

— Peter Kostenniemi, »Protection and Agency in Children's Gothic. Multiple Childhood(s) in Angela Sommer-Bodenburg's *Der kleine Vampir*«

— A B S T R A C T —

The child in gothic fiction is often interpreted as a symbol of adult fears, and childhood in this context is therefore stripped of intentionality. This article discusses the representation of childhood as performed through acts of agency in children's gothic fiction, with Angela Sommer-Bodenburg's famous novel series *Der kleine Vampir* as a case study. Previous research into the novel series has focused primarily on the human protagonist, the boy Anton Bohnsack, and neglected childhood as performed by the vampire children Rüdiger and Anna. These two characters diverge from previous representations of vampires within the vampire sub-genre and challenge the very concept of childhood.

In terms of space made available for agency, the human sphere differs from the vampire sphere. Whilst the former emphasizes protective measures on behalf of the child the latter seems to emphasize agency. However, there is a dialectic relation between the two spheres. Neither protection nor agency is favoured, instead *Der kleine Vampir* offers the possibility of a fusion between them through a number of different images of childhood, or rather, multiple childhoods.

— Peter Kostenniemi is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University. His dissertation revolves around the representation of childhood in contemporary Scandinavian gothic fiction for children. His research interests are primarily the gothic, the gothic child, welfare studies and adaptations.

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■—Peter Kostenniemi—■

■—PROTECTION AND AGENCY IN CHILDREN'S

GOTHIC. Multiple Childhood(s) in Angela

Sommer-Bodenburg's Der kleine Vampir—■

■—The prominence of children in the gothic genre has led to the recognition and consolidation of a cultural trope known as *the gothic child*. Perhaps the most famous examples are the siblings Flora and Miles in Henry James's gothic novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), but there are numerous others.¹ Whatever the examples that may enter our minds, they are likely to stem from fiction intended for the adult reader. After all, the gothic child reflects adult fears of childhood as being inscrutable, as something beyond adult control. As Stephen Bruhm argues, the gothic child »knows too much, and that knowledge makes us more than a little nervous«. ² In James's novella, Flora and Miles are repeatedly presented as epitomes of innocence, and yet they drive their governess to distraction with »teasing suggestions that they may be communing with ghosts with whose supposedly appalling sexual secrets they appear to be familiar«. ³ The notion of the child who knows too much stems from the paradigm of psychoanalysis and predominantly Freudian theory. However, within this context, the child is reduced to a state of unfinished business and childhood is stripped of intentionality and agency. ⁴ The gothic child is therefore in a state of becoming rather than being.

As Margarita Georgieva argues, innocence, divine enlightenment, blissful ignorance and damaging obliviousness are attributes of childhood in gothic fiction that can be depicted in both negative and positive terms, and may have beneficent or destructive effects in adult life. ⁵ The list can be further expanded, as the child is seen during the 20th and 21st centuries as the perpetrator wielding the knife, prompting the arrival of Satan or as the bearer of death. ⁶ The range of subject positions occupied by children in gothic fiction is infused with ideas connected to the concept of the child and the discourse on childhood. This is not least because the gothic genre, though obsessed with the past, fictionalizes the fears and anxieties of contemporary society. ⁷ Associated sources have been thoroughly examined, including with reference to such tropes as the evil child, the corrupted or possessed child and the failings of the adult world. ⁸ However, in an attempt to reclaim the child in gothic fiction, and reinstate agency into the discourse on childhood, it seems appropriate to seek out

sources where such matters are likely to take centre stage: in *children's* gothic fiction.

In *The Gothic in Children's Literature* (2008), the editors point out that the child in contemporary children's gothic is likely to assimilate the gothic into their own world, viewing it less as an anomalous intrusion from an external threat, and more as something to embrace in order to court their dark side and do away with the image of themselves as an innocent victim.⁹ The emphasis is therefore on the child's agency and competence. As in the case of its adult counterpart, children's gothic fiction comprises a vast, heterogeneous field. A comprehensive survey is therefore far beyond the scope of this article (and presumably beyond the scope of this entire issue). The intention is to dig a little deeper into one example: Angela Sommer-Bodenburg's German novel series *Der kleine Vampir* (1979–2015). A number of vampires are featured in children's fiction, but as is often the case with generic gothic, children's vampire fiction published outside the Anglo-Saxon realm has remained somewhat absent from discussion.¹⁰

Der kleine Vampir includes 21 volumes, and since its inception it has been translated into more than thirty languages and adapted numerous times for television, the stage and the cinema. The novel series' ubiquity attests to its enduring popularity, as do the many active internet forums devoted to it.¹¹ The plot revolves around a human boy, Anton Bohnsack, who is nine years old and lives with his parents. His life changes radically when he befriends the vampire boy Rüdiger von Schlotterstein, who appears one Saturday night on the windowsill at Anton's window. Subsequently, Anton's nights overflow with adventures, as he finds he can fly, visits Rüdiger's home in the local cemetery and participates in a number of nocturnal excursions. He also meets Rüdiger's sister Anna, to whom he gradually grows closer in a shy romance.

Previous research into the novel series has focused primarily on Anton in connection with discourses of the abandoned or oppressed child, and topics such as children's fears.¹² In accordance with the claim made by the editors of *The Gothic in Children's Literature*, emphasis has been given to the way Anton assimilates the gothic into his life in order to enjoy the possibilities provided by it. However, with reference to Rüdiger and Anna, I discuss the representation of childhood and agency as performed in both the human sphere and the vampire sphere. Interaction between the spheres is bound up with the seemingly antithetical relationship between discourses of protection and agency. This interaction, in turn, serves both to corroborate and challenge various discourses of childhood as represented in *Der kleine Vampir*. Before moving on to the analysis, I will elaborate further on previous research on the

novel series and children's gothic fiction in general, in order to clarify my theoretical point of departure.

— CHILDREN'S GOTHIC FICTION AND THE
(IMPLIED) CHILD READER —

Recent decades have seen an increase in gothic fiction for children, to the point where fear, or the pretence of fear, has come to be relished in literature for a young readership.¹³ However, this has also sparked controversy as the unsuitability of certain forms of experience for children continues to be debated, specifically with reference to works producing high levels of fear and anxiety.¹⁴ Dale Townshend traces this controversy back to tensions between the rise of the gothic in the late 18th century and the simultaneous establishment of children's literature as a category in its own right; in short, everything praised in the gothic was banned from culturally approved literature for children.¹⁵ Concern for the child reader has endured, even as gothic works for children are perceived to deviate from generic gothic fiction in terms of the representation of terror and horror. J. Gordon Melton, for example, discerns in the typical vampire of children's literature a sympathetic character or, at worst, a mischievous boy, while the element of horror merely hovers in the background.¹⁶ Sabine Planka takes *Der kleine Vampir* as her case study, claiming that the vampire in children's fiction is adjusted for the child reader and humanized with a view to eliciting empathy.¹⁷ However, as I intend to demonstrate, the vampires in *Der kleine Vampir* are neither sympathetic nor necessarily humanized.

The view of children's gothic fiction as intrinsically kind does not go unchallenged. Gregory G. Peppone suggests that, far from avoiding the effects of terror, gothic fiction for children confronts »head-on the issue of when-bad-things-happen-to-good (children or adults)«. ¹⁸ Karen Coats defines the gothic as a cultural symptom that can help children to cope with trauma.¹⁹ While these accounts may liberate children's gothic fiction from preconceived ideas regarding its representation of terror and horror, they remain situated within an interpretive frame where the child as represented within the text is equated with an implied child reader, thereby establishing a causal connection between fiction and reality that guides interpretation. In relation to the gothic, this notion is often situated within the aforementioned framework of psychoanalysis, with a view to emphasizing the therapeutic value of the text for the reader. Chloé Germaine Buckley, on the other hand, argues that the paradigmatic use of psychoanalysis in discussing children's gothic reduces it to a rather shallow pedagogic value; gothic is considered good because it helps the child to grow up.²⁰

In the case of *Der kleine Vampir*, equating the child with an implied child reader permeates previous research. Jörg

Waltje, for example, concludes that the novel series revolves around Anton's coming of age and conquering his fears, and he suggests that these fears allude to common childhood fears of being dismissed as an outsider or being abandoned by one's parents. Accordingly, Waltje stresses the importance of identification in children's vampire fiction.²¹ With the same emphasis, Planka elaborates upon the way the child reader identifies with Sommer-Bodenburg's story, partakes in a learning process and then translates the experience into his/her everyday life.²² The subject position of Anton is emphasized whilst Rüdiger and Anna are reduced to the means by which Anton may be allowed to partake in adventures within the vampire sphere.

Both Waltje and Planka devote themselves to what Maria Nikolajeva describes as *the identification fallacy*, wherein the reader is assumed to adopt the subject position of a single literary character. Nikolajeva detaches subjectivity from character(s), placing it either with the narratee or the implied reader, thus seeing the characters themselves as agents that manipulate the reader (in a non-pejorative sense).²³ However, as a point of departure, I would reassign subjectivity to the characters, but argue that the multiple subject positions represented in *Der kleine Vampir* produce a variety of images of childhood. In order to uncover these multiplicities, it is necessary to depart from the path of identification (fallacy) and from preconceived ideas related to the implied child reader. To this end, the text must be decontextualized from sociological as well as psychological perspectives, and then recontextualized differently through the act of reading.²⁴ Allowing the text to transcend previous conditions of production liberates it from the influence of the author or, more importantly in this case, the intended reader. Thus, the text is seen as a »network«, freed from any set of rigid aspects and open for a variety of readings.²⁵ A new context for interpretation provides a new framework for analysis that reveals intertextual elements as well as various sociocultural discourses of childhood.

Approaching this concept from a constructionist point of view means considering childhood as a structural and cultural construct, in which children are both creators and subjects of the social structures and processes that constitute childhood.²⁶ However, addressing children's literature in connection with societal aspects, and in relation to sociology, is not unproblematic. Peter Hunt cautions against treating children's literature as a reliable source of information as to what childhood was or is; rather, children's literature reflects attitudes towards childhood.²⁷ In line with the constructionist perspective adopted here, Hunt questions the concept of childhood as an entity in itself. Rather, the discourse of childhood incorporates shifting attitudes towards childhood as represented in children's culture. He acknowledges this performative quality,

suggesting that there is a symbiotic relationship between children's literature and childhood.²⁸ »Thus we do not simply read about childhood or talk about childhood or even theorise about childhood«, writes Michael Wyness, »we bring childhood into being.«²⁹

The topic of agency is vast, but when viewed in connection with the aforementioned relation between protection and agency, it becomes manageable as the focus of analysis for this article. However, before addressing this relationship, a closer examination of how vampires are represented is needed in order to provide the framework for childhood as performed by Rüdiger and Anna. This, alongside the manner in which it is performed by Anton, contributes to a multiplicity of childhoods.

— THE AMBIGUOUS VAMPIRE IN DER KLEINE VAMPIR —

In many ways, Rüdiger and Anna are represented in opposition to Anton: he is human, they are non-human; he is alive, they are dead (though re-animated); he is predominantly active by day, they are nocturnal beings; he lives in an apartment in a city, they reside in a crypt beneath the city, and so on. Whilst Anton is represented as an unambiguous nine-year-old boy, Rüdiger and Anna are ambiguous in many ways, particularly regarding their age. They originate from 19th century Romania, and were born as humans but bitten (presumably by a family member) and, thus, transformed into vampires along with the rest of the family. Since then, they have existed for over a hundred years without ageing or reaching adulthood. Physically, they appear to be children about the same age as Anton, albeit with distinct vampire traits which will be discussed later. Their family's disconnection from life processes is most vividly embodied in the character Lumpi, Rüdiger's and Anna's brother, who was transformed into a vampire when entering puberty and never advances beyond it.³⁰ Instead of ageing, the vampires' bodies are subjected to the post-mortem process of decomposition, evident in the way they reek of putrefaction.³¹ Nevertheless, the vampires acquire knowledge and experience and, in this sense, are not entirely detached from ageing. But they remain situated outside the developmental discourse of child-becoming-adult.

The differences between Anton and his gothic friends are clear, but there are similarities as well. For example, they all share an interest in vampire stories, reside in nuclear families, and devote themselves to activities such as organizing parties and playing board games. Sabine Planka emphasizes the importance of the similarities between the human and the vampire spheres as encouraging identification and facilitating learning process, while she sees the differences as a narrative device that creates excitement and entertainment.³² However, leaving aside the perspective of identification makes it possible

to consider similarities and differences as interacting in the creation of ambiguity, rather than as serving different purposes for an implied reader.

Der kleine Vampir is not unique in its representation of humans as antithetical to vampires. This theme is shared by most vampire fiction of the 19th century, alongside the related theme of the impossibility of coexistence between vampires and humans; the vampire emerges as essentially evil and the human as the representative of good, albeit with some futile attempts to challenge this distinction.³³ The vampire as the other, cast as an outcast, endures through most of the 20th century, although a shift occurs in the last decades. From then on, the vampire's otherness is frequently perceived not as a negative but a positive feature, providing him/her with the position of a glorified outsider, as a superhuman or a potentially queer being.³⁴ In contemporary vampire fiction, coexistence is coveted by humans, a convention culminating in vampire romances in which the vampires frequently appear as astoundingly beautiful, powerful and seductive.³⁵

The vampire has indeed travelled a long way, and gone through various processes of transformation, which are in the interim well documented. Nina Auerbach once famously stated that »there is no such thing as The Vampire, there are only vampires«. ³⁶ This much is acknowledged of vampires in both adult and young-adult fiction, but the same mutability is denied to their counterparts in children's fiction. According to Tony Fonseca, vampires created for young readers are neither the »scary, loathsome vampires of classic adult vampire fiction, nor the suave, beautiful, romantic vampires of more recent adult and much young adult vampire fiction«. ³⁷ However, Fonseca's description fails to include the ambivalence present in *Der kleine Vampir* that is, in fact, situated precisely amid the tension between the two categories he describes.

When Anton first encounters Rüdiger, he is confronted by a vile creature with a chalk-white face, bloodshot eyes, untidy hair and a pair of sharp, canine teeth.³⁸ All vampires in the series are frightening to behold, and they all emit an odour of putrefaction and decay. Thus they maintain their otherness vis-à-vis humans, and resemble the »loathsome« vampires of classic adult vampire fiction. There are indeed noteworthy exceptions, but in relation to the humans in *Der kleine Vampir*, the vampires are placed in the world of make-believe, where their appearance and feeding habits resemble those of Fonseca's vampires of old. Anton often reads such tales.

The 19th-century vampire's habit of drinking human blood was the strongest argument for its relegation to the unmistakable realm of evil. When the 20th-century vampire was provided with alternative food sources (blood from animals other than humans, or other substitutes), an ethical crossroads

was established. The question of good versus evil was no longer essentially a matter of predestination but a matter of choice. Vampires were largely sorted into two categories, which Anna Höglund defines as humane on the one hand and monstrous on the other.³⁹ This division is perhaps best exemplified in Anne Rice's iconic novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), in which the ravenous appetite of the vampire Lestat sets him apart from his benevolent counterpart Louis, who tends to feed on animals or starve. Accordingly, Louis is given the role of the protagonist in the narrative while Lestat serves as the antagonist.⁴⁰

The ethical crossroads is present in *Der kleine Vampir* as well; alternative food sources are available, but Rüdiger and Anna choose to drink human blood. Rüdiger explains to Anton that blood from animals is ingested only when necessary, and he completely rejects chemical blood preservatives.⁴¹ Anna's vampire teeth have yet to grow at the outset of the novel series, so she drinks milk. However, she states with some pride that this won't go on much longer.⁴² As the novel series unfolds, her teeth gradually grow and she develops into a fully-fledged vampire who drinks human blood. Regarding the aforementioned distinction between humane and monstrous within the genre, Rüdiger and Anna are intertextually linked to Rice's Lestat concerning their feeding habits. Nonetheless, they enter the narrative position of protagonists alongside Anton and thus bear similarities to Louis too. Their ambiguous nature serves to complicate matters further, since their friendship with Anton is at the heart of the narrative, though Rüdiger in particular proves a somewhat unreliable friend. This is occasionally referenced, as in the episode in which Anton pays him a visit, an episode that deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

— Anton saw his [Rüdiger's] bloodshot eyes and large mouth with the protruding sharp canine teeth. The sight of them sent chills down his spine ...

»I... just wanted to pay you a visit«, he said quickly.

»Visit?«

The vampire laughed hoarsely.

»An excellent idea! If you only knew, how hungry I am!«

»I didn't mean it like that!«

»How then?«, the vampire said and approached Anton.

Anton wanted to step back, but his boot was still stuck in the mud. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead. The vampire mustn't notice his fear!

[author's translation]⁴³

Anton's fear of Rüdiger is evident, but his trust in Anna is more profound, particularly for as long as she remains a sort of half-vampire.⁴⁴ However, she repeatedly expresses her desire for Anton to succumb to her bite (once she has grown her teeth)

and undergo the transformation into a vampire so they can remain together for eternity. She does not force Anton to accept her offer, which Anton continually declines anyway, but she proclaims on one occasion that sometimes you have to make humans do what is good for them.⁴⁵ The ambiguous friendship between Anton and his gothic friends creates a tension that permeates the entire novel series, so that Rüdiger and Anna emerge as loyal friends as well as dangerous predators. Appearing as both protagonists and antagonists, Rüdiger and Anna cannot be properly categorized as being *either* humane *or* monstrous. They appear as both friend and foe, as both benign and overtly dangerous, as distinctly child-like and yet situated outside such conventional distinctions.

In conclusion thus far, I would claim that Rüdiger and Anna embody a fusion of opposites: that is, a fusion of the vampires of old with such contemporary vampires as are found in vampire romances. In fact, as the romance between Anton and Anna flourishes, she is represented as a combination of precisely those two categories that Fonseca mentions. The ambiguous vampire, as represented by Rüdiger and Anna, serves as a further point of departure in discussing the representation of childhood and agency. First, childhood as performed by Anton will be considered, and then childhood as performed by Rüdiger and Anna. After that, the interaction between the human and vampire spheres will be discussed.

— FROM CONSTRAINT TO FREEDOM FOR ANTON

As pointed out previously by other researchers, Anton holds a subordinate position within his family.⁴⁶ In addition to being subjected to domestic regulations (bedtime at 8pm, no TV in the evenings, and so on), Anton's personal wishes are repeatedly ignored. When deciding to spend a week during the summer on a farm, Anton's parents neglect to ask his opinion. They act on his behalf, assuming that they always know his best interests.⁴⁷ His protests are met with incomprehension and an unwillingness to reconsider decisions already taken. When Anton's mother stumbles over his vampire cloak, she starts mending it without asking his permission, and dismisses his protests.⁴⁸ These events clearly display a disrespect towards Anton that is underlined by the invasion of his privacy; his parents enter his room at will and Anton is hesitant about locking his door since his mother hates locked doors; they also habitually interrogate him on private matters such as phone calls.⁴⁹ Worried about Anton's conspicuous friends, i.e. Rüdiger and Anna, Anton's parents consult a doctor and later a psychiatrist (again, without asking Anton's opinion). The psychiatrist, ironically, suggests that Anton's parents spend more time with their son, doing things *he* would like to do.⁵⁰

Anton is cared for within his family, and protected, although under a strict regime of authoritarian control.⁵¹ Further, his space for agency outside parental surveillance is limited; he is forced to avoid his parents whenever possible in order to exercise free will. Anton's rebellion is evident from the first instalment of the novel series. When left home alone on a Saturday evening, he plans to watch a crime movie despite being forbidden to do so; when questioned, before being left alone, he lies about his intentions.⁵² The failure of Anton's parents to grant him space for agency prompts his desire to rebel, and yet when Anton first encounters Rüdiger, his parents' absence leaves him without any protection from potential danger.

In his entry on Angela Sommer-Bodenburg in the *Encyclopedia of the Vampire* (2011), Robert Butterfield claims that there is a claustrophobic sense in the first instalments of the novel series as they take place mostly in the confinement of Anton's apartment or in the crypt beneath the cemetery where the vampires reside.⁵³ For the most part, Anton remains situated within the domestic sphere of his home, which also functions as the locus of constraints, where boundaries are defined and legitimized within the discourse of protection.⁵⁴ When alone, before meeting Rüdiger, Anton feels detached and estranged from his home, and his room remains his safe haven.⁵⁵ However, this refuge is, as I argue, vulnerable to parental intrusion. Claustrophobia is thus not merely connected to physical space but serves, by extension, as a metaphor for the limitation of Anton's ability to exercise his agency. In order to transcend these conditions, he has to expand his space by leaving his home behind for a time. Upon meeting Rüdiger, an opportunity to do so presents itself.

Unlike Anton in the human sphere, Rüdiger and Anna lead seemingly less regulated »lives« within the vampire sphere, in which adult vampires ignore the needs of vampire children.⁵⁶ Child vampires spend their nights on their own since the adult vampires are mostly absent and busy hunting. But while their space for agency seems unlimited, they are denied protective measures. For Anton, this unregulated existence is appealing, and he embraces the possibilities it offers. Margaret L. Carter defines Rüdiger in *Der kleine Vampir* as a symbol of rebellion against adult norms, while Gundel Mattenklott suggests that Anton's visits to his fantasy world provide him with the secret den that his parents deny him, and that Rüdiger and Anna serve as Anton's allies in a subversive guerrilla war with his parents.⁵⁷ This conflict comes about as a result of parental failure to counteract external dangers, and parental denial of the space that Anton requires to perform his agency. According to Waltje, Anton's friendship with Rüdiger is the means by which he is able to extricate himself from parental control, and Waltje further suggests that Anton shifts from fear of loneliness at

home on Saturday evenings to the fear that his parents might actually stay in.⁵⁸ Once granted the possibility to exercise his agency, Anton expresses a fear of further confinement. Gaining the ability to fly and wearing a vampire cloak proves to be the strongest evidence of his power to transcend the constraints of the human sphere; thus, the claustrophobic confinement in his room is exchanged for the open air, a metaphor of liberation if ever there was one.

— THE ILLUSION OF FREEDOM FOR RÜDIGER AND ANNA —

Waltje, Mattenklott and Planka all discuss, in various forms, the way Anton performs his childhood through acts of rebellion within the vampire sphere as a space beyond parental control. None of these commentators takes childhood as performed by vampires into account though. And yet, if Anton is oppressed within the human sphere, vampire children are even worse off in theirs. The vampire sphere might appear unregulated, but only as far as Anton is concerned. For Rüdiger and Anna, freedom is merely illusory, as the vampire sphere proves highly authoritarian. Anton is able to exercise his agency when leaving the human sphere, and thus parental surveillance, behind. However, Rüdiger and Anna's excursions into the human sphere are strictly regulated by the adult vampires because of their need to feed; acts of disobedience are punished.

In the second instalment of the novel series, *Der kleine Vampir zieht um* (1980), Rüdiger is banished from home as a punishment for having friendly relations with a human, something that is strictly forbidden.⁵⁹ His expulsion from the crypt (*Gruftverbot*) is the first in a series of increasingly severe punishments, which ends in an occupational ban (*Berufsverbot*), equal to starvation and, thus, extermination.⁶⁰ Rüdiger's offence is exposed by his aunt Dorothee, who discovers it when spying on him. Thus, the adult vampires may appear absent, but they continually exercise control. Anna manages to avoid exposure, but gets into a conflict over something less dramatic, albeit not unimportant: she is uncomfortable with wearing the mandatory vampire cloak and the rags underneath. She therefore approaches the family council in order to claim the right to wear other clothes, but her request is rejected.⁶¹

When transgressing the boundary between the two spheres, Anton, Rüdiger and Anna are juxtaposed in terms of their vulnerability to outside threats. Anton is subjected to the threat of the adult vampires, mainly aunt Dorothee. Rüdiger and Anna, on the other hand, face the threat of extermination at the hands of vampire hunters, such as the cemetery caretaker Geiermeier, whose belief in vampires is as profound as his ambition to wipe them out. To an extent, all of these characters seem to be more or less equal in terms of their lack of agency

within their respective spheres, though this is not quite true. Anton's subject position as human at least allows him to make use of the entire day, all 24 hours. During the daytime, he attends school and engages in domestic activities whilst most of his nights are spent with Rüdiger and Anna. They, on the other hand, are destroyed if exposed to sunlight and therefore spend the day in their coffins, completely without agency. And while Anton has much to gain from his visits to the vampire sphere, Rüdiger's and Anna's experiences when entering the human sphere prove less auspicious.

When transgressing the border between the two spheres, Rüdiger and Anna find themselves in immediate conflict with the human sphere. They acquire their necessary quota of blood, but clearly they must use force, and this has consequences. In *Der kleine Vampir im Jammertal* (1986), the vampire clan has temporarily established itself in an old ruin. When hiking in a valley close by, Anton reads in the local newspaper that the adjacent village has suffered an increase in deaths and the rapid spread of a spring fatigue that has anaemia as a symptom.⁶² At the same time, the vampires have to be wary of vampire hunters, and Rüdiger laments the loss of caretaker Geirmeier's predecessor, who didn't believe in the existence of vampires.⁶³ The ongoing conflict with the vampire hunters makes it vital for the vampire children to avoid exposure, something that applies to Anton too when visiting the vampire sphere. However, he has the option to disguise himself as a vampire too. This becomes apparent in an episode in *Der kleine Vampir zieht um*, where the vampire clan hosts a party in the aforementioned ruin. Through the use of heavy make-up and his vampire cloak, Anton's disguise succeeds. He attends the party under the name of Antonio Bohnsackio der Düstere (which would translate to Anton Bohnsackio the Gloomy).⁶⁴ When the roles shift, and Rüdiger and Anna visit Anton's home, their cosmetic attempts at disguise prove less effective:

— Rüdiger and Anna looked frightful: their cheeks blushed, their lips were painted red and their usually chalk-white skin was powdered over with brown – but it was so badly done, that white spots were visible everywhere. [*author's translation*]⁶⁵

Anton's parents recoil when meeting Rüdiger and Anna, and the mother in particular finds both conspicuous and odd. She declares to Anton that, as far as she is concerned, they need not visit again soon.⁶⁶ Unlike Anton, who manages to blend in among the vampires, neither Rüdiger nor Anna is able to appear entirely human.

— INFLUENCE BETWEEN THE TWO SPHERES —

As pointed out previously by researchers, the impact of the vampire sphere on Anton is connected to his rebellion. His desire to challenge his parents' power advantage precedes his friendship with Rüdiger and Anna, but reaches new proportions through that friendship. As acknowledged by Mattenklott, the »guerilla war« is subversive, but she does not elaborate on the ways this is represented. After meeting Rüdiger, Anton asks his parents' view on vampires. They laugh at him and explain that in the olden days, people believed in the strangest things, such as witches and ghosts. The chapter is entitled »Elternweisheit« (wisdom of parents) and, read in the light of the introduction to the vampires in the preceding chapter, this is highly ironic.⁶⁷ From here on, Anton's secret knowledge and his continuous adventures serve to undermine his parents' superiority, but the real negotiation of power occurs after the psychiatrist's intervention. Following his advice, Anton's parents take their son on a trip to Transylvania, hoping that this might cure him of his romantic notion concerning vampires.⁶⁸ In *Der kleine Vampir und die Tanzstunde* (2001), Anton's parents are under the impression that his vampire-phase is over.⁶⁹ Yet the negotiation of power continues as Anton frequents the vampire sphere.

Just as Rüdiger and Anna encourage Anton's rebelliousness, he stimulates theirs. He is infuriated when told about the numerous punishments Rüdiger and Anna must endure in the name of fostering obedience – crypt ban, party ban, flying ban – and states that they live under a dictatorship.⁷⁰ He encourages Rüdiger to stand up for himself and challenge this dictatorship, but Rüdiger explains that while this might be possible for humans, it would have severe consequences for vampires (the aforementioned *Berufsverbot*).⁷¹ There are other characteristics of the vampire sphere that Anton finds problematic. When Rüdiger is ill with blood poisoning, Anton expresses concern and asks who is caring for him. Anna has no understanding of the concept of concern (*kümmern*). Anton compares his own experience of being ill with Rüdiger's and concludes that to be a vampire child is a punishment.⁷² Anna, on the other hand, frequently idealizes human existence, and her affection for Anton leads to a desire to perform an unambiguous human childhood. This is evident in the ways she alters her appearance; upon meeting Anton for the second time, she has combed her hair for the first time in 75 years.⁷³ When writing an essay on Anton's behalf, she argues that she doesn't »believe that vampires are fundamentally evil creatures, as suggested in many books and films. Rather it depends on their character (just as with humans) whether they are good or evil«, [author's translation, italics in original].⁷⁴ Her claim that vampires, like humans, choose their way of life, indicates her

desire to challenge the boundary between human and vampire spheres.⁷⁵

Thus far, then, Anton as well as Rüdiger and Anna perform their childhood through acts that serve not only to expand their space for agency, but also to encourage each other to reconsider the terms of their existence. When comparing his situation to that of the vampire children, Anton acknowledges positive factors in his domestic sphere. Anna, and to some extent Rüdiger, claims the right to values inherent in the human sphere, such as friendship across boundaries, and choice regarding lifestyle. They use their new found ideas to affect change from within and even if their ideas are continuously ignored, the end of the novel series points in another direction as Anna is appointed heir to Elisabeth der Naschhaften, the head of the entire vampire clan.⁷⁶ It is possible to interpret their success as taking them one rung up on Roger A. Hart's famous ladder of participation, a common tool used to measure children's participation. The very use of the image of a ladder seems to enhance the idea of progress. However, there is a darker aspect of agency as well in *Der kleine Vampir*, that exceeds the highest rung on the ladder and which Hart terms »child-initiated, shared decisions with adults«.⁷⁷

In order to exercise their agency, Anton, Rüdiger and Anna are detached from parental concern and protection. Their decisions are child-initiated, there are no adults to share them with. When leaving their domestic space behind (the apartment and the crypt, respectively), they are subjected to dangers. For the vampire children, these pose an existential threat, but Anton enjoys much greater freedom of choice by comparison. When they visit each other's spheres, the only protection available derives from their own agency or one another's aid. For Anton, this occasionally means assuming the role of a vampire helper. When Rüdiger is banished from home, his decision to move into a basement storage area belonging to Anton's parents is presented to Anton as a *fait accompli*. This turns out to be highly troublesome for Anton who is forced to pretend to have lost the key in order to keep his parents away. On this and other occasions, Rüdiger proves a somewhat selfish friend, with little or no interest in helping out.⁷⁸ In addition to subjecting Anton to a number of troublesome issues and situations, Rüdiger effects a shift in Anton's agency so that it is no longer based on choice but obligation, assigning him the role of a follower.

For Anna, her desire to adapt to human ways turns destructive when she decides to renounce and resist being transformed into a fully-fledged vampire by sustaining herself on milk. Eventually, her willpower is weakened, and she is forced to succumb to her vampirism as she starts craving blood as sustenance.⁷⁹ In exercising her agency, Anna joins rank with other female

vampires throughout history, whose need for human blood clashes with their ethical standpoints and generates eating disorders.⁸⁰ Evidently, agency is far from unproblematic.

— CONCLUDING REMARKS —

Initially, I set out in this article to reclaim the child in the cultural trope of the gothic child, focusing on her as *a being* rather than merely *becoming*, and discuss the representation of childhood as performed through acts of agency. Without doubt, agency has emerged as a stock device, placed centre stage in discussions of childhood regardless of the commentator's scholarly discipline.⁸¹ The concept of agency has proven a valuable focus of analysis, but the representation of it in *Der kleine Vampir* is somewhat ambiguous. Instead of focusing exclusively on Anton, providing yet another account of his coming of age process in relation to an implied child reader, the inclusion of Rüdiger and Anna provides a number of sometimes contradictory images of childhood. Just as Sommer-Bodenburg's novel series challenges binaries – such as monstrous versus humane and protagonist versus antagonist – in terms of the representation of the vampires, it represents agency as being potentially in conflict with protection, but it does so without establishing yet another binary. A considerable part of the plot revolves around the performance of childhood beyond parental surveillance, and thus seems to highlight agency as a loss of protection, though there are numerous reminders of the importance of both agency *and* protection.

Der kleine Vampir manages to remain ambiguous in a variety of ways. The paradigm of childhood as becoming is avoided, as Rüdiger and Anna's very being challenge becoming in a developmental sense; they seem to merge with rather than diverge from their literary ancestors within the vampire sub-genre. Furthermore, *Der kleine Vampir* offers the possibility of the fusion of agency and protection through a number of images of childhood or, rather, multiple childhoods. In this regard, it appears worthwhile to return to the aforementioned definition of the gothic as a representation of contextual societal anxieties. *Der kleine Vampir* addresses anxieties concerning control as an authoritarian version of protection, and concerning agency gone astray, without necessarily passing judgement on either.

■ — ENDNOTES —

1 One need only make reference to Regan in William Friedkin's film *The Exorcist* (1973) or the range of children featured in works by contemporary authors such as Stephen King and John Ajvide Lindqvist. Friedkin's film is an adaptation of William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist* (1971), but the image of Regan in the former has eclipsed that in the latter in the popu-

lar imagination; Regan as played by Linda Blair is an iconic image of the possessed child. In King's debut novel *Carrie* (1974), a teenage girl appears as the main character. From then on, child characters and the motif of childhood are represented in works such as *The Shining* (1977), *Firestarter* (1980), *Pet Sematary* (1983) and *It* (1986). Ajvide Lindqvist's debut *Let the Right One In* (2004) features a vampire child and later works revolve around themes such as the love of a child alongside the representation of evil children in *Harbor* (2008) and the child as an outcast who strikes back violently in *Little Star* (2010).

2 Steven Bruhm: »Nightmare on Sesame Street; or, The Self-Possessed Child« in *Gothic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006), 103.

3 Ellis Hanson: »Knowing Children: Desire and Interpretation in The Exorcist«, in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (eds.) *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis, 2004), 110.

4 Allison James, Christ Jenks, Alan Prout: *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge, 1998), 20–21.

5 Margarita Goergieva: *The Gothic Child* (Basingstoke, 2013), 39.

6 Bruhm: »Nightmare on Sesame Street«, 98.

7 Fred Botting: *The Gothic* (New York, 1996), 1–6.

8 See for example Sabine Büssing: *Aliens in the Home: The Child in Horror Fiction* (New York, 1987); Gary Westfahl and George Slusser (eds.): *Nursery Realms: Children in the Worlds of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror* (Athens, 1999); Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (eds.): *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*; Michael Howart: *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature* (Jefferson, 2014); John Calhoun: »Childhood's End: Let the Right One In and Other Deaths of Innocence«, in *Cineaste*, 31 (2009), 27–31; Bruhm: »Nightmare on Sesame Street«; Karen J. Renner: »Evil Children in Film and Literature: Notes Toward a Genealogy«, in *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 22, no. 2 (2011), 79–95; Karen J. Renner: »Evil Children in Film and Literature II: Notes Toward a Taxonomy«, in *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 22, no. 3 (2011), 177–196.

9 Anna Jackson, Karen Coats and Roderick McGillis, »Introduction«, in Anna Jackson, Karen Coats and Roderick McGillis (eds.): *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (New York, 2008), 7–8.

10 There are a few extensive monographs, as well as articles, exploring gothic fiction for children in the Anglo-Saxon realm. See for example Kimberley Reynolds, Geraldine Brennan and Kevin McCarron: *Frightening Fiction: R. L. Stine, Robert Westall, David Almond and Others* (London/New York, 2001); Jackson et al (eds.): *The Gothic in Children's Literature*; Gregory G. Peppone: *Hogwarts and All: Gothic Perspectives on Children's Literature* (New York, 2012); M. O. Grenby: »Gothic

and the Child Reader, 1764–1850« (243–253); and Chloe Buckley: »Gothic and the Child Reader, 1850–Present« (254–263), both in Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (eds.): *The Gothic World* (Abingdon/New York, 2013). Regarding the sub-genre of vampire fiction, there are a few noteworthy exceptions in which German and Scandinavian fiction is included. See for example Sabine Planka: »Gruften, Burgen, Kinderzimmer: Der Vampir in der Kinderliteratur. Angela Sommer-Bodenburgs *Der kleine Vampir*«, in *Inklings. Jahrbuch für Literatur und Ästhetik* (2009: 27), 131–158; Jane Mikota and Sabine Planka (eds.): *Der Vampir in den Kinder- und Jugendmedien* (Berlin, 2012), especially Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer: »Unzuverlässiges Erzählen als narrative Strategie: Vampire in der skandinavischen Kinderliteratur« (73–88) and Jana Mikota: »Von Anna von Schlotterstein zu Lucy Vega: Die Darstellung von Vampir-mädchen im Wandelnder Zeit (111–132).

11 See for example Sommer-Bodenburg's official website, www.angelasommer-bodenburg.com [accessed 22.01.2016] and the fansite www.gruft-der-vampir.de [accessed 29.03.2016]. Both provide links to other fansites and communities as well.

12 See Gundel Mattenklott: *Zauberkreide. Kinderliteratur seit 1945* (Stuttgart, 1989) concerning the abandoned child (155–159); Jörg Waltje: *Blood Obsession. Vampires, Serial Murder, and the Popular Imagination* (New York, 2005) regarding children's fears (90–92).

13 Jackson et al: »Introduction«, 1.

14 Kimberley Reynolds: »Introduction«, in *Frightening Fiction*, 2.

15 Dale Townshend: »The Haunted Nursery: 1764–1830«, in Jackson et al (eds.): *The Gothic in Children's Literature*, 21; see also Jadwiga Węgródzka: »E. Nesbit and the Gothic Mode in Children's Fiction«, in Angieszka Łowczaning and Dorota Wiśniewska (eds.): *All that Gothic: Dis/Continuities* (New York, 2014), 170–183. Concern for the impact that the gothic might have on children is not to be conflated, however, with the idea that there were no gothic elements in early children's fiction or that children didn't read gothic works intended for adults. For a discussion of this topic, see Grenby: »Gothic and the Child Reader, 1764–1850«. The attitude towards gothic fiction for children owes a lot to the ideas of John Locke as recorded in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), in which he emphasizes the mental sensitivity of the child and the importance of shielding him/her from things that might cause damage or encourage unnatural cruelty, such as supernatural ideas. Section 116 in particular addresses the issue of children's proclivity for cruelty.

16 J. Gordon Melton: *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead. Third Edition* (Detroit, 2011), 393.

17 Planka: »Gruften, Burgen, Kinderzimmer«, 149.

- 18 Peppone: *Hogwarts and All*, 5.
- 19 Karen Coats: »Between Horror, Humour and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic«, in Jackson et al (eds.): *The Gothic in Children's Literature*, 77.
- 20 Chloé Germaine Buckley: »Psychoanalysis, 'Gothic' Children's Literature, and the Canonization of Coraline«, in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 40, nr. 1 (2015) 68, 75.
- 21 Waltje: *Blood Obsession*, 89–92.
- 22 Planka: »Gruften, Burgen, Kinderzimmer«, 148.
- 23 Maria Nikolajeva: *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (New York, 2010), 185–186.
- 24 Paul Ricœur: *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London, 1991 [1986]), 298.
- 25 The metaphor of the network is derived from Roland Barthes: *Image – Music – Text*, transl. Stephen Heath (New York, 1978 [1977]), 161.
- 26 Alan Prout and Allison James: »A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems«, in Allison James and Alan Prout (eds.): *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. 2nd ed. (New York, 2015 [1997]), 7.
- 27 Peter Hunt: »Children's Literature and Childhood«, in Mary Jane Kehily (ed.): *An Introduction to Childhood Studies* (Maidenhead, 2009), 51–52.
- 28 Ibid, 51–52.
- 29 Michael Wyness: *Childhood and Society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Childhood* (Basingstoke, 2006), 18.
- 30 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg, *Der kleine Vampir* (Hamburg, 2011 [1979]), 93.
- 31 Their horrendous smell is continually emphasized throughout the entire novel series. The vampires even arrange a contest where the vampire who smells the worst wins, see Angela Sommer-Bodenburg, *Der kleine Vampir zieht um* (Hamburg, 2011 [1980]), 53–56.
- 32 Planka: »Gruften, Burgen, Kinderzimmer«, 151.
- 33 See for example such works as J. Sheridan LeFanu's »Carmilla« (1872) and Eric, Count von Stenbock's short story »The True Story of a Vampire« (1894). Both stories revolve around the intimate friendship between a human and a vampire, in both cases with erotic overtones. In both stories, co-existence is deemed impossible and, in the former, the vampire is exterminated to save the human; in the latter the human dies and the vampire vanishes.
- 34 See for example Anna Höglund: *Vampyrer. En kulturkritisk granskning av den västerländska vampyrberättelsen från 1700-talet till 2000-talet* [Vampires. A Cultural Criticism Perspective on the Western Vampire Narrative, from the 18th Century to the 21th Century], diss. (Växjö, 2009), 356–364; Mia

Franck: »Vampyrens makeover. Tystnad som normbrott i vampyr-fiktion«, in Katri Kvivilaakso, Anne-Sofie Lönngren and Rita Paqvalén (eds.): *Queera läsningar* (Hägersten, 2012), 227–251.

35 Deborah Wilson Overstreet: *Not Your Mother's Vampire: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction* (Lanham, 2006), 60.

36 Nina Auerbach: *Our Vampires. Ourselves* (Chicago, 1995), 5.

37 Tony Fonseca: »Children's Vampire Fiction«, in S. T. Joshi (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Vampire: The Living Dead in Myth, Legend and Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara, 2011), 47.

38 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 8.

39 Höglund: *Vampyrer*, 310–313.

40 Later on, Rice assigned the role of the protagonist to Lestat too, in novels such as *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and its sequels.

41 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir zieht um*, 40, 78.

42 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 62.

43 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir auf dem Bauernhof* (1983), in *Das neue große Buch vom kleinen Vampir* (Hamburg, 2009), 32–34: »Anton sah seine [Rüdigers] blutunterlaufenen Augen und den großen Mund mit den weit herausragenden nadelspitzen Eckzähnen. Beim Anblick der Vampirzähne lief es ihm kalt den Rücken herunter.../ 'Ich – ich wollte dich nur besuchen', sagte er schnell./ 'Besuchen?'/ Der Vampir lachte heiser./ 'Eine gute Idee! Wenn du wüsstest, wie hungrig ich bin!'/ 'So meinte ich das nicht!'/ 'Wie dann?', sagte der Vampir und machte einen Schritt auf Anton zu./ Anton wollte zurückweichen, aber sein Stiefel steckte noch immer im Matsch fest. Kalter Schweiß trat ihm auf die Stirn. Nur den Vampir nicht merken lassen, dass er Angst hatte!«

44 The term half-vampire is borrowed from Höglund who claims that the humane vampire is almost exclusively male, whilst several female vampires in that category are half-vampires (312, note 915).

45 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und Graf Dracula* (Hamburg, 2001 [*Die Reise zu Graf Dracula*, 1993]), 79.

46 See for example Waltje: *Blood Obsession*; Mattenklott: *Zauberkraide* and Margaret L. Carter: »The Vampire«, in S. T. Joshi (ed.) *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*, vol. II (Westport, 2007), 637.

47 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir verreist* (Hamburg, 2011 [1982]), 10–11.

48 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 48–49.

49 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir liest vor* in *Das dritte große Buch vom kleinen Vampir* (Hamburg, 2010 [1988]), 25; Sommer Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 106–109.

50 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir in Gefahr* in *Das neue große Buch vom kleinen Vampir* (Hamburg, 2009 [1985]), 70; 108.

51 Jens Qvortrup: Varieties of Childhood«, in Jens Qvortrup (ed.): *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture* (Basingstoke, 2005), 6.

52 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 5.

53 Robert Butterfeld: »Angela Sommer-Bodenburg«, in S. T. Joshi (ed.): *Encyclopedia of the Vampire*, 308–309.

54 See Allison James, James Jenks and Alan Prout: *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge, 1998), 38

55 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 6. When Anton is alone at home, before meeting Rüdiger, he engages in a play of make-believe in which his bed is his cave where he can conceal himself from terrors outside. When he moves through the apartment, the hall is described as particularly scary and he is afraid of the stuffed rabbit in his mother's room, even though he has the habit of scaring other children with it.

56 Ibid: 80.

57 Carter: »The Vampire«, 637; Mattenklott: *Zauberkraide*.

58 Waltje: *Blood Obsession*, 92.

59 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir zieht um*, 14.

60 Ibid: 68–69.

61 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und der unheimliche Patient* (2000), in *Das dritte große Buch vom kleinen Vampir* (Hamburg, 2010 [*Der geheimnisvolle Patient*, 1989]), 103.

62 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir im Jammental*, in *Das dritte große Buch vom kleinen Vampir* (Hamburg, 2010 [1986]), 83–84.

63 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 36.

64 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir zieht um*, 36; 43. Another, similar episode is featured in Sommer Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und Graf Dracula* where Anton joins yet another vampire party, this time under the alias of Antonia (111–150).

65 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 118: »Rüdiger und Anna sahen zum Fürchten aus: Sie hatten sich rote Wangen gemalt, ihre Lippen waren rot geschminkt, und ihren sonst kalkweiße Haut hatten sie braun überpudert – aber so schlecht, dass noch überall weiße Flecken herausguckten.«

66 Ibid: 127.

67 Ibid: 15–18.

68 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und Graf Dracula*, 32.

69 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und die Tanzstunde* (Hamburg, 2007 [2001]), 13.

70 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir zieht um*, 68.

71 Ibid: 68–69.

72 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir*, 79–80.

73 Ibid: 78.

74 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und die große Liebe*, in *Das neue große Buch vom kleinen Vampir*

(Hamburg, 2009 [1985]), 43: »ich glaube, dass Vampire keine von Grund auf bösen Geschöpfe sind, wie in vielen Büchern und Filmen behauptet wird, sondern dass es von ihrem Charakter abhängt (genau wie bei den Menschen), ob sie 'gut' oder 'böse' sind.«

75 On a metatextual level, her essay also functions as a commentary on the evolution of the vampire genre, where she rejects the vampires of old in favour of the vampire in contemporary, postmodern vampire fiction.

76 Angela Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und die Letzte Verwandlung* (Hamburg, 2010 [2008]), 135.

77 Roger A. Hart: *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (Florence, 1992), 8.

78 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir zieht um*, 26; *Der kleine Vampir verreist*, 116–118.

79 Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir im Jammertal*, 25–27; Sommer-Bodenburg: *Der kleine Vampir und der unheimliche Patient*, 94–95.

80 Höglund: *Vampyrer*, 347–355.

81 See for example David Oswell: *Children's Agency. From Family to Global Human Rights* (Cambridge/New York, 2013), 275–276.
