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Death as a Character and Its Philosophical Depiction in Children's Books

Death has always been one of the biggest taboos of all times. A brief thematic investigation in children's literature can allow us to confront social attitudes regarding children's relationship with death. It is unquestionable that literature gives us the chance to create new worlds, which are in sharp contrast to our own and to discuss new concepts that contradict with the prevailing ones. Works of art, and namely literary works for children, allow their readers to give meaning to life. Therefore, the analysis of different ways of depicting death and its changing function in children's literature is of both social and literary interest.

The aim of this paper is to explore and demonstrate how children's books legitimize and encourage the philosophical depiction of the concept of death and, at the same time, the philosophical thinking of children. The basic representation of death, as a character, which is promoted through these texts and their illustrations, is the representation of a global and irreversible death. Death emerges as well as a concept between literature and philosophy. Both philosophy and literature represent the world and are puzzled about it. Although, they are clearly different, nevertheless they are converged, overlapped and they are related in various ways.

From the data of the present study comes out that picture books can open alternative ways of construction and representation of the concept of death, particularly into the "gap" between words and images, resulting opportunities for different kinds of knowledge and for different ways of speech and thinking. Finally, the picture books we studied, each with a different way, "triggers" the philosophical investigation of the concept of death and encourage children through philosophical "connections" to give meaning to their world.

Artemis Papailia is a graduate of the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood of the Democritus University of Thrace (2008-2012). In 2012 she wrote her first thesis entitled "Translations of Traditional "Bad" Heroes in Contemporary Children's Literature for Early Readers". At the University of the Aegean, she studied in the two-year master cycle (2014-2016) of the interdisciplinary specialization program "Children's Books and Pedagogical Material", in which she wrote her master's thesis in the field of Children's Literature and Philosophy entitled: "The Issue of Death and its Philosophical Portrayal in the Contemporary Children's Picturebook". Also, she holds a PhD (2022) in Children's Literature (with a scholarship of the Greek State Scholarship Foundation) from the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood of the Democritus University of Thrace, where she wrote her doctoral dissertation entitled: *A Picture Is Worth a Thousand... Stories: Wordless Books and Their Implied Reader*. Currently she works as an Adjunct Professor of Children's Literature at the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood at Democritus University of Thrace. Her scientific reflections focus mainly on theoretical approaches to Children's Literature, particularly in relation to wordless books, on issues of meaning-making strategies, and reader-response theories.

