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“Der Struwwelpeter” – A Critical Analysis of a Pedagogical Trend¹

In this paper I revisit the popular German children’s book classic “Der Struwwelpeter” written by Heinrich Hoffmann as a Christmas present to his son in 1845. The German psychiatrist compiled nine stories that would teach his son proper behavior by modeling mishaps, accidents, and ill will of bad children and the punishment that they will rightly receive for it. From the standpoint of critical pedagogy, I approach the power relations that are inherent in the pedagogical teachings of this book. With the help of lenses, such as feminism and post-colonialism, I look at the role of the adult, the behavior of the child that is marked as naughty or deviant from the desirable, and their punishment. This way, I dismantle the racist, patriarchal, and oppressive lessons that children are taught and I understand how the perverted power triad of adult, child, and punishment is mirrored by the theoretical writings of 18th and 19th century philosophical scholars. Katharina Rutschky assembles these writings under the term of poisonous pedagogy in that they propagate actions and beliefs of pedagogues that largely infringe on the rights of children manifested in the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, 1989. As I will show, these actions and beliefs have not only appeared in fictional works but also in residential state-run institutions such as the Halteshof in West Germany where children experienced physical, mental, and sexual abuse in the 1950s and 1960s. In this paper, I trace back pedagogical confusions which children are exposed to until this day in popular literature. Rutschky’s writings bridge the gap between fiction and reality as we see that scholarly work has served to justify the inhumane treatment of children.

Keywords: pedagogy, feminist critique, post-colonialist critique, children’s rights

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Introduction

In this paper, I introduce poisonous pedagogy/schwarze Pädagogik² as a concept of raising a child that was renowned and officially practiced in the 18th all through the 19th century as Katharina Rutschky demonstrates in her collection of pedagogical advice: *Schwarze Pädagogik: Quellen zur Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung*. As I will come to show, this child-rearing approach has served for legitimizing the sadistic treatment of children well into the 20th century in care institutions and residential homes in Germany. The goal of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, I will show how the stories depicted in *Der Struwwelpeter* mirror the pedagogical state of the art of its time and how the pedagogical truths conveyed in this book infringe largely on the rights of children as declared in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³. Secondly, I want to critically examine selected stories and shed light on underlying themes of racism and gender issues to practice an anti-discriminatory approach to children's literature. The Polish Anti-Discrimination Education Association (TEA) states: "It is important to understand how stereotypes and prejudice lead to unequal treatment and the violation of individual rights. Anti-discrimination education addresses the manifestations and consequences of discrimination as a result of power relations."⁴ To achieve this goal of addressing manifestations of discrimination, I draw from the theoretical-methodological framework of critical textbook analysis. Linguist Norman Fairclough argues that language use "is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations, (iii) and systems of knowledge and beliefs."⁵ Therefore, I want to look at how "social and economic structures [...] are reproduced [...]"⁶ with the help of popular children's stories that I understand as tools for reproducing gender concepts and socio-economic alignment. Hence, I look through the critical lens of feminism⁷ and post-colonialism⁸ at how a sense of inferiority is created in those who defy parental authority. I question

² All translations into English in this paper are done by the author; in English: Black or poisonous pedagogy.

³ The United Nations, 1989.

⁴ N. Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities*, „Discourse & Society” 4, No. 2 (1993) p. 134.

⁵ Joint Works of TEA (Anti-discrimination Education Association), *Edukacja antydyskryminacyjna i jej standardy jakościowe*, TEA, Warszawa 2011.

⁶ N. Blake and J. Masschelein, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concept*, Routledge, London 2000, p. 39.

⁷ M. Greene and M. Griffiths, *Feminism, Philosophy, and Education: Imagining Public Spaces*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2003, pp. 73-92.

⁸ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key*, Routledge, London 2000, p. 9 ff.

the "taken for granted"-ness⁹ of the pedagogical voice conveyed to the young reader in popular literature as well as theoretical writings. In conclusion, this paper seeks to dismantle the perversions of a pedagogical branch that cloaks the oppression of the individual in the dress of divine care for the human species up to this day.

My paper is structured in three parts. First, I will use a piece of German popular literature from the mid-19th century that the German foreign news agency Deutsche Welle lists among the ten German kids' book classics¹⁰ and pedagogy scholar Andreas Flitner describes in the foreword to his book *Konrad, said Mrs. Mother ...: About Pedagogy and Non-Pedagogy* as the "most successful of all German children's books"¹¹. *Der Struwwelpeter* is treated by Flitner as the example-par-excellence of the pedagogical tradition of *schwarze Pädagogik*¹². Published by German psychiatrist Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann in 1845, *Der Struwwelpeter* has been the target of various pedagogical analyses and writings¹³. Also, I want to critically analyze the text according to the following set of categories in order to derive principles of the pedagogical practice that we encounter here. If we want to cast a critical eye on power relations within children's stories, the following categories will help to unearth them. Firstly, I am interested in how the role of the adult/ the parent is portrayed in the stories, secondly, how the child and his or her behavior is depicted as deviant and divergent from the norm, and thirdly, what types of punishment were chosen to correct the child in its erroneous ways.

I will then use Katharina Rutschky's work *Schwarze Pädagogik*,¹⁴ to mirror the ideals conveyed in *Der Struwwelpeter* with the concepts of poisonous pedagogy. This will help to root Hoffman's stories in the pedagogical theories and assumptions of his time. Rutschky's work has received great accreditation in the academic world as Manuela Schmid points out in her dissertation on educational advice literature and the problematics of theory and practice in popular literature.¹⁵ Flitner claims

⁹ N. Blake and J. Masschelein, *Post-colonial studies ...*, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁰ Dillon, 04.01.2017, dw.com

¹¹ A. Flitner, *Konrad, sprach die Frau Mama...: Über Erziehung und Nicht-Erziehung*, (2. Aufl.), Beltz Verlag, Hemsbach 2004, p. 10.

¹² A. Flitner, *Konrad, sprach ...*, op. cit., pp. 10 ff.

¹³ See: F.K. Waechter, *Der Anti-Struwwelpeter: oder listige Geschichten und knallige Bilder*, Zürich, Diogenes Verlag 1990; F. Hirlinger-Fuchs, *Bilderbücher und Wirklichkeiten-vom Struwwelpeter bis zur Menschenfres-serin*, Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, Heidelberg 2002; K. Kroll, *Frauenbilder-Männerbilder*, Herbolzheim, Centaurus 2003, pp. 99-115.

¹⁴ K. Rutschky, *Schwarze Pädagogik: Quellen zur Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung*, Ullstein Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1977.

¹⁵ M. Schmid, *Erziehungsratgeber und Erziehungswissenschaft. Zur Theorie-Praxis Problematik populärpädagogischer Schriften*, Klinkhardt Verlag, Bad Heilbrunn 2011.

that Rutschky provides with her very one-sided and focused accounts of European pedagogical viewpoints, a strong opposition to the euro-centric enlightenment discourse.¹⁶ This way, Rutschky dismantles the allegedly intellectual and moral superiority to non-European traditions which can be found in the writings of Immanuel Kant and have played into the hands of racist and oppressive public knowledge of the ethnically Other¹⁷.

To further stress the valuable quality of Rutschky's work, the third part of my paper looks at recent examples of poisonous pedagogy in particular with regard to the German-speaking context. I will cast a look at the work of the parliamentary council of the German Bundestag which appointed a Round Table on Residential education in the 1950s and 1960s¹⁸ (RTH) in 2010. These round table investigations led to an interim report that acknowledged the physical and psychological pain that children had suffered growing up in state-run institutions, such as the Halteshof in Solingen¹⁹. In the post-World War II period up to 800.000 children and youth had lived in these institutions in former West-Germany. Ex-residents had initiated a petition to the Bundestag pressing for investigating the practices and conditions that these homes operated under. The terrifying and heart-breaking accounts of former residents are collected in the interim report²⁰. In the final part of this paper, I will explore the report in parts and comment on the same three categories, namely the portrayal of the pedagogue, the child, and the intent and practice of punishments.

Der Struwwelpeter: A Textbook made in Germany

Nine short stories await the reader upon opening the book *Der Struwwelpeter oder lustige Geschichten und drollige Bilder*²¹. Hoffmann, who created the first institution for "mad and epileptic people", outside of the city gates of Frankfurt, wrote these "funny stories" as a Christmas present for his three-year-old son²². In the following, I want to apply the analytical categories mentioned above to six of the nine stories that Hoffmann wrote. My selection is based on the fact that not every story has unique characteristics that are worth analyzing so that I would like to focus on

¹⁶ M. Schmid, *Erziehungsratgeber und...* op. cit., p. 272; A. Flitner, *Konrad, sprach die...* op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁷ See: P. Piesche, *Der ‚Fortschritt‘ der Aufklärung – Kants ‚Race‘ und die Zentrierung des weißen Subjekts*, Unrast Verlag, Münster 2009, pp. 30-39.

¹⁸ Original: Runder Tisch: Heimerziehung in den 50er und 60er Jahren.

¹⁹ Stark, 05.11.2013, welt.de.

²⁰ A. Vollmer, *Runder Tisch: Heimerziehung in den 50er und 60er Jahren*, 2010, pp. 9-13.

²¹ In English: *The Struwwelpeter or funny Stories and comical Pictures*.

²² n.a., Frankfurt-interaktiv.de

those that carry a rather strong pedagogical agenda that I want to expose while also sketching out the essence of the pedagogical tradition that runs through these stories. I refrain from explaining and analyzing each story in detail and instead summarize my findings considering the role of the adult/ the parent, the portrayal of the child and its deviation from the norm and the choice of treatment for the "bad" child.

Firstly, I want to start with the only story in which a girl models unacceptable behavior: *Die gar traurige Geschichte mit dem Feuerzeug*²³. Pauline discovers matches while she is alone at home and although her cats warn her not to play with the matches, she does not listen. Her curiosity takes over and she recklessly lights the matches, plays with them, and dances around. Her dress catches on fire and nothing remains of her but her shoes and her ashes. I would like to read this story as a reflection of a contemporary understanding of femininity and desirable behavior of women. Pauline shows a strong curiosity for fire that she gives into. Her doom is, so the story evokes, the disobedience of her father. Instead of playing with her dolls and unquestioningly following her parents' instructions, Pauline is interested in the element of fire. As the realm of chemistry and science strictly remains men's territory, girls are taught through the experience of young Pauline not to care about matters outside of the concept of a good woman, i.e. child rearing (playing with her doll), subordination to patriarchy (listening to her father) and unpolitical occupation (not being involved in investigating in rational, scientific questions). The adult figures in this story are only indirectly present. Their voices are heard through the cats' weeping: "The father has forbidden it! Miau! Mio! Miau! Mia!" In the end, the girl is punished by an invisible hand which relieves adults, i.e. her parents, of the responsibility of judging Pauline. This is quite a strong statement in that it allows interpreting the death of Pauline as her own, self-evoked mistake and God's hand in a way as a fair consequence to her behavior. The facts that would imply that Pauline's parents carry responsibility for the tragedy, for example that Pauline is maybe not old enough to be left alone yet or that the matches should not have been left in her reach remain unconsidered.

The second story of *Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben*²⁴ shows influences of German colonial history. It deals with boys who mock a black person for his dark skin color. The boys humiliate the man until Nikolas comes and dips the boys into black ink so that they must bear the same fate and wander the earth with a black skin color. The adult figure that punishes the children is a somewhat moral or even religious authority which is not specified in the story. The children being called out

²³ In English: The very sad story with the matches.

²⁴ In English: The story of the black boys.

for humiliating another person because of his skin color is a very welcome pedagogical intervention. However, the reasoning of the story is highly problematic. Nikolas explains to the children in the book, and essentially to the young readers, that black people are punished (by God) for their skin color and that having one's own skin turn black is an adequate punishment for mockery. Racial discrimination remains uncontested. In essence, young readers learn that although there are inferior groups of human beings (the black man is depicted only with pants and otherwise shirtless and barefooted, holding an umbrella), they should not be mocked. It is crucial to take notice of this story. In 1904 and 1905, German troops murdered 75.000 Herero and Nama in German-Southwest Africa, nowadays Namibia²⁵. History scholar Jürgen Zimmerer raises the hypothesis in his book *From Windhuk to Auschwitz* that German military practiced killing methods and concentrated actions in their occupied territories in Africa that would later be employed during World War II and in the eastern battles and occupation zones in particular²⁶. Also, the church helped to provide for an inhumane logic of colonialization which declared that civilization would come in the name of Christianity to the African people. Therefore, it might be the religious figure of Nikolas that Hoffmann chose to pass judgement. I would like to stress the potential danger of stories such as these that help to create common grounds on which racist and white-supremacist thinking can very comfortably dwell.

The third story *Der Daumenlutscher*²⁷ displays more drastic consequences to undesirable behavior. Konrad cannot stop sucking his thumbs. Before leaving the house, his mother asks him to be orderly (“ordentlich”) and pious (“fromm”). She warns him that the tailor will come with his big scissors and cut his thumbs off if he puts his fingers in his mouth. As predicted by his mother, the moment that Konrad relapses into his habit, the tailor rushes in and cuts off Konrad's thumbs. Looking at the adult figures of the story, his mother is only the warning voice. The one executing the punishment of the child is an anonymous persona: the tailor. He has the power to harm the child regardless of Konrad's parents who are the legal guardians of their son. The story tells us that Konrad is disciplined for his weakness since he cannot be orderly and pious when he is alone. Hence, readers learn that someone is always watching them and that they cannot even in private engage in undesirable habits and behavior. The child's physical welfare is easily compromised in the story and a right to privacy is not granted. This establishes almost a divine omnipresence of the moral

²⁵ 06.01.2017, bbc.com

²⁶ J. Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz*, LIT Verlag, Berlin 2011, p. 266 ff.

²⁷ In English: The thumb sucker.

ideals preached by parents and their right to enforce these ideals at any cost. I regard this story as highly problematic especially with regard to the total infringement of the child's right to privacy²⁸ and the right to physical integrity²⁹.

Not only Pauline's life is ended in the story collection but also Kasper's in *Der Suppenkasper*³⁰. Whereas Pauline did not provoke her death, Kasper is depicted as the ultimate stubborn boy who deserves to starve because he refuses to eat his soup. Again the adult is only implied since Kasper is given new soup every day. Particularly terrifyingly is the fact that in four short pictures the child reader can see how Kasper kills himself by starvation. To me, this story was always most macabre, as the reader is not even spared the bitter end of Kasper which is illustrated by a little cross bearing his name and almost mockingly a soup terrine sitting next to it. What makes this story so cruel is that childish stubbornness is met with parental stubbornness which will always win in the unequal power relationship between children and parents. Summing up, the child is denied his right to the freedom of choice and self-expression³¹. It simply cannot be tolerated that food is questioned and thereby the parental nurture. Also, this example shows that obedience and giving into conformity carry the highest pedagogical priorities that are relentlessly installed in the child.

Finally, I want to elaborate on *Der Zappelphilipp*³² and *Die Geschichte vom Hanns-guck-in-die-Luft*³³. Both protagonists, Philipp and Hanns, made it into German popular culture and language use up to now. Children, who fidget a lot and cannot concentrate for a very long time, are even nowadays referred to as "Zappelphilipp". In a similar vein, children who are dreamy and a little bit clumsy because they do not pay attention to what is right in front of their feet are reminded of being a "Hanns-guck-in-die-Luft". In *Der Zappelphilipp* no real harm is done to the child. Although his father scolds Philipp, on the whole his behavior remains unpunished. Of course, when his fidgeting causes the table to fall to the ground, both parents are "gar zornig sehr"³⁴ but no immediate punishment follows. Once again though, it is the child who triggers his own accident by ignoring the advice of his father. In conclusion, I want to draw attention to the fact that fidgeting does not seem to be regarded as bad of a trait as thumb sucking or refusing food as Philipp

²⁸ The United Nations, 1989, art. 16.1.

²⁹ The United Nations, 1989, art. 19.

³⁰ In English: The soup casper.

³¹ The United Nations, 1989, art. 12 and 13.

³² In English: „zappeln“ means to fidget, to not sit stillà Zappelphilipp = The Fidgeting Philipp.

³³ In English: The story of Hanns who looks in the air (Hanns who is easily distracted).

³⁴ In English: „very angry“.

is not physically hurt by a third person or himself. I find it quite striking that if we compare Philipp and Pauline who both ignore their father's warning, Pauline's consequence is death, whereby Philipp's is not commented on. Surely playing with fire is more dangerous than misbehaving at the dinner table but if we compare what it means for boy or girl to disobey their father then the girl is certainly punished more drastically than the boy.

Poisonous Pedagogy in Theoretical Writings

Rutschky's collection of more than 600 pages on poisonous pedagogy is manifold in terms of its focus and the authors presented. Therefore, I would like to use the stories I discussed above as the prism through which I look at a reduced selection of the texts she has assembled. Again, my prism is guided by the questions of what type of behavior displayed by children is deemed as undesirable, what role does the adult have in punishing the child and which treatment is regarded as effective when dealing with the misbehaving child.

In *Einiges über die Abhärtung bei Kleinkindern*³⁵, *In Flagranti*³⁶, *Über den Kinderfehler des Eigensinns*³⁷ as well as *Über kindliche Unordnung, gesellschaftliche Ordnung und Charakterbildung*³⁸ interesting notions about the child are expressed. In the last of the four texts we can read that the child does not have a real, truly informed will yet.³⁹ From this, Ziller concludes that the child's wishes and expressions do not need to be taken seriously by the adult. The grown-up is in comparison to the child a rational and fully developed human being that is characterized most of all by self-control. What Ziller justifies here corresponds, to my mind, with the infringement of the child's right to self-expression as stated in art. 12 and 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and depicted in *Der Suppenkasper*. In a similar vein, Basedow elaborates on breaking the will and stubbornness of the child, in order to teach him or her a life lesson on the hardships that it will endure

³⁵ In English: Some things about the hardening of the small child; J.B. Basedow, *Einiges über die Abhärtung bei Kleinkindern*, 1773, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik: Quellen zur Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung*, (ed.) K. Rutschky, Ullstein Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 257 ff.

³⁶ P. Villaume, *In Flagranti*, 1787, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 316 ff.

³⁷ In English: About the child's mistake of stubbornness; H. Grünewald, *Über den Kinderfehler des Eigensinns*, 1899, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 423 ff.

³⁸ In English: About childish disorder, social order and the formation of character; T. Ziller, *Über kindliche Unordnung, gesellschaftliche Ordnung und Charakterbildung*, 1857, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 135 ff.

³⁹ T. Ziller, *Über kindliche...*, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

over the course of life. Interestingly, his example focuses on food and that a child shall endure hunger or thirst if it refuses the food that he/she is given⁴⁰. It would be wrong, according to him, to give into the childish tantrum which is a scenario well-displayed in *Der Suppenkasper*.

Rutschky's chapter on *Erziehung als Triebabwehr*⁴¹ is quite disturbingly to read as the pedagogical literature obsesses over the human sexual desires and how to keep them at bay. According to the writings of the pedagogical advisors, especially children need to be protected from their own desires. It is absurd how pedagogues ought to rob children and youngsters of any privacy and how they indulge in their imaginations on what the pubescent child does under its blanket. The adult's right to the child's body is the most saddening revelation these writings offer to me. Hoffmann's story on Konrad who sucks his thumbs when he is alone is probably mirroring this part of poisonous pedagogy the most. Villaume writes that the pedagogue needs to "stalk the child when it seeks secret hiding places"⁴². I claim that these are the texts that speak legitimacy to the intrusion of children's space in state-run institutions that become accused of sexually abusing their child residents. May Konrad have sucked his thumb or masturbated when he was alone at home, in the end his right to privacy is equally violated which is another clear infringement of the right that a child has according to art. 16.1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Eventually, I want to let Grünwald speak and introduce his thoughts on the child. His writing is soaked with the call for breaking the child's will. He argues for a radical cure⁴³ of the childish stubbornness that can only be achieved by following through with iron consequence⁴⁴. When a child first shows its stubbornness, the pedagogue has to fight it with the whole power of his own personality. Grünwald promotes the three stages⁴⁵ of breaking the child's will presented by Waitz. The young child is firstly, crushed by installing in it the feeling of incredible inferiority to its pedagogue. When the child is a little older, humiliation is the tool of choice with which to break his or her will. The child that is about to finish its education is disciplined by pointing it towards its own ugly and unethical mistakes. Grünwald concludes by declaring child-like stubbornness an "anti-social, mental phenomenon"

⁴⁰ J.B. Basedow, *Einiges über die...*, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

⁴¹ K. Rutschky, *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 299 ff.

⁴² P. Villaume, *In Flagranti...*, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

⁴³ H. Grünwald, *Über den Kinderfehler...*, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, "eiserne Konsequenzen", p. 425.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

which needs to be investigated by child psychologists and pathologists⁴⁶. A view such as this might explain why Pauline's "childish stubbornness" must result in her death and Hanns needs to be humiliated by the fish who laugh at his accidents.

The second focus of my analysis rests on the role of the adult in the persona of a pedagogue, a teacher or a moral voice from above as we have encountered in the stories of *Der Struwwelpeter*. For this, I chose the texts *Tödliche Folgen des Ungehorsams*⁴⁷, *Der Erzieher ist ein Organ der Gottheit*⁴⁸, and *Das Kinderleben – ein Bitte-Leben*⁴⁹. My observations on how the adult roles in *Der Struwwelpeter* usually escape of having to discipline children because natural punishment sets in within due time is also elaborated on in Rochow's text. He gives the example of a child that refuses to take its medication. Upon granting the child its will, it dies because it could not foresee that medication would save its life⁵⁰. Here, we enter the key rationalization in pedagogy which is that older age means experience and therefore, the privilege of making decisions for the better of the child. Unfortunately, this reasoning ends up being perverted in poisonous pedagogy as it legitimizes a claim to superiority that the pedagogue holds against the child. This allows him to break the child's will and to force it into the role of the pleader⁵¹, who neither owns anything, nor may it question the decision of the adult. However, the overall argumentation falls back on the same pattern as operated in *Der Struwwelpeter*. In the end the accidental consequences to the supposedly bad behavior of the child confirm the rules of parents and society. Therefore, a preemptive pedagogy installs obedience in the first place so that these natural consequences, such as burning or starving to death, falling into the water or ruining dinner do not have to occur. In the cases that active punishment by an adult is pursued, such as in the stories of the boys who are blackened by Nikolas or Konrad whose thumbs are cut off, it is a third persona similar to natural fate that executes punishment. This way, the parental love does never have to be questioned as they, the parents, do not harm the child intentionally. To me this

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ In English: Deadly consequences of disobedience; F.E. v. Rochow, *Tödliche Folgen des Ungehorsams*, 1772, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 14 ff.

⁴⁸ In English: The pedagogue as an organ of divinity; B. Blasche, *Der Erzieher ist ein Organ der Gottheit*, 1828, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 65 ff.

⁴⁹ In English: The life of the child – a life of pleading; C.G. Scheibert, *Das Kinderleben – ein Bitte-Leben*, 1883, [in:] *Schwarze Pädagogik...*, *op. cit.*, p. 128 ff.

⁵⁰ F.E. v. Rochow, *Tödliche Folgen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

⁵¹ C.G. Scheibert, *Das Kinderleben...*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

is a clever strategy of adults who fear to lose their child's affection because of pedagogical measures they take. In the case of poisonous pedagogy, it is a well-deserved fear as children have the right to property and to physical integrity⁵².

Finally, Blasche gives insights into the self-perception of the pedagogical profession in the 19th century: "Each pedagogue can consider himself as an organ of divine destiny [...] a pedagogue of true education [...] is an immediate organ of divinity as the highest educating power"⁵³. Hence, it might become understandable that pedagogues believed themselves as extensions of divine judgement who through their knowledge execute the noble task of cultivating the young. I consider poisonous pedagogy, therefore, as a dangerous mix of immoral measures applied by the self-declared mission to carry out a divine task.

Examples of Contemporary Poisonous Pedagogy

The final part to this paper casts a view of the latest public accounts of poisonous pedagogy that the Federal Republic of Germany had to come to terms with. Upon reading through the 2010 report on Residential education in the 1950s and 1960s, I discovered shocking similarities to practices and self-concepts that Rutschky's collection of pedagogical writings gave insights into. A strong theme that runs through *Der Struwwelpeter*, Rutschky's collection, and the Round Table Report is the way that punishment is executed via the physical need of any human being to eat. To me it is particularly sadistic that the basic human need for food is corrupted by pedagogues in all of these examples. Former child residents testified that they were forced to eat moldy food and if they brought it back up they were forced to eat their own vomit under the threat of beatings⁵⁴. Power over the individual was executed by means of taking food away, making children eat moldy or bad foods, as well as taking over control of their natural reflexes by making them swallow their own vomit⁵⁵. This shines a bright light on the self-concept of pedagogues and the way they saw themselves fit to tamper with human nature. This perverted self-concept of being the god-like ruler over life and death of the child evokes Blasche, who considers the pedagogue as the extended hand of god⁵⁶. This is supported by accounts of former

⁵² The United Nations, art. 19.

⁵³ B. Blasche, *Der Erzieher ist ein...*, op. cit., p. 66.

⁵⁴ A. Vollmer (ed.), *Zwischenbericht des Runden Tisches: Heimerziehung in den 50er und 60er Jahren*, 2010, p. 12.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ B. Blasche, *Der Erzieher ist ein...*, op. cit., p. 65.

residential pedagogues whose voices were also heard during the round table talks. One of them said that they believed it took “rigor, discipline and order to turn these children into fully valuable human beings”⁵⁷. This implies that children who were brought to the residential homes because their parents were dead or could not care for them, since they were alcoholics or prostitutes⁵⁸, were considered as not valuable yet. Hence, only through the hand of the pedagogue, children were made a decent part of society. This, to me, shows once more very clear resemblance to the aforementioned notion of the pedagogue as a “divine organ”⁵⁹ through whose touch children become complete and moral human beings.

The fact that children had any rights to privacy or physical integrity as declared in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is not only denied bluntly in most of the stories found in *Der Struwwelpeter* and in Rutschky’s collection but also in the Round Table accounts: “I was 12 or 13 years old. The first thing that I learned in the home was that I did not have any rights at all”⁶⁰. In the previous chapter of this paper, I made a strong point to read the story of Konrad, whose thumbs were cut off because he would suck them in private, as one which teaches chastity to the child and also the full legitimization of adults, i.e. pedagogues, to intrude children’s private lives and their bodies. I see a clear parallel between the infringement of the right to privacy that is exemplified in Konrad’s story and in writings, such as *In Flagranti*⁶¹. Looking at the accounts of the report that spoke of the sexual violence against children by their pedagogues, priests and doctors⁶², I see my claim supported that granting the pedagogue access to the child’s body reduces the barrier to physical and even sexual violence.

Summary

In this paper, I have taken a critical stand on a very popular German work of children’s literature. Whereas I do not argue in favor of banning the book, I urge readers to reflect on the intention, the message, and the protagonists of the stories which support, at times, racist, patriarchal, and oppressive thinking. The self-concept of the pedagogical voice that speaks through parents, a third persona or a natural

⁵⁷ A. Vollmer, *Zwischenbericht...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ B. Blasche, *Der Erzieher ist ein...*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁶⁰ A. Vollmer, *Zwischenbericht...*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁶¹ P. Villaume, *In Flagranti...*, *op. cit.*, p. 316 ff.

⁶² A. Vollmer, *Zwischenbericht...*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

coincidence has been critically reviewed and compared to writings that Rutschky named "poisonous". My analysis of theoretical concepts is mirrored by examples of pedagogical care in residential institutions, situated in former West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s. Pedagogues or rather employees applied similar punishment advocated in *Der Struwwelpeter* from 1845 and Basedow's *Some things about the hardening of the small child* from 1773. Their legitimization was derived from a disturbing understanding of children as morally and biologically incomplete human beings. On the basis of this, pedagogues turned poisonous as they believed that their superiority as adults granted them access to body and soul of the child. This, however, leads to a complete inversion of what pedagogy is aiming at, to my mind. It is not an occupation that sacrifices the need of an adult to feel superior or advanced over the children in his or her care. Instead it is an occupation that first and foremost focuses on the personal growth of the young individual at hand. This, to me, is what pedagogy is about.

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