Literary Form and Narrative Analysis

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Disability and Intersectionality: The Concepts of ›Healing‹ in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* Novels

Part of the canon of Western children's and young adult literature, the story of the child Heidi details her life with her grandfather in the Swiss mountains and how she is brought to the city of Frankfurt to live as a playmate of the bourgeois girl Klara. Johanna Spyri's two novels *Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre* (1880; *Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning*) and *Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat* (1881; *Heidi: How She Used What She Learned*) have been translated into over 70 languages and have been adapted into numerous media formats, including movies, anime, comics, musicals, and more. They are by far the Swiss author's most successful books.[1]

Jean-Michel Wissmer emphasizes that when it comes to the story of Heidi, we often only remember her life in the mountains with her grandfather, her friend Peter, and the goats.[2] However, this idyllic landscape is contrasted to the city of Frankfurt in Germany. Embedded in this constellation is a second juxtaposition that decisively characterizes the novels: disabled and non-disabled. By introducing Klara Sesemann as a character with disabilities – her legs are paralyzed, and she uses a wheelchair – the novels follow a typical narrative structure of literary representations of disability, one that David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder have referred to as ›narrative prosthesis‹: The ›problem‹ of disability is introduced and demands an explanation, placing disability at the centre of the story, only to be ›solved‹ at the end – by compensating or overcoming the disability or even by eradicating the character with disabilities.[3] Accordingly, Klara is healed at the end of the second novel; she overcomes her paralysis and begins to walk.

1 Cf. Linda Leskau/Sigrid Nieberle: Kanonisierung/Popularisierung. Johanna Spyris *Heidi*-Romane, in: Wernli, Martina/Klimek, Sonja (eds.): Heidi und mehr. Neue Studien zu Johanna Spyris Werken, Berlin 2026 (in print).

2 Cf. Jean-Michel Wissmer: Heidi. Ein Schweizer Mythos erobert die Welt, Basel 2014, p. 19.

3 Cf. David T. Mitchell/Sharon L. Snyder: Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse, Ann Arbor 2000, pp. 53f.

Thus, the *Heidi* novels can be identified as a form of supercrip narrative.[4] Supercrip narratives are, as Sami Schalk argues, »stereotypical representation[s] of disability« that »rely on concepts of overcoming, heroism, inspiration, and the extraordinary«, »making it seem as if all effects of disability can be erased if one merely works hard enough«.[5] Even if in disability studies, supercrip narratives are often problematized, this almost unanimous criticism in academic discourse is, as Schalk stresses, offset by the narrative's high popularity – as can be seen in the reception of the *Heidi* novels. Without denying that supercrip narratives can indeed reproduce problematic stereotypes of disability, Schalk demands we »open up disability studies to increased engagement with mainstream genres that are often dismissed as too normative, regressive, or uncomplicated« in order to »demonstrate that rather than having one self-evident meaning, supercrip actually encompasses a large body of representations«.[6]

Both agreeing with and extending Schalk's call for a methodological, theoretical, and cultural-historical analysis of supercrip narratives, the aim of my article is to show how the *Heidi* novels ultimately reject a one-dimensional representation of disability. Instead, I argue that disability cannot be read separately from other categories such as age, class, gender, and religion.[7] In the following, I will therefore first outline some central concepts in literary disability studies and then employ these together with intersectional narrative theory to examine the various ›healing processes‹ of disability present in the *Heidi* novels.

4 Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* novels were published in the late 19th century (1880 and 1881). Sami Schalk explicitly draws attention to the fact that supercrip narratives are not only a current phenomenon, but that the »discursive use of supercrip narratives (without the actual label of supercrip)« can be traced back to around 1900, cf. Sami Schalk: Reevaluating the Supercrip, in: Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies 10:1 (2016), p. 73.

5 Ibid., pp. 72f.

6 Ibid., pp. 71f.

7 Cf. Linda Leskau/Sigrid Nieberle: Wiedersehen mit Heidi. Zur Einführung, in: Leskau, Linda/Nieberle, Sigrid (eds.): Wiedersehen mit Heidi. Polyperspektivische Lektüren der Heidi-Romane von Johanna Spyri, Bielefeld 2023, pp. 9–24; Victoria Gutsche: Das kranke Töchterlein. Behinderung und Krankheit in den *Heidi*-Romanen Johanna Spyris, in: ibid., pp. 217–229.

Narrating Disability

In their article »Representation and Its Discontents«, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder provide an overview of various tendencies in disability studies' engagement with literary texts. They divide the development of literary disability studies into different historical phases, starting in the 1980s.[8] The so-called early phase – the ›Negative Imagery School‹ and the ›Social Realism‹ – is based on a mimetic understanding of literature, in which literature should reflect reality as authentically as possible because a causal relationship is assumed between literature and society. The assumption is that negative or stereotypical images of disability in literature and discrimination against people with disabilities in society are mutually dependent. Consequently, the task of literary disability studies is to critically expose negative images and to demand positive or realistic representations of disability.

However, this early phase is criticized for neglecting the historical context of disability and literary texts. As a result, researchers employing a historicist approach focused their attention on the reciprocal interactions between literature and historical reality. The inclusion of the historical-cultural context through the ›New Historicism of Disability Representations‹ brought authorship into focus. ›Biographical Criticism‹ departs from the assumption that disability influences literary writing and vice versa and centers primarily on criticism and revision of the hegemonic canon that excludes authors with disabilities. The final phase Mitchell and Snyder mention is called ›Transgressive Resignifications‹: »Rather than rail against or bemoan the unjust social exclusion of cripples, scholars have begun to attend to the subversive potential of the hyperbolic meanings invested in disabled figures«.[9] Counteracting the medical and individual perspectives on embodied difference, this theoretical direction offers a plurality of perspectives regarding the historical category of disability.

Despite the differences discussed, these theoretical directions share a focus on the extra-literary potential of literature. Each supports a socio-political perspective that is fundamental to disability studies. However, I argue that this perspective can sometimes lead to the neglect of both literary and rhetorical

8 Cf. David T. Mitchell/Sharon L. Snyder: Representation and Its Discontents. The Uneasy Home of Disability in Literature and Film, in: Albrecht, Gary L./Seelman, Katherine D./Bury, Michael (eds.): Handbook of Disability Studies, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi 2001, pp. 195–218. The following explanations of the phases are based on this article, cf. ibid., pp. 196–212.

9 Ibid., p. 208.

aspects of the texts discussed. The use of disability metaphors can serve as an illustrative example. They are often used in literary texts either for the purpose of characterization or to refer to more general issues:

> Blindness may represent the incapacity of humanity to see into the future; lameness can designate the crippling effects of social ideologies; physical deformity may symbolize corrupt corporate policies; deafness may represent a refusal of leaders to listen to their constituencies; diabetes might conjure up images of gluttonous commodity culture; amputation can provide evidence of an unchecked medical industry; and so on.[10]

In the *Heidi* novels, Klara's paralysis can be interpreted as a criticism of the 19th-century bourgeois upbringing of girls, who were only allowed to leave the house when accompanied by someone, if at all.[11] They did not learn, to use another metaphor, to stand on their own two feet. Such use of disability metaphors is criticized in disability studies, but, as Michael Bérubé points out, there is a catch:

> One of the tasks undertaken by disability studies so far has been to point out these tropes and these characters, and to critique them for their failure to do justice to the actual lived experiences of people with disabilities. That project is long overdue and still needed; yet it sometimes proceeds as if characters in literary texts could be read simply as representations of real people. At the risk of sounding polemical, I want to stress how counterintuitive this should be for literary critics. If there's one thing we're all trained to do, it's to read things in terms of other things – whether the »other things« be the deep structure of human thought, the workings of the unconscious, the inscription of gender difference, the determination of cultural forms by the material base, the contradiction between literal and rhetorical senses of language, the trace of hybridity, or the homo-hetero divide that has guided so much binary thought in the past century or so. It is altogether queer that disability studies might suggest that the literary representation of disability *not* be read as the site of the figural.[12]

The inextricable link between literariness and extra-literary potential that Michael Bérubé emphasizes is crucial. Only by analyzing the literariness of texts and their genre-specific characteristics can we explore non-literary functions. Clare Barker and Stuart Murray also emphasize this:

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10 David T. Mitchell: Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor, in: Snyder, Sharon L./Brueggemann, Brenda Jo/Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie (eds.): Disability Studies. Enabling the Humanities, New York 2002, p. 25.

11 Cf. Anna-Katharina Gisbertz: Gehen, um frei zu sein. Zu den Lehren der Aufklärung in *Heidi*, in: Leskau, Linda/Nieberle, Sigrid (eds.): Wiedersehen mit Heidi. Polyperspektivische Lektüren der Heidi-Romane von Johanna Spyri, Bielefeld 2023, pp. 27–42.

12 Michael Bérubé: Disability and Narrative, in: PMLA 120:2 (2005), p. 570.

> The relationship between the aesthetic, the political, and the ethical implications of disability representation is an ongoing concern within literary and cultural disability studies, but such work on aesthetics and narrative theory has pushed the field beyond making distinctions between »positive« and »negative« representations toward a better understanding of the complex nature of many disability narratives.[13]

In what follows, I unpack the »complex nature« of the *Heidi* novels by drawing on methods from narrative theory and using intersectionality as an analytical tool. I focus on two characters with disabilities – the young girl Klara Sesemann from Frankfurt and Peter's grandmother on the mountain pasture – to analyze how the novels narrate different concepts of ›healing‹.

The *Heidi* novels are told by an authorial, heterodiegetic narrator, who makes no explicit statements about themself. Therefore, it is not possible to ›determine‹ the narrator's social and political identities. In narrative theory, this has often resulted in either considering the categorization of the narrator as irrelevant or in the unquestioned identification of the narrator as male, heterosexual, non-disabled, middle class, middle aged etc. Feminist narratology has criticized such generalizations for not doing justice to the complexity and plurality of narratives. Consequently, scholars are calling for the inclusion of intersectionality as an analytical tool in narrative theory.[14] According to Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge,

> [i]ntersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytical tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences.[15]

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13 Clare Barker/Stuart Murray: Introduction. On Reading Disability in Literature, in: Barker, Clare/Murray, Stuart (eds.): The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability, Cambridge 2018, p. 5.

14 Cf. Sigrid Nieberle: Gender Studies und Literatur. Eine Einführung, Darmstadt 2013, pp. 108–110; Vera Nünning/Ansgar Nünning: ›Gender‹-orientierte Erzähltextanalyse als Modell für die Schnittstelle von Narratologie und intersektioneller Forschung? Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Entwicklung, Schlüsselkonzepte und Anwendungsperspektiven, in: Klein, Christian/Schnicke, Falko (eds.): Intersektionalität und Narratologie. Methoden – Konzepte – Analysen, Trier 2014, pp. 33–60; Eva Blome: Erzählte Interdependenzen. Überlegungen zu einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Intersektionalitätsforschung, in: Pohl, Peter C./Siebenpfeiffer, Hania (eds.): Diversity Trouble. Vielfalt – Gender – Gegenwartskultur, Berlin 2016, pp. 45–67.

15 Patricia Hill Collins/Sirma Bilge (eds.): Intersectionality, 2nd ed., Cambridge 2020, p. 2.

An intersectional assessment helps us to consider the interplay of these different categories not as additive but rather as interdependent. When focusing on the *Heidi* novels, the perspective of intersectional narrative theory can assist in drawing conclusions about the narrator based on the way in which the story is told. As such, we find that the narrator uses the demarcation between healthy and sick in the introduction of the main characters Heidi and Klara. Moreover, this demarcation is also tied to specific spaces: outside and inside, countryside and city, Switzerland and Germany. On the one hand, we have Heidi, the »kräftig«[16] (strong[17]) looking girl with the glowing cheeks,[18] who runs and jumps around on the mountain pasture with her friend Peter and his goats. On the other hand, we have Klara, the »kranke«[19] (sick) and »lahm[e]«[20] (lame) girl with a »blasse[n], schmale[n] Gesichtchen«[21] (pale, narrow face), who sits in a wheelchair and never leaves her house in Frankfurt.

The narrator introduces Klara as follows: »[D]as [Töchterlein] müsse immer im Rollstuhl sitzen, denn es sei auf einer Seite lahm und sonst nicht gesund, und so sei es fast immer allein [...].«[22] And further: »Im Hause des Herrn Sesemann in Frankfurt lag das kranke Töchterlein, Klara, in dem bequemen Rollstuhl, in welchem es den ganzen Tag sich aufhielt und von einem Zimmer in's andere gestoßen wurde.«[23] The text constructs a causal relationship between impairment and disability: Klara's impairment causes her social isolation. This is indicated by the two conjunctions »denn« (because) as well as »und so« (and so) being used in the sentences. Furthermore, the narrator speaks about Klara using the diminutives »Töchterlein« and »Töchterchen« (little daughter) and the hypocorism »Klärchen« for her. These belittlements, which appear over 40 times in the novels, have

16 Johanna Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, Gotha 1880, p. 1.
17 Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are mine.
18 Cf. Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 1.
19 Ibid., p. 89.
20 Ibid., p. 79.
21 Ibid., p. 89.
22 Ibid., p. 79. Translation: »[O]ne daughter, who was ill, and obliged to remain all the time in a rolling-chair, because she was paralyzed on one side. This girl was almost always alone [...]«. Johanna Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, Boston 1885, p. 138. The translations by Louise Brooks are provided to support understanding, however, since they differ greatly from the original, my analysis is based exclusively on the German version.
23 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 89. Translation: »In the house of Mr. Sesemann, in Frankfort, lay his little sick daughter, in the comfortable armchair in which she reclined all day, and was rolled from one room to another.« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 153.

an affective function, they convey the impression of closeness and empathy between the narrator and Klara. The narrator seems to take pity on the girl with disabilities because they assess disability as an individual and tragical fate that leads to social exclusion and dependence. Based on these observations, I argue that the narrator speaks from a non-disabled positionality.

Moreover, I presume that the narrator, like the Sesemanns, belongs to the Bildungsbürgertum (highly educated middle classes) since the narrator positively highlights the different types of rooms in the Sesemann household – for example, the »Studierzimmer« with a »großen, schönen Bücherschrank mit den Glasthüren« and the »Eßstube« where »vielerlei Geräthschaften herumstanden und lagen, die das Zimmer wohnlich machten und zeigten, daß man hier gewöhnlich sich aufhielt«.[24] The aforementioned adjective »bequem« (comfortable) that the narrator uses to describe Klara's wheelchair is also intended to make clear that Klara receives what the father and medical institutions imagine to be the best possible care. Against the background of the sheltered environment and care for Klara, the slightly violent expression »gestoßen wurde« (was pushed) that the narrator uses to describe Klara's movement in her wheelchair comes as a surprise. In German, the verb ›schieben‹ (to push) is usually used to describe the movement of a wheelchair by another person not inhabiting it.[25] The difference between ›schieben‹ and ›stoßen‹ is the amount of pressure exerted to cause the movement. ›Schieben‹ entails light, continuous, and even pressure, whereas ›stoßen‹ connotes a rough and strong, momentous push that lacks continuity. As such, ›stoßen‹ is more aggressive than ›schieben‹ and points to a movement that is defined by continuous (inter)ruptions. By attributing this aggressive treatment of Klara to her servants, the narrator does not negate the previous laudatory description of her surroundings but does call it into question. It also establishes a hierarchy of care and sends an implicit message: While Klara's family cares and wants the best for her, the people working for the Sesemann family perceive it as tied to their employment. Furthermore, the passive construction ›gestoßen wurde‹ (was pushed) makes clear that Klara's

24 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 89. Translation: For example the »study« with a »large, handsome bookcase with glass doors« and the »dining-room« where »all sorts of pretty things were arranged and disposed in such a way as to make it look attractive, and prove that it was the place where the family usually lived.« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 153.

25 In Swiss German, the verbs ›stoßen‹ and ›schieben‹ are often used synonymously for the movement of a wheelchair by another person – nevertheless, the more vehement aspect of the verb ›stoßen‹ remains.

wheelchair – despite the existence of wheelchairs in the late 19th century that allowed self-determined movement indoors[26] – was not designed or intended to be used for independent mobility. To be more precise, the narrator reduces Klara to an object in need of care.

To illustrate this point further, I turn to Klara's healing at the end of the second novel, in which Klara visits Heidi in Switzerland and is on the mountain pasture for the first time. After taking a few steps, the narrator says: »Gewiß kannte sie gar kein größeres Glück auf der Welt, als auch einmal gesund zu sein und herumgehen zu können, wie die anderen Menschen, und nicht mehr elend die ganzen Tage lang in den Krankensessel gebannt zu sein.«[27] Once more, the narrator structures and evaluates Klara's happiness based on the constructed opposition between healthy and sick (or disabled). On the one hand, we have Klara associated with misery, dependency, and limitation while using a wheelchair. On the other hand, we have all »die anderen Menschen« (the other people). They are positioned as healthy and ›normal‹ and thus associated with happiness and independence. The adverb »[g]ewiß« (certainly) that introduces the sentence is also linked to the expressions »größeres Glück« (greater happiness) and »gesund« (healthy) via the letter ›g‹. The alliteration leaves no room for doubt as to the hierarchical opposition operating linguistically between healthy and sick (disabled).

In his reflections on border crossings in narratives, Jurij M. Lotman argues that transgressions can both consolidate and subvert borders.[28] When it comes to Klara, the focus remains on the former. After Klara overcomes her disability and switches sides in the disabled/non-disabled paradigm, the narrator clearly distances themself from the wheelchair as a symbol of Klara's former disability. While the wheelchair was initially described as »bequem« (comfortable) it is now devalued – for the first time – as »Krankensessel« (sick chair). The re- and devaluation of the wheelchair supports the line being drawn between disabled and non-disabled, sick and healthy, and marks Klara's progression towards becoming a full member of society.

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26 Cf. Nick Watson/Brian Woods: History of the wheelchair, in: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015, www.britannica.com/technology/history-of-the-wheelchair (28.03.2024).

27 Johanna Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, Gotha 1881, pp. 131f. Translation: »Certainly there could be not greater happiness in the world than to feel strong, and able to go about like other people, and not lie suffering all day long in a sick-chair.« Johanna Spyri: Heidi: How She Used What She Learned, Boston 1885, p. 200.

28 Cf. Jurij M. Lotman: Die Struktur literarischer Texte, München 1972.

Such an impression is confirmed when we examine the intersectionality of disability, age, class, and gender. After Klara's healing, significant changes to her previous life and social position transpire:

> Herr Sesemann hatte sich vorgenommen, mit seiner Mutter eine kleine Reise durch die Schweiz zu machen und erst zu sehen, ob sein Klärchen im Stande sei, eine kurze Strecke mit zu reisen. Nun war es so gekommen, daß er die genußreichste Reise in Gesellschaft seiner Tochter vor sich sah, und nun wollte er auch gleich diese schönen Spätsommertage dazu benutzen.[29]

Through linguistic means the two sentences convey Klara's transgression. In the first sentence, which refers to the time before the healing, the narrator uses the hypocorism »Klärchen« and tells of Mr. Sesemann's doubts about the possibility of a long journey due to Klara's physical impairment. The second sentence refers to the time after the healing and uses the term »Tochter« (daughter) removing the belittlement. The young and disabled »Töchterchen«, »Töchterlein«, or »Klärchen« (little daughter) has become the adult, non-disabled daughter with whom her father plans to go on a journey. Furthermore, when Klara's father sees her walking for the first time, he remembers his late wife.[30] This suggests that Klara, having overcome her disability, is finally ready to take on the role of a woman in the Bildungsbürgertum (highly educated middle classes) at the end of the 19th century; she will leave her father's house (the journey is a first step) and, now looking like Mrs. Sesemann, will become a married woman and mother.

However, this traditional, bourgeois ending of the Sesemann family is contrasted with Heidi's non-traditional ending. As Heidi Schlipphacke has argued, Heidi lives in a queer family at the end of the second novel consisting of herself and two old men, her grandfather Öhi and Klara's doctor from Frankfurt:[31]

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29 Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, p. 169. Translation: »Mr. Sesemann had proposed to travel a little with his mother through Switzerland, and to see if Klara were strong enough to make a short distance with them. Now, it was all so different; he could have the most delightfully interesting trip with his daughter, and he would make use of these beautiful late summer days for that purpose.« Spyri: Heidi: How She Used What She Learned, pp. 256f.

30 Cf. Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, p. 153.

31 Cf. Heidi Schlipphacke: Zur Temporalität von Bildung. Traumatisierte Männerseelen und das queere Prinzip ›Heidi‹ in Johanna Spyris *Heidi*-Romanen, in: Leskau, Linda/Nieberle, Sigrid (eds.): Wiedersehen mit Heidi. Polyperspektivische Lektüren der Heidi-Romane von Johanna Spyri, Bielefeld 2023, pp. 67–81.

> Der Herr Doktor und der Almöhi werden täglich bessere Freunde, und wenn sie zusammen auf dem Gemäuer herumsteigen, um den Fortgang des Baues zu besichtigen, kommen ihre Gedanken meistens auf das Heidi, denn Beiden ist die Hauptfreude an dem Hause, daß sie mit ihrem fröhlichen Kinde hier einziehen werden.[32]

In contrast to the previous past tense, when describing the queer family, the narrator uses the present tense; the queer mountain pasture is presented as an »ewige Gegenwart«[33] (eternal present). This diverges from Klara's story in both its division into before and after the healing and its trajectory aimed toward the future of the next generation of the Sesemanns.

Klara Sesemann, who has been my focus of attention so far, is not the only character with disabilities in the *Heidi* novels. From the very first mentioning of Peter's grandmother, the narrator introduces her as a character with disabilities, assigning her the adjective ›blind‹ without going into further detail about the disability.[34] The grandmother's blindness is discussed for the first time after more than 60 pages in a conversation between herself and Heidi. The grandmother mourns her blindness: »›Ach Kind, ich kann sie nie mehr sehen, die feurigen Berge und die goldenen Blümlein droben, es wird mir nie mehr hell auf Erden, nie mehr.‹«[35] The grandmother's direct speech begins with an interjection, the exclamation »[a]ch«, which strengthens both the oral nature and the intense emotionality of the statement. The triple repetition of »nie mehr« (never again) reinforces the emotional statement; blindness is thus presented as a tragic condition. The grandmother's recounting of what

32 Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, p. 176. Translation: »The doctor and the Alm uncle are daily more and more intimate, and as they walk about inspecting the progress of the building in Dörfli, their talk falls mostly upon Heidi, for their greatest pleasure in the new dwelling is that the happy child will here live with them.« Spyri: Heidi: How She Used What She Learned, p. 267. However, Eva Blome emphasizes that this alternative family structure goes hand in hand with Heidi's commitment to care work for the two old men. Gender norms are thus partially reaffirmed and reproduced, cf. Eva Blome: Zwischen Alp und Alphabetisierung. Spyris Heidi als *transclasse*-Figur, in: Leskau, Linda/Nieberle, Sigrid (eds.): Wiedersehen mit Heidi. Polyperspektivische Lektüren der Heidi-Romane von Johanna Spyri, Bielefeld 2023, pp. 211–213.

33 Schlipphacke: Zur Temporalität von Bildung, p. 76.

34 Cf. Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 12. In addition to Peter's grandmother, Peter himself has been examined in the context of disability, cf. Grit Dommes: »Hoffentlich […] nicht normal«: Behinderung als Thema der deutschsprachigen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur, in: Luserke-Jaqui, Matthias (ed.): Literary Disability Studies. Theorie und Praxis in der Literaturwissenschaft, Würzburg 2019, pp. 54–56.

35 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 62. Translation: »›My child, I cannot see the fiery mountains nor the golden flowers. It will never be light for me on the earth, never again.‹« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 108.

she can no longer see supports this evaluation: »die feurigen Berge und die goldenen Blümlein« (the fiery mountains and the golden flowers). In doing so, she names the very natural objects that so enthused Heidi on her first day on the mountain pasture.[36] Peter O. Büttner and Hans-Heino Ewers emphasize that the mountain pasture functions as a *locus amoenus* for Heidi, as an idyllic place of happiness.[37] This experience of happiness in or through nature is linked to visual perception: »Heidi wurde niemals unglücklich, denn es sah immer irgend etwas Erfreuliches vor sich […].«[38] Since Heidi's happiness is tied to the constant (»immer«) visual experience of her surroundings in the Swiss mountains, she reacts to the grandmother's blindness by crying.

In contrast to Heidi, who wants to heal the grandmother's blindness, the other characters – including the grandfather, Peter, and his mother – do not view the disability as necessitating a cure or as a lack needing remedied. However, the approach to female disability is completely different in the grandmother's context than it is presented in Klara's case. Here, it is not only Heidi, but also the grandfather who believes in the need to overcome the disability and repeatedly urges Klara to walk.[39] This stance towards Klara's disability is reinforced by the narrator who hints the possibility of Klara's paralysis to be overcome through her own willpower.[40] The different ways in which the characters and the narrator approach female disability can be explained by taking the categories of age and class into account. The aged grandmother is no longer an active, reproductive, and economically significant contributor to the village community. Moreover, the link between disability and old age leads to a normalization of disability and opens up the possibility of establishing blindness within a model of compensation.

The compensation narrated in the novels is based on one stereotype associated with blindness, in which blindness is conceptualized as a loss of access to the outside world. Primarily, this is due to the primary positioning of the

36 Cf. Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, pp. 33–37, 45f., 48.
37 Cf. Peter O. Büttner/Hans-Heino Ewers: Arkadien in bedrohlicher Landschaft. Die Mehrfachcodierung der Schweizer Berge in Johanna Spyris *Heidi*-Romanen (1880/81), in: Bialek, Edward/Pacholski, Jan (eds.): »Über allen Gipfeln…« Bergmotive in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 18. bis 21. Jahrhunderts, Dresden/Wroclaw 2008, pp. 14–22.
38 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 52. Translation: »Heidi, for her part, was never unhappy. There was always something that interested and amused her.« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 90.
39 Cf. Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, p. 114.
40 Cf. ibid., p. 126.

sense of sight over other senses since antiquity.[41] When taking the loss of the outside world into account, the light-and-dark-metaphor the grandmother uses becomes relevant. She describes blindness as a state of darkness: »›Laß mich nur sitzen, du gutes Kind, es bleibt doch dunkel bei mir, auch im Schnee und in der Helle, sie dringt nicht mehr in meine Augen.‹«[42] This metaphor is taken up in another encounter between Heidi and the grandmother after Heidi has returned from Frankfurt and has learned to read. Heidi reads parts of the Lutheran hymn »Die güldene Sonne voll Freud und Wonne« (The golden sun full of joy and delight) by Paul Gerhardt, a German theologian and hymnist, to the grandmother:

> Die güldne Sonne
> Voll Freud' und Wonne
> Bringt unsern Gränzen
> Mit ihrem Glänzen
> Ein herzerquickendes, liebliches Licht.
>
> Mein Haupt und Glieder
> Die lagen darnieder;
> Aber nun steh' ich,
> Bin munter und fröhlich,
> Schaue den Himmel mit meinem Gesicht.
>
> Mein Auge schauet,
> Was Gott gebauet
> Zu seinen Ehren,
> Und uns zu lehren,
> Wie sein Vermögen sei mächtig und groß.[43]

In the hymn, the lyrical subject cites the »herzerquickende[], liebliche[] Licht« (heartwarming, lovely light) of the sun, which opens up a view into the afterlife. The grandmother reacts to the religious hymn through an adoption

41 Cf. Georgina Kleege: Introduction: Blindness and Literature, in: Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies 3:2 (2009), pp. 113–114.

42 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 61. Translation: »›Let me sit here quietly, you good little child. It will always remain dark for me, in snow and in sunshine. The light can never pierce my eyeballs again.‹« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 107.

43 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, pp. 222f. Translation: »The sun's orb of gold / Brings joys untold; / Brings us the showers, / And the shining hours, / Brings heartfelt rejoicing and beautiful light. // Heavy of heart, / I languished apart; / Now again I am strong, / Now I raise my loud song, / Praising the Lord with my strength and my might. // I see, up above, / What God in his love / Has made to teach men, / Again and again, / How strong and how great is his kingdom on high. // […]« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, pp. 370f.

of the metaphor; she speaks of the brightness of the heart: »›O Heidi, das macht hell! das macht so hell im Herzen! […]‹«[44] The narrator continues the alignment of the grandmother's life with the hymn in the following passage:

> Heidi strahlte vor Glück und mußte sie nur immer ansehen, denn so hatte es die Großmutter nie gesehen. Sie hatte gar nicht mehr das alte, trübselige Gesicht, sondern schaute so freudig und dankend aus, als sähe sie schon mit neuen, hellen Augen in den schönen himmlischen Garten hinein.[45]

The change from dark to light, from blindness to ›seeing‹ occurs through this reading of a religious hymn. This is no coincidence. The contrast between light and dark and the overcoming of darkness by light is a common metaphor in Christianity.[46] This transition from dark to light is staged as a kind of ›metaphorical healing‹ for the grandmother. This is reflected in the absence of and the replacement of the adjective ›blind‹ through which the grandmother has received »neue, helle Augen« (new, bright eyes). It is as if she now sees. Since blindness is understood as a loss of access to the outside world, the compensation for blindness often takes place through an inward turn – here in the sense of a religious, inner contemplation – that opens new horizons. In the process, it substitutes the outer world for an inner vision. This supplants the worldly restrained view with a wider, more heavenly view of life.

Conclusion – Concepts of ›Healing‹

I would like to emphasize that in the novels *Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre* and *Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat* we have not just one, but at least two healing stories that follow the basic organizing principle of a supercrip narrative: overcoming and/or compensating. Whereas Klara overcomes her disability, the grandmother compensates it. However, the grandmother's metaphorical healing in the form of an inner sight that is independent of seeing, opens up the possibility of interpreting it within the second model of

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44 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 224. Translation: »›That makes it light for me, my child. That makes it light in my heart. […]‹« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 374.

45 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 225. Translation: »The face of little Heidi was irradiated with pure pleasure as the grandmother thus spoke, for the grandmother's countenance seemed as if the blind woman really saw the heavenly peace that awaited her.« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 374.

46 Cf. Gerhard Härle: Die Alm als pädagogische Provinz – oder: Versuch über Johanna Spyris *Heidi*, in: Rank, Bernhard (ed.): Erfolgreiche Kinder- und Jugendbücher: Was macht Lust auf Lesen?, Baltmannsweiler 1999, p. 75.

Jurij M. Lotman's conceptualization of border crossings I mentioned above: the questioning of fixed categorizations.

Nevertheless, despite the religious context, the grandmother's inner contemplation is not a divine gift. Rather, the narrator clearly attributes this »sakrale Leistung«[47] (sacred achievement) to Heidi. The ›religious healing‹ is thus somewhat profaned; for it is the social act of reading that ›heals‹ the grandmother. Therefore, the compensation of the grandmother's disability takes place through social interaction. While her sensory impairment remains unchanged, the limitation of her opportunities to participate in religious and social life changed significantly. Within a disability studies framework, this can be understood in terms of the social model of disability. However, ›healing‹ in the form of social participation is also part of the novel's comprehensive normalization strategies that not only apply to figures with disabilities but also to ›outsiders‹ in general. The villagers speak of Heidi's grandfather as a man who lives on the fringes of the community not just in spatial terms, but also in social and religious ones:

> »Es weiß ja kein Mensch, was mit dem Alten da oben ist! Mit keinem Menschen will er Etwas zu thun haben, Jahr aus Jahr ein setzt er keinen Fuß in eine Kirche, und wenn er mit seinem dicken Stock im Jahr einmal herunterkommt, so weicht ihm Alles aus und muß sich vor ihm fürchten. […]«[48]

After her return from Frankfurt, Heidi reads the grandfather the parable of the prodigal son, in which a long-lost son returns to his father. As in the case of the grandmother, the story is aligned with the grandfather's life and the same metaphor already encountered during the grandmother's ›healing‹ is used for the grandfather's reintegration process: The grandfather sees the world with »hellen Augen«[49] (bright eyes) and finally returns to his place in the social and religious structures of the village.

Certainly, Klara's healing is also part of the novel's normalization strategies that level out differences. Her healing shares many similarities with supercrip narratives; above all, the focus on the individual perspective of disability, i.e.

47 Volker Mergenthaler: Woher das Licht kommt. Sakralisierungsstrategien in *Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahren*, in: Thums, Barbara/Mergenthaler, Volker/Kaminski, Nicola/Bischoff, Doerte (eds.): Herkünfte. Historisch, ästhetisch, kulturell, Heidelberg 2004, p. 355.

48 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 4. Translation: »›No one knows how he lives up there. He will have nothing to do with other people, year in year out. He never sets foot in a church; and when he comes down here once a year, with his thick stick, every one avoids him, and is afraid. […]‹« Spyri: Heidi: Her Years of Wandering and Learning, p. 10.

49 Spyri: Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre, p. 231.

on »individual attitude, work, and perseverance«.[50] Klara overcomes her disability through her willpower. Shortly before Klara begins to walk for the first time, the narrator mentions Klara's desire for independence: »[E]in großer Wunsch stieg auf in ihr, auch einmal ihr eigener Herr zu sein und einem Anderen helfen zu können und nicht nur immer sich von allen Anderen helfen lassen zu müssen.«[51] Because she no longer wants to be dependent on other people and wants to help people as they helped her, she starts to walk. However, this individual perspective on disability, which assumes that the cause and responsibility for disability are situated in the individual and their body, is called into question over the course of the novel. The narrator states several times that the healing is influenced by both the change of location and the changed social environment. Klara's healing is the product of the good air,[52] the sun,[53] the food[54] (especially the goat's milk[55]), and the care of Heidi's grandfather.[56] Thus, the *Heidi* novels are part of a discourse that conceptualizes the mountain pasture as a »Therapielandschaft«[57] (therapeutic landscape).[58] I do not mean to imply that the individual perspective has disappeared at the end of the novels. Rather, the non-disabled narrator's references to social aspects in relation to the construction of disability become more prevalent.

To summarize, different concepts of ›healing‹ are presented in the *Heidi* novels, all of which ultimately aim at the social reintegration of the characters. In the end, they all find their place in society, be it in the bourgeois nuclear family (Klara), in a queer family (grandfather), or in the religious community (grandmother). Nevertheless, to be part of these social units, the characters have to overcome or compensate for their disabilities. The different concepts of ›healing‹ – physical (Klara) and religious/social (grandmother) – can be

50 Schalk: Reevaluating the Supercrip, p. 73.
51 Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, p. 126. Translation: »[A] greater desire arose in the girl's heart than she had ever yet experienced, to be for once mistress of herself, and to be able to help others, and not always be waited on and tended.« Spyri: Heidi: How She Used What She Learned, p. 192.
52 Cf. Spyri: Heidi kann brauchen, was es gelernt hat, pp. 98, 105, 111.
53 Cf. ibid., pp. 105, 133.
54 Cf. ibid., pp. 94, 111f., 140f.
55 Cf. ibid., pp. 106, 110f., 114, 141.
56 Cf. ibid., pp. 89f., 103f., 113f.
57 Büttner/Ewers: Arkadien in bedrohlicher Landschaft, p. 14.
58 As early as 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau praises the benefits of country air in contrast to the harmful air in the city in *Emile oder Über die Erziehung* (*Emile, or On Education*), cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Emile oder Über die Erziehung, (ed.) Zumhof, Tim, Stuttgart 2019, pp. 54f.

explained through the interdependence of disability, age, class, gender, and religion as well as through a shift in emphasis in the novels, one that manifests not only in the individual but also vis-à-vis the social perspective on disability. The *Heidi* novels, albeit presenting normalizing and uncomplicated supercrip narratives, represent disability as an intersectional category with multiple forms of representation.

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