a thing. In the context of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies, for a child to be simply called “child,” “boy” or “girl” signifies that s/he is unimportant, exchangeable, unwanted, and a “Ding” rather than an individual. Therefore, the terms “Daskind” and “Bub” function in the narrative as violent naming. Like cutting off Daskind’s hair, or not giving her a name, violent naming is done to debase and objectify the addressed. The slurs act on the WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures, preventing escape from their prescribed social location. This in turn makes it easier to exploit them as cheap or free labour, abuse them and use them as a site of projection. Because injurious speech is in the novel directed at the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters, “all those who live with their families retain authority and authenticity.”588 This retention of authority is expressed in the narrative, “not only through adult characters but also through child figures.”589

The portrayed society perceives both WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures as coming from disorder, i.e. from “undesirable” parents and families, and forces the children’s removal to ensure order. The community’s attempts to reintegrate them are characterized by different levels of violence: the children are put into an institution or in a “foster family” where order is to be ingrained in the “disorderly” child. The broader community reinforces what government, institution and “foster families” start. Learning what they have been taught, Lacher and Daskind defer frustration and violence. Lacher, who is stripped of his dignity from a very young age and stripped of his manliness as a young adult, defers his anger eventually towards Daskind. He treats her with the same disrespect he has personally experienced, and sees society treat her. Unlike

589 Ibid.
Daskind, Lacher does not make sense of and “order” in his life. 590
The narrative problematizes herewith one possible outcome of an upbringing such as his. The protagonist, on the other hand, adopts society’s idea and philosophy about order, discipline and violence and uses the corresponding methods to make sense of and bring “order” to her world. “Exposed almost daily to verbal, physical, sexual”591 and religious abuse,592 without speech and little social support throughout the entire novel, and unable to escape her situation, “Daskind internalizes and reiterates the experienced violence.”593 When considering that unsubverted violence enforces conformity, then the protagonist does break with conformity although by re-enacting the violence.

After Daskind shoots the sexton and walks away, the narrative ends with the lines:

Hat Daskind einen Frieden gefunden.
Lächelt wieder, Daskind. 594

Daskind has found a peace.
Smiles again, Daskind.

The text’s open ending signifies that readers don’t know how the story ends. They don’t know if the sexton dies, if the protagonist is found out, if she is punished for what she did, and so on. In fact, the open ending allows for a potential future wherein Daskind receives the help and environment she needs to heal, thrive and have a chance at a positive life. The narrative’s last two lines, however, do also express the warning that if the protagonist does not receive the support she

590 The narrator states: “Nie zuvor hat er versucht in seinem Leben Ordnung zu schaffen” (Never before in his life has he tried to make sense of/order in his life), Mehr, Daskind, 171.
592 People cross themselves if they see her, and support that exorcism is performed on her.
594 Mehr, Daskind, 224.
needs, then her smile and sense of peace may mark the beginning of the next step in the vicious cycle of violence, namely, that now retaliation is what brings Daskind peace. This statement of caution is underscored when taking into account that little Armin, who grows up to never hit anybody turns into a sexual predator and “monster.” Considering that the protagonist responds already as a child to the senseless violence she experiences with destroying things, killing birds, sexually abusing a boy and striking down an adult, then the question arises, into what kind of “monster” will she have turned by the time she is an adult? The novel’s last two lines underscore the argument that both WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters are socially made “monsters,” and how society created them.

2.2.7. The Kellers – Conflating Large Discourses

After having mainly focused on historical and socio-cultural allusions referring to various rarely discussed “local character[s] of history,” I now turn to allusions which refer to the “local character” of a history that needs to be addressed and explored within the larger discourses on the Second World War and Colonialism. The juxtaposition of the familial child figure Marie Keller with the protagonist raises questions concerning the interconnection of the practices of “foster care” and these discourses. At the core of the contrasting of Daskind and the Kellers lies the dyad “light versus dark.” Marie Keller’s blond hair, which is also termed “Goldhaar” (gold-hair), signifies that she has “ihr goldenes Haar nicht vom Teufel” (her golden hair not from the devil). Daskind learns to believe the fallacy that Marie Keller is, because of her blond

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595 Mehr explores some of these questions in the trilogy’s other two books.
596 Mehr, Daskind, 159.
597 Ibid., 127.
hair, in “Verbundenheit mit Gott”\(^{598}\) (fellowship with God). The narrator references here the deep-seated cultural and religious ideas and symbols wherein blond hair is associated with the “light” and the “precious,” evokes images of a “Gloriole”\(^{599}\) (gloriole) and in extension thereof of the divine and heavenly. Consequently, the protagonist allows herself “kein Zögern, wenn eine wie die blonde Keller Marie”\(^{600}\) (no hesitation, when one like the blonde Keller Marie) “advises” her to use cow dung, inside and outside, during full moon to cleanse herself from the devil. Within the portrayed dichotomy, “dark” represents the “dark side of life” as well as the hellish and evil. Consequently, dark hair, dark eyes and a darker complexion can be read by those living in this system as a marker for the negative and of lack. Daskind’s dark hair and eyes in combination with her unknown origin, her being family-less and her behaviour convinces the community members that she has fallen “dem Teufel ab dem Karren”\(^{601}\) (off the devil’s cart).

2.2.7.1. World War II

The protagonist’s dark hair juxtaposed with Marie Keller’s blond hair, which she wears, readers learn, like a gloriole, in conjunction with the “Hohn aus den Augen der Blonden”\(^{602}\) (the slyness from the blonde’s eyes), her scorn for Daskind and Bruno Keller’s desire to squelch Daskind “wie eine Laus”\(^{603}\) (like a louse), reference World War II and Paul Celan’s poem *Todesfuge* (Death Fugue).\(^{604}\) The text suggests herewith, and research at large confirms, that

\(^{598}\) Ibid.
\(^{599}\) Ibid., 159.
\(^{600}\) Ibid., 127.
\(^{601}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{602}\) Ibid., 127.
\(^{603}\) Ibid., 91.
\(^{604}\) Paul Celan was a German Jewish poet and translator. He wrote *Todesfuge* in 1944-5.
WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, children, youth and adults alike, were during WWII treated similar to other as “unworthy” deemed groups. Nazi Germany sought to create a nation whose members are “racially valuable,” “hereditarily healthy” and “politically and socially responsible.” This resulted in the exclusion of “racial aliens” as well as of a diverse group of people of German ethnicity. The second group was termed “asocial” or “socially unfit.” This classification was applied to a heterogeneous group of people, namely, “gypsies’, ‘vagabonds’, ‘persons of no fixed abode’, ‘alcoholics’, ‘unmarried mothers’, ‘homosexuals’, ‘Großfamilien’ (large families), ‘criminals’, ‘idlers’, ‘good for nothings’, ‘wastrels’, ‘grumblers’ and ‘grousers’ as well as [to] anyone else who did not, could not or would not perform their duties to the Volksgemeinschaft (people’s community).” Social historian Lisa Pine highlights that the Nazi regime implemented various discriminatory policies against “asocials,” “which ruthlessly disposed of individuals and groups that did not conform to its norms, even if they were ethnically German.” She shows how the Nazi regime took increasingly harsh measures against the “asocials, between 1933 and 1945: in 1933, for example, 100,000 beggars and vagrants were taken into police “protective custodiy” during the “beggars week.” The majority, however, had to be released within days due to lack of prison space. In December 1937, Himmler decreed that “asocials” could be taken in “preventive custody.” Pine explains that this meant, “that people were interned in concentration camps just for being’asocial’, rather than for committing a

605 “Outsiders in Nazi Germany - The Jews were not alone in being excluded in Nazi Germany: Dr. Pine examines the other social outcasts,” Yesterday, last accessed, December 28, 2014, yesterday.uktv.co.uk/warzone/world-war-two/nazi-germany/article/hitler-and-third-reich/.  
606 Lisa Pine, Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945 (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 117. The “asocial” and “workshy” were, for example, not to receive welfare. Echoes of this rhetoric can still be found today.  
608 Ibid., 117.  
609 Ibid., 118.
specific criminal offence.”\(^{610}\) During the “Reich Campaign against the Workshy” in June 1939, approximately 11,000 people were rounded up, most of whom “ended up in concentration camps.”\(^{611}\) From 1939 onwards, homeless people had to carry “Vagrants’ Registration Books.” If they did not carry the book, they could be arrested and imprisoned. It is estimated that the “asocials” made up two thirds of the approximately 110,000 non-Jewish Germans interned in concentration camps.\(^{612}\) In 1939, “a new racial hygiene law [furthermore] allowed for the special sterilization of ‘asocials.’”\(^{613}\) Pine concludes, “it is manifestly the case that the Nazi regime discriminated against the ‘asocials’ as group”\(^{614}\) i.e. a “social minority.”\(^{615}\) It is important to remember that the stigma and persecution that was perpetrated upon “asocials” affected their children and families, which were often termed “asocial families,” as well.\(^{616}\)

There exist striking similarities between those who were considered “asocial” or “asocial families” during the Nazi reign and the so-called “undesirable” people and families in Switzerland where these concepts were upheld into the late nineteen sixties and the early nineteen seventies. People were in both cases, for example, put into “institutions,” and sterilized without consent to prevent them from creating more “inferior” offspring. Consequently, the children of “asocials” were, like the Swiss children from “undesirable” families, un-familied and in some cases made family-less. Mehr speaks to this in 1986 when she states that the

\[^{610}\] Ibid.
\[^{611}\] Ibid.
\[^{612}\] Ibid., 119.
\[^{613}\] Ibid., 128.
\[^{614}\] Ibid.
\[^{615}\] Ibid., 117.
\[^{616}\] Furthermore, Jewish children, youth and adults, who were banned from schools and universities were often classified as “asocial” as they were “unemployed” and therefore considered to not contributing to the nation. For a brief overview of the category “asocial” see, “Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies,” University of Minnesota, accessed September 4, 2014, http://www.chgs.umn.edu/histories/documentary/hadamar/asocials.html.
**ProJuventute** project can only be understood in the context of the “braune Vergangenheit” (brown past). However, as I have shown in previous chapter sections some of the structures and the appertaining rhetoric that made the removal and institutionalizing of children, youth and adults in Switzerland possible, predate Nazi Germany. In fact there is evidence that the Nazis utilized a country’s existing welfare system, and the people’s attitude towards Travelers and those in need of welfare support. The children’s clinic *Spiegelgrund* in Vienna, for example, became part of the Nazis’ placement system for so-called “asocial” children and youth. *Spiegelgrund* was turned into an “Endstation” (final destination) where children and youth were “verwahrt” (detained), moved to so-called “Jugendschutzlager” (“youth-protection” camps) and ”Jugendverwahrlager” (“youth-keep-safe” camps), as well as in “Jugendkonzentrationslager” (youth concentration camps) or killed.

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618 And other European countries. For example, Germany: Ian Hancock, *Jewish Responses to the Porrajmos (the Romani Holocaust)*, University of Minnesota, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, accessed November 17, 2014, http://www.chgs.umn.edu/histories/victims romaSinti/jewishResponses.html.
621 The first youth concentration camp was *Lager Moringen* near Göttingen for male youth and young adults, ages thirteen to twenty two. The “Lager” operated from 1940 to 1945. Of the estimated 1400 males interned, an estimate of eighty-nine were killed. In addition, the Nazis had also established “Anstalten,” (institutions) “Arbeitslager,” (work camps) and “Jugendgefangnisse” (youth prisons) for children and youth. The *Moringen* camp was, for example, also known under the name “Polizeiliches Jugendshutzlager” (police youth protection camp). In June 1942, the *Lager Uckermark* opened in Brandenburg. This youth concentration camp for girls and young women had more then 1000 internees. In 1945, the camp was converted into the death camp for the nearby women concentration camp *Ravensbrück*. In Germany, there were among other institutions the *Lebensborn* children’s homes, which were mass institutional care. In addition, in 1942 the children concentration camp *Lager Litzmannstadt* was opened for polish children and youth from the ages of two to sixteen (initially only 12-16 years old, then 8 years old, and eventually children as young as two). An estimate of 500 children and youth died in the *Lager*. The camp was liberated in 1945. All three children and youth camps had “Aussenlager” (satellite camps). It is important to note that those who could not be aryenised or had the wrong ethnic or racial background were at the highest risk of being transferred to concentration camps and killed.
By alluding to WWII, the narrator references, furthermore, the reality that all across Europe, Nazi sympathizers were able to remain in their professional positions long after the war ended. This meant that the practices in several institutions for children and youth, as well as in many psychiatric clinics, prisons and other “ordering” institutions changed little after WWII. The youth revolution of the nineteen sixties and the third wave of “Anstaltskritik” (critique of institutions), namely, the “Heimkampagne” (Home-Campaign), openly criticized these circumstances.

In the context of World War II, Armin Lacher, the son of a Traveler alludes to the challenges “Gypsies” and other “asocials” have encountered in their attempts at being recognized as victims of the Holocaust. Armin Lacher, the abuser of Traveler descent alludes furthermore to Elie Wiesel’s book Night. In Night, Wiesel not only ignores that “Gypsies” had been exterminated by the Nazis, in part, to make room for the increase of Hungarian Jews who were deported to Birkenau, but he also puts the blame of the horrible treatment of his father, and in extension thereof of the Jews in Birkenau, on “Gypsy” deportees. While research shows that the genocide of the “Zigeuner” was motivated by the same premeditation and ideologies, Wiesel, a political activist, author of numerous books, former professor, Holocaust survivor, and recipient of countless prizes, awards as well as of recognitions for his studies and interpretations of the Holocaust, insisted that the term “Holocaust” be only used for Jews. This had far reaching consequences, particularly in North America, in regard to recognition, commemoration, compensation and restitution, research and dissemination of knowledge. Furthermore, as long as Wiesel was the chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., “Gypsies”

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622 I am deliberately choosing the term “Holocaust” and not “Porajmos,” the Roma term, because “Holocaust” is widely recognized as the systematic eradication of people whom the National Socialists considered “undesirable” or “unworthy” during World War II.
were not represented in that committee.\textsuperscript{623} In contrast, Holocaust survivor, Nazi hunter, author and founder of the \textit{Jewish Documentation Center} in Vienna, Simon Wiesenthal, acknowledged that “Zigeuner” were like Jews and other “inferior” people systematically murdered.\textsuperscript{624} The \textit{Simon Wiesenthal Center} in Los Angeles uses the term “Gypsies” rather than Sinti and Roma,\textsuperscript{625} as well as “other inferior people,” i.e. “asocials” and in doing so acknowledges the diverse group of people who were classified as “Zigeuner.” The history of discrimination against “Zigeuner” in regard to WWII is not yet over. Although Nazi documents speak of “Zigeuner,” i.e. “Regelung der Zigeunerfrage” (“Gypsy” Question), “Endgültige Lösung der Zigeunerfrage” (Final Solution to the “Gypsy” Question) and not of Sinti and Roma, many researchers and officials who do recognize “Gypsies” as victims of the same prosecution as the Jews, choose the terms Sinti and Roma, rather than “Zigeuner,” when they speak about “Gypsies.”\textsuperscript{626} This signifies a false political correctness. In the context of World War II, the use of the terms Sinti and Roma instead of “Zigeuner,” in German, or Travelers, in English, writes once more those of the population who were considered, classified and processed as “Zigeuner” but were neither Sinti nor Roma out of history. This group included the Yenish, and many others who were indiscriminatoryly


\textsuperscript{624} “About Simon Wiesenthal,” \textit{Simon Wiesenthal Center}, accessed September 4, 2014, http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=4441293#.V Aj---f9rg8. It is known that “Zigeuner” (“Gypsies”) were considered racially inferior. They were deported and murdered in camps. It is estimated that more than half of the German and Austrian “Zigeuner,” Sinti and Roma were killed in concentration camps. Some estimate the number as high as 1 to 1.5, millions that were killed.


\textsuperscript{626} The Berlin memorial for “die im Nationalsozialismus ermordeten Sinti und Roma Europas” (for Europe’s Sinti and Roma who were killed during National Socialism) in Berlin does not mention the Yenish, or “Zigeuner” (Gypsies). Other important recognitions concerning the National Socialism “Zigeunerfrage” (Gypsy question) too only mention Sinti and Roma. “Tilman Zülch: Der Preisträger des Jahres 2014,” Europäischer Bürgerrechtspreis der Sinti und Roma, accessed September 4, 2014, http://www.buergerrechtspreis.de/preistraeger/2014.html. Breger is one of the exceptions. She acknowledges that “Zigeuner,” that is, the broad group of Travelers including the Yenish were prosecuted and often categorized as “asocials” under Nazi reign. Breger, \textit{Ortlosigkeit des Fremden – “Zigeunerinnen” und “Zigeuner” in der deutschsprachigen Literatur um 1800, 370.}
termed “Zigeuner,” as well as their children of whom many have to be considered WVHPKL/OHGFR1 children and youth. To represent victims of WWII and the Holocaust accurately, more research needs to be done on the topic of “Zigeuner” and of WVHPKL/OHGFR1 people under National Socialism.

2.2.7.2. A Postcolonial Reading

Mehr subverts in Daskind the belief that only people of former colonies were and are affected by colonial ordering mechanisms, and goes beyond the simplifying dichotomy of “white” versus “race-ethnicity.” A few select words engender associations with colonialism and suggest interconnections between the practices of “foster care” and colonialization. To underscore the assertion that colonial topoi and tropes are also part of the history and the cultural memory of non-colonial Europe, the blonde Marie Keller is drawn as the daughter of the owner of the “Kolonialwarenladen,” the compound noun translates literarily as (colonial goods store). Furthermore, by choosing a protagonist who is a local child rather than one of Gypsy, Jewish or of some other ethnic-racial descent, the author highlights through this narrative that colonial mechanisms existed in countries with no colonial history, neither as colonial powers, nor as colonized countries:

Die Puppe war ein Geschenk der Kellers nebenan. Eigentlich kein Geschenk, eher ein Lohn, denn für die Stoffpuppe mußte Daskind der Keller Marie wöchentlich dreimal das lange, wirre Haar bürsten. Vorsichtig hatte es durch

627 Interestingly, Roma families were at times kept together in camps, because it “caused the guards less problems to leave families together for processing.” Ulrich König, Sinti und Roma unter dem Nationalsozialismus: Verfolgung und Widerstand (Bochum: N. Brockmeyer, 1989).
628 Mehr, Daskind, 61. “Kolonialwarenladen” is often translated as: “general store.”
das Haar zu fahren, vorsichtig Knoten um Knoten zu lösen, bis das Haar glatt und glänzend über die Schultern des Mädchen floß. Das Haar roch nach Kakao und Kuchen. Wenn Daskind unvorsichtig wurde und an den hellen Haaren riß, schlug Marie es ins Gesicht oder – noch schlimmer – Marie weinte so lange, bis die Keller vom Laden hochkam und Daskind laut schimpfend aus dem Haus jagte. 629

The doll was a gift from the family Keller, the neighbors. Not really a gift, rather payment, for the rag doll, Thechild had to brush Marie Keller’s long tousled hair three times a week. Carefully, it [Thechild] did move through the hair, carefully undo knot by knot until the hair fell shiny and straight across the girl’s shoulders. The hair smelled like cacao and cake. When Daskind got careless and pulled on the fair hair, Marie hit her in the face - or worse – cried so long that Mrs. Keller came up from the store and swearing loudly hunted Thechild out of the house.

The smell of Marie Keller’s blond hair serves as an associative link to colonial history. That is, to how cacao, sugar and certain spices first became available to Europeans through the colonization of the “Americas” and Papua, New Guinea in the sixteenth century. When read through the post-colonial lens, Daskind reminds readers in the above excerpt of the “darker” child-woman serving the fair-haired and fair- skinned one. The ragdoll references within this context the inadequate payment, which was common for people serving in colonial work relations. 630 In a post-colonial reading, the namelessness of a protagonist of darker complexion references that only the history and stories of “Whites” were seen worthy of being remembered. Colonial historian Ann Laura Stoler shows this, for example, with the help of former colonial families’ photo albums in which only the “Whites” but not their servants have a name. 631 In the context of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies, this is echoed, for example, in how “Verdingkinder” were often simply called “Bub” and “Meitschi,” or how the charges of institutions and children’s homes were called “Heimzögling”

629 Ibid., 32.
630 Dua and Robertson, Scratching the Surface – Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1999)
(children’s home orphan, children’s home minor) or simply “Zögling,” and in some cases “Zögling-Nummer” (minor-number). The violence Daskind experiences brings to mind the brutality “native” women and children endured at the hands of their “masters,” and at times of their children. The debasing name-calling the protagonist is exposed to reveals a mixture of sexual attraction and repulsion. These twin feelings are typical for colonial fantasies and desires, particularly in regard to the “darker” female “other.”

Mehr argues through Daskind that models and theories that problematize interconnections between sex and race, or sex, race and madness have to be expanded to include WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults. American cultural and literary historian Sander L. Gilman, for example, “demonstrated the ways in which the links between sex and race were developed in the nineteenth century.” He shows, furthermore, how a link was established between madness, sex and race, in particular in regard to Blacks and Jews. Mehr suggests in Daskind an interconnection between the practices associated with colonialism and those associated with “foster care” in non-colonial countries as well as in colonial mother countries.

While little to no research has been done on the interconnection between “foster care” in non-colonial countries and colonialism, a growing body of work addresses different aspects pertinent to this topic. I focus in the following on three of those aspects, namely on the “internal enemy,” the racialization of class and the importance of “proper” child rearing.

632 Ibid.
633 The dominant, self-assured, cunning and violent Marie Keller reminds readers furthermore of the “Hitler Jugend” (Hitler Youth).
634 This is excellently described by Robert Young. Robert J.C. Young, Colonial Desire - Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (London, New York: Routledge, 1995).
635 Young, Colonial Desire - Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, 97.
Ute Planert shows that the rise of nation states, which went hand in hand with the emergence of the bourgeois society, is based on a combination of participation and aggression.\(^{637}\) On the one hand, “the nation” promised its members universal equality and participation. Conversely, the promised equality went hand in hand with the exclusion of everybody who was not considered to be part of the national community. Those who were excluded were divided into the two groups “outer enemy” and “inner enemy.”\(^{638}\) The members of these groups were considered to lack bourgeois values and were regarded as a threat to the social order as well as inherently and socially inferior, and hence in need of “civilization.” The category “inner enemy” encompassed the rural lower class, the poor, the wild, the mentally ill, the Travelers and the Jewish people,\(^{639}\) as well as their offspring. In other words, the “inner enemy” was the “feeder population” for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth.\(^{640}\)

Postcolonial theorist, cultural critic and historian Robert J. C. Young reiterates how in the process of the development of the term “civilization” in its Enlightenment sense, the ideological polarization of savagery and civilization evolved. The category “savage” signified the “wild man” who lived outside the city walls, that is, the rural population, i.e. the lower classes including the “inner enemy,” as opposed to the “civil” i.e. cultured, respectively educated citizens of cities.\(^{641}\) Consequently, people who did not live in cities and who did not attend higher education were automatically considered to be without culture, and therefore not fit “to govern

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638 Ibid.
639 Ibid, 22.
640 Stoler looks at “how regulatory mechanisms of the colonial state were directed not only at the colonized, but as forcefully at “internal enemies” within the heterogeneous population that comprised the category of Europeans themselves.” Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire – Foucault’s history of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 96.
641 Originally, the civilized were the citizens from walled in cities. Young, Colonial Desire - Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, 31.
themselves.” Stoler shows that throughout seventeenth century Europe, the urban and rural labouring class as well as other poor whites were considered to be “‘the vile and brutish part of mankind,’” and thought of as having the “‘many marks of an alien race.’” She concludes in her research on race, culture and class of the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, that “race serve[d] as a charged metaphor,” that “parallels were made between the immoral lives of the British underclass, Irish peasants and the ‘primitive Africans,’” and that this “emphasize[d] the deep difference between working class and bourgeois culture.” These ideas survived into the twentieth century and were problematized in fiction by authors such as D.H. Lawrence, Lisa Tetzner and Kurt Held, and Mariella Mehr, to name just a few. They argue in their texts that the ideology of an interconnection between manual labor and “colored” was vital in non-colonial countries as well as in colonial societies. Young provides an example of racialization of class from D.H. Lawrence’s first version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Young recounts how Connie ponders whether to move in with Parkin (Oliver Mellors in the final version) and that when she remembers Parkin “eating bloaters for his tea, [and] saying ‘thaese’ for ‘these’ […] ‘[s]he gave it

642 Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire – Foucault’s history of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, 127. By the nineteenth century, civilization and culture had become a means for the European middle class male to locate itself at the top of the new evolutionary scale against which all “Others,” societies and individuals, were judged.  
644 Ibid.  
645 Ibid., 126.  
646 Ibid, 125. The Irish were labeled with “chronic self-indulgence, indolence and laxity of purpose” and posited to be the “missing link between the gorilla and the Negro.”  
647 Ibid., 126. This meant, furthermore, that servants were not seen as a different class, which could have prompted critical analyses and social change. Furthermore, Stoler provides an interesting overview of research investigating the link between class and race. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire – Foucault’s history of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* 125ff. She cites Eric Hobsbawm who stated, “the bourgeois was, if not a different species, then at least the member of a superior race, a higher stage in human evolution, distinct from the lower orders who remained in the historical or cultural equivalent of childhood or adolescence.” Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1845-1878* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 247ff, quoted in Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire – Foucault’s history of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 126.
up, culturally he was another race.”\textsuperscript{648} Scholars investigating race and class have pointed out that racial classification had often nothing to do with the actual pigments of one’s skin but instead mirrored a cultural and political ordering mechanism. In fact, those who did not have to work, namely, the upper and middle-class were considered “white.” Those who performed manual labour, however, were perceived as “colored,” among other reasons, because they were literally colored, i.e. covered with dirt from doing their work.\textsuperscript{649} The German-Swiss authors Lisa Tetzner and Kurt Held, for example, reference the subject matter in their novel \textit{Die Schwarzen Brüder}.\textsuperscript{650} “Black” in \textit{The Black Brothers} does not primarily refer to the protagonist’s skin color – although being from the Kanton Tessin, he is likely to have been darker than somebody from the northern part of Switzerland. Here the color black refers to the darkened skin due to his work as a chimney sweeper. Until the mid-nineteenth century, children of the poor from this region were sold to Milano (Italy) to work as chimney sweepers. The book describes the exploitation and danger these boys faced, and how it cost some of them their lives.

The concept of being dirty due to manual labour has also been used to distinguish the educated man from (the uneducated) monster. Swiss author Lukas Bäruffus, for example, recounts the young Mary Shelley writing, “The Swiss then appeared to us – and our experience has strengthened this view – as people of slow comprehension and sluggishness. […] It would be easier for God to create man anew than to get these monsters clean.” Bäruffus goes on to ponder,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{648} Young, \textit{Colonial Desire - Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race}, 96. This passage shows furthermore that economic power exceeds sex. As a consequence of belonging to a lower class, Parkin is not only racialized but also feminized. \\
\textsuperscript{649} Coal miners are one of the better-known examples for this relationship between work, being dirty and of dark color. \textsuperscript{650} (\textit{The Black Brothers}, 1941) This text is based on the life of Giorgio from Sonogno, a small village located in the Italian speaking Tessin. Lisa Tetzner und Kurt Held, \textit{Die schwarzen Brüder: Erlebnisse eines kleinen Tessiners} (Düsseldorf: Sauerländer, 2002). Tetzner began writing the text and her husband Kurt Held (Kurt Kläber) finished it. The book was published under her name alone because as a political refugee Held/Kläber was was not allowed to publish in Switzerland.
\end{flushright}
“it would be worth investigating if the local population served as a model for the monster.”

This is not that far fetched when considering that most Swiss people lived at that time a rural lifestyle and many in poverty. The interconnection between manual labour, the lack of education and the notion of “monster” is alluded to in Daskind through both WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters: the son of a Traveler and “Verding” Lacher is by the villagers perceived as brutish and by Daskind as well as by readers as a sexual predator, i.e. as a “monster.” The seemingly uneducable foster child and “little servant” Daskind is by the villagers perceived as a spawn of evil, and therefore as monstrous. Readers discover that she does turn into a “monster.”

The ideologies that those who did not fulfill bourgeois ideals were considered unfit to “govern themselves” and in need of “civilizing,” which are known to have been prevalent in colonial powers, echoes the rhetoric and ideologies employed to justify the removal of Swiss children from milieus that did not provide what was considered to be the “proper” societal environment. Similar to Switzerland, in Europe and the colonies of the mid and late nineteenth century, childhood and children “became the subject of legislative attention.” Stoler concludes:

In Europe and the colonies, the liberal impulse for social welfare and political representation focused attention on the preparatory environment for civil responsibility, on domestic arrangements, sexual morality, parenting, and more specifically on the moral milieu in which children lived.

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653 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power – Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, 120.

Although Stoler’s research on “proper” childrearing focuses on the interconnection of these issues in the mother countries and their colonies, when her data and results are juxtaposed with Switzerland’s and the rest of German-language Europe’s history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults, Travelers, the poor, and the “philanthropic moralizing mission,” they show that debates about child welfare and related discourses were truly transnational. This conclusion is further supported by the international history of Europe’s orphanages, children’s institutions, children’s homes, group homes and other forms of “foster care.” The practice of ”Verdingung,” which some believed helped “rescue children from poverty and perceived moral depravity,” is a further example of how a link between the practice of foster care in non-colonial countries and colonization can be established. “Verdingung,” a practice widely used in German-language Europe was not limited to central Europe. British child migrants were sent overseas as early as the late seventeenth century to work as farmhands, serfs and maids. This international transfer peaked from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. From 1869 until well after the Second World War, destitute and institutionalized children, as young as four or five years of age, were arranged by different Christian and imperial groups to be moved from Britain to farms in Canada, Australia and

656 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power – Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, 120.
Rhodesia. These children, who are also known as “Canada’s Home Children,” are British “Heimkinder” and “Pflegekinder,” respectively “Verdingkinder,” and in some cases familial and un-familied children who were simply gathered off the streets, and who were made into family-less “Verdingkinder” in British colonies. Around the turn of the last century, approximately half of all immigrant children in Canada were in fact British child labour migrants, i.e. “Verdingkinder.” From where we stand today, these children have to be regarded as White. When considering the racialization of class, however, it is very likely that they were perceived as another race in nineteenth century England. Child labour migrants were one tool colonial Britain employed to strengthen its position in the colonies and to externalize a growing problem. Residential Schools for the children of First Nations People are another way how the practice of “civilizing the Other,” in this case with the help of children and youth institutions, has found its way into the colonized world. Mehr, we can conclude, is acutely aware of the long and persistent history of Othering in colonial and non-colonial Europe, and that it often goes beyond ethnicity and biological race. Her novel Daskind challenges readers in multiple ways by, what Margery Fee calls, “rewriting the dominant ideology from within.” The novel Daskind serves, therefore, as a potential site of counter-memory, counter-identity and as an act of insurrection for the individual as well as the community. As such, the book can be read as a text that helps

660 This term is used, for example, by Phyllis Harrison in her extensive research on this particular group. Phyllis Harrison, The Home Children (Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing INC, 2003). Sherington and Jeffery’s research analyzes the motives behind establishing the Fairbridge child migration scheme to Austria and Canada. Sherington and Jeffery, Fairbridge – Empire and Child.

661 Harrison’s findings show that “almost every second immigrant child in Canada was from a Bernardo Home.” However, this institution was not the only organization to bring children to Canada. She writes, “by 1889 the Canadian Department of Agriculture, which was responsible for immigration, recorded more than 50 agents or agencies involved in bringing children to Canada for farm labour.” Harrison, The Home Children, 4.

rewrite “the European historical and fictional record[s]”\(^{663}\) and can therefore be classified as part of the post-colonial literature.

2.3. DASKIND AND MIGNON: UNVEILING A SUBJUGATED HISTORY: LITERARY ALLUSION

As previously mentioned, Mehr alludes in her novel to a number of literary works from preceding literary periods. Most prominently she refers to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96) and this text’s child character Mignon. In the following chapter sections, I show how fruitful an analysis of the Mignon character is for an understanding of the scope and breadth of Mehr’s novel *Daskind*. The narrative’s allusions to Mignon, in turn, engender a new reading of that character when *Lehrjahre* is read through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens.

I begin with a brief summary of Mignon’s story and of the scholarly reception of her figure. In a next step, I read the character Mignon as a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child. I argue that Mignon longs for a father and permanency and not for a lover, and that it is the lack of belonging and repeated loss that cause her death not infantile jealousy or pre-pubertal love. I further argue that the reading of Mignon as a failed lover reveals a complicity of literature in sexualizing and diminishing WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls, in the literary, as well as in the extra-literary world. I then discuss how society and scholars externalized WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls as “Other” by labeling them as “Gypsies.” I end my reading of the “Mignon allusions” by juxtaposing the two

WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl characters to each other and by discussing how the allusions to Lehrjahre in Mehr’s novel help expand that narrative’s problematization of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people beyond Daskind’s setting of two generations and a small region in central Europe to include the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people of previous centuries and non-Germanic countries.

2.3.1. A Brief Summary

The character Mignon is a child of incest, an abandoned child, a foster child, a stolen child, a “Verdingkind,” who is brought across national borders, a child that is sold and bought, a child that is almost but never fully adopted, and a child that has for the largest part of her fictional life no traceable roots. Hence, the child dancer and singer Mignon is a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child. As such, she represents a vast group of “Others” of her time, be they nobility by descent - one only has to think of the countless “bastards,” who were considered inappropriate and a threat to property - or be they of lower classes.

Daskind’s allusions to Mignon unveils how society creates the very thing it professes to abhor. In other words, these allusions show how moral laws un-family children, create the structures wherein unwitting sibling incest can occur, and children pay for their forbearers’ “sins”: Sperata, Mignon’s mother, is the fruit of a late marital passion between her Italian high-nobility parents. For fear of social ridicule, her father hides his relation to his daughter “als man

664 At this point, Wilhelm “sehnte sich, dieses verlassene Wesen an Kindesstatt seinem Herzen einverleiben, es in seine Arme nehmen und mit der Liebe eines Vaters Freude des Lebens in ihm erwecken.” Book 2, chapter 8: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,” 116. Carlyle and Neilson translate this as, “He longed to incorporate this forsaken being with his own heart; to take her in his arms, and with a father’s love to awaken in her the joy of existence.” Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 96. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 112.
sonst die früheren, zufälligen Früchte der Neigung zu verbergen pflegt”665 “as people use to conceal its earlier accidental fruits,”666 and lets the girl be raised by a family friend. Years later and unaware that they are related, Sperata and her brother Augustin fall in love. After family and clergy learn of their intimate relationship they enforce their separation. Their child, Mignon, is taken from Sperata a few months after birth, and given into care “zu guten Leuten”667 “to good people.”668 The story of Mignon and her family of origin are a testament to Goethe’s knowledge about how his contemporaries all across Europe dealt with “undesirable” children. That is, the ties to children who were given into care with friends and neighbours, placed in foundling homes or abandoned at the doors of churches were not always completely severed. This is alluded to in the text when Mignon’s blood relatives stayed involved in her care even though she is given to a foster family:

… und obgleich es von ihren Pflegeltern höchst unanständig und unzulässig gehalten wurde, so ließen wir ihr doch soviel als möglich nachsehen.669

… and though her foster parents thought this highly blameable and unbecoming, we bade them indulge her as much as possible.670

The practice of staying involved in the care of a child who was given into care, was upheld mainly, it seems, by families that had the means to pay for the child’s extrafamilial care, as

Mignon’s did, or when the parents hoped that one day they would have the means to support their offspring.\footnote{Hunecke shows in his study of abandoned children in Europe that a staggering number of legitimate and illegitimate children were abandoned, in particular, in Milan and that a child, if still alive, could later be reclaimed without “any danger of punishment.” He analyzes this practice using the example of the special hospital, the Pia Case degli Esposti e delle Partorienti, which was founded in 1780. Hunecke, “The abandonment of legitimate children in nineteenth-century Milan and the European context,” in \textit{Poor Women and Children in the European Past}, ed. John Henderson and Richard Wall (London: Routledge, 1994), 125. The Pia Case opened just a few years before Goethe’s first Italian journey.}

The allusions to Mignon further highlight that neglect in “foster families” did not only occur in the late nineteenth or during the twentieth century. The description of how Mignon lived while “in care,” resembles more how a half-wild animal is kept than how a human child lives who is cared for by a family, and exposes the “goodness” of the so-called “good people” as questionable. The girl is, with the approval of her family, mostly left to her own devices for hours on end. Hence, the tale of freedom and indulgence, with which Mignon was supposedly to be cared for, reveals itself as a story of abandonment and neglect:

\begin{quote}
Ihre wunderlichen Wege und Sprünge führten sie manchmal weit, sie verwirrte sich, sie blieb aus und kam immer wieder. [...] man suchte sie nicht mehr, man erwartete sie.

[...]

Her wild walks and leapings often led her to a distance; she would lose her way, and be long from home, but she always came back. [...]\footnote{Carlyle, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels}, 130. Neilson, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship}, 579.} (one no longer went looking for her; one expected her return).

[...]
But at last, (our hopes were befooled and our leniency punished). The child went out and did not come again: her little hat was found swimming on the water, near the spot where a torrent rushed down into the sea. It was
conjectured that, in clambering among the rocks, (she had an accident); all our searching could not find her body.\textsuperscript{674}

Readers later learn that Mignon had gotten lost, and that the people who found her took her with them instead of bringing her back home. It is important to remember that she could not have been taken, were it not for the neglect and abandonment she experienced while “in care,” similar to Daskind who would not have been exposed to the severe sexual abuse at the hands of Armin Lacher, were it not for neglect and emotional abandonment she experiences while “in care” with the Kenels.

Goethe reveals little about the girl’s life with those who took her. The scene that prompts Wilhelm, the novel’s protagonist, to intervene and buy her from a traveling group of tight rope artists implies that she ended up in a situation where she was exploited as a dancer and physically abused.\textsuperscript{675} After being rescued by Wilhelm, Mignon develops an emotional attachment to him and becomes part of his chosen family. Taking his responsibility for her seriously, the protagonist eventually arranges for Mignon to attend a school for girls to receive a gender appropriate “Bildung.” However, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl dies while in the care of that school.\textsuperscript{676} Mignon’s origin remains a secret until after her death when a Marchese, who turns out to be her uncle, recognizes her body and reveals her family relations and tale.

\textsuperscript{674} Here, I chose to translate some of it myself. The rest of the citation is from Carlyle and Neilson. Book 8, chapter 9: Carlyle, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels}, 130. Neilson, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship}, 579.

\textsuperscript{675} Unlike in Daskind, however, there is no indication of sexual abuse of the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl in Lehrjahre, unless one reads Mignon’s insisting on wearing male cloths as a means to prevent, and therefore as an allusion to sexual abuse. The first \textit{Wilhelm Meister} novel, \textit{Sendung} includes a scene of sexual assault.

\textsuperscript{676} When read through the lens of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies, the girl’s death in the school engenders associative links to the unknown number of WVHPKL/OHG FRI children that died over the last centuries in institutions, including in Ireland’s Magdalene Laundries and Canada’s residential schools for First Nations People. Alex Maass, “At least 3,000 died in residential schools - Missing Children Project.” \textit{CBC News – Canada}, February 18, 2013, accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/at-least-3-000-died-in-residential-schools-research-shows-1.1310894.
2.3.2. Mignon in the Reception

_Daskind’s_ allusions to Mignon highlight how little WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters are recognized, and acknowledged as such, in literary research. Mehr’s novel underscores literary studies’ complicity in silencing the voices of WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters in well-known texts, and in hindering a critical exploration of their history and social position within the field of literary studies. Or, to use Foucault’s terminology, _Daskind’s_ allusions to Mignon unveil literary discipline’s complicity in subjugating and disqualifying knowledges of and about WVHPKL/OHGFRI history. This becomes very apparent when some of the extensive literary reception to the character Mignon is included in the analysis of _Daskind’s_ allusions to Mignon.

The figure Mignon is said to have inspired more scholarly studies than any other supporting character of German fiction. Research to _Lehrjahre’s_ Mignon focuses on Mignon’s Afterlives – _Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-Frist Century_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). In addition, German, French, Italian and Russian composers have set the songs of Mignon to music.

677 Terence Cave provides a seminal overview of “Mignon reincarnations.” Terence Cave, _Mignon’s Afterlives – Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-Frist Century_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). In addition, German, French, Italian and Russian composers have set the songs of Mignon to music.


predominantly on three main subject matters: on Mignon as a “Kunstfigur” (fictional character) that was created so the novel works on several levels, most notably as a “Bildungsroman” (novel of formation); on Mignon as Wilhelm’s site of projection and mirror with no function of her own and no foundation in reality; and on Mignon as a failed lover. Within these analyses,
scholars interpret the female child figure largely via the male protagonist. While many of these critics do, in their analyses, go beyond the “verengende Kategorie des Bildungsromans”\(^{683}\) (narrowing category of the novel of formation), they still use the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child character as a metaphor and allegory.\(^{684}\) They reason that as soon as the protagonist completes his “Bildung,” that is, as soon as Wilhelm accepts a bourgeois profession, marriage and fatherhood, there no longer exists a need for a figure such as Mignon who portrays Wilhelm’s “dichterisch in sichtbare Form verkörperte”\(^{685}\) […] “Innenwelt”\(^{686}\) (the literally in visible form embodied inner world of Wilhelm). Consequently, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl can “safely” die and disappear from the novel’s pages.\(^{687}\) This reading is problematic as it dismisses the character as a representative of real-life people.

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\(^{684}\) As does Elisabeth Krimmer. She reads Mignon as a figure that stands for homoerotic desire and argues that this desire has to be renunciated in order for successful integration into “a society of men whose homosocial bond guarantees patrilineal descent and hence societal order.” Elisabeth Krimmer, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: Paternity and ‘Bildung’ in Goethe’s ‘Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre’” *German Quarterly* 77, No. 3 (2004): 268.


\(^{686}\) Ibid, 111.

\(^{687}\) One exception is Mahlendorf. She is to this day one of the few authors who analyze Mignon in her own right. She investigates the figure through the lens of childhood abuse with a special focus on incest. See, Mahlendorf “Medea Darning Socks: German child abuse fiction as cultural critique.” As well as in, Mahlendorf, “The Mystery of Mignon: Object, Relations, Abandonment, Child Abuse and Narrative Structure.” *Goethe Yearbook* 7 (1994). Jirku starts out analyzing Mignon independently from Wilhelm. However, she too reads her eventually in relation to his inner development. And although Jirku recognizes many of Mignon’s behaviours as the result of abuse and abandonment, she concludes with reading her as a being that has access to “übermenschlichen Ordnung” (superhuman order) and as a “Vorstufe” (prestage) on Wilhelm’s way to Natalie. Jirku, “Mignon: Rätsel oder Geheimnis,” 285ff. Schottlaender recognizes Mignon as a foster child and child of incest, and acknowledges her love for Wilhelm as a father. In a next step, however, he veers off and reads that love in a Freudian sense, as a daughter’s jealousy of her father’s mate and brings his analysis back to the notion that Mignon dies because she wants Wilhelm to be her lover but cannot have him. Schottlaender, “Das Kindsleid der Mignon und ihre Verwandtschaft mit Gretchen und Klärchen,” 72ff.
2.3.2.1. Mignon as a Failed Lover

In my examination of Mignon as a character to whom the novel Daskind alludes to, I focus on the reading of Mignon as a “failed lover” and argue that there exists no textual evidence of her wanting to be Wilhelm’s lover. In referencing Mignon, Mehr’s novel underscores that if WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters are not considered as such in literary investigations, readers are likely to reiterate unwittingly derogatory stereotypes of this group of people.

Karl Schlechta688 and other scholars, who postulate Mignon’s pubertal love for Wilhelm, base their interpretation on the girl’s early death as well as on the doctor’s and Natalie’s interpretation of Mignon’s so-called “Bekenntnisse” 689 “confession[s].” 690 When the “Bekenntnisse” and the passages associated with them are analyzed through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens, however, another explanation emerges for Mignon’s behaviour. I argue that the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl makes in the novel not one unambiguous statement that confirms her desire for Wilhelm as an amorous lover. On the other hand, there is textual evidence of Mignon’s need for a family, namely, for belonging and permanency as a child, not as a lover and wife.

The novel is clear on how the girl’s confessions come about: Natalie elicits them from Mignon “durch ihre Fragen und Anleitungen”691 “by her questions and management”692 and then passes her interpretation of that information on to the doctor. He in turn relays his impressions of

692 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 82. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 521. Waidson translates this as, “for having elicited these confessions with her questions and hints.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 401. Blackall choses to leave some of the original out and translates this as, “reproached herself for eliciting by her questions these confidences.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 321.
what he learned from Natalie to Wilhelm, and that is the version readers receive. Mignon does not provide Natalie with clear and coherent statements. In fact, it takes Natalie and the doctor considerable time and effort “bis [sie] den verworrenen Zustand dieses guten Wesens, [...] nur so deutlich einsehen konnten”⁶⁹³ (before could thus far discover the confused condition of the dear being).⁶⁹⁴ Hence, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child’s alleged “confessions” are the interpretative results of data originally collected through repeated suggestive questions and then passed on through the means known as “telephone game” and “Chinese whispers.” This unreliable data is in a next step synthesized into a story by the two figures, which double as the eighteenth century version of a psychiatrist and a pedagogue-psychologist. Although unreliable due to how the information was obtained, the doctor’s account does include the detail that Mignon wanted to spend a night with Wilhelm, “dem Geliebten”⁶⁹⁵ (the beloved male person),⁶⁹⁶ “ohne”⁶⁹⁷ daß sie dabei etwas weiter als eine vertrauliche, glückliche Ruhe zu denken wüßte⁶⁹⁸ “without conceiving anything to be implied in this beyond a happy and confiding rest.”⁶⁹⁹ Nevertheless, scholars have time and again chosen to focus on the first part of this character’s statement and to ignore the second part.

⁶⁹⁴ Carlyle and Neilson translate this as, “before [they] could thus far discover the perplexed condition of the poor dear creature.” Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 81. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 520. Blackall translates this as, “the troubled state of the girl.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 321. Waidson translates this as, “the confused condition of this dear creature.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 401.
⁶⁹⁷ Italic by author of dissertation
⁶⁹⁹ Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 81. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 520. All four translators include this important qualifier. Blackall translates this as, “without any further thought thaford, peaceful resting.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 321. Waidson translates this as, “without her being able to envisage by this anything further than a trusting, happy repose.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 400.
Some critics trace their interpretation of Mignon’s amorous desire for Wilhelm back to the “Italienlied” (Italian song), which is also known as “Mignon Ballade” (Mignon’s ballade). Philosopher, classical philologist and translator Rudolf Schottlaender, for example, argues that the lied clearly states that Wilhelm is “nicht nur ihr Vater und Beschützer, sondern auch, von ihr aus gesehen, ihr Geliebter” (not only her father and protector, but also, from her point of view, her lover). In contrast, I suggest that the term “Geliebter” (lover) is in Lehrjahre used in the text’s contemporary understanding, namely, to address any beloved male person. It is in that sense that Therese calls Wilhelm “dreifach Geliebter” “three times dearer.” The meaning of this expression is later clarified when she exclaims “Mein Freund! Mein Geliebter! Mein Gatte!” “My friend! my lover! my husband!” Her utterance mirrors the functions of the addressee in the “Italienlied” and underscores the different paths Mignon and Therese are on, as well as the different goals they aim for: the Italian lied lists “Geliebter” i.e., beloved male person-friend in the first verse, “Beschützer” (protector) in the second and “Vater” (father) in the third and last verse. Mignon, the Lied implies, is longing for a friend, a protector and ultimately for a father; Therese, on the other hand, is ultimately looking for a husband. Scholars who read the term “Geliebter” in the “Italienlied” as lover, not only contest that order but also appear to

701 Ibid.
707 Ibid.
708 Ibid.
709 Ibid.
imply that the female WVHPKL/OHGFRI child character perceives Wilhelm as a lover before she experiences him as a protector and father. This is clearly not the case. The sequence of the storyline shows that Mignon dies after she calls him “father.” Hence, unrequited romantic love is not what causes her death. The meaning of the term “Geliebter” in the “Italienlied” is clearly “Freund” (friend), namely, the friend who took her in and stood up for her against the leader of the travelling group of tight rope artists who threatened to beat her. Furthermore, when considering that the doctor concludes that Mignon’s attempt to go to Wilhelm’s room was prompted “[d]urch leichtsinnige Reden Philinens und der anderen Mädchen, [und] durch ein gewisses Liedchen”710 “[b]y some wanton speeches of Philina and the other girls, [and] by a certain song which she had heard Philina sing,”711 then it becomes far more likely that Mignon’s “Italienlied” is made up of a creative mixture of songs the girl (over-)heard while living with the tight rope artists and Wilhelm’s theater group, as well as her own additions, in which “Geliebter” is used in the text’s contemporary sense. Moreover, Lehrjahre’s “Italienlied” is not what Mignon sings. The novel’s lied is Wilhelm’s translation of what he understood of the girl’s singing:

…ob er gleich er die Worte nicht alle verstehen konnte. Er ließ sich die Strophen wiederholen und erklären, schrieb sie auf und übersetzte sie ins Deutsche.712

…he could not understand all the words. He made her […] repeat the stanzas, and explain them; he wrote them down and translated them into his native language.713

711 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels. 81. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 520. Blackall translates this as, “For some frivolous remarks of Philene and other girls, as well as from a certain song”: Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 321. Waidson, Frivolous chatter of Philene and the other girls, together with a certain little song.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 400.
713 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 120. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 143, All four translators include the fact that Wilhelm does not fully understand what Mignon is singing, that he asks her to repeat it and that he translates what he understands into German.
Friedrich Kittler’s comment that critics, who observe an increasing infantile sexuality in Mignon fail to investigate whether that analysis is in fact a result of the “Effekt des Beobachtens selber”\textsuperscript{714} (the result of observing itself), applies to Wilhelm’s data gathering, transcription and translation, as much as it does to critics’ selective omissions.

Mignon’s alleged confession of desiring Wilhelm as a lover is further called into question when considering the doctor’s statement that the girl has her first sign of heart problems the night she wants to be with Wilhelm and observes a woman entering his room and the door being locked behind the nightly visitor. The doctor declares in book eight, “[Mignon’s] Herz, das bisher vor Sehnsucht und Erwartung lebhaft geschlagen hatte, fing auf einmal an zu stocken”\textsuperscript{715} “[Mignon’s] heart, which up to that point had been beating animatedly with yearning and expectation, all at once began to falter.”\textsuperscript{716} The doctor’s statement implies that this is the first time Mignon experiences any heart problems. The attentive reader knows, however, that Mignon shows already first signs of heart problems at the end of the second book, namely, the very moment she is informed by Wilhelm that he wants to move on and leave her in the care of strangers.\textsuperscript{717} The narrator shows with this that without Mignon’s voice, the doctor and Natalie’s knowledge and information about her are limited.

How far reaching and systemic the interpretation of Mignon as a female figure who wants to be Wilhelm’s lover is, becomes even more apparent when considering English translations of \textit{Lehrjahre}. Carlyle and Neilson translate Mignon’s “Bekenntnisse”


\textsuperscript{716} Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 401. All four translators stay close to the German original in that they reiterate the doctor’s implication.

\textsuperscript{717} Book 2, chapter 14: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 142.
“confessions”718 as singular “confession.”719 The German original “Bekenntnisse,” signifies a connection between Mignon’s confessions and the highly esteemed “Bekenntnisse einer schönen Seele”720 “Confessions of a beautiful soul.”721 This account of a woman’s educational journey mirrors and equals Wilhelm’s. Hence, the German original allows for the WVHPKL/OHGFR character to potentially experience the same development, if given the opportunity.722 By turning the plural into a singular, Carlyle and Neilson have edited this allusion and the associated potential out of the text, and sexualized the content of Mignon’s “confession[s].” Both Neilson and Carlyle translate the doctor’s account that Mignon wanted to spend a night “bei dem Geliebten”723 as “beside the man she loved,”724 and in doing so reiterate that the girl’s wish is sexual.725 Their translations of the doctor’s account of Mignon’s heart problem imply that the girl has excessive and pathological feelings, and that it is this pathology which results in her death: “Her heart, which hitherto had beaten violently with eagerness and expectation, now at once began to falter and stop.”726 As Carlyle’s is the first English translation of Lehrjahre, and Neilson’s the second, their texts control since 1824 (Carlyle), respectively 1917 (Neilson), how

724 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 81. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 520.
726 Book 8, Chapter 3: Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 82. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 520ff.
the figure Mignon is perceived by students and scholars reading the novel in English translation; As such, their translations have been part of the international discourse on WHPKL/OHGFRI girls and how they are perceived in the extra-literary world. Mehr alludes through Daskind to this discourse and the evoked perception of WHPKL/OHGFRI girls.

Blackall is not suitable for all scholarly work, as his translation misses entire passages from the original. Moreover, in translating Mignon’s “Bekenntnisse” as “confidences,” Blackall too severs the textual interconnection the original establishes between Mignon and the aristocrat described as having a beautiful soul.727 Waidson’s translation is closer to the original. However, as mentioned earlier, Waidson stays at times closer to Carlyle’s and Neilson’s translations than to the German original, for example, when he translates “dieses guten Wesens”728 as “this dear creature,”729 rather than as (this dear being). Daskind’s allusions to Mignon highlight that not only uneducated rural people such as, for example, Armin Lacher, Frieda or Bruno Keller sexualize WVHPKL/OHGFRI females to “right” i.e. “order” their world. On the contrary, the allusions to Mignon stress the long history of this practice at the hands of the cultured and the educated.

2.3.3. To Not Belong - A Recurring Theme

The novel Daskind problematizes many consequences of not-belonging. By alluding to Mignon, the narrative brings not only some other potential consequences of not-belonging to the reader’s attention but stresses furthermore that relational non-permanency and its consequences have long been part of the lives of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. Like Daskind and little Armin, 

727 Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 321.
Mignon falls prey to exploitation and abuse. However, unlike in Daskind there is in Lehrjahre no indication that the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl is sexually abused. While Mehr’s WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters do not experience good foster care placements, Mignon does. She experiences the time in Wilhelm’s care as mostly positive, even though she is drafted as a servant by Philene, and at times by Wilhelm,730 and treated with contempt by Jarnos.731 That the girl feels at some point some sense of security and safety, and therefore of entitlement, is highlighted when she asks Wilhelm for something that is generally reserved for familied children. That is, after she pawned her “großen silbernen Schnallen”732 “large silver buckles”733 for an atlas, she asks Wilhelm to buy that atlas for her, so she could “have back [her] pledge.”734 When reading Mignon through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens, it is important to remember this exchange occurs when Mignon still believes that Wilhelm has truly adopted her as his daughter.

The following chapter sections explore how Mignon navigates being part of a foster family, her own needs and longing for permanency and family, and how she finally comes to terms with being a foster child instead of being adopted. Daskind’s allusions to Mignon bring these experiences to readers’ attention and stress that this process has for foster children and youth remained the same for the last two hundred years. Mehr argues through her novel that this process will remain the same until “foster care’s” structures are changed in such a way that lifelong connections are formed and maintained between the children and youth in care and a caretaker.

734 Ibid.
2.3.3.1. From “Herr” to “Vater”

At the end of the second book, Mignon senses Wilhelm’s restlessness and asks, “‘Herr!’ rief sie aus, ‘wenn du unglücklich bist, was soll Mignon werden?’”735 “‘Sir!’”736 she cried, ‘if thou art unhappy, what will become of Mignon?’”737 The protagonist responds with, “‘Liebes Geschöpf,’ […] Ich muß fort.”738 “Dear little creature, […] I must go hence.”739 Several important things happen in this exchange and in the ensuing scene. The female WVHPKL/OHGFRI child shows a strong attachment to Wilhelm and deep emotional distress when faced with losing the one person who freed her from exploitation and abuse at the hands of the leader of the travelling group of tight rope artists. As a consequent thereof, Mignon experiences signs of heart problems:

... eine Art Zucken, das ganz sachte anfing und sich, durch alle Glieder wachsend verbreitete. […] fuhr auf einmal nach dem Herzen, wie mit einer Gebärde, welche Schmerzen verbeißt.740

... a sort of palpitating movement in her, which began very softly, and then by degrees with increasing violence diffused itself over all her frame. […] and all at once laid her hand upon her heart, with the countenance of one repressing the utterance of pain.741

736 Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 106. In contrast, Carlyle, Neilson and Blackall translate “Herr” as “Master.” In doing so they do not reflect the change of address in their texts. Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 117. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 140. Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 81.
741 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 117. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 140.
Confronted with the girl’s great anguish and his own fear of losing her to death, the protagonist responds by addressing Mignon as “mein Kind”\textsuperscript{742} “my child,”\textsuperscript{743} and tells her that he will keep her. In response to being called “my child” and being reassured by Wilhelm that he will not abandon her, the girl’s tears subside and “eine weiche Heiterkeit glänzte von ihrem Gesichte”\textsuperscript{744} (a soft cheerfulness shone upon her face).\textsuperscript{745} It is in this moment that Mignon calls Wilhelm for the first time father and exclaims:

\begin{quote}
‘Mein Vater!’ rief sie, ‘du willst mich nicht verlassen! willst mein Vater sein!
Ich bin dein Kind!’ \textsuperscript{746}

‘My father!’ cried she, ‘you won’t leave me! You will be my father! I am your child!’ \textsuperscript{747}
\end{quote}

Mignon states here loud and clear that she wants Wilhelm as a father, not as a lover.

Both the protagonist and Mignon experience at this point in \textit{Lehrjahre} a change of address.\textsuperscript{748} Mignon, who was by Wilhelm still called “dear creature,”\textsuperscript{749} when he announced that

\textsuperscript{742} Book 2, chapter 14: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 143.
\textsuperscript{744} Book 2, chapter 14: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 144ff.
\textsuperscript{746} Book 2, chapter 14: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 144.
\textsuperscript{748} Secondary literature has so far only identified the protagonist as experiencing a change of address.
he plans to leave, is now addresses by him as “my child.” Wilhelm, who at the beginning of this seminal scene was addressed by Mignon as “Herr” “Sir,” that is, with a title appropriate for a feudal lord, is now called “father” by her. These changes of address signify the beginning of Wilhelm’s “wunderbaren Familie” (miraculous, wonderful, marvellous family). However, this term should not disguise that this is Mignon’s second foster family and her fourth, respectively her fifth change of caregivers. The first caregiver was her mother, the second caregivers were her first foster family, the third the people who took her, the fourth the travelling group of tight rope artists, and the fifth was Wilhelm. Mignon’s childhood, like Daskind’s, clearly lacks permanency and stability. Both WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls act out. Mignon’s previous life experiences leave her in doubt about the permanency of this latest living arrangement. This causes in her “eine innere heftige Erschütterung” “some inward violent commotion.” Although she does not turn violent the way Daskind does, Goethe’s WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl does display “Heftigkeit […], zuckende Lebhaftigkeit [und] rastlose Stille” “violence […], spasmodic vivacity [and] restless stillness,” which fills Wilhelm with

“angst und bange” (with fear and worry). Unfortunately, Mignon’s fears are justified: Wilhelm’s chosen family turns out to not be Mignon’s “forever family,” but instead just another step on her journey as a WVHPKL/OGFRI child. This is signified by the second change of address.

2.3.3.2. From “Vater” to “Meister”

Mignon addresses Wilhelm for the first time with “Meister” when she reports the fire. Some scholars attribute this second change of address once more to Mignon wanting to be Wilhelm’s lover. When comparing how Wilhelm responds after accepting Felix as his son with how he acts after he accepts Mignon as his child, however, a crucial difference becomes apparent. One of Wilhelm’s first actions as Felix’s father is to find a mother for the boy. This is the real reason why he asks Therese to marry him:

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Meister’s Apprenticeship, 156. Waidson translates this as, “the convulsive vivacity […] moved in aprecarious calm.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 199.


762 I owe this expression to Catherine Pope who directed the documentary Forever Family (Canada, 2012).


765 Those who read her as purely symbolic, as does for example Ammerlahn, interpret the second change of address as an indication for “Wilhelms Annäherung an Aspekte der nicht-theatralischen Meisterschaft” (Wilhelm’s approach to non-theatric mastership). Ammerlahn, Imagination und Wahrheit – Goethes Künstler-Bildungsroman »Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre« Struktur, Symbolik, Poetologie, 194.
…, daß er eine Mutter für den Knaben suchen müsse, und daß er sie nicht
sicher als in Theresen finden werde.\textsuperscript{766}

... that he must look for a mother for the boy and that he would not find one
more assuredly than in Theresa.\textsuperscript{767}

In contrast, Wilhelm is not looking for a mother for Mignon after he exclaims: “Mein Kind! […]
mein Kind! Du bist ja mein! […] Du bist mein! Ich werde dich behalten, dich nicht verlassen!”\textsuperscript{768}
“My child! […] my child! […] Thou art mine! I will keep thee, I will never forsake thee!”\textsuperscript{769} In
fact, he qualifies his statement by inserting, “wenn dich das Wort trösten kann”\textsuperscript{770} “if that word
can comfort thee,”\textsuperscript{771} and spends the night before the fire with a woman. This action shows the
WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl, who sees the woman enter Wilhelm’s bedroom, that his reassurances
and calling her “mein Kind” were indeed just words, and that he does not intend to really adopt
her. Wilhelm’s clandestine female visitor is Mignon’s competition, or “rival”\textsuperscript{772} as all four
translators call her, but not as a lover, as some scholars conjecture. That woman signifies that
Mignon will not be legitimized as Wilhelm’s child. This is what almost breaks the
WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl’s heart:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{766} Book 8, Chapter, 1: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 504.
\textsuperscript{767} Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 386. Carlyle and Neilson translate this as, “that he must
seek a mother for the boy; and also that he could not find one equal to Theresa.” Carlyle, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s
now find a mother for the boy, and he could not find a better one than Therese.” Blackall, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s
Apprenticeship}, 309.
\textsuperscript{768} Book 2, chapter: 14, \textit{Goethe Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre}, 143.
\textsuperscript{770} Book 2, chapter 14: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 143.
Waidson too includes this disclaimer. He translates this as, “if this word can be any comfort to you.” Waidson,
“Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 106. In contrast, Blackall leaves this statement out and replaces it with
one that reassures Mignon of Wilhelm’s sincerity. He translates “wenn dich das Wort trösten kann” as “let that
console you.” Blackall, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship}, 82.
\textsuperscript{772} Book 8, chapter 3: Carlyle, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels}, 81. Neilson, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s
Apprenticeship,” 400.
\end{flushright}
Mignon empfand unerhörte Qual: [...] Ihr Herz [...] fing auf einmal an zu 
stocken und drückte wie eine bleierne Last ihren Busen, sie konnte nicht zu 
Atem bekommen, sie wußte sich nicht zu helfen.\textsuperscript{773}

Mignon’s agony was now unutterable: [...] Her heart [...] now at once began 
to falter and stop: it pressed her bosom like a heap of lead; she could not draw 
a breath, she knew not what to do.\textsuperscript{774}

The novel provides several answers as to why Felix is fully adopted but not Mignon. I focus first on the children’s ancestry and their gender.

The second time Mignon calls Wilhelm “Meister” is when she tells him to save “deinen Felix!”\textsuperscript{775} “thy Felix.”\textsuperscript{776} Shortly before that invocation Mignon learned from “Hamlet’s ghost” that Felix is Wilhelm’s natural son. Although it is not proven beyond doubt that Wilhelm is Felix’s biological father, there is textual evidence which implies he is. Before Wilhelm started his “Lehrjahre,” he and Mariane, who is clearly identified as Felix’s mother, were in love with each other and had spent several nights together and consummated their love for each other.\textsuperscript{777} Felix is, furthermore, the right age to be their child. In comparison, Wilhelm has no prior connection to Mignon’s parents or Mignon herself. At the time the protagonist accepts Felix as his son, Mignon’s parents and where she is from are still unknown. When considering the time’s preference for traceable roots and for male offspring, it is not surprising that the male, natural

\textsuperscript{777} The narrator describes Wilhelm exclaiming in book 1, chapter 9, “Sie ist dein! Sie hat sich dir hingegeben! [...] dir auf Treu und Glauben hingegeben.” Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 34. Carlyle and Neilson translate this as, “She is thine! She has given herself away for thee! [...] has given herself away to thee in trust and faith.” Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 32. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 29. Blackall translates this as, “She is yours! She has given herself to you, [...] given herself in faith and trust to you.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 16.
child effectively replaces the female WVHPKL/OHGFRI child. Hence, although Mignon was part of Wilhelm’s “wunderbaren Familie” before Felix, her place within that family is now no longer secure. She is once again the foster child, a foreigner and female and therefore superfluous. Understanding this but being too young to be on her own, Mignon relegates herself to the position of a servant within what in the end turns out to be a fairly common family situation, namely, a father, a son and an absent mother who died in childbed. In fact, Mignon’s only way to stay as close to Wilhelm and Felix as she has been, without becoming the protagonist’s lover, is to now be Wilhelm’s maid or Felix’s nanny. The girl acknowledges this new situation by addressing Wilhelm no longer with “father” but instead with the bourgeoisie signifying term “Meister,” and acts more like a devoted servant, who is doing her duty, than the family’s child. Mignon continues to address Wilhelm as “Meister” without ever being questioned by him, or others, as to why she does, and without being asked to call him again “father” instead. This is a clear indication that her understanding of how the discovery of Felix’s parentage changes her status in Wilhelm’s chosen family was correct.

The second change of address signifies, moreover, the shift from nobility to bourgeoisie, and with that of the development of the bourgeois nuclear family. The importance of this change of address is underscored in the German original when the narrator states “noch niemals, 778 Minden elaborates on this point when he stresses, “there is also a fundamentally traditional, feudal, aspect to the way in which the continuity of masculine identity is guaranteed: the principle of primogeniture. The law of inheritance guaranteed the eldest son his name and power.” Minden, The German Bildungsroman, 3. 779 Krimmer argues that Goethe’s message in Lehrjahre is “that fatherhood is not naturally given but socially created,” [that a man has to accept his responsibility as a] ‘pater,’ [even if he is not the child’s] ‘genitor,’ if societal order is to be maintained.” Krimmer, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: Paternity and Bildung in Goethe’s ‘Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,’” 269. If this were the main message, then his “Lehrjahre” (years of apprenticeship) would have been completed if Wilhelm had accepted Mignon as his child. In other words, the novel would have ended with the second book and Mignon would have lived to prove Krimmer’s point. However, this is not what happens. 780 Building on Kittler’s thesis that the changes made from Sendung to Lehrjahre represent transfigurations of familial discourse systems, in particular, the development of the bourgeois nuclear family, I consider Mignon’s ancestry and journey. Kittler, “Über die Sozialisation Wilhelm Meisters,” 42.
als diesen Abend, hatte sie ihm diesen Namen gegeben, denn anfangs pflegte sie ihn Herr und
nachher Vater zu nennen”.781 “She had never called him that before this evening, having addressed
him first with ‘Sir’ and than as ‘Father’.”782 By replacing “never” with “hardly ever,”783 Carlyle
and Neilson’s translations undermine Mignon as a strong and independent character. When
considering that Carlyle and Neilson’s translations fit much better with the ideology of Mignon as
a pubertal yearning lover, as well as with her being a mirror and symbol for the male
protagonist’s inner world and for the novel as a “Bildungsroman,” then it becomes clear that they
chose to reiterate prejudice rather than to stay close to the German original. That is, females,
particularly those of the lower classes and those belonging to the group of WVHPKL/OHGFR1
people, are assumed to be submissive and inferior, as well as lascivious and calculating.
Daskind’s allusions to Mignon reveal that Frieda, the nuns, the ordained clergy, representatives of
science and most of the villagers operate, almost two hundred years after Carlyle and Neilson’s
translations were first published, still under the same prejudice.

2.3.3.3. Mignon, the “Verdingkind”

Daskind’s allusions to Mignon show that, like Mehr through Daskind, Goethe too
explores through Mignon how far children go to stay close to their caretakers, and to “family.”
Mignon is willing to be a servant to stay close to Wilhelm and Felix. Daskind is willing to rub

782 Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 201. Waidson translates this phrase similarly, “Never before this
evening had she given him this name, for at first she was accustomed to calling him ‘sir’ and later ‘father.’” Waidson,
“Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 254.
783 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 268. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 337.
cow dung all over herself, wrap herself in Kari’s wolf fur and take revenge on the sexton in order to stay close to him, even though he abuses her.

Mignon expresses in her own words how hurtful it is for her to no longer be considered “his child” by Wilhelm: when he informs her of his plans to place her in Therese’s (and Natalie’s) finishing school for girls, Mignon responds with the words, “‘Meister!’ sagte sie, ‘ behalte mich bei dir! es wird mir wohl tun und weh,’”784 “‘Master!’” said she, ‘keep me with thee: it will do me good and do me ill.’”785 Although the loss of Wilhelm as her “father” hurts her, staying with him and Felix is still more desirable to the girl than to completely lose the “family” that treated her decently.786

To have to work for her keep is not new for Mignon. The abandoned and stolen child, whose care depended on her monetary return787 for her “Herr,” had already worked as a performer, i.e. as a “Verdingkind,” for an unknown amount of time of her childhood before Wilhelm bought her. By choosing to address Wilhelm with “Master” rather than with “Sir,” in the second change of address, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl picks up what she had put in motion after

785 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 54. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 486. Blackall embellishes the text a bit in his translation. He writes, “Keep me with you, it will do me both good and ill.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 299. In this section, it is Waidson who choses modern day language. He translates the phrase as, “Keep me with you. It will be good for me as well as hurting me.” Waidson, Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 373.
786 In addition, Mignon’s use of the term “Meister” indicates that she is not only at risk of being removed from “her” family, but also of being placed in a school for girls where she would learn how to become an obedient and subservient wife, whose ultimate goal it is “daß man auf jede Weise für das Glück der Männer und der Haushaltung sorge” (to provide in every way for the happiness of men and household). Book 7, chapter 6: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 459. Blackall stays close to the German original. He translates this as, “to provide in every way possible for the happiness of menfolk and the smooth running of the household.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 281. Carlyle and Neilson change this phrase in an interesting way. They stress husbands’ intellectual needs and translate the phrase as, “to provide for the happiness of future husbands both in household and in intellectual matters.” Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 33. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 459.
787 The leader of the traveling tightrope artists seizes the opportunity to sell her to Wilhelm in order to get some of his “investment” in her back, e.g. having provided clothe for her, when she refuses to perform in public. Book 2, chapter 4: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 103.
Wilhelm bought her. At that time, Mignon accepted Laertes’s statement that if she repays the amount Wilhelm paid for her, she will be free. Interestingly though, Mignon circumvented Laertes’s comment, which linked her future earnings and freedom to her obedience. Instead, she offered to serve, i.e. to work:


‘You ’re ours now,’ cried Laertes, ‘we have bought you.’ ‘What did you pay?’ The child asked drily. ‘A hundred ducats,’ replied Laertes, ‘if you give them back, you can be free,’ ‘That’s a lot, I suppose?’ The child asked. ‘Oh, yes, just you behave properly.’ ‘I will be your servant,’ she replied.789

The exchange between Mignon and Laertes makes clear that according to bourgeoisie and nobility, the girl was not bought into freedom but instead into a debt bondage-like “Verdingung.” This, and not adoption, is what girls like Mignon could expect. This reality explains also why Wilhelm’s chosen family is termed “wunderbare Familie.” The meaning of “wunderbar” (wonderful) furthermore includes “miraculous” and “marvellous,” two terms, which signify the not quite real, the preternatural. Hence, it is already implied in the expression “wunderbare Familie” that this family, like most foster families, will not last. Mehr argues that the same was still the case for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, such as Daskind and Armin Lacher, almost two hundred years later.

789 Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 77. Blackall’s translation deviates somewhat from Waidson’s. He writes, “‘Now you are ours,’ said Laertes. ‘We have bought you.’ ‘How much did you pay?’ she asked curtly. ‘A hundred ducats,’ said Laertes. ‘And when you pay us back, you may go free.’ ‘That’s a lot, isn’t it?’ the child asked. ‘Yes indeed, so just see that you behave well.’ ‘I will be your servant,’ she replied.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 59. Carlyle’s and Neilson’s translations deviate, as discussed in the body of text, in some important aspects from the original.
By insisting that she will work off the debt by serving, rather than via obeying, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI child takes as much control of her life as is possible for her at that time. This active role, which Mignon claims is edited out by Carlyle and Neilson, who translate “Ich will dienen, versetzte sie” (I will serve, she retorted) with “‘I will try,’ she said,”\textsuperscript{790} That is, their translations state that the character Mignon will try to be obedient. Their translations allude to a much meeker personality than the one given to the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl in the German original. Daskind’s allusions to Mignon underscore the longevity and geographic prevalence of the practice of using WVHPKL/OHGFRI children as cheap labour, and traces it back to the late eighteenth century and beyond.

\textbf{2.3.3.4. “Herz” versus “Vernunft”}

Daskind’s allusions to Mignon highlight once more that “care” and benevolence\textsuperscript{791} without love and belonging, connection and permanency, is not enough, and is, in fact, detrimental for children. The allusions reference here also the knowledge that infants who are not touched and lovingly cared for, even if they are fed and clothed, have a much higher death rate than their lovingly parented peers. The ones who do not die are at risk of Hospitalism, respectively Kaspar Hauser syndrome. This has been known for centuries and has been confirmed in the nineteen fifties through Harry F. Harlow’s \textit{Monkey Love Experiments}. His studies became a

\textsuperscript{790} Carlyle and Neilson translate this as, “‘Thou art ours now,’ cried Laertes, ‘we have bought thee.’ ‘For how much?’ inquired the child quite coolly. ‘For a hundred ducats,’ said the other; ‘pay them again, and you thou art free.’ ‘Is that very much?’ she asked, ‘O yes! thou must now be a good child.’ ‘I will try,’ she said.” Carlyle, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels}, 88. Neilson, \textit{Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship}, 102.

powerful tool for those arguing against institutional childcare. While Harlow’s research indicates that the early damage cannot be changed by later nurturing care, recent research in brain plasticity and resilience show a more hopeful picture. Daskind’s allusion to Lehrjahre reveals that Goethe explores these issues through the child character Mignon.

Mignon initially rejects Wilhelm’s idea that something has to be done for her “weitere Bildung” (further education) with the words, “‘Ich bin gebildet genug,’ […], ‘um zu lieben und zu trauern’” “I am sufficiently educated’ […], ‘to love and mourn.’” The WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl, who never knew her father, lost her mother shortly after birth, then her entire family as well as her foster family, who experiences neglect, being abducted, and exploited all while she is still a child, and who finally finds a home with Wilhelm and Felix, only to lose it again, does indeed know enough about loss and grief and the absence of love and care. The girl responds to Wilhelm’s appeals to be a reasonable child and to agree to go to the girl school with, “‘Die Vernunft ist grausam,’ […] ‘das Herz ist besser,’” “Reason is cruel,’ […] ‘the heart is better;’” In doing so, the girl tells Wilhelm, and the reader that true “Bildung” is a combination of “Vernunft” and “Herz.” Mignon, I argue, knows that staying with Wilhelm

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792 No matter how little or how much permanent damage there is, loving and long-term caregivers, e.g. parents enable any child to maximize his or her potential.
796 Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 373. Blackall translates this as, “I am educated enough to love and to sorrow.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 299.
798 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 55. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 487. Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 299. Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 374. Staying true to their interpretation of Mignon, Carlyle and Neilson translate “versezte sie” once again with “said she” instead of “she retorted.” Blackall does the same. All three translators portray a meeker Mignon than the original.
799 Goethe’s text references here also to the fact that many children who are adopted into a loving family after having been severely neglected, abandoned and abused, are known to first regress and then to slowly start developing again. Hence, Mignon’s wish to stay with Wilhelm and Felix can also be read as a sign of such a regress. Consequently, she is not ready to leave “her” family and being placed in a boarding school, no matter how well intended these plans are.
and Felix offers her the best chance at life. She eventually yields to Wilhelm’s suggestions concerning the finishing school and states, “‘Ich will hingehen, wohin du willst, aber laß mir deinen Felix!’”\textsuperscript{800} “‘I will go as thou requirest, only leave me [your] Felix.’”\textsuperscript{801} Her pleading with him to not separate her from Felix underscores that she has not only grown attached to Wilhelm but also to Felix. At last, Wilhelm gives in to her request and sends both children to Therese. However, several pages later readers learn that Mignon is severely ill and that her caregivers worry she could die any moment. Wilhelm is asked to hurry to her and to bring Felix with him.\textsuperscript{802} This request highlights that despite Mignon’s wish to have Felix placed with her, the children were at some point separated and Mignon remained in Therese and Natalie’s care while Felix went back to Wilhelm. The text leaves no doubt that Mignon’s illness is accelerated because she is separated from the only two people she has strongly bonded with. This reading is underscored by the narrator, who states that Mignon “schien eine Trennung von [Vater und Sohn] mehr als alles zu fürchten”\textsuperscript{803} “seem[s] to dread a separation from [father and son] more than anything beside.”\textsuperscript{804}

\textsuperscript{800} Book 7, chapter 8: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 489.
\textsuperscript{801} Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 55. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 487. In omitting “dein” “your” in this sentence, the two translators omit that Wilhelm’s Felix, i.e. the familied boy, is juxtaposed to Mignon, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl. Blackall and Waidson stay closer to the German original. Blackall translates this as, “I will go wherever you wish, but let me have your Felix.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 299. Waidson translates this as, “I will go wherever you like, but leaf me your Felix.” Waidson, Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship, 374.
\textsuperscript{802} Book 8, chapter 2: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 508.
\textsuperscript{803} Book 8, chapter 3: Goethe, “Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,” 528.
\textsuperscript{804} Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 85. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 524. Blackall translates this as, “fearing more than anything that she might be separated from them.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 323. Waidson translates this as, “and appears to fear separation from them more than anything else.” Waidson, Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 404.
2.3.3.5. “Bildung”

Not only does Mignon not receive the “Herz” of “Bildung,” she does not receive an education at all. The argument that Mignon rejects Wilhelm’s aspirations for education and cultivation, or that the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl is unable to live in the world of prose is untenable. The text shows clearly that it is Wilhelm who does not make an effort to give her an education. He does not really consider it until after he receives his certificate of apprenticeship, and until he thinks as Felix’s father about the boy’s future:

Am I not acting with the boy exactly as I did with Mignon? I drew the dear child towards me; her presence gave me pleasure; yet I cruelly neglected her. What did I do for her education, which she longed for with such earnestness? Nothing! I left her to herself, and to all the accidents to which in a society of coarse people she could be exposed.

Wilhelm’s self-assessment is correct.

Most of the different “German nation states” had in the eighteenth century a compulsory elementary school system in place for all children ages five or six until ages thirteen or fourteen, and as the century went on to age eighteen. Hence, Mignon should have been in school or tutored

805 Brandenburg-Frank, speaks of Mignon’s refusal to be socialized. Brandenburg-Frank, Mignon und Meret – Schwellenkinder Goethes und Gottfried Kellers, 9. Minden follows the same line of thought when he states, “Neither Tower nor Natalie are able to socialize Mignon.” Minden, The German Bildungsroman, 43.
“at home,” while she was in Wilhelm’s care. Instead she was by some used as a servant, i.e. a “Verding” and by Wilhelm for his own enthrallment.

Mignon’s desire for knowledge is, in fact, so strong that she becomes an autodidact and asks questions as much as her language skills and age allow her to. As discussed earlier, she is even willing to pawn her “silbernen Schnallen” “her big silver buckles” which represent unexpected valuables for a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child, for a book. That her eagerness to learn more about other countries is fueled by her wish to find her home does not signify a lack of intelligence. On the contrary, this shows how needs for belonging and permanency, and for a family and home utilize and incite intelligence and other skills. Moreover, there is nothing surprising or symbolic about Mignon’s difficulties with the German language when considering that she has been exposed to Italian, French and German, and likely to several dialects, by the time Wilhelm buys her. This, as well as the lack of schooling and tutoring, and not, as some scholars argue, her weak cognitive and fine motor skills, explain her struggle with writing.

What is surprising though, as well as a testament to her cognitive and social aptitude, is that

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808 In addition to religion, the pupils were to be instructed in reading, writing and singing, and in some regions, for example, in Prussia and Saxony, also in arithmetic. Peter Petschauer, *The Education of Women in Eighteenth-Century Germany: New Directions from the German Female Perspective – Bending the Ivy* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 110.
810 Blackall, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 156. Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 198. Carlyle and Neilson translate the plural “Schnallen” as singular “buckle.” One wonders whether it was for these authors simply too difficult to accept that a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child could own not only one but two or more silver buckles and that a WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl would pawn them for an atlas. Carlyle, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels*, 213. Neilson, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 265.
811 Several scholars comment on Mignon’s cognitive ineptness. Minden, for example, calls Mignon and the Harper “inarticulate and enigmatic ‘alien’ beings who are simply not at home in ordinary language.” Minden, *The German Bildungsroman*, 44. Brandenburg-Frank states that Mignon has “ein problematisches Verhältnis zur sprachlichen Kommunikation” (has a problematic relationship to communication). Mignon’s status as a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child, who travels across national and language borders, and the fact that she has not been schooled adequately are by Brandenburg-Frank not considered as reasons for the girl’s problematic relationship to communication. Brandenburg-Frank, *Mignon und Meret – Schwellenkinder Goethes und Gottfried Kellers*, 12. Marc Redfield highlights Mignon’s challenges with writing and attributes this to her being associated with “bodily deformation” and the “poetic language” but not with the lack of schooling she experiences. Redfield, *Phantom Formations – Aesthetic Ideology and the ’Bildungsroman,’* 89.
despite multiple adverse factors, Mignon does become proficient enough to read out loud to Felix.\textsuperscript{812} The WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I girl’s knowledge of reading, speaking French, her interest in geography and her talent in singing and music allude to the education middle and upper class girls received in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{813} Boarding schools for girls with an open component for other students, like the one headed by Therese and Natalie, were common at that time.\textsuperscript{814} Middle and upper class girls who were not sent to schools were tutored at home. The narrative reveals that Mignon is clearly bright enough to be educated and cultivated to be a good daughter and to grow into a “complete” middle and upper class woman, if given the chance. Goethe probes through her the function and place of WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I children and youth in the nobility and bourgeoisie. Her story tells readers that there is no room for them in bourgeois nuclear families, but not, as a cursory reading may suggest, because WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I children, and particularly WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I girls of darker complexion, are not able to acquire “Bildung” or be “edel”\textsuperscript{815} (noble). On the contrary, Goethe’s novel very clearly rejects that interpretation, and instead puts the responsibility for WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I children, youth and adults, like Mehr does almost two hundred years later, into the hands of the “governing classes.” In addition, Goethe’s WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I girl is inadvertently used by the protagonist as a practice ground for his own future as a father. Mehr’s allusion to \textit{Lehrjahre} references herewith the many young caregivers in children’s homes, group homes, and orphanages who see WVHPKL/OHGFR\-I children and youth

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{812} Book 7, chapter 8: Goethe, \textquote{Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre,} 471ff.
  \item \textsuperscript{813} After elementary school, middle and upper class girls were, among other subjects, instructed in French language. In Erfurt, for example, the curriculum of a boarding school for nobility and middle class girls included natural sciences, mythology, geography, world and literary history, English, etc. as well as rules of courtesy and decency, and in how to be “good daughters” and to become “complete women,” i.e. “housemothers.” Petschauer, \textit{The Education of Women in Eighteenth-Century Germany: New Directions from the German Female Perspective – Bending the Ivy}, 162-66.
  \item \textsuperscript{814} In addition to the basic subjects, boys and girls were increasingly taught “Realien.” That is, subjects and handicrafts that would allow children to later master their daily life and help them to become part of society’s workforce. Sewing and spinning were, for example, “Realien” girls were taught.
  \item \textsuperscript{815} Schottlaender, \textquote{Das Kindsleid der Mignon und ihre Verwandtschaft mit Gretchen und Klärchen,} 86.
\end{itemize}
as a means to give something back before they, like Wilhelm, start their own family and their own career. This leaves many WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth like Mignon and Daskind with the sense that they are not good enough to be the caregivers’ or anybody’s child.816

2.3.3.6. Loss and to Not Belong

Having been separated from Felix, Mignon eventually resorts to the same coping mechanism she used years earlier, when the people who found her refused to bring her back home:

Es schwur darauf bei sich selbst einen heiligen Eid, daß sie künftig niemand mehr vertrauen, niemand ihre Geschichtete erzählen und in der Hoffnung einer unmittelbaren göttlichen Hülfe leben und sterben wolle.817

The child then swore within herself a sacred oath, that she would henceforth trust no human creature, would disclose her history to no one, but live and die in the hope of immediate aid from Heaven.818

Mignon’s choice to continue to wear the “angel dress” and her song “So laßt mich scheinen”819 “So let me seem”820 is a consistent implementation of that oath. The loss of Felix triggers the final aspect of it. That is, to die with the “immediate” help from Heaven. This also

818 Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 80ff. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 519. Blackall and Waidson make small changes in their translations of this passage.
820 Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 316. Waidson rephrases the statement and translates the entire line as, “So let me stay as I appear.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 394. Carlyle and Neilson translate “So laßt mich scheinen, bis ich werde” as “Such let me seem, till such I be.” Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 75. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 512.
explains why she, when she collapses seemingly the moment Therese and Wilhelm kiss, says, “‘Laß [das Herz] brechen!’ […] ‘es schlägt schon zu lange’” “Let [the heart] break!” […] ‘it has beat too long.’" Once Mignon is faced with the inevitability of losing the family she so longed for, she can no longer go on living. It is important to remember that this is the second time the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl loses her entire family, respectively the third time, if the separation from her mother is also considered as loss of family. When Wilhelm and Therese kiss to reaffirm their marriage promise, Felix makes sure he is not forgotten by pulling on Therese’s skirt and exclaiming, “Mutter Therese, ich bin auch da! “Mamma, Theresa, I am here too!” For all appearances, this signifies the inception of a bourgeois family and therefore the end of Wilhelm’s “apprenticeship,” which is argued by some scholars to be the reason why Mignon dies, be it, as problematized earlier, because she is in love with Wilhelm, or be it because neither protagonist nor narrative need her any longer. However, this reading is further contested by the questionable reasoning as to why Wilhelm receives his “Lehrbrief” “Certificate of Apprenticeship.” If marriage or the commitment to it were a crucial part of accomplishing the “Lehrbrief,” then the question emerges, why does Wilhelm receive his certificate of

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821 Italic by author of dissertation.
823 Italic by author of dissertation.
824 Book 8, chapter 5: Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 97. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 539. In an attempt to modernize the language, Blackall and Waidson lose some of the German original’s meaning. Blackall translates this phrase as, “It has been beating long enough!” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 333. Waidson translates this as, “It’s been beating too long anyway.” Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship,” 415.
825 The cited excerpts and phrases signify furthermore that Mignon would likely have died much earlier, had Wilhelm not bought her. Goethe references here the reality of many of Mignon’s real-life contemporaries.
apprenticeship before he asks Therese to be his wife? More importantly, it is Natalie, the woman of his dreams and desires, whom he eventually marries and who makes it possible that the protagonist “is reinstated into his inheritance,” and thus brings about the desired economic order, which is according to Claude Lévi-Strauss associated with marriage. Therefore, if Mignon really were nothing but a character solely created to personify the protagonist’s inner world and growth, then Goethe would have let her live long enough so that she could make some attempts to steer Wilhelm away from Therese and towards Natalie, similar to how she made attempts to steer him away from the theater. But this is not what happens, and Mignon dies before Wilhelm and Natalie marry. Furthermore, if one assumes that the narrative has an inner logic and that that inner logic continues to the novel’s end, then the highly perceptive WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl character with ostensibly unerring instincts could not have been drawn as being jealous of the wrong woman. As I have shown, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl does not die of jealousy or other emotional excesses linked to pubertal love. These are, I argue, the male phantasies of the middle and upper classes.

In this novel, where “Bildung” is essential to a good and successful bourgeois life, and where the lack of it signifies the end of life, Mignon dies because she does not receive true “Bildung.” That is, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl dies for lack of permanency, belonging, connection and parental love. In other words, she dies because she does not have family. Daskind’s allusions to Mignon show that not accepting a child as ones own not only means his or

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830 Wilhelm’s apprenticeship would have been over before they began, as he wanted to marry Mariane.
833 It is Schottlaender who argues that Mignon has highly developed instincts that guide her. Schottlaender, “Das Kindsleid der Mignon und ihre Verwandtschaft mit Gretchen und Klärchen.”

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her social disadvantages and possibly social death, as is the case for both of Mehr’s WVHPKL/OHGFR1 characters, but also that it can result in the child’s actual death, as is explored through Mignon.

2.3.3.7. Externalization: The “Zigeunermacher” (Making of “Gypsies”)

Mignon’s gender and ancestry are not the only reasons why she is not adopted by Wilhelm. Like Daskind, Mignon is drawn as a child with dark hair, dark eyes and dark complexion. Both WVHPKL/OHGFR1 girls are juxtaposed with a familied, or soon-to-be familied, child character with “goldenen Locken”834 “golden locks.”835 This juxtaposition plays on the cultural insinuations that are associated with the dyad “light versus dark.” These references are underscored when Felix’s sunny disposition and the boy’s “offenen Augen”836 (open eyes)837 are contrasted with Mignon’s gender ambiguous,838 “düstere[n] Gestalt”839, (somber figure),840 who barely speaks German and struggles with writing. Daskind’s allusions to Mignon highlight here how old and prevalent the distinction between “light” and “dark” as well

838 “Mignon” is French for “sweet” and “cute” and is used to describe male rather than female children, who would be called “Mignonne.”
840 Carlyle and Nielson circumscribe the word “düster” (sombre) and underscore that Mignon is a “dark” figure. Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels, 77. Neilson, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 87. Blackall stays closer to the German original. He translates this phrase as “sombre-looking young girl.” Blackall, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 50. Waidson, “Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship.”
as the preference of “light” over “dark” are. The portrayal of WVHPKL/OHGFR1 figures of darker complexion goes hand in hand with WVHPKL/OHGFR1 figures being read as children of “Gypsies,” as being dangerous, or as both. Daskind’s allusions to Mignon stress that the history of WVHPKL/OHGFR1 children and youth is a history of the dark haired, dark eyed and darker skinned people and of externalization of society’s own as “das Fremde” the “Other,” be it as foreigners, “Fahrende” (Travelers) or as “undesirables.” The figure Mignon is often read as a “Zigeunermädchen.” Lisa Lowe observes a similar process of labeling an “own” as “Other” in French and English literature in the context of colonialism. She shows how internal domestic challenges to social order were “figured and emplotted as foreign challenges.” I argue that the reading and creation of WVHPKL/OHGFR1 characters as “Gypsies” follows in non-colonial countries the same ideology as the one observed by Lowe.

The narrative’s vagueness about whether Mignon was stolen by the tight rope artists or not, alludes furthermore to the widespread tale that “Gypsies” snatched “our” children. This inversion of reality does not only cover up that “Gypsy” children were already in the eighteenth century, alongside “non-Gypsy” children, placed in Christian institutions, and that their parents

841 The figuration of the familied blond character versus the un-familied character of darker complexion can be found in many literary works containing WVHPKL/OHGFR1. Also, fair children have to this day a higher chance of being adopted than those of darker complexion.


843 Ibid., 125-186. Breger devotes several sub-chapters to the depiction and creation of Mignon as a “Gypsy” girl.


845 That this myth is still around, as is the powerful juxtaposition of “light versus dark” is shown in a more recent article. Oksana Marafioti, “Actually, Stealing Children Isn’t Our Favorite Pastime – We have enough children of our own, thank you. And ethnicity alone is not a crime,” Time, October 23, 2013, http://ideas.time.com/2013/10/23/roma-writer-actually-stealing-children-isnt-our-favorite-pastime/.
desperately tried to “steal” them back, but also that many children of the bourgeoisie and nobility were, like Mignon, neglected and abandoned. Mignon, it is important to remember, could not have been stolen were it not for her caregivers’ neglectfulness, and the moral customs that engendered her grandparents’ actions and determined her parents’ lives. Daskind’s allusions to Mignon suggest that the long-standing propaganda of “‘Gypsies’ stealing ‘our’ children” had by the twentieth century turned into the tale of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth being “rescued” from their parents, many of whom were considered to have a vagabonding and morally debouched lifestyle.

As discussed earlier, abandonment was a widespread problem that affected not only the poor. Exact data about child abandonment in eighteenth century Europe is still scarce and limited to individual cities and institutions. Historical data shows, however, that in the second half of the eighteenth century a large number of children were abandoned in Mignon’s birth country, Italy, some from married couples. In regard to gender, the figure Mignon alludes to the fact

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847 Nevertheless, historians speak of a common trend across Europe, which unfolded over generations and centuries. See Hunecke, “The abandonment of legitimate children in the nineteenth-century Milan and the European context,” 119ff. The process started to unfold from Italy, to France, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, the German countries, the Netherlands and Russia. As early as the eighth century, Italy, the dominion of the Catholic Church, is the first European country known to have opened foundling homes to address the issue of abandoned children. Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor - Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*, 9. Foundling homes were foremost urban institutions, which meant that baby transports existed from rural regions to cities, and if necessary across national borders. The systems dealing with infant abandonment were shaped by the Church’s ideology and their practice of regulating society and its members’ sexuality. Seminal were the ideas and convictions that children only be raised by married couples, that all babies be baptized, and that abortion and infanticide as a means to preserve family honor be stopped. The numbers of abandoned children is ample evidence that many did not live according to the Church’s doctrines. In France, the intermediaries who collected abandoned babies for transfer were called “faiseuses d’anges” (angel makers). Kertzer states, “the same term might have been applied in Italy, given the slender chance their little passengers had of surviving the journey.” Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor, Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*, 144. Boswell provides an excellent introduction to the subject of child abandonment and societies’ reactions to it, from late antiquity to the renaissance. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 17.
848 Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor - Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*. 74. Kertzer estimates that abandoned babies comprised in Rome approximately 23% of all births.
that, for example in Naples, more girls than boys were abandoned. Like Daskind almost two centuries later, these children were dropped off at designated places. While Britain externalized some of its growing numbers of children in need to the colonies, Switzerland and other European countries externalized children and youth ideologically as “Other,” and placed these children as “Verding,” in institutions and foster families. This process of “Othering” functions as a dissociation of the upper from the lower classes to prevent the former’s decline of their social position and status.

Daskind’s allusions to Mignon highlight that as long as society could (and can) argue that any dire and from the norm deviating situation is due to a different culture, ethnicity or race, and therefore of the people’s own making, i.e., “fault,” dominant society did (and does) not have to do anything but to defend its boundaries. Mehr argues that this “logic” is applied to WVHPKL/OHGFRI children. That is, as long as WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth can be othered, they are not treated as societies “own children and youth.” In other words, rather than dealing with societal problems such as misogyny and sexual violence, lack of rights for women, children and minorities, to name a few, these children and youth were sent off to colonies, or marginalized (and still are) within society’s borders, by placing them with “strangers” and keeping them in lower standing.

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849 Ibid., 92. He bases his conclusions on data from the charitable institution Annunziata in Naples, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.
850 Unlike many of them, Mignon was not brought to a foundling home but placed privately with a family, which increased her chance of survival manifolds. Kertzer provides a vivid account of the conditions foundlings lived and died in Naples’s ospizio. He stresses that the survival chance of foundlings who were taken in by a family was significantly higher. Kertzer, Sacrificed for Honor - Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control, 125.
2.3.4. Monster versus Role Model

Unlike Goethe, who chooses a male adult as protagonist to explore “Bildung,” culture and development of self, and who uses a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child as a supporting character to address some aspects therefrom, Mehr creates a WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl as her protagonist and makes the long and often silenced history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people the main topic of her novel, with “Bildung,” culture and development of self as elements thereof. She subverts and critiques Goethe’s canonical script for highly conforming and aesthetic supporting roles for WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls: despite the challenges Mignon faces, she morphs more and more into a role model as the novel unfolds. She comes, for example, to the rescue of Wilhelm851 and assists him otherwise; she saves Felix’s life and cares for him, and she is eventually dressed up as an angel who brings birthday gifts to twin girls. As the female “Gegengestalt” (counter figure) of “Knecht Ruprecht”852 “Knecht Rupert”853 and as the bearer of gifts, Mignon is linked to “St. Nikolaus”854 (St. Nicholas) and the “Christkind” (Christ Child), two figures who sacrifice what they have for the betterment of others; St. Nicholas his wealth and Jesus his life. In contrast, instead of internalizing pain and anger, Daskind externalizes her pain and vitriolic anger by becoming violent, and does not die, even though Frieda, one of her main caretakers, never touches her and does not show any loving care: “[Frieda, d]ie Daskind nie züchtigte, es nie berührte, nicht im Zorn, nicht in Zärtlichkeit”855 (Frieda, who never chastised Daskind, never touched “it,” not in anger, not in affection). Like Mehr’s Daskind, Mignon is made a sacrificial lamb, but unlike the

854 The historical St. Nicholas distributed his wealth among the poor.
855 Mehr, Daskind, 90.
twenty-century protagonist, the eighteen-century supporting character pays with her life. However, the novel’s allusions to Mignon highlight also that if Goethe’s Mignon is read independently and autonomously from the protagonist, she becomes recognizable as a WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl, and readers discover that she “talks back.” Moreover, her story becomes a “Bildungsroman” within THE “Bildungsroman” with Mignon as the protagonist, who not only acquires “Bildung” but also promotes “Bildung” in readers, as defined by Morgenstern’s second point. In addition to the hero’s education, Morgenstern further underscores the pedagogical and the social importance of the “Bildungsroman.” He states: “weil er gerade durch diese Darstellung des Lesers Bildung in weiterem Umfang als jede andere Art des Romans fördert” “this depiction promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel.”

In a collection of essays on literature and values Sibylle Baumbach et al. argue that

856 Mignon, the angel (italic by author of dissertation) who dies, reminds scholars of German literature of another female WVHPKL/OHGFRI child figure in German fiction who turns into a role model and then dies. That is, Pavel’s sister Milada in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s poetic-realism novel Das Gemeindekind (1887, Their Pavel, 1996). Milada and Pavel, the children of a vagabonding brick-maker and violent drunk and a devout mother end up in the care of a rural Austrian community that does not want them, after their father is sentenced to death by hanging for killing a local priest, and their mother to ten years of hard labour. Subsequently, the trusting and friendly Milada is taken in by the Lady of the Manor who, fully aware of the community’s nineteenth century “Verdingsystem” knows that the girl “geht zu Grunde bei Euch,” “will go to ruin in your [the community’s] hands.” Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Das Gemeindekind, ed. Rainer Baasner (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1983), 9. Ebner-Eschenbach, Their Pavel, trans. Lynne Tatlock (Columbia: Camden House, 1996), 5. Like Mignon, Milada is never fully adopted and dies before she can become a threat to social order. That is, Mignon dies before she enters puberty and can develop into a bride and head her own household, or if she were not to marry, to become another “beautiful soul.” Milada dies before she can enter the order and succeed on her path of becoming the monastery’s future abbess. Both, Mignon and Milada dedicate their lives to God. They outdo themselves in becoming the most perfect female member of the community they live in. In the end, this means for the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls that they die.

857 Interestingly, the same scholars who read Mignon as a crucial element of the “Bildungsroman” completely disregard her own “Bildung”-journey and the “Bildung” she promotes in the reader.


“society does not only rely on literature for the dissemination of its values [and knowledge] but also uses it for the affirmation of its moral concepts and social norms.”

This is strongly expressed in the existence of the literary canon. As part of German-language Europe’s high school and university curricula, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and its secondary literature have been, and continue to be, part of the discursive process of negotiating, reflecting, reaffirming or critiquing norms, values and social power structures, and of what is considered a “good life.”

The question that needs to be asked is whether a reading of Mignon as a purely symbolic “Kunstfigur,” mirror or structural element without any import in her own right can be maintained. The answer is no. To continue to deny Mignon to be a character that represents WVHPKL/OHGFRI people in the extra-literary world means to deny their history, their real-life experiences, their exploitation, struggles and achievements. Scholars, who ignore Mignon’s own words, reiterate social power structures in which the voice of a female WVHPKL/OHGFRI child means little to nothing. They turn the doctor’s and Natalie’s accounts along with Wilhelm’s uneasy feelings about his unidentified, amorous visitor into a tale that fits best with society’s prejudice, namely, to sexualise and “gypsinise” WVHPKL/OHGFRI females, as well as with the commonly accepted understanding of the novel. Moreover, their reading also means that the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl is not even allowed to exist in art. That is, Mignon is even in art only seen as a servant to the dominant culture and class. This is in itself a form of exploitation and

862 *Ödipus, Verbrecher aus verlorenen Ehre, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Die Judenbuche, Das Gemeindekind, Lulu* and more recently *Das Parfum*, to name just a few, were all at some point, and most still are, part of German Europe’s high school and university curricula. As such, they disseminate pictures and perceptions of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.
diminishes of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people and their stories.\textsuperscript{864} Mehr’s allusions to Mignon stress herewith literature’s complicity in the cultural creation of a certain type of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

2.4. MEHR’S WRITING TECHNIQUES

Letztlich gehört die literarische Form zur politischen Botschaft des Inhalts.

\textit{Mariella Mehr (1990)}\textsuperscript{865}

(Ultimately, the literary form is part of the content’s political message.)

After analyzing the novel through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens with a focus on Mehr’s historical, international, socio-cultural and literary allusions, I now turn to the structural and stylistic analysis to discuss other writing techniques the author employs in \textit{Daskind} to problematize and explore the long and international history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

\textsuperscript{864} How common this approach still is in the year \textit{Daskind} was published is revealed when briefly considering the reception of the novel \textit{Parfum}. Scholars such as Bradley Butterfield read Grenouille as enlightenment’s other (405), his function in the text is “to uncover the positive value of the text’s negativity.” (403) Butterfield argues, “[t]he fact that Süskind does not illustrate a positive solution to enlightenment but only its negative conclusion […] is what separates his own art from that of Grenouille’s, which turns enlightenment into death with the false promise of identity.” (416) He concludes, “successful modern works represent the world as it is, \textit{in its essence} with the implicit admission that “things ought not be this way.” (416) The fact that a WVHPKL/OHGFRI figure is used as the epitome of negativity, as the criminal, the fascist artist (414), as a figure who “in terms of formation of identity resembles the SS and SA executioner” (408) in order to make this critique of enlightenment, Facism and entertainment, is completely ignored. Bradley Butterfield, Enlightenment’s Other in Patrick Süskind’s “Das Parfum”: Adorno and the Ineffable Utopia of Modern Art,” \textit{Comparative Literature Studies} 32, no. 3 (1995).

\textsuperscript{865} Mehr, “Frauenmut,” 177.
2.4.1. Writing Devices

2.4.1.1. Literature Reviews

The novel’s literary reviews emphasized from the very beginning Mehr’s exceptional narrative skills. The author was recognized for developing a new language for each of her books, and praised for how she crafts “Rhythmus, Ton und Bilder” (rhythm, tone and images) into a powerful language in Daskind. Bucheli, for example, identified the novel’s style as “eine lyrisch verdichtete Prosa” (a lyrically condensed prose). Other reviewers recognized the spartan “Kunstsprache,” which Mehr develops to express the protagonist’s muteness, as Mehr’s signature style of her literary art, and as a means to convey the banality of evil in an apparently idyllic environment. Her literary technique has already been compared by Tebbutt to the “urexpressionist” Georg Büchner and to writers and artists of the early twentieth century Expressionist period. Other reviewers drew a connection between Mehr’s

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866 Döbler, “Silberherz stirbt.” Bucheli, “Die Lust an der Selbstpreisgabe; Mariella Mehr im Werkstattgespräch.”
868 Corina Caduff ascribes Mehr’s autonomous voice in her texts to the centrality of violence in her work. Corina Caduff, “Zeus oder der Zwillingston,” Neue Zürcher Zeitung – Kultur, August 6, 2006. Other critics, for example, Pulver refer to the author’s childhood experiences as a reason for the text’s intensity, and credibility. Pulver, “Steinkind; Mariella Mehrs neuer Roman.”
872 Tebbutt, “Reisefertig, die Heimat im Arm’: Mariella Mehr and her distinctive delight in words,” 307.
fierce, expressive and unrelenting voice, to the voices of Helene Meier,\textsuperscript{873} Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan.\textsuperscript{874} Von Matt classified Mehr as belonging to the group of female Swiss authors of the nineteen nineties, who made language and composition their writings’ guiding principles rather than focusing on self-discovery, confessional writing or the roles of women.\textsuperscript{875}

Finnan and Hӓntzschel analyzed \textit{Daskind} for literary devices\textsuperscript{876} and aptly concluded that the author employs various techniques to disturb the text’s rhythm so the portrayed violence cannot be misused as entertainment.\textsuperscript{877} In addition, Finnan suggested that Mehr’s break with standard German grammar is a transgressive act with which the author opposes state authorities, who employ this language.\textsuperscript{878} Hӓntzschel recognized statements such as, “Im Kind denkt’s ans Töten” (in Daskind “it” thinks of killing),\textsuperscript{879} and the text’s intensity as Mehr’s way to give voice to the mute and neglected child protagonist and to convey the devastation that the mostly negative experiences wreak on this character.\textsuperscript{880} Building on their work, I show in the following chapter sections how Mehr employs different literary devices to unveil the often-overlooked history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults.

\textsuperscript{873} The actual citation is: “Was die Unerbitterlichkeit und Heftigkeit des Tons angeht, liessse sich Mariella Mehr […] als jüngere Verwandte von Helen Meier verstehen.” Beatrice von Matt, \textit{Frauen schreiben die Schweiz} (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1998), 83.
\textsuperscript{875} von Matt, \textit{Frauen schreiben die Schweiz}, 104ff.
\textsuperscript{877} Häntzschel, “Im Kind denkt’s ans Töten. Mariella Mehrs düsterer Roman Daskind.” See also: Döbler, “Silberherz stribt.”
\textsuperscript{878} The use of high-German by state authorities can be seen as a sign of oppression. Finnan, “From Survival to Subversion: strategies of Self-Representation in Selected Works by Mariella Mehr,” 149.
\textsuperscript{879} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 112.
\textsuperscript{880} Häntzschel, “Im Kind denkt’s ans Töten. Mariella Mehrs düsterer Roman Daskind.”
2.4.1.2. Literary Devices

In a first step, I briefly introduce and discuss those techniques which are visually distinguishable from the page. They are employed to underscore and mirror the discontinuity, disruption and violence the protagonist experiences. I then turn my focus of investigation to literary devices which are not marked off from the embedding text. All of the examined devices are meant to slow down the reading process and to prevent readers from identifying too closely with the novel’s figures, in particular with the protagonist. Readers are instead prompted to pay attention, question what they just read and to engage in research if terms, phrases or historical references are unclear or unknown. This results in a “Verfremdungseffekt,” which has been translated as “distancing effect,” “estrangement effect” or “alienation effect.” Many of the techniques Mehr employs in this narrative function also as a way of bringing readers close to the text so they cannot read over things or turn away short of closing the book and putting it aside. The novel convinces precisely as a literary problematization and account of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults because the narrative oscillates skillfully between the poles of emotional distance and closeness. The high numbers of literary devices used in Daskind function itself as a literary technique. They disrupt the reading flow and prevent that a discernible pattern can occur. This mirrors the unpredictability Daskind as well as the child, youth and adult Armin Lacher experience in their lives, and alludes to the many forms of non-permanency and lack of stability WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth endure. Many of the novel’s literary devices are multiply coded.

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881 I focus here on literary devices which have not been specifically mentioned in previous chapters.
882 “Verfremdungseffekt” has been translated as “distancing effect,” “estrangement effect” or “alienation effect.” This signifies a link to the political author Berthold Brecht.
2.4.1.2.1 Literary Devices that Effect the Novel’s Structure

Blank Lines - Text Segments and Vignettes

Visually all but chapter sixteen are subdivided by blank lines into two, three, or four pieces of text segments or vignettes similar to how scenes in a movie are separated by “cuts.” The blank lines in combination with text passages and vignettes signify the discontinuity and non-permanency of the protagonist’s life story. The blank lines cut the narrative into pieces, signifying the broken stories this text tells. The narrative’s segments and vignettes represent on an individual and societal level shards of memories separated by the cuts, i.e. blank lines. Daskind, for example, literally draws a “blank” when she tries to remember when she was “ins Haus geholt”\(^ {883}\) (brought into the house). She cannot create a concise story of her life and neither can anybody else, as nobody has been consistently in her life. Similarly, Lacher cannot “order,” i.e. make sense of, his life. The blank lines, moreover, represent gaps in society’s cultural memory and historical records. To this day, there exist only bits and pieces of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. In addition, the blank lines signify the invisibility of the challenges WVHPKL/OHGFRI people face. They further allude to the challenges real-life WVHPKL/OHGFRI people face to this day, namely, in accessing records about themselves and their families, contacting former caretakers as

\(^ {883}\) Mehr, Daskind, 17.
well as the agencies that were involved in their care and placements. This is another layer how these people are made family-less, and shows how their own history is withheld from them.\textsuperscript{884}

**Poetry Inserts**

*Daskind* has several lyric insertions interspersed throughout the narrative. The poetry inserts are distinctive textual elements, which are different in nature from the embedding text and capture as such the readers’ attention and highlight visually the importance of what is being said. They draw readers close to the figures, mainly to the protagonist, and give insight into their thoughts and desires. They, furthermore, underscore the difference between the genres and allude herewith to Goethe’s Mignon and *Lehrjahre*. Mehr’s lyric insertions are her own and not taken from anterior texts, although some do allude to other texts, and in doing so stress the link to other countries and centuries even further. The author’s inserts are free verses, and some of them are grouped in two or more stanzas.\textsuperscript{885} Some are connected to the rest of the text via enjambments and anadiplosis.\textsuperscript{886} Mehr’s lyrical insertions evince heightened expressions of feelings. They are told from different narrative perspectives, the majority through the authorial point of view employing third person subjective voice, and one from Frieda’s perspective in the form of free indirect speech. When read on their own, they tell in a very concise form a story of trial and tribulation of some of the worst kind, but also of strength, resistance and standing up for oneself.

\textsuperscript{884} Switzerland, for example, has made great efforts since 2013 to secure files of former WVHPKL people. However, many of the files have been destroyed before the new regulations were implemented. Canada currently keeps the files of their wards of the state only for a few years. The practice of how long and how well files are stored is important, as these files are often needed as proof of having been a ward of the state and to access support.

\textsuperscript{885} Not included are here “Single Lines” and the telegram-style paragraph discussed under “Capitalization of Each Word.”

\textsuperscript{886} Anadiplosis is the repetition of the last word of a preceding clause. The word used at the end of a sentence is used to open the next sentence.
The last two poetry inserts allude to a love story and happy ending and thus seduce readers to keep reading:

**Love Story:**
Frieda’s perspective
free indirect speech
... ei-
er wie Lacher,
ach Lacher, in seinen Armen.  

Happy Ending:
authorial voice
third person subjective

Hat Daskind einen Frieden gefunden.
Lächelt wieder, Daskind.  

It is not until one reads the entire novel that readers realize that the love story is inverted, as is the happy ending. The narrative stresses herewith once more that not all is, as it seems, especially not when it comes to so-called “foster care.” Therefore, readers need a strong commitment to uncover the real stories behind the easily visible, i.e. readable surface narratives.

**Capitalization of Each Word**

The telegram-style paragraph, in which the first letter of each word is capitalized, can remind readers of a photographer’s lens that zooms in and takes a series of stills on a high shutter speed setting. The verbal snapshots are put together as a free verse with elements of metre and repetition. The latter imprints a sense of urgency. The insert is told as interior monologue from

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887 Mehr, *Daskind*, 216.
888 Ibid., “224.” Hover, the actual page number “224” is missing. This style of numbering seems to be typical for texts published by *Zytglogge*, as the same pattern occurs in other Mehr texts that were published with *Zytglogge*.  

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Daskind’s perspective. The capitalized words remind readers of nouns and give each word extra weight. They function, furthermore, as an allusion to the infamous murderer and WVHPKL/OHGFRI figure Grenouille. *Parfum*’s protagonist spoke as a child rarely in full sentences. Instead he developed an olfactory vocabulary, which consists mainly of nouns, to describe the scent of things.\(^{889}\)

Readers witness in this passage the protagonist’s expert use of the slingshot, and a step-by-step insight into how the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl kills a blackbird. The text leaves no doubt that Daskind’s actions are a reaction to the violence she experiences. As a whole, the paragraph reads like an incantation. On the one hand, it is for Daskind an incantation to ban feelings of fear and a sense of powerlessness, particularly of feeling powerless against the abuse. On the other hand, the paragraph’s words evoke a fairy tale-like world where Daskind finds some measure of peace and calm. Furthermore, this scene foreshadows the one describing how she shoots the sexton.

\[
\text{Fest Jetzt [...] Spannt Jetzt [...] Spannt Fester Noch Fester Fühlt Stein Fühlt Hand…}^{890}
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\[
\text{Tight Now [...] Draws Now [...] Draws Tighter Still Tighter Feels Stone Feels Hand…}
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\(^{890}\) Mehr, *Daskind*, 30.
“Single Lines”

When read separately from the embedding text, “single lines” create another poetry insert, namely, a free verse that reiterates what happens in this novel. They tell how Daskind is abused, how she responds, how her suffering is unknown and/or ignored. The novel, however, does not ignore her suffering, nor that these are the reasons why Daskind resorts to the “Steinschleuder” (sling shot) and why the novel is written the way it is:

Also, Daskind. 891
Treten. 892
Will weinen. 893
Auch dieser Tag nimmt sein Ende. 894
Geschafft. 895
Aber vom Kind mit der Schleuder. 896
Also die Steinschleuder. 897

Therefore Daskind.
To kick.
Wants to cry.
This day too ends.
To be home free.
But about the child with the sling shot.
Therefore the slingshot.

When read as one poem, the single lines serve as a strong allusion to the Biblical story of David and Goliath, and stress the struggle this story tells. Like David, Daskind is fighting against an overwhelming power, in her case, the familied, majority society, which seems to perceive her predominantly as “other.” Furthermore, the single lines underscore that the history of

891 Ibid., 5.
892 Ibid., 11.
893 Ibid., 43.
894 Ibid., 135.
895 Ibid., 147.
896 Ibid., 218.
897 Ibid., 218.
WVHPKL/OHGFRI people and the WVHPKL/OHGFRI people themselves are often not worth more than one line. The “single lines” function moreover as commentaries. They too interrupt the reading process. Many of the “single lines” function as covert titles of what is about to come. Others express a pseudo-casualness, as if there were no need to say more than what was just revealed, when, in fact, the paragraph leading up to the laconic summary opens up more questions than it answers. On one occasion, a “single line” bridges two chapter sections separated by a blank line:

Covered titles: Aber vom Kind mit der Steinschleuder. 898
But about the child with the slingshot.

Pseudo-casualness: Also Daskind. 899
Therefore Thechild.

Bridge: Auch dieser Tag nimmt sein Ende. 900
This day too ends.

**Capitalization of Entire Words**

The biblical words “DER HERR” (THE LORD) accentuate the overall importance of Catholicism in *Daskind* and underscore the abuse of people’s, and especially children’s, faith and spirituality. In this novel, people are taught to believe that God the Father, the Lord and Master, sees everything, most importantly every sin, and rules over everyone, especially whether one enters heaven or hell after one’s passing. The fatherless, young female protagonist starts to

898 Mehr, *Daskind*, 218.
899 Ibid., 5
900 Ibid., 135.
901 Ibid., 111.
believe that she must be faulty, that she must be “sin” since the world she lives in is an endless living hell orchestrated by the masters, lords and fathers, in short, by the “Gods” of her world. When read through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens, the phrase “DER HERR” highlights the interconnection between “Verdingung” and placement in foster families, and underscores the role Churches, Catholic as well as Protestant, played worldwide and throughout centuries in the lives of child and youth wards in their care.

2.4.1.2.2 Other Literary Devices

In the following, I analyze only those literary devices that, although embedded in the text, differ from recognized standard German language. They signify, as formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, a break with the unitarity, authority and hierarchic concepts of the described society.

Conflated Phrases and Compounds

Mehr creates for Daskind compound words as well as conflated phrases in which the blank spaces are omitted. The latter are a means for the author to draw readers as close as possible to a figure’s, mostly the protagonist’s, experiences. Sentences written as one word deny readers the opportunity to stop and step away from that statement. This mirrors, for example in the case of Daskind, experiences of being unable to escape the anger and violence associated with certain interpellations. When read through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens, these conflated phrases signify WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth’s experiences of deprivation and loss of authority and, as
shown earlier, their reality of not being able to escape the violence which seems often to be an integral part of this system.

Compound phrase: …Ichwilldirzeigenwerhierderherrimhausist,…

…Iwillshowyouwhoisheretheremastertothehouse,…

As already mentioned by other scholars, Mehr develops for this novel a wide range of compound words. The compounds create associative links, for example, between different characters, and between things and characters. Within the framework of WVHPKL/OHGFR1 studies, the compounds function as a means to conflate multiple references to various aspects of Daskind’s life. So for example the expression “Daskind”, or the one-word sentence “Kindfüralle” (Childforeverybody), which expresses how harmful it is to be nobody’s child. The author establishes multiple links between Jesus, the Bible and Daskind’s suffering. The expression “Silbereltern” (silver-parents) links the foster parents, via Judas’ betrayal, to the suffering of the silvery shining Jesus on the cross. Compounds such as “Schmerzzerfressen” (Eatenbypain) and “Haßzerfressen” (Eatenbyhatred) give voice to the girl’s emotional state. Furthermore, compounds are another way for Mehr to allude to other literary texts, so for example through the phrase “Nimmerwald” (Neverforest) to Peter Pan’s Neverland. Compounds are

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902 Ibid., 197.
903 Ibid., 7.
904 Ibid., 6.
905 The figure Daskind and her suffering are in the text compared to Jesus and his suffering.
906 Ibid., 113.
907 Ibid.
908 Ibid., 29.
909 Daskind is herewith identified as an inversion of the Peter Pan story, as the shadow side of Neverland, and is a direct allusion to the Kaspar Hauser Syndrome.
also a way to give readers insight into a character’s psyche: for example through the aptronym “Freudenstau”\textsuperscript{910} (Joydam).

These compounds serve to highlight how difficult and dangerous the situation is Daskind lives in.

\textbf{Corrective Allusions}

Corrective allusions are in Mehr’s novel employed to conflate the meaning of several culturally important concepts into one phrase. The phrase “In dieser Nacht voll schwirrender Narrenlichter”\textsuperscript{911} (in this night full of whirring Jester lights), is in Mehr’s narrative part of a free verse which alludes to Goethe’s \textit{Erlkönig} (1782).\textsuperscript{912} By replacing the term “Irrlichter” (Ignes Fatui) with “Narrenlichter,” a term best translated as Jester-lights, i.e. the lights of the Jester, it is underscored that unlike the Jester who is allowed to speak the truth, WVHPKL/OHGFRI children or youth were in many cases not allowed to do so. The term “Narrenlichter” functions as an associative link to “crazy” and “stupid.” These two classifications were frequently applied to WVHPKL/OHGFRI people to justify their internment in psychiatric clinics or other institutions. If a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child, youth or adult did tell the truth, they were at best not believed, which signifies a symbolic death.\textsuperscript{913} More often they had to endure additional punishment. This and the consequences thereof are further underscored in the paraphrasing of the term

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{910} Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{911} Ibid., 104.
\item \textsuperscript{912} In this eighteenth century poem, a caring father carries his sick son home and tries to reassure him that there is nothing to fear. Upon arrival, the father discovers that his son had died.
\item \textsuperscript{913} This is one reading of \textit{Erlkönig}.
\end{itemize}
“Klagemauer” (Wailing Wall) as “Schweigemauer”\(^{914}\) (Wall of Silence). This corrective allusion stresses the cultural void and silence WVHPKL/OHGFRI people have lived in, and in many cases still live in, and how their pleas and stories fell, and often continue to fall, on deaf ears.

\textit{Daskind} is a critique of the Church and stresses the deep suffering society’s double standard and the abuse of faith causes. To show how damaging and damaged the protagonist’s environment is, the narrator conflates, for example, two lines from the Lord’s Prayer into a prayer Daskind or any abused child would say: “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” is in \textit{Daskind} rephrased as “Herr, erlöse mich von der Versuchung”\(^{915}\) (Lord, deliver me from temptation). This once more reiterates the Church’s complicity in un-familizing children and youth and in creating WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

\textbf{Direct Speech}

There are only two phrases in the entire novel that are marked as direct speech. This underscores their significance for the text’s message. One of the two statements is, “«Man habe es ja nur gut gemeint»”\(^{916}\) (After all, one only meant well). Interestingly, this phrase is murmured and not exclaimed out loud. The statement is made by Keller Marie’s mother who represents from the outside the ideal middle class woman, with the “ideal” family. The in the meantime almost historical phrase “Man habe es ja nur gut gemeint” was used by those in charge of the care of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and people as an apparent apology and explanation, but is in reality

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\(^{914}\) Mehr, \textit{Daskind}, 163.
\(^{915}\) Ibid., 145.
\(^{916}\) Ibid., 163.
a defense and a plea for forgiveness and understanding before the extent and magnitude of the damage and violation is acknowledged and recognized.

The novel stresses the double standard of “well-meaning” citizens and their actions. Kari’s regular beatings, for example, are done full of “well-meaning,” as they are to ensure that Daskind turns into an upstanding citizen. Pastor Knobel too “means only well” when he takes the protagonist to task to ensure she carries the burden God allegedly demands that everybody carry, as does Pater Laurentius when he performs an exorcism on her, to free “it” from the devil. Frieda too “means only well” when she gives the strict instructions to cut the protagonist’s hair extra short, so the young WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl would not entice desire in others and herself.

The second phrase, which is put in indirect speech, “«Daskind bedürfe weiterer Gebete und frommer Inbrunst, wolle man das Werk Pater Laurentius’ nicht gefährden»”917 (Daskind is in need of further prayer and devout fervour, if one does not want to put Pater Laurentius’ work at risk)918 underscores the deep seated belief that “one” has to continue on as before to be successful in the “care” of Daskind, i.e. of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth. Both sentences are not addressing the protagonist directly, but signify how adults talk about her. This mirrors the lack of communication between adults responsible for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth, and those children and youth, how little say those “in the care” of the state or community have over their own lives, as well as how strongly and completely their lives are managed and governed.

917 Ibid.
918 The narrator alludes here to preparatory work to perform exorcism.
Latin

“Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi”\textsuperscript{919} (Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world). Mehr alerts readers with this phrase of the Lamb of God invocation to a chapter in which the Church’s complicity in perpetuating and at times engendering abuse is exposed. The phrase “Agnus Dei”\textsuperscript{920} is repeated towards the end of the chapter and functions herewith also as a bracket framing the culturally sanctioned violence. Furthermore, the phrase is used metaphorically to describe Daskind’s function as the perfect and ultimate sacrificial lamb for other people’s sins. Intrinsic to this imagery is Daskind’s innocence, which stands in stark contrast to the villagers’ belief that she is “dem Teufel ab dem Karren”\textsuperscript{921} (off the Devil’s chart) and a danger to everyone. Like Jesus, the Lamb of God, Daskind is drafted as the village’s scapegoat. Mehr argues, through \textit{Daskind}, that WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth function as living scapegoats and sacrificial lambs, literally embodying, as well as paying for society’s sins and wrongs. And like the scapegoat, they are sent into the “social dessert” where they have to fend for themselves and receive “God’s” judgment. This means for many a social or even physical death. The narrative alludes herewith to the lack of support WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults received and the negative consequences this has on their chances to survive and move ahead in life.

\textbf{Missing Parts of Speech}

Mehr employs a proliferation of one-word sentences, two-word sentences and incomplete three-word sentences. They are found anywhere in a paragraph, at the beginning, at

\textsuperscript{919} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{920} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{921} Ibid., 12.
the end or somewhere in-between, or on a line of their own. Many are repetitions, or function as a summary of what was just described. At first, they often cause bewilderment. Because they force readers to linger where one does not want to, these incomplete sentences are a tool to bring readers closer to the text. However, they also function as “verbal blank lines,” with the same consequences for readers as “blank lines.” True to Mehr’s political style of writing, the missing grammatical elements provide clues as to what is portrayed within the narrative. The following example shows phrases which highlight that something is wrong with the connections in this text, namely, that the relationships in this story are broken:

Das Geschick fühlt sich sicher geborgen im Kind.\textsuperscript{922}

Destiny feels secure / certainly safe in the child.

The manifold meanings of “sicher,” namely, “secure,” “safe,” “certainly,” “for sure,” and “reliable” in connection with the terms “Das Geschick” (destiny) and “Kind” (child) allows for two possible readings. If we read the sentence as it is, then it translates into the shocking statement, (destiny feels certainly safe in the child). Another possible interpretation of this sentence is that it misses the conjunction. This reading underscores the missing connections in the text, in particular the missing connections in Daskind’s life. In this case, the sentence translates as, (destiny feels safe and secure in the child). Readers, I argue, are meant to perceive both meanings in order to understand how much is really wrong in the portrayed society.

The author employs the technique of missing parts of speech, furthermore, to show how boundaries are violated, how that violation echoes throughout Daskind’s psyche, and how causalities are omitted to hide the causes which effect certain experiences and behaviours:

\textsuperscript{922} Ibid., 130.
Penetrates the poison the pores, through all orifices, spreads foreign world in the child, feels Thechild unravels.

In this prose poetry, the object, “poison” is the sentence’s grammatical subject, while Daskind, a human subject is the sentence’s grammatical object. This “objectifying” of the protagonist carries throughout the phrase and mirrors on a grammatical level what the WVHPKL/OHGFRl girl experiences, including her deep and profound isolation from the rest of the “human world.” The last section of this four phrase prose poetry evokes a brief moment of hope, where readers can believe that somebody “spürt,” (senses, perceives, sees) Daskind and what she experiences. However, that hope is quickly destroyed as one continues on reading and realizes that “zerfranst” (unravel) is here not linked to an empathic subject but instead states the simple fact of what happens to Daskind.

Neologisms

Mehr is known for creating a plethora of neologisms. Many of them are multiply coded. Word creations such as “Sündenkind” 924 (sinchild), “Steinkind” 925 (Stonechild) and “Winterbalg”926 (Winterbantling) help convey the prejudice the WVHPKL/OHGFRl character experiences. Neologisms such as “Winterkind”927 (Winterchild) “Dornenkind”928 (Thornschild),

923 Ibid., 96.
924 Ibid., 185.
925 Ibid., 177.
926 Ibid., 7.
927 Ibid., 7, 102.
“Kindfüralle” 929 (Childforeveryone) as well as “Steinkind” 930 (Stonechild) express the protagonist’s emotional experiences and the utter desolation she feels. 931 Neologism, such as “Sündenkind” 932 (sinchild), “Dornenkind” 933 (Thornschild) and “Winterbalg” 934 (Winerbantling) functions as allusion to Christian notions of “abnormal,” and “asocial.” As all the here listed neologisms are used to label the protagonist and in lieu of a name, they provide important insight to the environment and conditions the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl lives in.

Swiss German and Anachronistic Terms

The use of Swiss German phrases such as “gsund isch’s” 935 (it’s healthy) and “Bsitz isch Bsitz” 936 (Property is Property), as well as of outmoded or Swiss-German terms such as “verdingt” 937 (contracted-out) “im Tenn” 938 (in the barn) signify a specific sociolect which links the unveiled subjugated history resurrected in this text to a specific country, namely to Switzerland. Moreover, it indicates the local character of this criticism as theorized by Foucault.

The Swiss German terms make the point that the “establishment” which is proficient in what was for the longest time known as “High-German,” does not know, or does not want to know, what happens with and to those who are traditionally considered the class-less, the uneducated, as well

928 Ibid., 116.
929 Ibid., 7.
930 Ibid., 177.
931 See also Compounds, Corrective Allusions.
932 Ibid., 185.
933 Ibid., 116.
934 Ibid., 7.
935 Mehr, Daskind, 146.
936 Ibid.
937 Ibid., 5.
938 Ibid., 170.
as the WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. In addition, the statement “Bsitz isch Bsitz” reiterates a connection between foster care and “Verdingung.”

2.4.2. Dedication

_Daskind_ is dedicated to Swiss author, psychologist, songwriter, interpreter and founder of the Swiss Association for Myopathy Erica Brühlmann-Jecklin. The author herself suffers from macular dystrophy and was in 1974 (mis-)diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. The socially engaged Brühlmann-Jecklin was in April 2013 honored with the _Goldene Lilie_, a prize of the Swiss city Schlieren for local cultural work and with the _SwissRe-Milizpreis – The Civilian Service Prize_ for her life-long engagement in the field of Myopathy. _Daskind_’s dedication to Brühlmann-Jecklin is, like the novel itself, a testimony to Mehr’s commitment to go beyond her own story and that of the Yenish people to uncover the structures that make discrimination possible, and to seek alliances with other marginalized groups.

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2.4.3. **Structure and Composition**

Mehr’s novel *Daskind* opens with an onslaught of violent language and insinuations of abuse. The text continues to confront readers with at times almost unbearably detailed accounts of emotional, verbal, physical and sexual violence. These shocking and emotionally taxing topics and the wide range of literary techniques and shifting narrative perspectives with which they are conveyed, make it at first glance nearly impossible to identify any compositional elements and require a second reading to recognize how closely the text’s structure mirrors its content.

The narrative starts in the midst of the protagonist’s life with the Kenels. The first three chapters describe Daskind’s immediate environment as well as her daily and weekly routines. The topics introduced in these chapters are revisited throughout the novel in a non-predictable and highly fragmented way. This method is in the narrative poignantly expressed through a metaphor for how Daskind’s perceives time and incidents:

> Die Zeit ist ein spiralförmiger Lindwurm, man weiß nie, auf welcher Ebene seines mehrfach gewundenen Rückens man grad sitzt.  

Time is a spiral-form Lindworm, one never knows on which level of its multiply twisted back one is just sitting.

This reference to the dragon the protagonist “rides” on in chapter ten describes how Mehr relays this story and mirrors the unpredictability of the protagonist’s life. The author skillfully interweaves story fragments by employing a wide range of literary devices. Some fragments can be rearranged into different narrative order, depending on which story line a reader focuses on.  

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941 Mehr, *Daskind*, 106.

942 This technique alludes to German author Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck* (1837), an influential stage play that contains a child. In its existing stage certain sections of the play can be read in different order. In addition, seminal moments of characters’ lives are often told from different points of view.
Daskind contains elements defining modern dramas as originally outlined by Gustav Freytag.⁹⁴³ The exposition, for example, is dispersed throughout the whole novel and not just an element of the beginning. The readers’ disorientation and non-understanding of the fast-paced accounts of different, and mostly unpleasant and abusive aspects of the Daskind’s life, mixed in with her desire to retaliate, mirror the protagonist’s experiences of the world she finds herself in, and of her emotional reaction to it. The text’s middle section consists of eighteen non-chronological chapters portraying defining moments in Daskind’s and other figures’ lives. The “rising actions” of Mehr’s narrative are tightly interwoven with scenes relaying the unraveling of the protagonist, i.e. with “falling actions.” I argue though that the novel has a clear climax. The turning point happens in chapter eight when Daskind takes revenge and abuses one of the boys who assaulted her. Until this act, the WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl could find some sense of solace, hope and escape in the act of inflicting violence. After assaulting the boy, however, she realizes that this is no longer the case. The narrator shows herewith and in particular with the ensuing scenes not only, as previously discussed, that violence begets violence but also how violence continues to destroy people long after an assault took place and long after a perpetrator is gone, unless help is provided. The narrative’s last chapter in which Daskind shoots the sexton is, as explored earlier, the story’s “revelation” as well as “catastrophe.” This marks the Daskind as a text where the protagonist is neither clearly positive nor negative.

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⁹⁴³ See also Manfred Pfister, who distinguishes between initial and successively integrated exposition. Manfred Pfister, Das Drama, Theorie und Analyse (Stuttgart: UTB Verlag, 1994).
2.4.3.1. Chapters: Book of Revelation

Mehr’s novel, in which bigotry reigns, abuse and repression are sold as “God’s will,” and eternal hell is lived here on earth by everyone, albeit to different degrees, but in particular by WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults, turns out to be an inverted Book of Revelation. The Biblical text which is, like Daskind, made up of twenty-two chapters, prophesies the second coming of Christ as a judge, and of what will happen to those who sin and do not follow Jesus Christ’s teachings before Judgment Day. Mehr’s text describes the destruction of WVHPKL/OHGFRI child characters and the consequences this has, the most important of which is, how Daskind, who is compared in the text to the sacrificed Lamb of God, the Agnus Dei, responds with her own “Armageddon” and “Judgment Day.” The retaliating WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl puts the “fear of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children,” more aptly of WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls, in the reader. However, this narrative does not simply reiterate stereotypes of the dangerous WVHPKL/OHGFRI child, youth or adult, a stereotype that is often found in German-language literature. Instead, the novel exposes that stereotype for what it is, namely, society’s projection of its own fear of one day having to pay for what has been done to these children in the name of “foster care” and “charity.” Roughly fifteen years after the novel was first published, what society feared started to come true, albeit differently than many literary texts seemed to suggest. Following the examples of ethnic minorities, voices around the world started to demand that the basic tenets of human rights, and social justice be applied to WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, and

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944 Mehr does, however, stress with the figure Daskind that sexually abused girls and women may one day strike back.
that what transpired in the past be officially acknowledged and investigated. The changes are, as previously discussed, discernible in actions such as the apologies to the hundreds of thousands of former children and youth wards, who were taken from their families to fit society’s ideals of “family” and in the retribution payments and other funding made available to former children and youth of state care. The changes are further signified by the attempts to raise the age of “graduating” from “foster care” from eighteen or nineteen to twenty one, and the efforts to make higher education accessible to (former) WVHPKL/OHGFRI youth and adults.

2.4.4. Setting: Geographical Locations and Historical Moments in Time

For the most part, the narrator is vague about the novel’s setting and thus underscores not only that the topic explored could, and, as I have shown, did occur all over German-speaking Europe and beyond, but also that the problematized subject matter was much more prevalent than was generally acknowledged at the time the novel was published.

Mehr employs in this fairly short novel different literary devices to expand the setting beyond the protagonist’s ethnicity, one-generation time frame and the location of the village the girl lives in. The adult WVHPKL/OHGFRI character expands the novel to two generations. The character Armin Lacher, furthermore, signifies, as I have shown in previous chapters, the inclusion of the history of all Travelers as well as of “Verdingung.” This in turn expands the novel’s setting to include the several centuries long and international history of “Gypsies,” and of the welfare practice of contracting-out children, youth and adults.

In addition, the novel contains vague references to historical moments in time. Readers learn, for example, early in the book that Kari Kenel came back from Idaho “[weil ihn] der Krieg
in die Heimat zurückrief\textsuperscript{946} (because the war called him home). Instead of becoming a soldier as one might expect when considering the novel to be set in Germany or Austria during the Second World War, respectively Germany and Austria-Hungary during the First World War, Kari works as a foreman in an aluminum factory upon his return. The associative links that are prompted by the phrase “because the war called him home” locate the novel’s story in the first half of the twentieth century, and therefore in a more comfortable distant past. This time frame is further supported by outmoded terms such as “verdingt”\textsuperscript{947} (contracted-out) and “Anstalt”\textsuperscript{948} (institution), as well as the use of concepts that are mainly associated with the past, as are for example, nuns that care for child and youth wards.

The single reference to war and the fact that Switzerland was at one time leading in aluminum production as well as in founding aluminum factories in Europe, implies that the novel is set in Switzerland. For the following almost one hundred pages, however, readers are left with a sense of timelessness and placelessness as the narrator provides no further information that could help date and locate the story. This underscores the extensive geographical space and historical time this novel covers. This reading is supported by the fact that the name of the village where the story takes place is never revealed. It simply remains a “Dorf”\textsuperscript{949} (village) and is sometimes regionally referred to as “Harch.”\textsuperscript{950} This signifies that the village the protagonist and her foster parents live in stands for any village, or city where a certain type of people live and work. Such a reading is further stressed as the villagers are introduced, through the protagonist’s point of view,

\textsuperscript{946} Mehr, Daskind, 31.  
\textsuperscript{947} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{948} Ibid., 177.  
\textsuperscript{949} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{950} Ibid., 102. Ellenberger reveals “Harch” to be a pseudonym for “March,” a region on the left bank of the lake of Zurich. H. U. Ellenberger, e-mail message to author, November 26, 2012.
as faceless “Dörfler”\textsuperscript{951} (villagers), “Frauen”\textsuperscript{952} (woman) and “Männer”\textsuperscript{953} (men), as well as through their professional titles, so for example, “Näherin”\textsuperscript{954} (seamstress), “Schwestern”\textsuperscript{955} (sisters), “Herrpfarrer”\textsuperscript{956} (Misterpastor), “Sigrist”\textsuperscript{957} (sexton), “Totengräber”\textsuperscript{958} (gravedigger), “Coiffeur”\textsuperscript{960} (hairdresser), “Polizist”\textsuperscript{961} (police man), “Gemeindepräsident”\textsuperscript{962} (major), etc. Interestingly though, more than half way through the book readers are given extra-literary information that helps identify a country. The train the foster family is on to bring Daskind to the “Schwarzen Madonna”\textsuperscript{963} (Black Madonna) enters the railway station “Einsiedeln.”\textsuperscript{964} This establishes that Daskind was brought to the Black Madonna in the Einsiedeln Abbey, a monastery near Zurich, Switzerland. The Elmer-Citro the foster-mother sips at during a train ride\textsuperscript{965} is not only an additional reference to the country Switzerland but furthermore expands the narrative’s time frame and brings it uncomfortably close to the present. The beverage was first created in 1927, and is to this day the best known and most favoured lemon flavored Swiss mineral water in Switzerland. Moreover, the mention of the Elmer-Citro serves as an associative link to the infamous Pro Juventute project “Kinder der Landstrasse” (Children of the Country Road), which was founded only one year earlier in 1926.\textsuperscript{966} Rather than contradicting the novel’s message that this could and did happen in the entire West, Daskind’s references to Switzerland underscore that

\textsuperscript{951} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{952} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{953} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{954} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{955} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{956} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{957} Mehr creates the compound noun “Herrpfarrer.”
\textsuperscript{958} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{959} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{960} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{961} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{962} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{963} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{964} Ibid., 1995: 122.
\textsuperscript{965} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{966} It was shut down in 1972.
if it could and did happen in “picture perfect” Switzerland, it could, and as the novel’s many historical, socio-political and literary allusions show, did happen “anywhere.”

The narrative’s allusions to other literary texts with WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters are yet another way the novel’s geographical and historical setting is expanded. Mehr creates, as earlier mentioned, a link to eighteenth century Germany and Italy by alluding to Goethe’s Mignon as well as to nineteenth century Switzerland by alluding to Gotthelf’s Jeremia and Anneli. She creates, furthermore, a link to eighteenth century France by alluding to Patrick Süskind’s Grenouille, to the nineteenth century Austro-Hungarian Empire by alluding to Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s Pavel and Milada, and again to nineteenth century Switzerland by alluding to Gottfried Keller’s Meretlein. The various and often vague references to time are not the result of an unreliable narrator. On the contrary, they mirror the text’s content and expand the narrative’s time frame beyond the story of the easily identifiable WVHPKL/OHGFRI character Daskind and the less easily identified WVHPKL/OHGFRI character Armin Lacher to include the history of other groups of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

2.4.4.1. Timetable

In addition to the novel’s historical scope, the narrative contains information about time that allows readers to develop a sketch of the course of the story. The narrative begins, after a brief introduction of Daskind and the villagers, on a Tuesday, with a flashback to Monday, and ends on a sequence of Friday, Saturday and Sunday. This could give the impression that the narrative portrays one week in the protagonist’s life. That this is not the case is conveyed through the description of changing seasons. The allusion to one full week signifies, however, how
intrinsic, relentless, ongoing and all facets of life permeating the described abuse is in this portrayed rural society where the WVHPKL/OHGFRI children live. There is no mention of a Wednesday or a Thursday but for what happens “alle Nachmittage”\(^967\) (every afternoon) or every evening and night, “täglich muß es etwas tun, damit die Nacht einen Sinn bekommt”\(^968\) (daily “it” has to do something to make sense of the night), or “bald wird Daskind, für die Nacht hergerichtet”\(^969\) (soon Daskind will be prepared for the night).

The information that the grade one and two teachers tried to instruct the protagonist, and about how long Lacher has lived in the Chalet Idaho, indicate that Daskind lives for approximately two years and three to four months with the Kenels. The statement that she cannot remember a night when she does not have to do something “damit die Nacht einen Sinn bekommt”\(^970\) (to make sense of the night), signifies that the protagonist and Lacher started living at the Kenels’ house around the same time. This poignantly expresses how long Daskind had to live with the abuse at the Kenel’s and in this village. When juxtaposed with Leni’s obedient actions of handing the child over into state care, the two years with the Kenels and the six years Daskind was in an “Anstalt,” expose this “welfare” system’s intrinsic flaws. It is a system that takes children away from people who do not live in strict conformity with society’s ideals about family and parents and places them with people who apparently do. However, Mehr’s *Daskind* argues, and history agrees, that more often than not, this puts the children in harm’s way, partly, because they are not accepted and treated as the caretakers’ own children.

I created the following timetable to put this highly fragmented and elliptical text into a sequence that shows the story’s chronological course of events:

\(^967\) Mehr, *Daskind*, 7.\\(^968\) Ibid., 19.\\(^969\) Ibid.\\(^970\) Ibid.
3. CONCLUSION

Mehr’s *Daskind* is a literary implementation of what Foucault calls ‘local criticism.’ By exploring the interconnection of indirect, i.e. structural and cultural violence, and direct, i.e. personal violence through the characters Daskind and Armin Lacher, Mehr identifies power in its “regional and local forms and institutions,”971 “where it is less legal in character,”972 and grounds her literary experiment in historical contents. This reveals conflicts and struggles. By identifying different discourse systems (medicine, psychiatry, psychology, Church, law, family, to name just a few), as well as the different players who struggle to seize and utilize the rules that would give them the advantage within the Foucauldean power-knowledge network,973 Mehr is able to unveil subjugated, minor knowledges. By putting these knowledges into fiction. Mehr “emancipates,”974 with the help of the Barthesian productive reader, these specific historical and socio-cultural knowledges, and gives them the potential to function as, what Foucault calls, an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges.”975 The unveiled subjugated knowledges are that of the WVHPKL/OHGFRI people and their history. The author writes through these processes, a first draft of an archae-genealogy of the long and international history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

In addition to unveiling the history of centuries of marginalization, exploitation and other forms of abuse, most of which are particular to the status of “growing up in care,” so for example, “to not belong,” Mehr draws connections, vertically through time, between different “foster care” systems, and between those systems and notions of colonialism and the ideologies that led to

971 Ibid.
972 Ibid., 97.
974 Foucault, “Two Lectures,”85.
975 Ibid., 81.
persecution in the second world war. She also draws connections horizontally, across national borders and shows how widespread the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRi people is. The ideologies driving these different practices of “othering” center around four main points, namely, the dyad “responsibility-superiority,” “integration through separation,” “un-familizing without positive permanency,” and “monetary concerns versus abuse.” By proposing interconnections between foster care practices as well as different discourses of othering, the author pre-sketches the idea of the acronym/s WVHPKL/OHGFRi and of an ensuing field of studies dedicated to WVHPKL/OHGFRi people. Using the acronym/s does not deny the differences within this group, rather, the acronym/s highlight the differences without invisibilizing the common thread that runs through the different forms of state and community “care,” and deprives and continues to deprive children and youth from growing up in either any kind of family of origin or in a non-enforced adoptive family.

Mehr’s many literary allusions are a further testament to her skillful use of literary devices. When Daskind is read through the WVHPKL/OHGFRi lens, the literary allusions serve to underscore the internationality and how long lasting the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRi people is, and that they have long been part of society’s cultural reflection. My problematization of the narrative’s allusion to Lehrjahre’s Mignon illustrates that a reading of a text through the lens of WVHPKL/OHGFRi studies can alter our understanding of that text significantly. The investigation of “Mignon allusions” reveals, furthermore, literature’s complicity in sexualizing WVHPKL/OHGFRi girls and in externalizing and “Othering” them as “Gypsies.” The exploration of Daskind’s many allusions to Mignon moreover, stresses the need for including in research and teaching an analysis of texts in translation’s underlying premises, as well as of their secondary literature. The literary allusions show that Daskind can be read as an inverted book of
revelation, an inverted “Bildungsgroman,” an inverted “Dorfgeschichte” as pointed out by Jacovino, an inverted Kaspar Hauser story, an inverted fairy tale, an inverted love story, and as a detective story in the sense that readers have to uncover the truth about all members of the village, but most importantly about Lacher and Daskind. Future examinations of canonical and non-canonical texts through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens will show how fruitful this new approach is. The list of fiction containing WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters, included as an appendix at the end of this dissertation, can be used as a point of departure for research and teaching.

A Political Author

Mehr is a political writer and activist, who dedicates her work to social and political causes. She is one of the authors whose writing and research have already during her lifetime helped bring about significant changes in some parts of society, in particular in regard to the treatment and the history of Europe’s Yenish. Mehr, the author, responds to the Barthesian “loss of author” and Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” with a postmodern style of writing. Understanding herself as a political author of Yenish-WVHPKL/OHGFRI descent, Mehr writes from the point of view that the literary form is part of a text’s political message, and therefore considers all that came “before” open to imitation and reinterpretation. She echoes and plays with texts, as well as with well-established genres and employs literary techniques and devices, such as historical, socio-cultural and literary allusions to convey her political message and write a first draft of an archae-genealogy of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. In other words, Mehr seizes,

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976 Mehr, “Frauenmut,” in RückBlitze, ed. Mariella Mehr (Bern: Zytglogge, 1990), 176.
interprets and paraphrases literary discipline’s established rules to position herself in a different location on Foucault’s power-knowledge network.

Society relies on fiction to create counter-stories or world models\textsuperscript{977} that allow for marginalized, neglected or repressed stories to exist next to the dominant world models, putting both of them into perspective.\textsuperscript{978} As a published and discussed book, \textit{Daskind} enters the Foucauldian power-knowledge network and functions as vehicle by which WVHPKL/OHGFRI history enters the field of literary discourses. This narrative acknowledges the existence of WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults as an intrinsic part of Western society. Rather than putting the blame on the individual, the family, or the child and youth, as has often been the case in the past, Mehr’s text highlights the underlying socio-political and cultural-religious structures that have un-familied children and youth, and in some cases continue to do so, and support(ed) that these minors remain WVHPKL/OHGFRI people instead of being re-familied.\textsuperscript{979}

Hence, \textit{Daskind} can be read as a text that helps rewrite “the European historical and fictional record[s].”\textsuperscript{980} The novel serves as a potential site of counter-memory and counter-identity, as well as an act of insurrection for the individual and the community. The text signifies that such stories can be told in today’s socio-cultural context, and that one is currently allowed to claim an identity as a WVHPKL/OHGFRI person.\textsuperscript{981} As such, Mehr’s narrative contributes to new perspectives in

\textsuperscript{979}The re-familying has to be long-term and “non-enforced.”
the extra-literary “Wissensordnung” (knowledge order). Furthermore, Daskind is part of an international effort to unveil and confront the history of the “Verding” (contracted-out persons), “Administrativ-Versorgte,” (institutionalized without due process) and of other WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

Another Violent Character

My dissertation may be read as reiterating negative WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures, and therefore as perpetuating the stigma that is attached to growing up “in care.” Or, the choice of text may lead some readers to conclude that this dissertation suggests that all WVHPKL/OHGFRI experiences are negative experiences. This is not the case. By choosing Daskind and analyzing the narrative through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens, I am able to show how Mehr exposes and critiques other texts containing WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters who turn violent, as well as scholars’ interpretations of these texts. Furthermore, the “Mignon allusions” in Daskind reveal that WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl character as a “role model,” and unveil an at times positive care experience.

Mehr is not the first author to create WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters who turn violent. On the contrary, as mentioned earlier, German-language literature and its cultural sources offer several WVHPKL/OHGFRI child and youth figures who do so: Sophocles’ Oedipus commits patricide, albeit unwittingly. Nicola, Kleist’s protagonist of the novella Der Findling “The Foundling” is a bearer of intrigue, malediction and bad luck. Droste-Hülshoff’s supporting figure Johannes Niemand from the novella Die Judenbuche “The Jew’s Beech” is suspected of

murdering the Jew Aaron. Pavel, Milada’s older brother from Ebner-Eschenbach’s *Das Gemeindekind* *“Their Pavel”* acts out before he turns his life around and becomes a role model.

Lulu, Wedekind’s protagonist in the eponymous drama does whatever she needs to do to survive and eventually kills Dr. Schön. And last but not least, Grenouille, Süskind’s protagonist from the best-seller *Das Parfum – Die Geschichte eines Mörders* *“Perfume - The Story of a Murderer”* turns into one of the most notorious serial killers of German fiction. These and other fictional WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters are part of a larger extra-literary discourse that identified WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, for the longest time, as asocial and dangerous, as “children-stealing-Gypsy,” as a threat to social order, or at risk to turn into such a threat. Furthermore, the literary representatives of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people are often interpreted as metaphors for larger discourses. Johannes, for example, is often read as the protagonist’s shadow double and interpreted as a mirror for the familial protagonist’s inner development. Lulu is mostly read as a literary exploration of the femme fatal. Grenouille has been metaphorized to express a critique of Fascism and Enlightenment ideals. In addition to being metaphors, some WVHPKL/OHGFRI figures are, as shown through the discussion of Goethe’s Mignon, instrumentalized by authors and critics as seeming role models. This is, for example, also the case with Pavel and Milada, who are drawn as “role models” and “creators” of a better world and of changing societal structures. A close reading reveals, however, that the future of these two WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters is limited.\(^983\) Milada, like Mignon, dies before she can upset the social order and become the abbess of a monastery. Pavel does survive and gain landownership, however, he never marries and does not have offspring, two seminal attributes of full citizenship and

983 Thomas Salumets recognizes this. He concludes that Pavel’s past is an obstacle that hinders him to develop a satisfying life. Ibid., “Geschichte als Motto,” *Sprachkunst. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 14 (1983): 23.
manhood. Moreover, the price he is asked to pay for his partial integration is that he forgets what has been done to him.

Mehr references in *Daskind* the above-mentioned and other literary texts, as well as their interpretations, and underscores these interconnections through her retaliating WVHPKL/OHGFRI girl protagonist. In doing so, she prompts readers and scholars to uncover the prejudice against WVHPKL/OHGFRI children, youth and adults, which seems to be inherent to the interpretations of the alluded to literary texts mentioned above. In contrast, Mehr employs WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters to write their own stories, and makes the many centuries long and international history and the stories of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people the very subject of her book. She draws violent WVHPKL/OHGFRI characters to problematize the role violence, in all its forms (i.e. structural, personal, cultural, religious), plays in the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people. This is underscored by the fact that Daskind is still a child when the novel ends. This leaves readers to extrapolate and imagine what the protagonist’s ultimate fate will be: will she die like many of her “literary relatives,” and how much destruction will she sow on the way? Or will she receive the support needed to gain back her dignity and a non-abusive life?

**Contributions and Limitations**

For German literature studies, the critical analysis of fiction through the WVHPKL/OHGFRI lens engenders an interconnection to seminal North American and international disciplines such as First Nations studies, colonial and post-colonial studies, Indigenous Australian studies, sociology, social studies and history, including medical history and World War II, beyond the already existing body of research. In addition, research into World
War II and Colonialism through the lens of WVHPKL/OHGFRI studies and the more in-depth analysis of policies and laws pertinent to “foster care” of different countries will provide more answers regarding the interconnection between these discourses which have so far mostly been discussed separate from each other. This may contribute to our understanding of why, whom and how we other.

The acronyms and a new field of studies devoted to WVHPKL/OHGFRI people could support the understanding of this particular status as a group identity which transcents ethnic-racial and national borders without denying them, and may also enable WVHPKL/OHGFRI people to connect across nationality, race and ethnicity. Furthermore, it may help that the negative instrumentation of being a (former) child or youth “in care” is turned into empowering characteristics. This could eventually result in the inclusion of the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people in textbooks and that their history is taught at high schools, colleges and universities. It may also inspire the creation of a website or a book showcasing famous WVHPKL/OHGFRI people from all over the world.

There are two elements I chose to not elaborate on in my dissertation. Firstly, Mehr’s protagonist is a WVHPKL/OHGFRI child who is also abused and maltreated by her biological father and his wife. By including different aspects of domestic violence in her narrative about the history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, Mehr acknowledges that there have always been children who are moved into the status of WVHPKL/OHGFRI because they, or one of their parents usually the mother, experience abuse, neglect or maltreatment at the hands of their family of origin. This reality, however, does not contest Mehr’s scalding critique of “the foster care system.” To remove minors from their families based on factual or perceived lack of parenting skills and resources does not justify or explain away the abuse, neglect and oversight that happens
While WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth are in out-of-home care, therefore, and because family violence is tightly interconnected with lack of minority rights and protection, including children rights, I chose to focus on the socio-political and cultural notions which lead to violence in families and their breakdowns, rather than on problematizing families’ contribution to unfamilying children and youth.

Secondly, Mehr’s narrative can be analyzed for the creative use of irony. In fact, the narrative subverts with irony many of the problematized epistemological certainties of the discussed societies: for example, the notions of “proper family” and “proper citizen” which were, and to a certain degree still are, employed to justify the unfamilying of children and youth. The very fact that society’s structures and ideological notions help create WVHPKL/OHGFRI people in the first place, as shown in this narrative, is deeply ironic. Moreover, Foucault links the exposure of the limits of epistemological fields with “virtue.” Consequently, when considering Mehr as a critic of the power-knowledge network pertaining “foster care,” we can conclude that the author shows a critical attitude which Foucault calls “virtue in general.” Similarly, the protagonist, who is throughout the novel understood by the villagers as lacking virtue, turns virtuous in Foucault’s notion, when her violence is read as breaking with conformity.

As irony, as shown by Linda Hutcheon, is highly situational and relies on shared knowledges, I chose in this research to focus on the unveiling of the international and diverse history of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people, in order to not read over them, once again, in pursuit of an accepted and established literary concept.

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984 This point has also been stressed by Hobbs and Hobbs, “Abuse of children in residential care.”
Mehr’s Novel Today

Self-interest and lack of civil courage as portrayed in Mehr’s novel is unfortunately not something that belongs to the past. Schreiber, for example, stresses the importance of speaking up and acting in order to stop and prevent abuse from ever happening again.\textsuperscript{987} Therefore, more and more voices suggest that politics and policy take full and not only partial, i.e. serial responsibility for children in care, and focus more on their welfare than on saving money. In addition to the already made progresses (official recognitions, apologies and retribution payments), this would include payments for therapy, the storing of files for several decades, and the release of or access to the files to the person/s concerned. It would further include the right of contact with former caretakers and care-siblings. For many WVHPKL/OHGFRI people their former caretakers, foster care-siblings and the files are the only way to learn something about their childhood and why they, for example, ended up “in care” in the first place. Their caretakers and foster care-siblings were, at one time, their families, and to sever that connection and deny contact, as is common practice, equals a reoccurring trauma of loss. How important these changes are, becomes increasingly clear when considering that many WVHPKL/OHGFRI people who were “in care” in the last century were unable to earn enough to today receive a decent pension. Moreover, it was, for example, in Switzerland in the early nineteen eighties still common to steer WVHPKL/OHGFRI girls into low-income jobs, which would keep them on the brink of poverty for most of their lives. Higher education is for WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth to this day an almost unattainable goal. Instead of having these rights and benefits, WVHPKL/OHGFRI

\textsuperscript{987} While Schreiber’s research focuses on Tirol, professionals agree that the findings of his research group apply to entire German Europe. Ibid., \textit{Im Namen der Ordnung – Heimerziehung in Tirol} (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2010).
children were, and to a certain degree still are, expected to be grateful for what society has given them. If a child like Daskind did not show ‘‘Dankbarkeit, das Hergeholte’’\textsuperscript{988} (gratefulness, the fetched-one), that could be reason enough to prompt another disciplinary spree or even replacement.

Faced with a high level of violence, and the more recent connection between former ‘‘foster children’’ and terrorism, voices are getting louder demanding harsher disciplinary actions be taken against ‘‘problem’’ children and youth. This group still includes for many people those in extrafamilial care.\textsuperscript{989} Mehr’s \textit{Daskind} is a reminder of what happens when changes are expected from WVHPKL/OHGFRI children and youth without changing the structures that un-familied them in the first place.

Growing up without family has always been, and will likely always be, part of human existence and is therefore of great societal importance. My ultimate hope is that this dissertation helps create awareness throughout the field of literary studies and contributes to positive changes in the perception and status of WVHPKL/OHGFRI people.

\textsuperscript{988} Mariella Mehr, \textit{Daskind} 1995: 63.
\textsuperscript{989} Wenger, ‘‘Zu autoritär! Zu lasch! Heimerziehung im Spiegel des Zeitgeists – Sie kamen am Sonntag, um die Zöglinge zu befreien.’’
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APPENDIX A: FICTION CONTAINING WVHPKL/OHGFR CHARACTERS


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Büchner, Georg. Woyzeck (1879).

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