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(Recibido: 1 junio 2018/ Received: 1st June 2018)

(Aceptado: 11 octubre 2018 / Accepted: 11th October 2018)

STUDY OF DEATH IN THE NOVEL *THE PRINCESS BRIDE*: DEATH AS PART OF THE ADVENTURE

*ESTUDIO DE LA MUERTE EN LA NOVELA LA
PRINCESA PROMETIDA: LA MUERTE COMO PARTE
DE LA AVENTURA*

Abstract

In *The Princess Bride*, an adventure and fantasy epic novel that is intended for an ideal ten-year-old reader, death is only one element together with fencing, fighting, torture, poison, true love, hate, revenge, giants, etc. Its presence is very noticeable, since it is everywhere, both as the motivation and the result of the battles and fights that happen throughout the narration. In this work I analyze the novel through the words of the characters to determine different representations of death offered by its author, as a representation of the end of life, due to varying reasons, and also as a recurrent element of literary discourse. This work is a particular contribution to the area of study of children's literature that focuses on deaths that are necessary and violent in the narrative fiction. It pursues as a general objective the defense of long books as a learning tool to promote reading and discussion among children about important existential subjects. In particular, it presents the *The Princess Bride* as an example, proposing a brief study guide of this novel, which consists of some easy tasks for approaching the concept of death.

Keywords: death, adventure, fantasy, epic novel, typology, learning.

Resumen

En *La princesa prometida*, una novela épica de aventuras y fantasía destinada a un lector ideal de diez años, la muerte es solo un elemento junto con la esgrima, la lucha, la tortura, el veneno, el amor verdadero, el odio, la venganza, los gigantes, etc. Su presencia en la novela es altísima, pues está en todas partes, tanto como motivación como consecuencia de las batallas y de los enfrentamientos que acontecen a lo largo de la aventura narrada. En este trabajo analizo la novela a través de las palabras de los personajes para determinar diferentes representaciones que de la muerte nos ofrece su autor, como representación del fin de la vida, debido a causas de lo más dispares, y también como elemento recurrente del discurso literario. Este trabajo es una aportación particular al área de estudio de la literatura infantil que se centra en las muertes necesarias y violentas de la ficción narrativa. Persigue como objetivo general la defensa de libros largos como herramienta de aprendizaje para promover la lectura y la reflexión entre los niños de temas existenciales importantes y, de forma particular, presenta la novela *La princesa prometida* como ejemplo de ello, proponiendo una breve guía de estudio de esta novela, consistente en una serie de tareas sencillas en torno al concepto de la muerte.

Palabras clave: muerte, aventura, fantasía, novela épica, tipología, aprendizaje.

1. Introduction: About the novel and the topic of death in children's literature

The topic of death has been present in children's literature for centuries through popular tales and other traditional stories, which were originally passed on orally and only later, from the 19th century onwards, set down in writing. Children listened to them told by their elders, and in this way, they were confronted with the subject of death. During the Romantic period, society began to protect the child from some aspects of reality that supposedly took part exclusively in adult lives, such as death. Consequently, authors denied it in children's literature; it became a social and educational taboo topic in western society, where it took off in the 70s and 80s of the twentieth century within the movement called critical realism. From then on, it is again the objective of some literary production and it has also begun to be the subject of research in children's literature.

In line with the so-called pedagogy of death, the new books deal with this topic from a realistic point of view, showing in general a gentle approach to the subject and a friendly message about the end of life¹. As referred to by Barsanti (2018), this pedagogy consists in a series of proposals regarding methodology and the development of attitudes and skills that will provide young people with tools that will allow them to address death, taking the drama out of it by making it seem natural, and providing planned educational answers to the questions that arise after the experience of losing someone.

They have become necessary literature, aimed at contributing to the emotional education of children by not avoiding this universal and unavoidable theme for all of us and doing it frankly and in an honest way, far from ideological pollution, as Arnal et al. (2014: 8) refer.

The Princess Bride, a fantasy epic novel written by writer and screenwriter William Goldman, was published at that time, in 1973, but it has nothing to do with the realistic perspective of this body of production. Goldman's novel is an anachronistic² tribute to love and life for adults and children from age ten. Its plot is very simple: rescuing a young woman who has been kidnapped just before the celebration of her wedding to Prince Humperdinck, a union that will make her the queen of the kingdom of Florin. To entice readers, the author presents the story as an adventure where characters must face surprising challenges and battles. Its intention, as opposed to the plot, is not so simple: you must come to grips with the idea that life is not fair and in order to demonstrate this lesson death, contrary to life, is one of the central topics the novel is based on. Its weight, therefore, is enormous, constantly transmitted through its more than three hundred pages. This can be surprising as the novel was intended for children ten and older.

For all these reasons, its anachronistic character, on the one hand, and the role of the topic of death in the novel, on the other hand, together with the serious and at the same time humorous author's attitude about death, I chose this novel to analyze this topic as an original contribution to the scant body of informative and research publications that relate children's literature and death, such as House-Ruzicka (2018)³, Koutsompou-Kotsopoulou (2015), Ewans (2014), Comellas (2014), Wiseman (2013), Reynolds (2011), Sasser (2008), Corr (2003a, 2003b), Townsend (2003), Moore & Mae (1997),

1 One example here is the German book market: see Corvo (2016: 125-127) and Barsanti (2018, pending publication: please see the reference section). Selfa et al. (2015) propose a set of readings in which death occupies a fundamental place and present a practical reading experience in the nursery school classroom.

2 With no connection to its time: Bombs on Cambodia, oil embargo issued by OPEC, stock market crash and Watergate scandal, just to name a few conflict situations.

3 Pending publication. Please see the reference section.

Seibert & Drolet (1993), Gibson & Zaidman (1991), Pyles (1988), Walker (1986), Goldreich (1977), or Butler (1972). This bibliography can be extended to some other very different and relevant works on death in children's literature in Spanish by Oittinen & Roig (2016)⁴, Díaz (2015: 67-84), Selfa et al. (2015), Arnal et al. (2014), Arnal (2012), Montoya (2007) and Lage & Lana (1996) or in German by Ensberg (2006) or Heinrichs (1991), for example.

In particular, this paper puts forth novel research on fictional deaths that are necessary and violent in the narrative fiction⁵. In *The Princess Bride* they occur among adventurous characters, such as pirates, bandits and open enemies in narrations of heroic deeds. As a final objective, this paper pursues the defense of the educational treatment of long books for children and their use as a learning tool in order to promote reading and to discuss relevant themes with them. Many other topics, such as friendship, love, hate or revenge, could also be discussed, but I will focus my interest on the topic of death in the following pages.

To achieve this goal, I will first analyze its presence by presenting a proposal of an initial typology of the topic of death in the novel and deal with it as a recurring feature of its literary discourse. The aim of this initial typology will be to determine different images of this topic presented in the novel, as a representation of the end of life due to varying reasons. I will show the treatment of this topic in Goldman's literary discourse through a selection of some passages of the novel as representative examples. Addressing the final objective of this study, a proposal of a brief study guide of this novel will be then presented. It consists of some easy tasks to deal with this novel with children aged 10 or more in the classroom as a tool for approaching the concept of death. These should be used mainly to stimulate active reading and collaborative and motivated learning. After that, I will complete my analysis and interpret some main aspects related to death in the novel in the last part of this study, where I will also make some conclusive and final considerations about the novel and the purpose of this paper.

Before starting with this analysis, however, some other details about the novel have to be recalled.

2. *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman

The novel develops around the protagonist couple, the lovers Buttercup and the poor Westley, who is later transformed into the mysterious and horrid man in black better known as the Dread Pirate Roberts. Beautiful Princess Buttercup is kidnapped shortly before the celebration of her wedding to Humperdinck, the ambitious heir to the throne of the kingdom of Florin, and the series of events that make up the story have to do with her rescue. They are presented as an adventure that involves the main and the secondary characters in many surprising challenges and battles. Thus, the novel puts the focus on the conflict between the main character, the man in black, and Prince Humperdinck. It represents this conflict through some struggles between them: first indirectly, between the man in

4 It also contains papers in English.

5 I dealt with this topic in a previous paper about deaths in the fairy tales *Dornröschen* and *Sneewittchen* –in English *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*– by the Brothers Grimm. Specifically, the death of the wicked stepmother is terribly cruel and violent: she is forced to put on red-hot iron shoes and dance in them until she drops dead. Her death is also necessary, because it is both restitutory punishment for all the harm she has done and also liberating, since it represents a happy ending: the good heroes live and the wicked villain dies. (Corvo 2018, pending publication: please see the reference section).

black and Inigo – a Spanish swordsman, a loyal son, smart and vindictive –, Fezzik – the strong giant Turk, a good friend to Inigo – and Vizzini – the Sicilian; he is the evil, cruel and traitorous boss of Inigo and Fezzik –, and then directly. In the background, the struggle between Inigo and Count Rugen, the man with six fingers, is also noteworthy.

While it is true that the story has had a large audience, the cinematic version released in 1987 by Rob Reiner, director of other well-known films such as *When Harry met Sally*, *A Few Good Men* or *The American President*, has had a larger international following. The film was not a great box-office success, probably due to its poor marketing. However, through the years it has become a cult classic film due to its distribution in VHS and DVD. As a result, many of us have discovered the written version. It has been translated into many languages, which has allowed many fans throughout the world, who had fallen in love with the cinematic representation, to reconnect to the story. Images 1 and 2 below represent one of the many book and DVD covers that are available on the market.



Image 1. A book cover. Image 2. A DVD cover.

The 25th anniversary edition was published in 1998. I will base my study on this edition first published in Great Britain in 1999 (Image 1)⁶. In it, the author adds a commemorative introduction at the beginning and the first chapter of another novel that Goldman intended to complete: *Buttercup's Baby*⁷. This chapter is meant to be the sequel of *The Princess Bride* and it appears at the end of this anniversary edition, inviting the reader to look forward to new adventures in this new novel.⁸

Goldman uses a literary device in his novel, making believe that the story comes from a pre-existing book written by S. Morgenstern⁹. The novel is an abridgement; the author explains that he discovered Morgenstern's book through his father, who read a succinct version to him while he was recuperating from pneumonia when he was ten. Now the author summarizes his own version only giving the "good parts", just as he heard it from his father:

6 All the citations related to the novel in this paper have been literally taken from it.

7 It introduces the reader into the new life of the characters and focuses on the eventual kidnapping of Waverly. She is Westley and Buttercup's daughter.

8 It has not been published yet.

9 An old trick to present a novel within a novel that has also been used by some of the most internationally recognized writers. In Spanish literature, for instance, there is the case of Miguel de Cervantes and his novel *Don Quixote*.

[...] Morgenstern wasn't writing any children's book; he was writing a kind of satiric history of his country and the decline of the monarchy in Western civilization. But my father only read me the action stuff, the good parts. He never bothered with the serious side at all (Goldman, 1999: 29)¹⁰.

These words do not correspond with reality. It is true that Goldman writes his novel and recreates the adventure story his father read to him, presented in a series of fantastic battles, which include:

Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Poison. True love. Hate. Revenge. Giants. Hunters. Bad men. Good men. Beautiful ladies. Snakes. Spiders. Beasts of all natures and descriptions. Pain. Death. Brave men. Coward men. Strongest men. Chases. Escapes. Lies. Truths. Passion. Miracles (p. 8).

However, it is more relevant that the result is not only a novel of adventure and heroic epic fantasy but, more importantly, that it deals with very serious aspects of life. It can be said that *The Princess Bride* is a lesson on life, with its positive aspects such as love, fidelity, companionship, etc. and its negative ones such as torture, ambition, betrayal, cruelty, revenge, poverty or death.

These last aspects¹¹, without a doubt, are surprising in a novel for adults but especially in a novel aimed primarily at ten-year-old children. This is the age the author claims to be when his father read him the story after coming back home from hospital when he was recuperating from pneumonia –“Which is how you have to think of me when I came upon *The Princess Bride*. [...] Each night my father read to me, chapter by chapter [...]. It took, as I said, probably a month, and in that time he read *The Princess Bride* twice to me.” (pgs. 7-9)– and this is also the age he gave his son the novel as a gift, as he had planned to do a long time before:

My whole life really began with my father reading me the Morgenstern when I was ten. [...] That book was the single best thing that happened to me [...], and long before I was even married, I knew I was going to share it with my son. [...] anyway, when Jason was born, I made a mental note to buy him a copy of *The Princess Bride* for his tenth birthday (pgs. 11-12).

This may be so because Goldman wrote this “kid's classic” (p. 12), that he presents as “S. Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure” (p. 28), with the idea that his child could learn that life is not fair:

This book says 'life isn't fair' (...) the point is, we're not created equal [...].

[...] there's a lot of bad stuff coming up, torture you've already been prepared for, but there's worse. There's death coming up [...]. Forget all the garbage your parents put out. Remember Morgenstern. You'll be a lot happier (pgs. 209-210).

10 Hereinafter referred to only through the page number.

11 Most of them have been traditionally considered taboo, especially death. Therefore, this novel is part of what can be considered as necessary literature aimed at contributing to the emotional education of children.

I should not idle now on the study of the complex and interesting role of the narrator of this novel, but it does deserve to be referred to briefly. Among the reasons is the fact that the reader of this novel has to face the fictionalization of Goldman the narrator, who is presented by Goldman the author as having characteristics of both his family life, such as his wife and child, and professional aspects related to his own work as an author and screenwriter.¹²

To know the author better, it is essential to remember some of his past successes during his extensive career of more than forty years. Amongst his works I can mention, for example, the novel *Marathon Man* (1974), released as a film in 1976 with the same title and starring Dustin Hoffman; regarding his films, he has received two Academy awards for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *All the President's Men*.

3. Study of death in the novel

I will now focus on the main objective of this study and analyze the topic of death in *The Princess Bride*. To accomplish this goal, I will assess the weight of death in the novel by analyzing how William Goldman approaches this topic. In order to do that, I will determine different representations of this theme through the words of the characters and the storyteller: as the end of life for many possible reasons and as a recurring literary element in his writing.

In both cases, this analysis is meant to be made only in a representative form, as many other types and examples of death have had to be left out of this study. For this reason, the typology of death as the end of life in the novel I present in the next section should only be contemplated as an initial representative proposal.

3.1. Death as a representation of the end of life. Towards a typology

The presence of death is so overwhelming in this novel, that it can be said that almost all its characters, in a manner of speaking, either stretch the bounds of death or they die. The root causes of it are manifold and the result is diverse. Thus, together with the characters who die, there are also those who are "invited" to die, others who choose to die –to avoid other evils, such as torture, for instance–, others who dream of death, others who talk about committing suicide, others whose lives are spared, others who avoid it by surrendering, others who sense it, etc. There is even one character who does not die entirely and returns to life by a miracle, as the miracle man Max explains with regard to the situation of the man in black: "[...] there's different kinds of dead: there's sort of dead, mostly dead, and all dead. This fella here, he's only sort of dead, which means there's still a memory inside, there's still bits of brain. You apply a little pressure here, a little more there, sometimes you get results" (p. 276).

Accordingly, analyzing the novel trying to work out a typology of death is presented to us as being an extensive work. We should keep in mind that with space limitations it is impossible to develop a complete typological study on death in a document of this length, which should include all the occasions death is directly or indirectly represented in the novel. Consequently, Table 1 shows an initial and representative typology of this theme, which emerges from the novel itself and not from

12 The study of the role of the narrator of the novel could be more extensive, for it should differentiate the biography of the real Goldman and the partially invented Goldman, who is the narrator. But I cannot stop to analyze it more deeply at this time, as mentioned before.

any theoretical approach. The selection of excerpts that illustrate this typology and some comments on them are annexed to this paper.

	Type	In the novel
(1)	Unexpected death	This is the way the writer-narrator's father dies in the novel.
(2)	Foretold death	Under this type, there is more than one case with very different endings: foretold deaths that do not take place: the cases of Buttercup and Westley (2.1.), and others which do happen (2.2.): those of Vizzini and Count Rugen.
(3)	Stalking death	The case of the man in black against Inigo, Fezzik and Vizzini.
(4)	Death with no warning	The case of Domingo Montoya, "the greatest sword maker" (p. 111) and Inigo's father.
(5)	Death as a show	Vizzini's contemplation of the man in black while he is trying to climb the Cliffs of Insanity.
(6)	Death as a hobby	Death and suffering are Prince Humperdinck's real passions.

Table 1. Initial typology of death in the novel.

After dealing with this initial typology of death in the novel, in the next section I will continue my analysis by focusing on the treatment of the topic of death as a recurring feature in Goldman's literary discourse.

3.2. Death in the literary discourse. Representative examples

Independently from the different cases included in table 1 about deaths that occur and those that are about to occur, the reader of this novel finds words distinctly related to the topic being covered, such as die, kill, cadaver, corpse, pain, doom, murder, etc., in the majority of the pages. These words are repeatedly mentioned throughout the literary discourse, constantly on the tongue of the characters and the narrator. The following are some representative examples.

The first one describes the moment in which Buttercup's parents contemplate Count Rugen's retinue, when he arrives at their house to meet Buttercup:

Buttercup's parents did not have exactly what you might call a happy marriage. All they ever dreamed of was leaving each other. [...]

"Ahhhh," he said after a while. And a little later, again, "Ahhhh." [...]

"Such riches," [...] "Glorious." [...] "The heart swells at the magnificence," Buttercup's father muttered very loudly. (...)

"They must be going to meet Prince Humperdinck someplace," Buttercup's mother said.

The father nodded. "Hunting. That's what the Prince does."

"How lucky we are to have seen them pass by," Buttercup's mother said, and she took her husband's hand.

The old man nodded. "I can die."
She glanced at him. "Don't" (pgs. 42-3).

The second one illustrates the explanation that Count Rugen gives to Westley about the Machine he has created to research pain:

"This is the Machine," the Count said when they were alone. "I've spent eleven years constructing it. As you can tell, I'm rather excited and proud. (...) I'm very interested in pain, (...). In an intellectual way, actually. I've written, of course for the more learned journals on the subject. Articles mostly. At the present I'm engaged in writing a book. My book. *The book*, I hope. The definitive work on pain, at least as we know it now. (...) I think pain is the most underrated emotion available to us, (...). Pain has been with us always, and it always irritates me when people say 'as important as life and death' because the proper phrase, to my mind, should be, 'as important as pain and death' (pgs. 227-8).

The following example takes place at the time the man in black succeeds in rescuing Buttercup, after having defeated Vizzini:

They moved along the mountain path. The moonlight was very bright, and there were rocks everywhere, and to Buttercup it all looked dead and yellow, like the moon. She had just spent several hours with three men who were openly planning to kill her. So why, she wondered, was she more frightened now than then? Who was the horrid hooded figure to strike fear in her so? What could be worse than dying? (p. 160).

A short time later, when they find out that Prince Humperdinck and his men are pursuing them, they have the following dialogue:

"You can never escape him," Buttercup said. "If you release me, I promise that you will come to no harm."

"You are much too generous; I could never accept such an offer."

"I offered you your life, that was generous enough."

Highness!" said the man in black, and his hands were suddenly at her throat. "If there is talk of life to be done, let me do it."

"You would not kill me. You did not steal me from murderers to murder me yourself."

"Wise as well as loving," said the man in black (pgs. 162-3).

Another example has to do with the situation when Inigo and Fezzik take the inert body of the man in black to Miracle Max so he can bring him back to life:

This huge guy and this skinny guy brought in this big guy and put him on the hut floor. Max poked the corpse. "Not so stiff as some," he said.

The skinny guy said, "We have money."

"Then, go get some great genius specialist, why don't you? Why waste time messing around with me, a guy who the King fired?" It almost killed him when it happened. For the first two

years, he wished it had. His teeth fell out from gnashing; he pulled the few loyal tufts from his scalp in wild anger.

"You're the only miracle man left alive in Florin," the skinny guy said.

"Oh, so *that's* why you come to me? One of you said, 'What'll we do with this corpse?' And the other one said, 'Let's take a flyer on that miracle man the King fired,' and the first one probably said, 'What've we got to lose; he can't kill a corpse' and the other one probably said—"

"You were a wonderful miracle man," the skinny guy said. "It was all politics that got you fired" (pgs. 272-3).

One more example to finish this point. It describes possibly one of the silliest moments of the novel, when the man in black comes back to life after swallowing the pill of resurrection in front of Inigo and Fezzik:

"You're alive!" Fezzik cried.

The man in black sat immobile, like a ventriloquist's dummy, just his mouth moving. "That is perhaps the most childishly obvious remark I have ever come across, but what can you expect from a strangler. Why won't my arms move?"

"You've been dead," Inigo explained.

"And we're not strangling you," Fezzik explained, "we were just getting the pill down."

"The resurrection pill," Inigo explained. "I bought it from Miracle Max and it works for sixty minutes."

What happens after sixty minutes? Do I die again? (...)

"We don't know. Probably you just collapse and need tending for a year or however long it takes to get your strength back."

"I wish I could remember what it was like when I was dead," the man in black said. "I'd write it all down. I could make a fortune on a book like that. I can't move my legs either. (...) The last thing I remember was dying, so why am I on this wall? (...) (pgs. 290-1).

Next, I will focus on the novel as a tool for approaching the concept of death with children ages ten or more in the classroom and propose some easy tasks.

4. The novel as a tool for addressing concepts of death. An initial proposal

Children's literature provides an appropriate tool for addressing concepts of serious topics. More specifically, in relation to death and according to Barsanti (2018), "children's literature is the appropriate gate for death to enter the life of children and young people in a natural way." Barsanti apud Poch Avellán expresses it by saying: "[...] la cultura que no valora la muerte no valora la vida. La muerte, como la vida, ha de entrar en las escuelas y en el salón de casa con naturalidad, serenamente y progresivamente desde la primera infancia" (Barsanti 2018)¹³.

And this is the case of the novel *The Princess Bride*, which I propose now as a tool for approaching the concept of death. For this purpose, a short study guide to deal with the novel with

13 "The culture that does not value death does not value life. Death, like life, has to enter the schools and the living room of the home naturally, serenely and progressively from early childhood." (Author's translation, pending publication).

children ages 10 or more in the classroom is shown below. It is presented as an initial proposal and consists of some easy tasks meant as a brief study guide to introduce them to this topic in the novel and to perform active reading and collaborative and motivated learning by recalling and interpreting.¹⁴

1. As you read.

- Make some notes about how the characters speak. Some words can differ from standard written English, pay attention to subjects or verbs left out of sentences and incorrect grammar.
- Notice how the following places are described: the Cliffs of Insanity, The Fire Swamp and the Zoo of Death and take notes of the words you may not know.
- Notice how the following characters of the novel are described: Westley, Buttercup, the Dread Pirate Roberts, Inigo, Fezzik, Vizzini, Prince Humperdinck and Count Rugen. You can learn about their personalities and characters from what they say, do, and think, and by paying attention to what other characters say.
- Pay attention to your thoughts or feelings when you know of the deaths of Domingo Montoya and Count Rugen.

2. Work with a partner or in groups.

- Try to write a description of The Fire Swamp, the Cliffs of Insanity and the Zoo of Death.
- Describe briefly what kind of persons the characters mentioned above are.
- Select words related to death in the texts included in the annex and in the examples given below in 3.2.

3. Work in a group, with the help of the teacher.

- Try to summarize the exposition –the introduction of the setting, the main characters, and the conflict –, the rising action –the events that contribute to the conflict–, the climax or the emotional high point of the story and the falling action or what happens after the climax, and the resolution or final outcome.
- Try to explain why the Cliffs of Insanity, The Fire Swamp and the Zoo of Death are important places in the novel.
- Answer the following question: do you think persons like the characters of this novel could exist in real life?
- Describe what you think of the deaths of Domingo Montoya and Count Rugen.
- Try to understand the typology of deaths proposed in this paper (table 1) and add other possible types.

Next, I will complete my study on the novel through the assessment of some aspects that refer to the topic being covered and the study carried out in this paper.

14 The inspiration for this proposal comes from the "Study Guide for *Bridge to Terabithia*" by Katherine Paterson. Please see http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/bridge_to_tereithia.pdf.

5. Interpretation and conclusion

In this study I have had the opportunity to examine how William Goldman approaches death in *The Princess Bride*, a novel that can be identified –amongst many others– with the keywords friendship, philosophy, death, fear, life, love and fantasy. It exists apart from the book format, since a film has been made based on the story, and it has become immensely popular and a classic work for people of all ages.

The analysis I have developed proves that the topic of death has an enormous weight in this novel. It is everywhere in its more than three hundred pages, both as the motivation and the result of the battles and fights that happen throughout the narration, and, curiously, as seen, it does not always have to do with deaths that occur but above all that could happen. That is why the word die, in its different conjugations together with others such as pain, suffering, terror, suicide, murder, etc., all of them related with the subject matter, generously fill the discourse and pages of the novel.

That is certainly true in a novel intended for an ideal reader aged ten, which can be surprising. The reason for this is that Goldman's intention is, on the contrary, a tribute to love and life and a lesson for children, who also must know that life is not fair and death is a part of life.

The novel successfully entertains and moves due to its dramatic progression, which includes a story with different approaches and a diversity of hindering forces –shocks, battles and fights – oriented to defeat the desire of the protagonists: to be together. In addition, children can understand them, since these conflicts develop on a physical plane and not in the minds of the characters.

No doubt this outcome is facilitated by the fact that the novel does not show old age, suffering due to illness, or other complicated issues, which could be difficult to comprehend by the young readers, but death as the result of fights and adventures. Thus, it gains acceptance painlessly thanks to the author's attitude about the theme, i.e. the masterly mixture between seriousness and humor through magisterial scenes and dialogues, as could be seen in some fragments mentioned above and annexed to this paper as well as in many others that have been left out of this study. Good examples of this are the following situations: the different reunions of the characters, such as those represented by Buttercup and Westley at the ravine bottom and in Humperdinck's room –when she was thinking about suicide–, and the meeting of all four, Buttercup, Westley, Inigo and Fezzik in the denouement of the novel, which is a chant of positivity, because this is a success story, in fact a story with a happy ending:

The four great horses seemed almost to fly toward Florin Channel.
 "It appears to me as if we're doomed, then," Buttercup said.
 Westley looked at her. "Doomed, madam?"
 "To be together. Until one of us dies."
 "I've done that already, and I haven't the slightest intention of ever doing it again," Westley said.
 Buttercup looked at him. "Don't we sort of have to sometime?"
 "Not if we promise to outlive each other, and I make that promise now."
 Buttercup looked at him. "Oh my Westley, so do I" (p. 316).

Through the dialogues, the child readers witness what happens to the characters, because nobody tells them and they can almost live the action at the same time. This allows children to

participate more actively in the story and it can persuade them better, because as witnesses they can much more easily believe what happens, as if they were told about it.¹⁵ Furthermore, the dialogues are very far from their younger audience's way of speaking but at the same time very close to them as far as their interests are concerned: you have to fight, you have to escape, you have to flee from danger, you ultimately have to... live the adventure and survive. And this is what grabs the reader, who holds fast only to the positive aspect, as Inigo suggests to Fezzik when they feel trapped in the Zoo of Death: "Then let's look on the bright side: we're having an adventure, Fezzik, and most people live and die without being as lucky as we are" (p. 261).

Thanks to the author's attitude to the theme, which he treats seriously and, to a certain extent, with great humor, he brilliantly moves the readers' attention to the adventure and they unconsciously absorb all the words related to death as part of the adventures that the characters live. Especially, up to a surprising point, if you think of young and not so young people's attraction to intangible and mysterious things and towards crazy situations. This is the case for example of Westley or the man in black coming back to life through the resurrection pill. It is also particularly the case when the reader wishes for the death of several characters, as seen in the novel for example when the author-reader tells of his wish for Humperdinck's death when his father reads him the novel when he is ten years old –as mentioned in the quotation where his father announces Westley's death to him.¹⁶

More correctly, the reader does it even almost unconsciously: indeed, only when reading the novel carefully and trying to analyze it does the reader become aware of the importance of death in the story. The fact is, in any case, that children are not frightened by the violence associated with death in this novel. Quite to the contrary, things that frighten adults sometimes fascinate them. In this case, they understand, in an almost subconscious way, that deaths and death threats are a part of the plot of the story and allow its development, which is none other than the heroes' road to happiness. That is because the aim of the novel is also to entertain and move, making the reader think about its real scope at the same time: ensuring the victory of good and true love.

In this regard, Count Rugen's death is necessary, because it also has a symbolic meaning to illustrate that the wicked must receive their punishment. Therefore, the violent duel between the two of them is particularly noteworthy as a symbol of the meaning death has in this novel. On the one hand, it is a matter of justice, like Inigo suggests: "We are lovers of justice" (p. 310), that is a restitutory punishment for the harm Count Rugen has done to him; and on the other, it is also liberating, since this death will allow Inigo to live a happy or, at least, a new life. In the end, the good hero lives and the wicked villain dies. That is something this novel has in common with some fairy tales¹⁷; in the words of Goldreich (1977: 18): "Death, for many generations, was offered to children on a tray of tempting fantasy, garnished with "happy endings" for the innocent, and retaliation and reparation for the evildoers".

The novel also shows that it is possible to overcome adversity and difficult situations and how to face them: you have to never give up, keep calm, have no fear and make use of your physical and mental abilities. That is the attitude Westley always takes to deal with the different encounters and duels in which he participates – against Dread Pirate Roberts, Inigo, Fezzik, Vizzini and Count Rugen

15 You can read more about the organization of a story for instance in Garcia (2013: 127 et seq.).

16 Please see in the annex under 2.1. "foretold death".

17 As for instance the case of the death of the wicked stepmother in *Sleeping Beauty* by the Brothers Grimm; please see footnote number 4.

and Prince Humperdinck and their guards – and with the problems he meets in The Fire Swamp too and it is also the attitude, for instance, of Inigo and Fezzik when they feel trapped in the Zoo of Death and in the end they find their way out of it.

The crossover audience was hinted at earlier, when referring to the dual readership within the narrative (son and father). This is also something this novel shares with fairy tales. Although it could be a very interesting way of approaching the subject in light of the omnipresence of the theme of death in fairy tales, it is unfortunately not possible to develop this comparison here. This could be a very interesting contribution to the research of crossover audience, studied among others by authors like Beckett (2008, 2012).

In line with the final goal of this study, which is the defense of the educational treatment of long books for children, I have made a proposal to show one possible educational function of the novel with children in the classroom. All the questions asked are based on passages supplied in this paper, however, they assume an individual, careful and complete reading of the novel.

I am certainly convinced it can be used for that purpose as a learning tool in order to promote motivating learning, not only by reading but also by writing and discussing with others relevant themes and existential problems such as death. I have only proposed a brief study guide that can serve as a model and be subsequently extended –as suggested by asking for new types that could develop the representative typology, comments and quotations. And as the novel is a dual-readership book, as mentioned before, this proposal could also be useful outside the classroom and in the context of the family home. In both cases, in the classroom and at home, *The Princess Bride* is undoubtedly a perfect option as suggested reading and film.

It is quite possible that someone might not endorse this position and think that fantasy and adventures are not the appropriate context to address issues such as death. In the case of this novel one also might observe that the excessive exposure to the topic does not facilitate empathy or reflection but alienation and desensitization. It is also true that the variety of images of death represented in this novel might not allow children to develop a clear representation of the concept of death. Yet in the face of all this, it is possible to conclude that children can clarify and extend their understanding of certain aspects of the reality of death in a subconscious way. The final sentence of the novel is a good illustration of this. It states the following reflection by the fictional ideal reader, a child of ten: "*But I also have to say, for the umpty-umpty time, that life isn't fair. It's just fairer than death, that's all*" (p. 317).

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ANNEX. SELECTED EXCERPTS FOR A COMMENTED TYPOLOGY

(1) Unexpected death

My father was next to illiterate. [...] He came from Florin [...]. He met my mother on the boat over, got married later and, when he thought they could afford it, had me. He worked forever as the number-two chair in the least successful barbershop in Highland Park, Illinois. Toward the end, he used to doze all day in his chair. He went that way. He was gone an hour before the number-one guy realized it; until then he just thought my father was having a good doze. Maybe he was. Maybe that's all any of this is. When they told me I was terrible upset, but I thought at the same time it was an almost Existence-Proving way for him to go (pgs. 7-8).

(2) Foretold death

2.1. Buttercup and Westley

Buttercup's case occurs at the end of the plot, after having been kidnapped by the group of the Sicilian with the intention of causing the war between the people of Guilder and Florin:

She awoke to the lapping of water.

She was wrapped in a blanket and the giant Turk was putting her in the bottom of a boat. (...) And after she had listened for a moment, it got harder and harder to hear. Because of the terrible pounding of her heart.

"I think you should kill her now," the Turk said. (...)

"She must be found dead on the Guilder frontier or we will not be paid the remainder of our fee." (...)

"Watch your heads," the Spaniard cautioned, and then the boat was moving. "The people of Florin will not take her death well, I shouldn't think. She has become beloved."

"There will be war," the Sicilian agreed. "We have been paid to start it. It's a fine line of work to be expert in. If we do this perfectly, there will be a continual demand for our services."

"Well I don't like it all that much," the Spaniard said. "Frankly, I wish you had refused."

"The offer was too high."

"I don't like killing a girl," the Spaniard said.

"God does it all the time; if it doesn't bother Him, don't let it worry you" (pgs. 92-93).

The same reasons are given in a dialogue that follows between the Sicilian and the man in black:

"I will admit that, as a ransom item, she has value; nothing more."

"I have been instructed to do certain things to her. It is very important that I follow my instructions. If I do this properly, I will be in demand for life. And my instructions do not include ransom, they include death. So your explanations are meaningless; we cannot do business together. You wish to keep her alive for ransom, whereas it is terribly important to me that she stop breathing in the very near future" (p. 154).

In Westley's case it is the Pirate Roberts who announces his death every day for a year while having him as a prisoner. He expressly says to Buttercup:

"Did he, in fact, capture you when you were sailing for the Carolinas?"

"He did. His ship *Revenge* captured the ship I was on, *The Queen's Pride*, and we were all to be put to death."

"But Roberts did not kill you."

"Clearly."

"Why?"

"I cannot say for sure, but I think it is because I asked him please not to. The 'please,' I suspect, aroused his interest. I didn't beg or offer bribery, as the others were doing. At any rate, he held off with his sword long enough to ask, 'Why should I make an exception of you?' and I explained my mission, how I had to get to America to get money to reunite me with the most beautiful woman ever reared by man, namely you. (...) 'I'll tell you, Westley,' he said then, 'I feel genuinely sorry about this, but if I make an exception in your case, news will get out that the Dread Pirate Roberts has gone soft and that will mark the beginning of my downfall (...)' 'I swear I will never tell, not even my beloved,' I said; 'and if you will let me live, I will be your personal valet and slave for five full years, and if I ever once complain or cause you anger, you may chop my head off then and there and I will die with praise for your fairness on my lips!' I knew I had him thinking. 'Go below,' he said. 'I'll most likely kill you tomorrow.' (...)

"What happened tomorrow?" Buttercup urged. "Go on."

"Well, you know what an industrious fellow I am;" (...) and finally he said, 'Very well, you can be my valet for a day. I've never had a valet before; probably I won't like it, so I'll kill you in the morning!' Every night for the next year he always said something like that to me: 'Thank you for everything, Westley, good night now, I'll probably kill you in the morning' (pgs. 184-6).

Related to this is the announcement of Westley's death made by the father of the writer-narrator when reading the novel to him for the first time at the age of ten:

'Westley dies,' my father said.

I said, 'What do you mean, "Westley dies" You mean dies?'

My father nodded. 'Prince Humperdinck kills him.' (...)

'I'm sorry,' my father said. 'I'll leave you alone,' and he left me.

'Who gets Humperdinck?' I screamed after him.

He stopped in the hall. 'I don't understand.'

'Who kills Prince Humperdinck? At the end, somebody's got to get him. Is it Fezzik? Who?'

'Nobody kills him. He lives.'

'You mean he wins, Daddy? Jesus, what did you read me this thing for? And I buried my head in my pillow and I never cried like that again, not once to this day' (...)

I knew I wasn't about to bawl again. Like Buttercup's, my heart was now a secret garden and the walls were very high (pgs. 248-249).

2.2. Vizzini and Count Rugen

Among the foretold deaths that come true are those of Vizzini and Count Rugen, the man with six fingers, who dies at the hands of Inigo.

Vizzini's death is the result of a battle of wits against the man in black. It is a death that is also foretold by the man in black, if only subtly, through the following words: "the battle of wits has begun (...). It ends when you decide and we drink the wine and find out who is right and who is dead" (p. 156). The duel for the Sicilian consisted in discovering the poisoned cup and surviving the drink of wine; for the man in black, however, this presented no challenge, as he explains later to Buttercup:

"You killed him," she whispered finally.

"I let him die laughing," said the man in black. (...)

"To think," she murmured, "all that time it was your cup that was poisoned."

"They were both poisoned," said the man in black. "I've spent the past two years building up immunity to iocane powder" (p. 159).

Out of all of them, without a doubt, the announcement that Inigo Montoya makes to Count Rugen is the most powerful. It is presented through words he repeats inexhaustibly during his fight against the count until he kills him. The duel ends in the following excerpt:

"Hello! HELLO. MY NAME IS INIGO MONTOYA. YOU KILLED MY FATHER, PREPARE TO DIE!"

"No—"

"Offer me money—"

"Everything," the Count said.

"Power too. Promise me that."

"All I have and more. Please."

"Offer me anything I ask for."

"Yes. Yes. Say it."

"I WANT DOMINGO MONTOYA, YOU SON OF A BITCH," (...). (pgs. 309-310).

(3) Stalking death

In the novel, there are three cases and in each one the intended victim is the man in black during his pursuit of Vizzini's gang in order to rescue Buttercup.

In the first case, death awaits him hidden at the top of the Cliffs of Insanity:

"He'll never catch up!" The Sicilian cried. "Inconceivable!" (...)

"How fast is he at climbing?" Fezzik said.

"I'm frightened" was the Spaniard's reply.

(...) The man in black had gained another hundred feet. He looked up now. The cliff tops were beginning to come into view. Perhaps a hundred and fifty feet more and they were safe. (...)

"He's over halfway," the Spaniard said.

"Halfway to doom is where he is," the Sicilian said. "We're fifty feet from safety, and once we're there and I untie the rope..." He allowed himself to laugh (pgs. 102-03).

In the remaining two cases, it can be said that the stalking death turns into an "invitation to death" by Inigo and Fezzik and into an "acceptance of his fate" by the man in black, which means he must have a fencing duel with the first and a hand-to-hand combat with the giant Fezzik later.

Inigo awaits him hidden at the top of the cliff; however, he becomes impatient and reveals himself to the man in black. The following excerpt refers to part of the dialogue between Inigo and the man in black at the moment when he is still climbing the cliff face with nothing to help him but his own two hands and feet:

"Hello there," Inigo hollered when he could wait no more. (...)

"If you want to speed things up so much," the man in black said, clearly quite angry now, "you could lower a rope or a tree branch or find some other helpful thing to do."

"I could do that," Inigo agreed. "But I don't think you would accept my help, since I'm only waiting up here so that I can kill you."

"That does put a damper on our relationship," the man in black said then. "I'm afraid you'll just have to wait." (...)

"I could give you my Word as a Spaniard," Inigo said.

"No good," the man in black replied. "I've known too many Spaniards."

"I'm going crazy up here," Inigo said. (...)

"But you wouldn't have ever known I was going to kill you if I hadn't been the one to tell you. Doesn't that let you know I can be trusted?"

"Frankly, and I hope you won't be insulted, no."

"There's no way you'll trust me?"

"Nothing comes to mind."

Suddenly Inigo raised his right hand high —"I swear on the soul of Domingo Montoya you will reach the top alive."

The man in black was silent for a long time. Then he looked up. "I do not know this Domingo of yours, but something in your tone says I must believe you. Throw me the rope" (pgs. 127-28).

A similar situation occurs with Fezzik, who also awaits hidden to kill him, just after the man in black defeats Inigo:

Fezzik stood in shadow, the great rock tight in his great hand.

(..) leaped from hiding and threw the rock with incredible power and perfect accuracy. It smashed into a Boulder a foot away from the face of the man in black.

"I did that on purpose," Fezzik said then, picking up another rock, holding it ready. "I didn't have to miss."

"I believe you," the man in black said.

They stood facing each other on the narrow mountain path.

"Now what happens?" asked the man in black.

"We face each other as God intended," Fezzik said. "No tricks, no weapons, skill against skill alone."

"You mean you'll put down your rock and I'll put down my sword and we'll try to kill each other like civilized people, is that it?"

"If you'd rather, I can kill you now," Fezziz said gently, and he raised the rock to throw. "I'm giving you a chance."

"So you are and I accept it," said the man in black, and he began to take off his sword and scabbard. "Although, frankly, I think the odds are slightly in your favor at hand fighting."

"I'll tell you what I tell everybody," Fezzik explained. "I cannot help being the biggest and strongest; it's not my fault" (pgs. 148-9).

In these cases it can be said that death was invited –it is true, however, that the invitation is for a battle, duel or fight, whatever you want, but with the conviction that they will beat their opponent and that he will die–. This stands as a direct contradiction to the following type, where death comes without warning.

(4) Death with no warning

Domingo Montoya, Inigo's father, dies at the hands of Count Rugen. It happened a long time ago, when Inigo was still a child of only ten and the nobleman came to his house to recover a sword that he had ordered. It was a very peculiar sword for its handle was for a man with six fingers. What happened was the count refused to pay what they had agreed upon, which caused Domingo Montoya to deny him the sword and which in turn caused the count to murder him:

"You quibbled. You haggled. Art was involved and you saw only money. Beauty was here for the taking and you saw only at your purse. You have lost nothing; there is no more reason for your remaining here. Please go."

"The sword," the noble said.

"The sword belongs to my son," Domingo said. "I give it to him now. It is forever his. Good-by."

"You're a peasant and a fool and I want my sword."

"You're an enemy of art and I pity your ignorance," Domingo said.

They were the last words he ever uttered.

The noble killed him then, with no warning; a flash of the nobleman's sword and Domingo's heart was torn to pieces (p. 117).

(5) Death as a show

It occurs when Vizzini, as an enthused spectator, contemplates the man in black while he is trying to climb the Cliffs of Insanity and thinks he will fall and die:

The man in black was hanging in space, clinging to the sheer rock face, seven hundred feet above the water.

The Sicilian watched, fascinated. "You know," he said, "since I've made a study of death and dying and am a great expert, it might interest you to know that he will be dead long before he hits the water. The fall will do it, not the crash."

(...)

"Oh, how rude we're being," the Sicilian said then, turning to Buttercup. "I'm sure you'd like to watch."

(...)

"Shouldn't we be going?" the Spaniard asked. "I thought you were telling us how important time was."

"It is, it is," the Sicilian nodded. "But I just can't miss a death like this. I could stage one of these every week and sell tickets. I could get out of the assassination business entirely. Look at him do you think his life is passing before his eyes? That's what the books say."

"He has very strong arms," Fezzik commented. "To hold on so long."

"He can't hold on much longer," the Sicilian said. "He has to fall soon" (pgs. 104-105).

(6) Death as a hobby

Prince Humperdinck's real passion is suffering and death in accordance with his two great loves, war and hunting. While he can only dedicate time to war occasionally –that is why he is looking forward to the war between the two kingdoms, Guilder and Florin, which would be caused by the assassination of Buttercup after her kidnapping, exactly as he planned it–, hunting, however, is an activity that is routine in his daily life:

Hunting was his love.

He made it a practice never to let a day go by without killing something. It didn't much matter what. When he first grew dedicated, he killed only big things: elephants or pythons. But then, as his skills increased, he began to enjoy the suffering of little beasts too. He could happily spend an afternoon tracking a flying squirrel across forests or a rainbow trout down rivers. Once he was determined, once he had focused on an object, the Prince was relentless. He never tired, never wavered, neither ate nor slept. It was death chess and he was international grand master (p. 66).

In order to have sufficient prey at all times, his passion for hunting has led him to build what he named the Zoo of Death, a subterranean zoo divided into five levels, according to the characteristics of his prey: the fast, the strong, the poisonous and the most terrifying animals:

He designed it himself with Count Rugen's help, and he sent his hirelings across the world to stock it for him.

(...) The fifth level was empty.

The Prince constructed it in the hopes of someday finding something worthy, something dangerous and fierce and powerful as he was.

Unlikely. Still, he was an eternal optimist, so he kept the great cage of the fifth level always in readiness.

And there was really more than enough that was lethal on the other four levels to keep a man happy (pgs. 66-7).

Moreover, his hobby is not limited to only hunting animals, but he also enjoys hunting people. In the novel, the prey are Buttercup and Westley, once Westley dressed as the man in black is able

to free her from her kidnappers, Vizzini's gang, after defeating all three: Inigo in their fencing duel; Fezzik, in their duel of skill; and Vizzini in their battle of wits. Humperdinck, along with Count Rugen and their soldiers, chases the lovers Buttercup and Westley. This next fragment describes the moment of satisfaction that Humperdinck feels when he knows he has them surrounded:

"Two bodies fell to the bottom, and they did not come back up."

"That is odd," the Count managed.

"No, *that* isn't what's odd," the Prince corrected. "Clearly, the kidnapper did not come back up because the climb was too steep, and our cannons must have let him know that they were closely pursued. His decision, which I applaud, was to make better time running along the ravine floor."

The Count waited for the Prince to continue.

"It's just odd that a man who is a master fencer, a defeater of giants, an expert in the use of iocane powder, would not know what this ravine opens into."

"And what is that?" asked the Count.

"The Fire Swamp," said Prince Humperdinck.

"Then we have him," said the Count.

"Precisely so." It was a well-documented trait of his to smile only just before the kill; his smile was very much in evidence now... (p. 170).

Without a doubt, Westley and Buttercup are his primary prey and he enjoys the idea of killing them. He believes that he is able to kill Westley, exposing him to the highest intensity of the Machine, invented by Count Rugen, to measure suffering by sucking years of life away. In Buttercup's case, he plans to assassinate her on their wedding night –with her death causing the war between the kingdoms of Guilder and Florin, as he would accuse the Guilders of it–. More concretely, he plans to strangle her and he even practices for it:

He was seventy-five minutes away from his first female murder, and he wondered if he could get his fingers to her throat before even the start of a scream. He had been practicing on giant sausages all the afternoon and had the movements down pretty pat, but then, giant sausages weren't necks and all the wishing in the world wouldn't make them so (p. 284).