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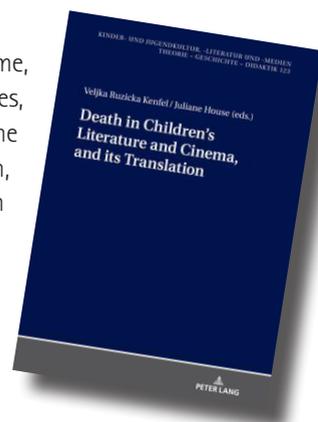
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Death is highly present in children's fiction and, at the same time, noticeably absent from it. In one way or another, folk and fairy tales, children's books and children's films have always been haunted by the Grim Reaper, yet its disquieting presence has often been frowned upon, censored, softened, silenced or relegated to secondary importance. Even today, when advances in child psychology suggest that overprotecting and talking down to children only leads to undesirable results, we can still find voices that disapprove of exposing them to the unpleasant aspects of life through fiction.

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, the presence and absence of death in children's texts have increasingly attracted the attention of scholars, many of whom demand more natural and benign representations of this unavoidable reality of our existence. This is the case with Veljka Ruzicka Kenfel and Juliane House's edited volume *Death in Children's Literature and Cinema, and its Translation* (2020), published by Peter Lang as part of their series *Kinder- und Jugendkultur, -literatur und -medien*.

Veljka Ruzicka Kenfel is a Professor of German Philology specializing in German children's literature at the University of Vigo, and one of the founding members of the Asociación Nacional de Investigación en Literatura Infantil y Juvenil. Juliane House, Professor Emeritus at Hamburg University, is an Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies scholar and the president of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies. Together, they have assembled seven contributions by seven scholars from the University of Vigo, all of them dealing with death in works of children's fiction from different cultures, eras and media. Despite common (adult) assumptions that children's fiction should protect child readers from unpleasant truths, Ruzicka Kenfel and House claim that "literature can become an important support mechanism not just for young readers but also for parents and educators, helping a child to understand and take on board the concept of death better, to overcome the fears it provokes and to face up to the painful situations that may stem from it" (7). Thus, starting from this premise, the essays collected in the volume acknowledge and trace the presence of death throughout the history of children's fiction, from ancient oral storytelling in Europe to present-day animated films and their translations. The different contributions also give visibility to works of fiction that feature death as a central theme and emphasize their didactic potential, among many other accomplishments.

The last few decades have witnessed a growing number of publications, PhD dissertations and conferences dedicated to death in children's fiction. Some of these aim to highlight its constant, albeit inconspicuous, presence in children's texts through the ages. Others, on the other hand, focus



more on the taboo status that this topic has acquired in recent times and stress the importance of using fiction to help children face up to life's ups and downs. As Ruzicka Kenfel and House point out, it is in German and Anglo-American academia that studies in this subject are most prominent. In the German context, for example, complete issues of scholarly journals have been devoted to this topic (see "kjlfm", 04/2010 and "interjuli" 1/2013), and articles and volumes have been published, such as Bettina Aeschbacher's *Wie sich Kinder mit Tod und Sterben auseinandersetzen. Eine qualitative Untersuchung zu Todes-, Sterbe- und Trauerkonzepten bei 5-12-jährigen Kindern* (2008), Claus Ensbarg's "Tod und Sterben in der erzählenden Kinder- und Jugendliteratur" (2006) and Margarete Hopp's *Sterben, Tod und Trauer im Bilderbuch SEIT 1945* (2015). In the English-speaking context, several publications also deserve to be mentioned: Judith P. Moss's 1972 article "Death in Children's Literature", Lois Rauch Gibson and Laura M. Zaidman's "Death in Children's Literature: Taboo or Not Taboo?" (1991), Jill Thompson's "Simplifications of Death in Children's Literature" (2013) and Lesley D. Clement and Leyli Jamali's *Global Perspectives on Death in Children's Literature* (2015), to name a few.

In Spanish children's literature studies, this topic is also increasingly attracting scholarly attention, and several titles deserve to be highlighted: Javier Ignacio Arnal's doctoral dissertation *El tratamiento de la muerte en el álbum infantil. Obras publicadas en castellano (1980-2008)* (2012), Riitta Oittinen and Blanca-Ana Roig's *A Grey Background in Children's Literature: Death, Shipwreck, War and Disasters/Literatura infantil y juvenil con fondo gris: muerte, naufragios, guerras y desastres* (2016), "Aproximación a la muerte en la LIJ" by Anabel Sáiz Ripoll (2010) and "La muerte en la literatura infantil y juvenil" by Juan José Lage and Manuel Lana (1996), among others.

All these works, however, focus mostly on children's literature and, as Ruzicka Kenfel and House have noted, Spanish academic bibliography that analyzes death in audiovisual texts for children is much less extensive. Similarly, the editors add that "works on Spanish translations of books about death are glaringly obvious by their absence" (9). Thus, the volume at hand not only offers a comprehensive and original contribution to the ongoing international debate about death in children's literature and film, but it also fills in an important gap in Spanish Translation Studies by examining how allusions to death in both literary and audiovisual texts have been translated for and received by Spanish children. The next few paragraphs will provide an overview of the seven chapters that compose this edited collection.

The first chapter "The Treatment of Death in German Literature and its Reflection in Early Children's Literature" by Helena Cortés Gabaudan functions as an introductory journey through the different stages of German history. Starting from Germanic pagan myths and medieval epic poems, Cortés Gabaudan highlights the importance of death in each historical period and its presence in literature, art, music, philosophy and culture in general. The author pays special attention to Romanticism, the time of authors like E.T.A. Hoffmann and the Brothers Grimm, and shows how death in those times was presented very differently from what we would consider suitable for children nowadays. Death was not avoided or justified by a didactic purpose, but it was very much present, albeit hardly ever presented as the central theme. Nonetheless, as Cortés Gabaudan very well states, "appearances can be deceiving, and the symbolic component of that 'collateral' death that appears in the background of so many tales is much more important than it seems at first sight. In fact, it is essential for the meaning of the tale" (29).

Cortés Gabaudan then moves on to the second half of the nineteenth century, when "death is no longer symbolic, it is real death and, to make matters worse, it affects the protagonist children themselves" (32). The author exemplifies how late nineteenth-century authors use death and horror

to frighten children into good behaviour with Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* (1845). Late-19th-century German philosophy is also examined in the chapter, with special emphasis on Nietzsche's nihilism and Freud's death drive, and their influence on the literature of the twentieth century. As the author beautifully puts it, "from the oneiric worlds of Romanticism or the Gothic terror that made us both smile and shiver, we move on to the treatment of death as something real, sadly very real, after the traumatic experience of mass death during the two world wars" (36-7).

Finally, Cortés Gabaudan looks into the representation of death in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, an era in which this issue is apparently less present in our daily lives while it still proliferates in fiction. According to Cortés Gabaudan, present-day children's literature consciously aims to prepare children psychologically to come to terms with death, and the author introduces an interesting notion: the idea that this is, in fact, part of a general tendency to overprotect children.

Along the lines of the first contributor, María Jesús Barsanti Vigo affirms that "If we focus exclusively on European literature, German literature is clearly the one that has approached the subject of death most frequently" (44). Her chapter, "Death and its Causes in Current German Literature for Young Readers: Towards a Typology", offers a comprehensive corpus of 70 German-language children's books about death and looks into their educational value. In Barsanti Vigo's view, and in line with previous scholars like Bruno Bettelheim, concealing the truth about death from children is just one more adult way of overprotecting them. This is why the author defends the vital role that literature can play to help young readers become familiar with this topic in a natural way and proposes a new typology to foster academic studies on this subject. Whereas previous authors have only considered the target reader's age and the type of character who dies in children's stories, Barsanti Vigo innovates by examining a third variable: the cause of death. For the author, *how* a character dies is just as important as *who* dies, and she addresses the question of why German literature for young readers tends to favour certain types of death over others.

Among other interesting and thought-provoking results, Barsanti Vigo's analysis reveals that death is much less present in books aimed at children under five years of age, probably as a result of the discomfort that adults experience when they talk to little children about this painful topic, as well as the latter's difficulty to understand death at such an early age. Regarding *who* dies in children's books and *how*, Barsanti Vigo has found a tendency to concentrate on older family members, pets and natural causes of death to introduce children to this theme. It is not until they reach the age of nine that books aimed at them start to tackle the death of younger people (parents, siblings or friends) and introduce more painful causes of death such as cancer, car accidents, war or suicide. As Barsanti Vigo concludes,

Although (...) there are works where the causes of death are violent situations or events, such as suicide, war or drugs, most of them tend to show the kinder and less dramatic side of death, probably with the intention on the part of the author not to cause readers too much anguish, and to help them accept this unquestionable reality in the gentlest way possible. (65)

In chapter 3, "The Conception of Death in *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and its Reception in Spanish. A Study of *Schneewittchen* and *Dornröschen*", we remain in Germany, but María José Corvo Sánchez takes the reader back in time to the nineteenth century and the Brothers Grimm and brings translation into the discussion. Corvo Sánchez proposes a comparative study between the Grimms' versions of "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty", and the Spanish translations of the Disney versions, in both film and book format, which popularized these fairy tales among Spanish children.

Like Barsanti Vigo, Corvo Sánchez emphasizes that folk and fairy tales that dealt with death were, in fact, quite common before this subject became taboo in twentieth-century children's fiction, only to be revived in the 1970s and 80s with the arrival of critical realism and the pedagogy of death. Deaths in these tales were often cruel and bloody but, as the author very well points out, Spanish children have been introduced to these stories mostly through the Walt Disney 'sanitized' adaptations. Corvo Sánchez acknowledges that "The modifications in the content in the Disney version in order to sweeten the tale, on the one hand, and the search for the spectacular on the other, also alter the tale's didactic content" (96). However, what is refreshing about Corvo Sánchez's reading is that it does not present this in a negative light, as often happens in scholarly criticism of Disney products. Instead, the author focuses on the positive side of this phenomenon: the fact that the Disney versions manage to tackle the subject of death without transmitting excessive fear to the child viewer/reader.

We now leave Germany, as Isabel Mociño González and Eulalia Agrelo Costas transport the reader to Galicia (Spain) in chapter 5, "The Topic of Death in Galician Literature for Children and Young Adults". As the editors affirm in the introduction, although death has not been as prominent in Spanish children's literature as it has been in the Scandinavian, German and Anglo-American traditions, its presence has certainly increased in recent decades. In this essay, Mociño González and Agrelo Costas shed light on manifestations of death in Galician folklore and the children's literature tradition that has stemmed from it. The authors present an extensive corpus of around 30 works of Galician children's literature and over 70 YA books, all of them concerned with death and most of them written in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. Mociño González and Agrelo Costas classify the texts both chronologically and thematically, providing a detailed synopsis for each title. Works of children's literature are classified as featuring: 1) the death of a close relative; 2) the death of nature and animals; 3) death during conflicts; 4) death intertwined with humour, adventure and subversion; 5) death at early ages; and 6) symbolic deaths. The second part of the chapter concentrates on YA literature, and the authors claim that the number of works of Galician juvenile fiction that deal with death is far superior to the previous children's literature corpus.

Similar to the German works for children aged 9 and up, studied by Barsanti Vigo, these YA Galician titles may feature: 1) the death of parents or close relatives; 2) the death of young people due to drugs, illnesses, traffic accidents and so on; 3) death in warlike conflicts; 4) death and supernatural mysteries; 5) death, parody, humour and subversion. As we saw in the case of Germanic cultures, Galician culture is also rife with references to and traditions involving death, and this is reflected in its literature. All in all, Mociño González and Agrelo Costas introduce the reader to a vast array of Galician texts, from Xosé Neira Vilas's classic *Memorias dun neno labrego* (1961) to the humorous Gothic of present-day writer Leticia Costas. The chapter shows how Galician children's literature represents death in a rich variety of ways, introducing adventure and humour to make this theme more palatable for young readers. As Mociño González and Agrelo Costas state, "The narrative discourse is never discouraging, and it is filled with hope" (114).

In chapter 5, "The Immortality of Death and its Permanent Presence in Children's Literature", Celia Vázquez García explores a thought-provoking notion: contrary to popular beliefs, death has always been present in children's literature, and it is the author's viewpoint and the treatment of the subject that has changed through the ages, depending on what adults considered appropriate for children. As Vázquez García states, "It has been said that the presence of death in Children's Literature has been scarce, that it has been the 'great absentee', the eluded subject because it was almost censured or hidden from children, it has been a taboo subject dealing with Children's Literature but

I think it has not been so" (139). Vázquez García admits that it is not easy to talk about death to children and, hence, this topic has become taboo in recent times, but she also defends that, somehow, death has always been present in texts aimed at them.

To prove this, the author looks into a selection of English-language works and English translations of texts written in other languages, paying particular attention to evolving conceptions of death and childhood in the English context and how they are reflected in the literature of each historical period. Vázquez García also explores how death was very much present in the daily lives of children, especially up until the first half of the nineteenth century. It was in the twentieth century that death started to become, as the author puts it, 'unfamiliar' in children's literature, as child mortality rates decreased, and medicalization and standards of living improved.

Although the presence of death was not as conspicuous as it had been in the past, García Vázquez looks into the different ways in which death still found its way into twentieth-century children's books, with novels like E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) or Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). Finally, the author looks into the 1990s as a death-denying period and examines how this attitude is portrayed in children's books. The author concludes that, if death has become taboo in children's literature, it is only because of an adult fear of it. Furthermore, she states that

death is always present in children's literature but since the second part of the twentieth century the shift in its approach has changed. It seems that the books are now used as a kind of bibliotherapy. Authors are requested to introduce the topic of death because adults think that it serves as comforter when a loved one dies. (157)

Like Cortés Gabaudan, García Vázquez also interprets this proliferation of books that purport to help children come to terms with death as part of a general tendency to overprotect children.

We now move on to chapter 6, "Back to Life: Death in Translated 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Fiction and Film", in which Beatriz M<sup>a</sup> Rodríguez Rodríguez and Cayetana Álvarez Raposeiras not only analyze representations of death in children's literature and film, but they also bring translation into the discussion to examine how these cultural manifestations have reached Spanish audiences, very much along the lines of chapter 2. The authors concentrate on the treatment of death in translation to see if the topic has somehow been softened or omitted in line with certain didactic and pedagogic criteria.

Contrary to common visions of death as a taboo topic that should be avoided in cultural products aimed at younger readers, Rodríguez Rodríguez and Álvarez Raposeiras sustain that they can be a powerful tool to help children and youngsters face and overcome their fears. They also highlight that the topic is often tackled with optimism in order to transmit a sense of hope, instead of sadness and despair. The key here is to present death "as a natural and unavoidable process—not as a terrifying event—that can be eventually overcome" (161). Thus, the authors stress that readers should be able to find in a book anything that they may encounter in real life, for this allows them to experience difficult issues in the safe and controlled environment that fiction provides.

As we have learned in the previous chapters, death has always been present in children's fiction, generally as a plot device to trigger action, a punishment for the evildoer or a didactic element to scare children into good behaviour. By contrast, Rodríguez Rodríguez and Álvarez Raposeiras examine cultural products that consciously revolve around and reflect on this topic, and which may therefore contribute to normalizing it for young readers. The research questions that the authors propose are "how do translators face references to death? What are the criteria they follow?" (162). To

answer these questions, they look into the Spanish translations of three twentieth-century children's classics and their film adaptations: Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) and Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977). The authors examine the strategies that translators use to tackle references to death, and they look for traces of manipulation prompted by didactic, moral or pedagogic criteria. As they point out, in the case of children's books and films, the double addressee that characterizes these texts further complicates the translation process. They quote Gillian Lathey's views that "Translating for children may therefore include an ideological dimension that required linguistic and political finesse as part of the translation. It is important to ensure that hidden encoded messages are not lost to the child or adult reader in the target culture" (2016: 6). Satisfying this double addressee will therefore be one of the challenges that the translator will have to face.

Finally, in chapter 7, "The Reaper's Kind Face: Treatment of Death through Dual Addressee (adults/children) Films and their Translations", Lourdes Lorenzo García and Ana Pereira Rodríguez also concentrate on English-language films and their Spanish translations. These two specialists analyze an impressive total of 12 children's films by Disney, Pixar and Tim Burton, among others, from a Translation Studies viewpoint. Lorenzo García and Pereira Rodríguez distinguish three main ways of dealing with death in twentieth-century children's books and films: a) harsh representations of death (especially in texts that deal with real-life warlike conflicts); b) euphemistic or metaphorical treatments of death; and c) humorous renderings of death. The authors look into the Spanish dubbing of the selected films, paying particular attention to whether translators have intervened in a paternalistic way and softened the death references or not.

Building upon previous studies about death in translated audiovisual products aimed at a dual addressee, Lorenzo García and Pereira Rodríguez identify three different translation trends: 1) similar focus ST/TT; 2) no attenuating elements in ST vs. use of euphemisms in TT; 3) euphemistic death in ST vs. no attenuating elements in TT. As their analysis shows, death is represented in a great variety of ways in children's films, and its presence might be central or collateral. From a linguistic point of view, the authors also discuss how screenwriters often resort to metaphorical allusions to death to create humorous puns, which will also pose a challenge to translators.

In light of the above, Ruzicka Kenfel and House's edited volume raises a series of thought-provoking questions and ideas about death in children's fiction and its translations. The different essays perfectly illustrate and encapsulate the richness of the debate that this topic is generating. For instance, we have seen that some scholars point out how absent death is in children's fiction if we compare it to adult fiction. Others, by contrast, prefer to revisit older texts to draw attention to the fact that death has actually always been there lurking in the margins. What we can certainly infer from this discussion is that death has indeed been absent and censored from children's texts in certain times, not because it was regarded as an unimportant topic, but rather because of adult fears and assumptions about what children can and cannot grasp, what they should or should not read. Indeed, the very notion that certain topics need to be censored and wiped out from children's fiction only reveals how powerfully they scare the grown-ups that produce and buy these texts.

To conclude, the dialogue among the different chapters also fosters another fundamental debate: some specialists defend that death should be more overtly discussed and represented in children's texts for the didactic and pedagogic value that this might have. Other authors, however, see this as yet another way of overprotecting children by assuming that they need the narratives that we create for them. This suggests the troubling notion that censoring a topic and overexplaining it

might only be two sides of the same spectrum and that, whatever we do, children's fiction cannot free itself from overprotective and patronizing attitudes towards children. As several authors in Ruzicka Kenfel and House's book propose, the optimum treatment of death in children's fiction would be an unaffected one that finds a middle ground between scaring children unnecessarily and talking down to them; one in which the presence of death does not exclude the possibility of humour, adventure, hope and the joys of life. As Barbara Wall once stated, "loveliness and ugliness, sadness and delight, comedy, tragedy and horror are all part of life, and might all appropriately be part of fiction for children, provided that the voice of the narrator, the voice which presents these things to children, is a voice which speaks to them with love and respect" (1991: 273). *Death in Children's Literature and Cinema, and its Translation* teaches us that it is not only the voice of the narrator, but also the (often unheard) voice of the translator and the skills of the filmmaker that possess the power to make death in children's fiction—as paradoxical as it may sound—come to life.

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