

## Wienke Haien and Her Environment: Perspectivisation in Theodor Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter* (*Rider on the White Horse*) in Light of Literary Disability Studies

This article examines the literary construction of the disability of the character Wienke Haien in Theodor Storm's novella *Der Schimmelreiter* (1888). It outlines whether the character might be a genre-typical disability icon following Ria Cheyne,<sup>1</sup> thus seeking to describe both the role disability plays in the plot and the perspectivisations of disability that can be identified at different narrative levels. Building on this, it discusses whether the diversity of perspectivisations and Wienke Haien's role in the embedded narrative undermine the demonstrably normative character of the frame narrative, thus confronting the reader with potentially opposing constructions of disability.<sup>2</sup> These questions may seem surprising, given that the work is known to have been appropriated in 1934 by National Socialist cultural propaganda, with its intolerance and hostility to disability, and that, independently of this propagandistic appropriation, the text itself continuously presents the reader with stereotyped gender roles<sup>3</sup> and a racist focus on ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> In light of

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1 With reference to Ria Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre. Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction*, Liverpool 2019.

2 This question is rooted in Mitchell and Snyder's fundamental hypothesis of a ›narrative prosthesis‹, that a narrative ›issues to resolve or correct [...] a deviance marked as improper to a social context‹. (David T. Mitchell/Sharon L. Snyder: *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Ann Arbor 2014, p. 53).

3 Theodor Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 36, 42, 53, 82, passim. All translations from German into English from this edition are my own.

4 *Ibid.* pp. 9, 44, 58, 63. »[...] Ihr hörtet wohl schon, Herr, die Friesen rechnen gut« (I dare say you have heard, sir, that the Frisians are good at arithmetic); »[...] die grauen Augen sahen aus dem langen Friesengesicht vorwärts [...]« (the grey eyes in his long Frisian face were looking ahead); »Der kluge Friese besann sich doch noch ein paar Augenblicke.« (Clever Frisian though he was, he nevertheless had to stop and think a few seconds); »[...] die lange Friesengestalt mit den klugen grauen Augen neben der hageren Nase und den zwei Schädelwölbungen darüber!« (the long Frisian over there with the keen grey eyes, the bony nose and the high, projecting forehead!).

Of course, immanent politicisation must also always be considered in the context of the emergence of Schleswig-Holstein's independence efforts under Prussian foreign rule at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; cf. Birgit Althans: *Storms Schimmelreiter. Das Töten als Initiation ins Soziale*, in: *Paragrana* 20 (2011), No. 1, pp. 328–347, p. 330.

its enduring popularity, especially as assigned reading in German-speaking schools, it seems all the more urgent to discuss an interpretation that raises the question of whether it communicates a future-oriented image of society and, at the same time, critically scrutinises its problematic contents.

In the research conducted so far, the character of Wienke Haien in *Der Schimmelreiter* has been analysed as an element in a literary-symbolic system.<sup>5</sup> There is one contribution written from a medical perspective that proposes a diagnosis of her condition.<sup>6</sup> In the novella, the term ›disability‹ is not used. Instead, we find discriminatory, normative attributions that suggest a form of pervasive developmental disorder.

In the article, I would like to show that research on the narrative scope and potential meaning of this character could benefit from insights provided by literary disability studies and, in doing so, address genre-related aspects of disability in Gothic fiction.<sup>7</sup> The methodological and theoretical foundation for this article is provided by Ria Cheyne's work on the narrativization of disability in genre,<sup>8</sup> along with David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's concept of ›narrative prosthesis‹.<sup>9</sup> Cheyne's identification of disability icons that are characteristic to certain genres and their embedding within familiar narratives are of central importance to this study. In particular, it seeks to connect

- 5 Cf. Ian Findlay: Myth and Redemption in Theodor Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter*, in: *Papers on Language & Literature* 11:4 (1975), pp. 397–403; Andrew Webber: The Uncanny rides again. Theodor Storm's Double Vision, in: *The Modern Language Review* 84 (1989), No. 4, pp. 860–873; Wiebke Strehl: Heredity and Environment. The Child Motif in the Novellas of Theodor Storm, 1992, [www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/heredity-environment-child-motif-novellas-theodor/docview/303988590/se-2](http://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/heredity-environment-child-motif-novellas-theodor/docview/303988590/se-2) (11.06.2024); Althans: Storms *Schimmelreiter*.
- 6 Cf. Maik Urban/Alexa Nieschlag: The Enigma of the Old Poet. Did the Child Wienke in Theodor Storm's Novella *Der Schimmelreiter* (1888) have Phenylketonuria?, in: *American Journal of Medical Genetics* 104:2 (2001), pp. 174–178. The proposed diagnosis concerns the metabolic disorder phenylketonuria. The authors speak of a ›probable case‹ (p. 174). This author finds the descriptions in the novel too vague to follow a medical diagnosis of Wienke's diversity.
- 7 From the perspective of literary history, *Der Schimmelreiter* is classified as a work of literary realism. In terms of its structure and motifs, the novella can also be identified as Gothic fiction, more precisely a Gothic realism novella (»Schauerliteratur« – the German- and English-language exemplars are difficult to distinguish) (Jürgen Vierig: Schauerroman, in: Braungart, Georg/Fricke, Harald/Grubmüller, Klaus/Müller, Jan-Dirk/Vollhardt, Friedrich/Weimar, Klaus (eds.): *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*. Vol. III, Berlin 2007, pp. 365–368, pp. 365f.).
- 8 Although Cheyne's studies focus on contemporary literature, her methods and results can be applied to the historical example of Gothic fiction, as the structures typical of this genre can be compared with the cases analysed by Cheyne.
- 9 Mitchell/Snyder: *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 49.

these icons from diverse genres examined by Cheyne with the potentially contradictory aspects of disability embodied in the figure of Wienke Haien. It is in this contradictoriness, if anywhere, that we can find a way of representing disability that is distinctive to the Gothic-realist novella. The disability icons in question are ›the needy disabled child‹, from romance,<sup>10</sup> and ›the disabled prophetess‹, modifying Cheyne's disability icons in fantasy.<sup>11</sup> Alongside the symbolic level, the text develops a literary construction of disability as an experience with a social dimension regarding both marginalization and inclusiveness.<sup>12</sup> This interconnectedness also seems to be specific to the genre.

With regard to the classification of the genre, the following can be said: *Der Schimmelreiter* is structured as an artful scheme of frame and core narratives. In his childhood, the anonymous frame narrator, to whom the author gives autobiographical traits, comes across a story in a magazine, which, as an elderly man, he reconstructs from memory decades later, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This outermost frame remains open at the end of the narrative. The story in the magazine is, for its part, composed as an autobiographical account by an unnamed man who travelled through North Frisia, on the west coast of Germany, in around 1830. While riding along the dike during a heavy coastal storm, he encounters a ghostly rider on a white horse. Afterwards, he stops off at an inn, where the schoolmaster of a nearby village tells him the story of the life and death of Hauke Haien and his family, said to have taken place some 100 years earlier. According to the schoolmaster and others present, the ghostly rider is a spectral figure, whose appearance in a storm foretells an impending dike breach and whose existence, as later becomes clear, can be traced back to Hauke Haien. The embedded narrative about Hauke Haien takes up the lion's share of the novella. This structure makes the text a typical representative of its genre.<sup>13</sup> Disability is only thematised in

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10 Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p. 11, 137f.

11 *Ibid.* p. 114f. Referring to »some iconic figures, such as the blind wizard, wise man, or seer, an icon that gains its force from the assumed contradiction.«

12 Cf. Mitchell/Snyder: *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 48; Anna-Rebecca Nowicki: Raus aus der semi-otischen Falle. Die Herausforderungen und Potenziale einer Disability Studies-Perspektive in der Germanistik, in: Luserke-Jaqui, Matthias (ed.): *Literary Disability Studies. Theorie und Praxis in der Literaturwissenschaft*, Würzburg 2019, pp. 9–44, p. 17.

13 Cf. Horst Thomé/Winfried Wehle: Novelle, in: Braungart, Georg/Fricke, Harald/Grubmüller, Klaus/Müller, Jan-Dirk/Vollhardt, Friedrich/Weimar, Klaus (eds.): *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft: Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*. Vol. II, Berlin 2007, pp. 725–731, pp. 726, 728; Vierig: *Schauerroman*, p. 366; Ian Cooper: Theodor Storm and Disenchantment, in: *German Life and Letters* 68:4 (2015), pp. 584–597, p. 593.

the core plot of the innermost narrative and the first frame narrative, meaning it is embedded in the perspectives of the frames. The oft-studied, polarising leitmotifs of the novella are, on the one hand, science, progress, and enlightenment and, on the other, the uncanny, superstition, and magical thinking.<sup>14</sup> Plot lines, characters, spaces and objects in the fictional world have opened up hermeneutic possibilities in light of one or the other of these two poles. The existence of a supernatural, uncanny entity is to some extent questioned at the narrative level of the schoolmaster,<sup>15</sup> but it is confirmed by the nameless author of the autobiographical narrative in the journal and not commented on by the anonymous frame narrator.<sup>16</sup> In virtue of the discontinuities in its perspectivisation of the uncanny, *Der Schimmelreiter* can be classified within the genre of Gothic fiction, and, more specifically, the subgenre of the Gothic-realist novella.<sup>17</sup>

Intertwined with this irresolvable perspectivisation of the uncanny, a similarly contradictory perspectivisation of disability can potentially be observed in the character of Wienke Haien. The narrative voice of the schoolmaster, who is, from a modern perspective, a regressive advocate of enlightenment values is dominated by an ableist perspective that defines disability as a deficiency.<sup>18</sup> However, in the characters of Hauke Haien, his wife Elke, and their daughter Wienke, the text constructs opposing ideological perspectivisations that stand in contradiction to those of other figures in the embedded narrative, as well as the narrative of the schoolmaster, but are also ambiguous in themselves. In order to show the contradictions and ambiguities of the novella's perspectivisation, I will focus on analysing the plot and character development in the embedded narrative: The protagonist Hauke Haien is

14 Cf. Lothar Köhn: Dialektik der Aufklärung in der deutschen Novelle, in: Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 51:3 (1977), pp. 436–458, pp. 438f.; Wolfgang Tschorn: Idylle und Verfall. Die Realität der Familie im Werk Theodor Storms, Bonn 1978, pp. 168f.; Webber: The Uncanny rides again; Beata Kołodziejczyk-Mróz: Das Verhältnis zwischen Rationalem und Irrationalem im Schimmelreiter von Theodor Storm, in: Roczniki humanistyczne 57:5 (2009), pp. 67–95, pp. 75f.; Althans: Storms Schimmelreiter, p. 331; Cooper: Theodor Storm and Disenchantment, p. 587.

15 However, this is not clear; cf. Storm: Der Schimmelreiter, p. 16.

16 Cf. Köhn: Dialektik der Aufklärung, p. 440; Thomas Heine: Der Schimmelreiter: An Analysis of the Narrative Structure, in: The German Quarterly 55:4 (1982), pp. 554–564, pp. 554, 558. On the fact that the contradiction is irresolvable, cf. the contributions in note 14.

17 Cf. note 7; Catherine Delyfer: Lucas Malet's Subversive Late-Gothic. Humanizing the Monster in The History of Sir Richard Calmady, in: Bienstock Anolik, Ruth (ed.): Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature, Jefferson 2010, p. 2, pp. 80–96, pp. 85–87.

18 Cf. Storm: Der Schimmelreiter, p. 16, 114f.

an only child, an intelligent autodidact, gifted in language and construction, and a patient, farsighted empiricist.<sup>19</sup> Described as an outsider from early in his life, Hauke's ambivalent development in adolescence is characterised by irascibility<sup>20</sup> and an interest in the macabre.<sup>21</sup> The schoolmaster's descriptions of Wienke's father and main caregiver are in many ways constitutive of Gothic-realist novella:<sup>22</sup> The ambiguity of his initial character traits, torn between rational and magical, and sometimes uncanny actions hint at the development of his character, as well as of the narrative. Within the perspectivisation of the schoolmaster, this development is marked from the beginning by a conventionalist power of failure, which, according to the symbolic logic of the plot, can in extension be attributed to his daughter.

Thanks to a profitable love match with Elke Volkerts, daughter of the incumbent dike-warden, an expansion of his holdings, and his own talent and ability, Hauke himself becomes dike-warden in a district of North Frisia, which makes him responsible for the construction and maintenance of the dikes there. In this role, he initiates and oversees the construction of a new, safer and considerably more expensive dike. However, Hauke's social advancement and engineering innovations alongside authoritarian leadership are enmeshed with social conflicts that drive him into isolation from the world outside his small family and farm.<sup>23</sup> This defensive isolation brings out negatively marked personality traits and behaviours, such as greed, harshness and authoritarian aggression, which are emphasised by the narrator's perspectivisation.<sup>24</sup> These traits stand in contrast to Hauke's behaviour as a husband and father, which is characterised by kindness, empathy, affection

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19 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 9–11.

20 Cf. *ibid.* One day, when the beloved cat of a lonely woman, who is described as witch-like, snatches a bird Hauke had caught while out hunting, he kills the cat in a brutal overreaction and the woman curses him. The narrative suggests at several points that his life is influenced by the curse.

21 Cf. *ibid.* p. 15.

22 Cf. Thomé/Wehle: *Novelle*, p. 726, Vierig: *Schauerroman*, p. 366.

23 Cf. Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 111.

24 *Ibid.* p. 101: »Es war doch trotz aller lebendigen Arbeit eine Einsamkeit um ihn, und in seinem Herzen nistete sich ein Trotz und ein abgeschlossenes Wesen gegen andere Menschen ein. (But in spite of all the lively work, a loneliness had spread round him, and in his heart nestled a stubbornness and a reserved manner toward other people.) [...] Gegen Gesinde und Arbeiter aber wurde er strenger, (Towards servants and workmen, however, he grew more severe) [...] die Ungeschickten und Fahrlässigen [...] wurden jetzt durch hartes Anfahren aufgeschreckt (the clumsy and careless ones [...] were now startled by his harsh address).«

and solidarity.<sup>25</sup> Elke Haien, née Volkerts, is introduced in the first third of the novel. As the only child of the incumbent dike-warden, she initially enjoys a higher social status than her husband. She is characterised as a serious and mathematically gifted woman,<sup>26</sup> who is just as taciturn as Hauke. Their Frisian ›ethnicity‹ is repeatedly emphasised and valorised, which reads strangely from a modern-day perspective.<sup>27</sup> The similarities between them as social ›misfits‹ have led some interpreters to the conclusion, in line with the conventions of the genre, that, within the narrative logic of the novella, their offspring is the product of spiritual incest<sup>28</sup> and therefore cannot endure. This interpretation sees Wienke as a character in the sense of ›narrative prosthesis‹, according to which her »extermination« would be considered a »purification of the social body«.<sup>29</sup> At the same time and in an ambiguous way, according to the racist focus on ethnicity in the text, the suggested ›abnormality‹ and racialised excellence of the two parents allow us to anticipate ›abnormal‹ and excellent offspring. The text thus projects the contradictory iconisation of Wienke who will arrive later in the narrative.

Despite Hauke's advocacy of enlightenment and progress, superstition and occult practices are very important in marshland society,<sup>30</sup> where stories<sup>31</sup> and supposed eyewitness accounts of mysterious apparitions also circulate.<sup>32</sup> A number of incidents reveal that even Hauke and his wife are affected by the uncanny: as a teenager, Hauke is cursed by the witch-like Trien' Jans,<sup>33</sup> after killing her white tomcat.<sup>34</sup> Later, when she is an old woman, she lives on Hauke's farm, where she becomes close friends with his daughter Wienke and gives her an animal companion.<sup>35</sup> Here, too, through its structure and

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25 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 36, 57, 101.

26 *Ibid.* p. 24: »[...] aber seine Tochter Elke, die kann rechnen!« (but his daughter Elke, she can calculate!).

27 Cf. note 2.

28 Cf. Strehl: *Heredity and environment*, p. 209; Urban/Nieschlag: *The enigma of the old poet*, p. 177.

29 Mitchell/Snyder: *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 54.

30 Cf. Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, pp. 7, 14, 15, 61, 72, 106, etc. Beliefs in ghost riders, sea devils, spirits of the drowned, the importance of hanging up of mirrors when someone dies, entombing sacrificial victims in buildings (in the best case a child), and many more.

31 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 119f. e.g. Trien' Jans' tale of the mermaid.

32 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 78–80.

33 Cf. Kołodziejczyk-Mróż: *Das Verhältnis zwischen Rationalem und Irrationalem*, p. 91.

34 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 18f.; 130.

35 *Ibid.* p. 113: »Dann hob sie das Kind [...] und setzte es derb auf den Schemel [Stool covered with the fur of her tomcat, which Hauke killed, S.O.] nieder. Da es aber stumm und unbeweglich sitzen blieb und sie immer nur ansah, begann sie mit dem Kopfe zu schütteln. »Du

narrative form, the text creates an ambiguity, as it is simultaneously suggested that Trien' Jans has a socially positive influence on Hauke's needy, impaired child, while simultaneously suggesting the opposite through Jans' derogatory judgement and abuse, as well as hinting at the uncanny draw that she exercises on Wienke.<sup>36</sup>

During his rise to the position of dike-warden Hauke buys a white horse from a stranger with demonic features.<sup>37</sup> However, several observant farmers claim that it is actually an undead horse carcass that had disappeared from the desolate land between the dike and the sea. The schoolmaster, who repeats the tale, considers it a ghost story<sup>38</sup> maliciously spread by Hauke Haien's opponents.<sup>39</sup> The narrative leaves it uncertain whether the undead horse carcass actually exists. However, the horse exhibits a distinctive behaviour and, after it is domesticated by the paterfamilias Hauke, allows only him to ride it, with the exception of his daughter, whom he leads around on it.<sup>40</sup>

Already before Wienke is born, characters and objects associated with the occult are gradually introduced, with which she later develops a close relationship and which confer on her an aura of the uncanny and magical. In this way, the text lays the groundwork for aspects of the disability icon distinctive of fantasy, namely the disabled prophetess.<sup>41</sup>

Elke is the first to bring up the tradition of entombing sacrificial victims during the construction of a dike, albeit in an ironic context.<sup>42</sup> With this remark, which is referenced numerous times in the course of the plot, the death of the family is hinted at for the first time, as I will show in more detail below. While in labour, Elke has visions of her own death, as she suffers from a severe

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strafst ihn, Gott der Herr! Ja, ja, Du strafst ihn!« [...] aber ein Erbarmen mit dem Kinde schien sie doch zu überkommen; ihre knöcherne Hand strich über das dürrtige Haar desselben, und aus den Augen der Kleinen kam es, als ob ihr damit wohl geschehe.« (Then she lifted up the child [...] and set it down roughly on the stool. But when it remained sitting there, silent and motionless and only kept looking at her, she began to shake her head. »Thou art punishing him, Lord God! Yes, yes, Thou art punishing him!« [...] but pity for the child seemed to come over her; she stroked its scanty hair with her bony hand, and the eyes of the little girl seemed to show that this did her good.)

36 Cf. pp. 8f.; Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 114.

37 Cf. *ibid.* The uncanny nature of the figure is also marked by ethnic, potentially racist categorisation.

38 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 74–80.

39 Cf. *ibid.* p. 100.

40 Cf. *ibid.* p. 103; cf. p. 13.

41 Cf. Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p. 114.

42 Cf. *ibid.* p. 72.

fever.<sup>43</sup> During her vision, Elke herself can be read as a disabled prophetic. Her disability does not consist in a chronic, physical impairment, but in a lack of awareness about her own prophecies due to the constricting circumstances of the birth and serious puerperal fever, a gender-specific vulnerability.<sup>44</sup>

If we adopt a semiotic reading proper to the genre, the text generally conveys that the future of the parents is baleful,<sup>45</sup> which has led many to the conclusion that, in the narrative logic, Wienke is supposed to be the ultimate result of their flaws and wrongdoings,<sup>46</sup> or even their incestuous relationship.<sup>47</sup> Hauke and Elke remain childless for a relatively long time, leading Elke to develop severe feelings of guilt, from which Hauke must absolve her.<sup>48</sup> Then, »in the ninth year of marriage« (»im neunten Ehejahre«),<sup>49</sup> their daughter Wienke Haien is born. She is thus, quantitatively speaking, a minor character, who is only introduced two-thirds of the way through the story. At first, only a single reference is made to her later existence, one that is inserted proleptically and whose context is explained below. The narrator describes the child as »feeble-minded« (blöde) and a God-given burden.<sup>50</sup> Despite its diverse meanings in contemporary interpretations, »blöde« is to be interpreted negatively here, in the sense of dull-witted or feeble-minded.<sup>51</sup> The presence of disability is hinted at from her birth: Elke's midwife worries about the newborn's crying, which sounds »strangely muffled« (wunderlich verhohlen).<sup>52</sup> In infancy, she does not react to attempts to entertain her and,

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43 Cf. Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 97f.

44 Cf. Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p. 114.

45 Cf. Findlay: *Myth and Redemption*, p. 401; Köhn: *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p. 442; Tschorn: *Idylle und Verfall*, p. 169.

46 Cf. Tschorn: *Idylle und Verfall*; Heine: *Narrative Structure*; Webber: *The Uncanny rides again*; Strehl: *Heredity and environment*; Urban/Nieschlag: *The enigma of the old poet*; Althans: *Storms Schimmelreiter*.

47 Cf. note 28.

48 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 82: »Du müsstest denn ein ander Weib nehmen; ich bring dir keine Kinder.« (You would have to take another wife then; I shall bring you no children.) »[...] Das überlassen wir dem Herrgott (We'll leave that to the Lord) [...] jetzt aber, und auch dann noch sind wir jung genug, um uns der Früchte unserer Arbeit selbst zu freuen. [...] but now and at that time too, we are young enough to have joy for ourselves in the fruits of our labors).«

49 *Ibid.* p. 97.

50 *Ibid.* pp. 16, 117.

51 (Art.) blöde, in: *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, Vol. 2, Leipzig (1854–1971), col. 139–140, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB) (12.02.25), col. 139–140; (Art.) blöde, in: *Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, Vol. 1 (1811), col. 1082–1086, [woerterbuchnetz.de/Adelung](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/Adelung) (12.02.25), col. 1082–1086.

52 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 98.

in contrast to another infant character, she is described as facing delays in linguistic, cognitive and motor development. The descriptions remain vague, making a specific diagnosis difficult.<sup>53</sup> Her disability only becomes evident through normative descriptions of how she is different, both those mentioned above and others.<sup>54</sup> Another element that offers a premonition of the child's otherness is that she is born in the ninth year of her parents' marriage, which, in keeping with the genre, symbolises an uncanny extension of the nine months of pregnancy.

Elke is the first character in the embedded narrative to notice Wienke's divergences from a norm established by the characters and narrator and to judge them negatively at first.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, Wienke does have a happy childhood, as the text repeatedly emphasises. At a very young age, she owns a dog<sup>56</sup> – a sacrificial victim that her father rescued from a superstitious custom, which serves to connect Elke's earlier mention of the sacrificial burial of animals underneath new dikes with the subsequent fate of her family. As mentioned above, she is friends with a seagull<sup>57</sup> and the sinister Trien' Jans, whose friendliness seems to be driven by both pity and an uncanny interest in the child.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Trien' Jans, as a character who embodies the uncanny, displays hostility towards the disabled, as shown above, and is assigned to a similar group as Wienke. This exemplifies the genre's association between the uncanny and the disabled, as suggested by the genre. The narrator comments on the foursome:

When by chance Hauke's or Elke's eyes fell upon this strange four-leaf clover which, as it were, was held to the same stem only by the same defect – then they cast tender glances upon their child. But when they had turned away, there remained on their faces only the pain that each carried away alone, for the saving word had not yet been spoken between them.<sup>59</sup>

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53 As mentioned above, Urban/Nieschlag diagnose her with phenylketonuria, cf. note 6.

54 Cf. Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 117, 114, 120, *passim*.

55 *Ibid.* p. 103: »[...] Elke [...] sagte mitunter schmerzlich: »Das Meine ist noch nicht so weit wie deines, Stina!« (Elke [...] sometimes said with regret: »Mine isn't as far on as yours yet, Trina.«)

56 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 108, 111.

57 Cf. *ibid.* p. 111.

58 Cf. note 35.

59 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 114f. »Fielen zufällig Haukes oder Elkes Augen auf dies wunderliche Vierblatt, das nur durch einen gleichen Mangel am Stängel festgehalten wurde, dann flog wohl ein zärtlicher Blick auf ihr Kind; hatten sie sich gewandt, so blieb nur noch der Schmerz auf ihrem Antlitz, den jedes einsam mit sich von dannen trug; denn das erlösende Wort war zwischen ihnen noch nicht gesprochen worden.«

In other words, the narrator presents Wienke's disability as a deficiency that primarily causes her parents grief, even though they conceal it from her.<sup>60</sup> In this way, his perspective is shown to not be any more differentiated than that of Trien' Jans. Although he describes the parents' interaction with the child as loving, despite their perception of otherness, and empathically addresses a realistic problem of parenthood in the couple's unspoken self-reproaches, the lack of agency implied by the metaphor of the four-leaf clover disparages her ability to create a community. Initially, therefore, the narrator and the characters' behaviour contribute to a consistently negative construction of disability. At the level of the embedded plot, the fact that her only friends are an old woman and animals, with whom she cannot interact as equals, is not problematised in itself.<sup>61</sup>

So far then, the narrative primarily constructs disability as a failure and exploitatively casts the social response to disability purely as a challenge to be overcome, rather than as the circumstance that constructs disability in the first place.<sup>62</sup> Once again, the text constructs a genre-specific ambiguity: In the face of Hauke Haien's ambitious attempt to secure his legacy through the new dike, on a symbolic-ableist reading his daughter appears to represent a countervailing element that threatens to invalidate this progressive accomplishment. Within the framework of Mitchell and Snyder's scheme of narrative structure, this antithesis seems to mark a step in the narrative where the »deviance is brought from the periphery of concerns to the centre of the story to come«.<sup>63</sup> It is in this centrality that a contradictory iconisation emerges: As the needy disabled child, Wienke receives empathy and care from her parents, and the text attempts to arouse the empathy of the reader – which is an exploitative narrative strategy, but at the same time has a potential

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60 A perspective that has been reproduced in research. Cf. Heine: *Narrative Structure*, p. 564; Webber: *The Uncanny rides again*, p. 872; Strehl: *Heredity and environment*, pp. V, 159; Althans: *Storms Schimmelreiter*, p. 344. Köhn: *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p. 442, speaks of an »ethical problem«, assigning the topic of disability to the broad theme of the novella, man's confrontation with nature.

61 Even if it is possible to draw parallels with other characters in Storm's late works on the basis of their friendship with animals, in the case of Wienke in the *Schimmelreiter* »isolation« (Tschorn: *Idylle und Verfall*, p. 145) – if we accept it as a theme – seems to be a problem caused by society.

62 The narrator reproduces disability as an absolute category, produced by an ableist society (cf. Davis, Lennard J.: *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. London 1995, p. 24f.).

63 Mitchell/Snyder: *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 53.

to influence a more accepting and diversity-friendly attitude of readers.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the schoolmaster's perspective conveys mistrust vis-à-vis the uncanniness that both surrounds the child and emanates from her, an uncanniness which, on a symbolic reading, gives her power, albeit one that is not to be identified here with empowerment. The latter is only to be found in the form of a judgement-free perspective on the freedom to shape social relationships to other characters, where the text (contradicting the schoolmaster's perspective) attributes the capacity to act to the character.

One day, Hauke takes his daughter to the sea on the white horse, accompanied by the incomprehensible »mumbling« of Trien' Jans. At the sight of the sea, a fearful Wienke speaks incoherently and abruptly: »Father, [...] you can do that. Can't you do everything?« and »It's not doing anything to me [...] no, tell it not to do anything to us; you can do that, and then it won't do anything to us!«<sup>65</sup> Back home, in answer to her mother's question as to whether she likes the sea, she declares: »It talks [...] Wienke is afraid!«<sup>66</sup> During a visit to the dike years later, Wienke is once again overcome by fear and seems to see »into an abyss.«<sup>67</sup> Just like her mother before her, she appears to have a vision of her own death.<sup>68</sup> This vision is to be situated in the long literary tradition involving a purely symbolic interpretation of disability, i.e. that her disability is equated with a supernatural gift.<sup>69</sup> In addition, it seems to reflect an ongoing suggestion that there exists a connection between disability, prophetic power and femininity, in which Wienke and her mother participate, although Wienke does so to a higher degree and more permanently. They both fulfil Cheyne's additional criterion of vulnerability for the disabled prophet.<sup>70</sup> Since women have an educational disadvantage over men in a literary-historical context and are also depicted in the novella as propagators of superstition,<sup>71</sup> it is quite possible to suspect a pejorative

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64 Wienke might count as a reflexive representation of disability; cf. Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p. 162.

65 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 115f. »Vater [...], du kannst das doch! Kannst du nicht alles? « and »Es tut mir nichts [...] nein, sag, dass es uns nichts tun soll; du kannst das, und dann tut es uns auch nichts.«

66 *Ibid.* p. 117: »Es spricht [...] Wienke ist bange!«.

67 *Ibid.* p. 121: »es war, als sähe sie erschrocken in einen Abgrund«.

68 Cf. Kołodziejczyk-Mróz: *Das Verhältnis zwischen Rationalem und Irrationalem*, p. 91f.

69 Cf. Davis: *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. 100ff.; Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p. 133f.

70 Cf. p. 7; Cheyne: *Disability, Literature, Genre*, p. 29.

71 See also Christoph D. Weber: *Deichbau und Selbstopfer. Der Katastrophendiskurs in Theodor Storms Der Schimmelreiter*, in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 90:1 (2016), pp. 109–133, p. 121.

attitude of the text here. However, this can be attributed to the schoolmaster and the space of ›society‹.<sup>72</sup> There is no judgement at the level of the plot or in the ›family‹ space. In any case, Wienke's function as an ambiguous disability icon seems evident by this point.

Hauke's and Wienke's second visit to the dike occurs at the site of the narrator's prolepsis at the beginning of the story, when the teenaged Hauke wanders further and further out onto the dikes. One February, corpses start washing up on the frozen sea. Their appearance is described as unappetising and they are compared to »sea devils«.<sup>73</sup> Hauke Haien immediately seeks out the place where they were found: »Nobody knew whether he wanted to look for more dead, or if he was drawn to the places now deserted by the horror that still clung to them.«<sup>74</sup> The impression made by the frozen marshes, dikes and mudflats is described in the following terms: »it seemed as if the whole world lay in a white death«.<sup>75</sup> Hauke is standing on the dike looking out over the surroundings, when he notices a ghostly mass of figures emerging from between the ice floes. On his way home, he continues to be enveloped by eerie sensations:

[...] Yet he is said to have told neither his father nor anyone else about it. But many years later he took his feeble-minded little girl, with whom the Lord had later burdened him, out onto the dike with him at the same time of day and year, and the same riot is said to have appeared then out on the sand flats; but he told her not to be afraid, it was just the herons and crows, that seemed so big and horrible, and that they were getting fish out of the open cracks.<sup>76</sup>

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72 Tschorn (*Idylle und Verfall*, p. 167) distinguishes between »work« and »privacy«.

73 A reference to superstition later repeated by Wienke under Trien' Jans' influence. Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 14: »Glaubt nicht, dass sie wie Menschen aussahen [...] nein, wie die Seeteufel! So große Köpfe [...] gnidderschwarz und blank, wie frisch gebacken Brot!« (Don't you believe they looked like people! [...] no, like sea devils! Heads as big as this [...] coal-black and shiny, like freshly baked bread!).

74 *Ibid.* pp. 14–16. »Es war nicht zu sagen, wollte er noch nach weiteren Toten suchen, oder zog ihn nur das Grauen, das noch auf den jetzt verlassen Stellen brüten musste.«

75 *Ibid.* p. 15: »Es war, als liege die ganze Welt in weissem Tod.«

76 *Ibid.* p. 16: »[...] niemals soll er seinem Vater oder einem anderen davon erzählt haben. Erst viele Jahre später hat er sein blödes Mädchen, womit später der Herrgott ihn belastete, um dieselbe Tages- und Jahreszeit mit sich auf den Deich hinausgenommen, und dasselbe Wesen soll sich derzeit draussen auf den Watten gezeigt haben; aber er hat ihr gesagt, sie solle sich nicht fürchten, das seien nur die Fischreihner und die Krähen, die im Nebel so groß und fürchterlich erschienen; die holten sich die Fische aus den offenen Spalten.«

The listeners then look out the window of the inn and, under the impression that the Schimmelreiter has just ridden by, the dike-warden interrupts the schoolmaster's narrative, out of fear that the story has provoked the ghostly figure.

While the existence of the uncanny is suggested, even if the schoolmaster urges his listeners to be reasonable, Hauke Haien is clearly sceptical and seems to view this attitude as a pedagogical mission. No mention is made of Wienke's vision here, although it plays an essential role in the resumption of the prolepsis later in the story. However, long before she surfaces in the narrative, her character is presented as a burden. At the same time, Wienke is the only character in the narrative who is entrusted with knowledge of an early childhood experience that terrified her father, even as a teenager, and that must also be considered a liminal experience, due to the poetic, death-related context. According to the father's scientific approach to explanation, the education of reason in the face of overpowering superstition is of central importance. The father's actions resemble a rite of passage, revealing a divergence between the narrator's perspective and Hauke's and Wienke's actions: The former constructs disability as a harmful deviance, whereas the latter depicts Wienke as a person in her own right, and with her own sense of agency. This divergence grows larger as the plot progresses. For the narrator, there exists only an ideologising perspective, but within the framework of the plot, disability plays no role at significant points in the narrative. Instead, the focus lies on an active subject, a friend, a prophetess, and daughter, which together constitute a unique, genre-specific disability icon.

After Wienke, who was terrified by the second visit to the dike, has run off to see Trien' Jans, her parents enter into a discussion, during which she is labelled »schwachsinnig« (feeble-minded).<sup>77</sup> Elke proclaims: »So we are left alone after all« (So sind wir denn doch allein gelieben).<sup>78</sup> She sees her behaviour as the cause of Wienke's disability, which she interprets as a punishment, while Hauke shows understanding and tries to convey acceptance.<sup>79</sup> Elke's statement about being alone does not negate the presence of the child, but rather scathingly addresses the mother's perceived lack of a relationship with her daughter and thus stresses the loneliness of the parents. Simultane-

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77 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 117. From this point onwards, this adjective is used repeatedly, e.g. p. 120.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 117f.: »I love her, and she throws her little arms round me and presses herself close to my breast; for all the treasures of the world I wouldn't want to miss that!« (Ich hab sie lieb, und sie schlägt ihre Ärmchen um mich und drückt sich fest an meine Brust; um alle Schätze wollt ich das nicht missen!) »But why? [...] what have I, poor mother, done?« (Aber warum? [...], was hab ich arme Mutter denn verschuldet?) – »Yes, Elke, that I have asked, too, of Him who alone can know [...]« (Ja, Elke, das hab ich freilich auch gefragt; den, der allein es wissen kann [...]).

ously, it expresses her concerns and doubts about the continuation of the family through the daughter, well prepared by the narrative structure of the genre's exemplar as shown above.

Only after Hauke reassures her and makes his central declaration in the text – »Don't let yourself be kept from loving your child as you do; be sure it understands that.«<sup>80</sup> – is Elke able to turn to her child, which she does with fervour. In other words, her husband must take the initiative before she is able to free herself from shame and feelings of guilt and live out a healthy relationship with her child.<sup>81</sup> This is followed by a new paragraph: »Thus the people on the dike-warden's farm lived together quietly; if the child had not been there, much would have been wanting.«<sup>82</sup>

This line makes clear that the family can be regarded as a safe space and that Wienke is an indispensable part of it. It is only hinted at that this represents a familial deconstruction of the interpretation of her disability that was previously understood as a deficiency and as an absolute category. The fact that they live together »quietly« suggests that the family does not and will not adhere to the socially acceptable norms and thus evades normative discrimination, whose very existence it nevertheless needs to take into account. Furthermore, in accordance with the plot and the narrator's comments, the retreat could also be attributed to Hauke and how he is perceived publicly as a result of negative behaviour, which is to be distinguished from the inclusive appreciation found in the family space. Although the text subtly calls into question the necessity of the family's withdrawal and thus the reasons for it, the withdrawal is also presented as beneficial and as a solution for the family. On the whole, this retreat functions as an exploitative »narrative prosthesis« that counteracts the structure of the embedded narrative. The question of whether the text thus presents itself as a critique of the anti-disability environment of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century period, which the text depicts requires further analysis, possibly involving comparisons with contemporary literature.

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80 Ibid. p. 118: »Lass dich nicht irren, dein Kind, wie du es tust, zu lieben; sei sicher, das versteht es!«.

81 Elke's painful confession and the ensuing dynamic call to mind Garland-Thompson's remark on the potential of disability to foster integration: »Telling one's disability story is an antidote to disability disqualification, to the social banishment and apartness of the sick role and the stranger-making function of disability stigma. Making disability narrative integrates one into the human community [...]« (Rosemarie Garland-Thomson: *Building a World with Disability in It*, in: Waldschmidt, Anne (ed.): *Culture - Theory – Disability*, Bielefeld 2017, pp. 51–62, p. 56).

82 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 118, »So lebten die Menschen auf dem Deichgrafshofe still beisammen; wäre das Kind nicht da gewesen, es hätte viel gefehlt.«

Thus, while Wienke's shortcomings are initially recognised by various characters, as well as by the narrator himself, there are other indications that the character can be read without reference to a normative perspective, especially in the ›family‹ space, such as the fact that Hauke repeatedly draws strength from his interactions with his daughter.<sup>83</sup> As mentioned above, Wienke is the only person other than her father to ride the supposedly demonic white horse, which emphasises both her own abilities and the uncanniness she shares with her father.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, she is described in terms of the same (rather limited) number of physical features as her parents.<sup>85</sup> While, as shown above, normative discrimination plays a role in the description of the character's behaviour, even in these cases the context points to a family's engagement in day-to-day life with progressive, inclusive approaches. Overall, it is possible to observe the character's subjectivity, dissociating it from symbolic meaning, but this remains in the background, as, in quantitative terms, it makes up a very small portion of the plot.

The non-normative aspects of Wienke's actions are inexplicably linked to the uncanny: the white horse is something that should not be ridden, and having Trien' Jans and animals as friends arouses suspicion, as does the gift of foresight. Further discrimination appears to result from the imposition of the narrator's perspective, from which readers must actively emancipate themselves by adopting Hauke Haien's point of view. That said, the empathy centred on the ›family‹ space provides a strong incentive to identify with the protagonist and his perspective. It stands in contrast to the inexplicable and ominous horror, while at the same time being linked to it, creating a unique bond, in which Wienke, as a disability icon of the Gothic-realist novella, thrives in an ambiguous way, making the degree of exploitation within the framework of the concept of ›narrative prosthesis‹ difficult to assess.

At this stage, there is an important conceptual observation to be made regarding the restriction of the theme of disability to the core narrative and the embedding of this narrative within the perspectivalisations of the frame stories, as discussed above. The figurative parallel of powerlessness produced by marginalization, which both Wienke and Hauke are exposed to during

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83 Ibid. p. 101: »[...] and every evening and every morning he knelt at the cradle of his child as if there he could find the place of his eternal salvation.« ([...] und an der Wiege seines Kindes lag er abends und morgens auf den Knien, als sei dort die Stätte seines ewigen Heils).

84 Cf. *ibid.* p. 103.

85 Cf. *ibid.* pp. 103, 111, 113, 119. She has pale blue eyes, pale blonde hair and an enigmatic facial expression.

their lifetimes and which is emphasised in the narrative by the schoolmaster, is reflected in the very structure of the novella. In this way, the form of the work itself reflects an immanent critique of hostility towards its diverse characters, without resolving the ambiguity inherent in the genre. This reading is affirmed above all at the end of the novella:

Hauke Haien, debilitated by social opposition and illness, makes an irresponsible decision to secure an old dike. On a stormy night before All Saints' Day, he rides out on his white horse to inspect both the old dike and the new one. His wife Elke brings their daughter Wienke and the dog, who had been saved from becoming a sacrificial victim, to see him. However, the worst possible scenario comes true and the old dike breaks. The reclaimed land of the new koog<sup>86</sup> remains unharmed, but the old, inhabited koog is swamped by a storm surge, along with the dwellings it contains. Hauke's family perishes before his eyes and Hauke throws himself and his horse into the flood, pleading to God to spare his family in return for his death.<sup>87</sup> The novella then concludes with a few paragraphs from the frame story in the inn set in 1830, in which a distant dike breach is reported, which the acting dike-warden insistently links with the appearance of the rider.

The aborted sacrifice from earlier in the narrative, which Hauke vainly attempted to forestall through his own self-sacrifice, is now completed. Through the extermination of the deviant a purification is carried out. But the final motif of the embedded narrative is the existential threat of losing one's family. The annihilation of the family, the protagonists of the central narrative, is naturally irreversible, but it is also incomplete, insofar as the central project of the new dike, Hauke's life's work, and whose construction the father, mother and daughter fundamentally accompanied, remains standing.

Does *Der Schimmelreiter* challenge the assumption that ableist perspectives are preferable or is the presentation of Wienke simply exploitative of disability for the sake of suspense? A reading of disability in *Der Schimmelreiter* that is limited to a semiotic understanding of the Gothic-realist novella as a subgenre has proven to be insufficient. The findings above illustrate that an inherently problematic representation does not prohibit the creation of a »reflexive representation«<sup>88</sup> of disability in the novella. Using the central figures of Hauke

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86 A type of polder specific to the North Western German coast, protected by embankments known as dikes enclosing the land to form arable marshland.

87 Storm: *Der Schimmelreiter*, p. 143: »Lord, take me instead, spare the others!« (Herr Gott, nimm mich; verschon die andern!).

88 Cf. note 64.

Haien, his wife Elke and their daughter Wienke Haien, the text constructs ideological perspectivalisations that stand in contradiction to those of other figures in the internal narrative, as well as that of the schoolmaster:

As we have seen, a countervailing perspective and narrative construction emerges in the embedded narrative, which seems to be abruptly subverted at the end, in a way that fundamentally aligns with the contradictory nature both of the genre in general and of Storm's text in particular. I have laid out how ›society‹ is constructed in this embedded narrative as a dangerous space, in which discrimination is the rule and Wienke serves as a symbol of improper deviance. The space of the ›family‹, in contrast, passes through various stages of discrimination before ultimately resulting in the acceptance and inclusion of Wienke as an influential subject capable of action. It is only at this narrative level that a diversity-friendly viewpoint can be constructed to stand in internal contradiction to the narrative figure of the schoolmaster and his ableist assumptions. This does not, however, undermine Wienke's construction as an ambiguous disability icon.

In the end, it seems that the uncanny prevails: the absurd tragedy of the conclusion, which lies above all in the fact that the progressive, pious protagonist, who rejects all superstition, ends up as a ghostly figure, has been emphasised many times.<sup>89</sup> But in his attitude towards his daughter, Hauke shows himself to be ahead of his wife, his environment and his time, which he is able to influence to a greater or lesser extent. Within the framework of the schoolmaster's ableist perspectivalisation, it is Hauke's behaviour that allows a reader to understand his daughter's disability not as a burden on the family, but as a natural manifestation of human diversity, and as a challenge to the emphasis on the homogeneity that the other characters establish as the norm.

The embedded narrative suggests that overcoming this prejudice is a task for society, but in the concrete case narrated here, it is the family's achievement and not a matter of social debate. Within the interpretative framework of the Gothic-realist novella, the imperfection of Hauke Haien's life and its guilt-ridden end, as well as the uncanny acquisition of the white horse, are brought together in the ghostly afterlife. There are also uncanny details, such as his saving the dog from sacrifice, only for it to come to pass anyway. The Old Koog, which in the semiotic reading stands for superstition, tradition, backwardness and hostility to the disabled, is flooded. Conversely, the

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89 Cf. Findlay: *Myth and Redemption*, p. 400; John Hamilton: *Rahmen, Küsten und Nachhaltigkeit in Theodor Storms Der Schimmelreiter*, in: *Weimarer Beiträge: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft, Ästhetik und Kulturwissenschaften* 61:2 (2015), pp. 165–180, p. 178.

progressive work, the new dike, is preserved. At the same time, the ghostly figure of the rider is to be understood as an uncanny reference to Hauke's Cassandra-like prophecies during his lifetime. The survival of the new dike transforms Hauke Haien's spirit of innovation into a force that influences the present of the second narrative level and symbolises the perseverance of a progressive attitude in the face of regressive hostility.

Wienke does share in her father's tragic heroism to a large extent: she is a child, first and foremost there to be protected. Ultimately, her disability scarcely plays a role in the advancement of the plot, since adults steer the action in the novella and Wienke's young age leaves her in a comparatively passive position. However, she does have a strong influence on her father, representing a source of strength and sharing in some of his formative experiences. Neither Wienke nor her mother, who are both able to make Cassandra-like prophecies, return as apparitions, since neither of them shares responsibility for the disaster, but the collective demise of the family symbolises their togetherness. The novella's final image of Hauke's dike lends substance to the professional and social progressiveness of his character, which is evident in his rejection of an ableist perspective on his daughter, but also to the uncanny, with the ambiguity of the ghostly figure.

Whereas in the beginning of the novella the genre-specific symbolism presents disability itself as a facet of the uncanny and some characters' perspectives on it as running counter to this, the focus shifts as the narrative takes its course. Within the novella's narrative construction, it is possible to integrate a progressive reading drawn from disability studies, in which disability is a bearer of meaning that informs the characters' actions, into the semiotic level of interpretation particular to the genre as a whole.

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