

**Searching for death: an analysis of The Story of a Mother, by
Andersen / À procura da morte: uma análise sobre A história de uma
mãe, de Andersen**

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ABSTRACT

It is known that the theme of death is discussed in many texts for adults and children, following different perspectives, which vary according to the context and the time in which they are produced. The theme of death is seen in the universe of children's and youth literature, especially in fairy tales, as they were considered the first texts intended for childhood in the seventeenth century. In this article, we will analyze how the construction and representation of death in Hans Christian Andersen's *History of a Mother* (2012) occurs. In the present narrative, a desperate mother looks for Death in order to recover her missing child. We will focus in this pursuit, paying attention to the details that mention not only the theme of death, but also the culture of the time when the text was written. For the construction of the paper, we read some studies and researches by authors such as Ariès (2012) and Coelho (2012) and traced a path about death in literature in general and in children's literature. More specifically, associating this trajectory to analysis of the text, which brings us death represented as a character and shows the plot of a mother facing a series of obstacles to find her son and to bring him back to life.

KEYWORDS: Children's Literature; Death; Fairy tale; Andersen.

RESUMO

*Sabemos que o tema da morte é abordado em diversos textos para adultos e crianças e em diferentes perspectivas, que variam de acordo com o contexto e a época em que são produzidos. Um dos universos em que ele é visto é o da literatura infantil e juvenil, principalmente nos contos de fadas, por terem sido considerados os primeiros textos destinados à infância, no século XVII. No presente artigo, analisaremos como se dá a construção e representação da morte em *História de uma mãe* (2012), de Hans Christian Andersen. Na presente narrativa, uma mãe desesperada procura pela Morte a fim de recuperar seu filho desaparecido e é nessa busca que centraremos nossa atenção, atentando para os detalhes que não apenas falam do tema, mas da cultura da época em que o texto foi escrito. Para elaboração do trabalho, realizamos a leitura de alguns estudos e pesquisas de autores como Ariès (2012) e Coelho (2012) e traçamos um percurso acerca da morte na literatura de modo geral e na literatura infantil, mais especificamente, associando essa trajetória à análise do texto, que nos traz a morte representada como personagem e mostra a trama de uma mãe ao enfrentar uma série de obstáculos para encontrar seu filho e trazê-lo de volta à vida.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Literatura Infantil; Morte; Contos de fadas; Andersen.*

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1 Introduction

Since ancient times, the theme of death is a cause of uneasiness, especially because there are more questions than answers regarding it. The amount of philosophers, scientists and religious that discuss about it is enormous. And literature, as a fundamental part of the universe of the arts, has represented death without being limited to time periods, through the story of multiple characters that compose the narratives and through various symbols and images, some of them being realistic and scary and others romantic, metaphorical or exemplary.

In general, we know that this theme is mentioned in a number of literary genres, for both adults and children, and in different writing styles and perspectives, which vary according to the context and the time period in which they are created. For children, the universe in which death appears is in the works of the so-called children's and youth literature.

And through the literature suitable for this public that the possibilities of dealing with such controversial topics as violence, sexuality, abandonment, poverty and, especially, death arise. In this context, fairy tales and wonderful narratives are influenced genres able to pass on knowledge through stories and enable readers and listeners to enter a universe that, despite dealing with fantasy and imagination, also deals with conflicts and situations that are part of human reality. Mainly because they emerged at a time when the idea of childhood did not exist as we have today and, for this reason, children were inserted in the same environments and occupations as adults, such environments that were characterized by poverty, misery and violence. Therefore, according to Darnton (2014), "rather than concealing the message through symbols, storytellers from 17th century in France portrayed a world of naked brutality." (DARNTON, 2014, p. 29).

In this mix, there were not themes only suitable for adults and unsuitable for children. For this reason, there are so many narratives in which death appears recurrently as a protagonist or a supporting character, showing its many facets, whether dramatic, scary, ironic, funny, or even grotesque. These kinds of fictionalization of literary texts only emphasize the tight relation between the theme and literature itself.

This connection happens mostly through representation and through that, authors transpose to the book pages what is part of the human universe and daily life.

With these narratives, some names have taken root in the children's universe. Authors such as Perrault (1628-1703) in France, Jacob (1785-1803) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786- 1859) in Germany, and Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) in Denmark marked this literature by compiling or creating texts from what was told by the people. Even though interconnected by different political, historical and social events, they have established themselves with undeniable importance in their countries of origin and, if we may say so, throughout the West.

The works of these authors are among the most popular, translated and adapted when it comes to fairy tales and wonderful tales. The studies that use them as *corpus* are not restricted to the field of children's literature, this happens especially because when reading their narratives we are not only facing the universe of the child as opposed to the adult, but mainly the representation of a variety of characters inserted in a historical and social context whose importance exists not only in Europe, but in many other parts of the West.

In this paper, we will focus on one of these names only. Our paper is an interpretive and bibliographic research, its main objective is the discussion of the representation and the fictionalization of death in the tale *The Story of a Mother*, written by Hans Christian Andersen in 1847, he is an author who brings in his texts, such as *The little matchmaker*, *The child in the grave*, *The ugly duckling*, *The little red shoes*, among others, the richest diversity of feelings, from the deepest pain to happiness that can be achieved with satire, compassion and humor. With his literature, he emphasizes the small bizarre events present in man's daily life, in addition to suggesting ways for the reflection of social problems. The writer represented for children, through the text and using simple language, the religious ideal in which he believed in, portraying life as a set of difficulties that each of us must go through to reach heaven, and death as a rite of passage from this world to a better one.

In our discussion, we will delineate a brief historical path regarding death in literature, as well as its insertion in children's literature. Thereupon, we will analyze the place of death in the narrative *The Story of a Mother*, through elements present in the text, as well as the description of the characters, the scenes in which she appears and the

influence of the narrative voice in the context of the story. To base our research, we use the texts of authors such as Ariès (2014), Rodrigues (1998), Chiavenato (1998), regarding the theme of death and its social and cultural representations; and Correia (2013), Lotterman (2009) and Aguiar (2010), regarding the relation between this theme and the universe of children's literature.

2 Representations of death in children's and youth literature

There are many means to talk about death and, when we think about reality and fiction, literature is one of the most important paths to build reflections on the subject. It is also through literature that we can find answers to a number of questions that are raised within it, in order for the individual to transpose something from real life to the pages of books or orality.

In addition to dealing with themes common to the reality of man, we must recognize that the literary text is a cultural product which carries markers of a time period and brings with it the story of many peoples narrated in the lives of the characters. In children's literature this is no different, and that is why Darnton (2014) classifies these texts as “historical-cultural documents”. The same narratives that amuse, also bring life lessons and have been enchanting readers for centuries, they are also the ones which reveal the social ills of a period and a place, and exhibit the writing style of the authors influenced by the historical moment in which they were a part of.

For this reason, it is inevitable not to come across the history and culture of civilizations, and the way in which their values have been transmitted over the years, without looking at the role that the literary text plays in this transmission. Since this type of text carries within itself an arsenal of traditions to be passed on and renewed as times change; an evidence of that is the advent of children's literature, and the influence that the emergence of this literature had on how some themes, such as death, were portrayed in the works.

Only in the 17th century, when the concept of family was originated, the idea of childhood arose; the importance that children came to have did not appear by chance, it

was the result of social changes that occurred throughout the century. Especially because a new social class called bourgeoisie emerged, which interferes directly in the literature, and since at this moment in history real importance is given to education. Before this time, some classic tales that we are very familiar with today as children's literature, did not have children as their target audience. For this reason, so many death scenes, violence and other subjects that are not "suitable for children" nowadays used to be mentioned. The themes addressed the adult life, the fight for survival, sexuality, "social rules, celebrations, indignations and perplexities were experienced by the entire community, regardless of age groups" (AZEVEDO, 1999, p. 3) and they were included precisely to portray people's lives.

However, it is known that literature is not a perfect copy of what is real or a fanciful realization that has distanced itself from the meanings of the world and the history of mankind. It brings these two universes closer (fiction and fantasy) through the representation. According to Eagleton (2006), it is by means of literature that man can "ponder on interior experiences or objects in the real world, 'make thoughts and feelings present', or describe reality." (EAGLETON, 2006, p. 194).

The author also highlights that there are some mistakes around this notion of representation. As stated by him, it is not possible to present to the reader an exact copy of our reality using all the information that the author includes in his work, "This happens because it is not possible to have a pure meaning or experience of reality without deformation." (EAGLETON, 2006, p. 194). And that is why we only see a part of the reality through characters and plots of many literary works, it is all a fragment that is not completely true to the referred context, due to fiction and fantasy, already mentioned before.

Other than this fact, there are specific ways of fictionalizing such realities, particularly because each author possesses a singular way of understanding them and passing them along through the written product, as they "always position themselves from a social point of view and the looks they adopt are permanently contingent on circumstances that emerge from such places." (LUCCA; MIRANDA, 2004, p. 1). The reality in which Andersen, the author of the narrative *The Story of a Mother* is a part of, is different from the one in which the first texts destined for children appeared. As the period in question was another one, the approach to the same subjects would also be.

However, in spite of being a part of a historical context in which the idea of childhood and family were already defined and influencing his stories, the narrative to be analyzed here is a clear example of how the social context - regarding the principles of faith which guided Andersen's life and the romantic ideals of the time influenced his writing.

The tale was written in the 19th century, precisely in 1848. It was in this period that romantic principles, such as "encouragement to fraternity and Christian charity; the resignation and patience when facing the difficult trials of life, Appreciation of Obedience, Purity, Modesty, Patience, Reservation, Submission, Religiosity" (COELHO, 1984, p. 119-120) were in vogue. These principles are easily noticed in his text by the way that the protagonist acts, a brave and patient mother who faces Death itself to have her son back.

The very representation of death in Andersen's tale demonstrates how the author handled a theme that is usually treated only as an event that does not generate significant changes in narratives uniquely. As to this common approach to children's texts on the subject, Lotterman (2009) states that

in children's and youth literature, there is a higher incidence of works in which death is treated as ephemeris. As an event that, in spite of its consequences, does not cause change in values or concepts. In these cases, death is trivialized and does not provoke reflections about life. And even if there is pain, it evanesces quickly: sometimes there is no mention of suffering and grief. Death leaves its mark, but such imprint is never a scar: it is easily erased. (LOTTERMAN, 2009, p. 08).

Maybe this is due to all the social weight that has been built around death for centuries. As talking about death in adulthood was something that caused fear and dislike, in childhood it would be no different. Even so, as well as in *The Story of a Mother*, there are many narratives in which the theme of death takes up a lot of space in the story and eventually reaches the existence of the text itself, allowing the reader to reflect on events of both within the narrative and what it is external to it.

Paiva (2011) points out that literature allows children to be in touch with information and situations that are part of their lives, bringing through the stories, feelings and emotions that they can understand on their own, such as family relationships, the difficulties of separation, growing up, and living with the death of a loved one, among other situations. In addition to that, they can "be in contact with other

places, other times, other ways of being and acting, which lead them to new discoveries” (PAIVA, 2011, p. 50).

Within this context, as they provide the dialogue on various topics, the approach of death in children's texts is a means of making the subject understood by small readers. Through texts in which death appears as part of the plot, children will probably be better prepared to face the possible losses they may suffer throughout their life. Additionally, they could experience the grieving process “more easily and probably could also relate better to the inevitable situations, being able to see death as something that is part of the process of living.” (PAIVA, 2011, p 17).

For children and even for adults, the narratives that talk about the theme of death, portray how it is an inherent part of life and how it is possible that there are so many considerations regarding its existence. An example of this will be seen in the following analysis, in which the relation to death is built with sensitivity and sentimentality, something common in the nineteenth century. And this eventually emphasizes the fact that Andersen was one of the writers of the period who imprinted in his stories, his insights about God, human suffering and social problems.

Although *The Story of a Mother* tells a story about the relationship with death through the perspective of a mother and not a child, it shows us Death itself as a character full of symbols and metaphors and mentions a lot about pain and renunciation in the face of death. Portraying a woman's ability to give herself off for the sake of her child.

3 From pain to resignation

The works of Hans Christian Andersen (1805 - 1875) part stemming from popular literature and another created by him, brings the wonderful, magical and mysterious universe, typical of the “old Celtic-Germanic-Nordic spirit seen in those anonymous collections, presents itself in Andersen, as if 'filtered' by the tenderness and sentimentality of the romantic spirit that occurred in his day. ”(COELHO, 1984, p. 77).

Two attitudes appear as strong marks of his works, Coelho (1984) names them as "Christian spirit" and "liberal bourgeois spirit". The first praises the basic virtues that

every man must have: patience, resignation, love, obedience, charity, “and to see this world as a valley of tears, which we need to cross to reach heaven, eternal beatitude” (RABBIT, 1894, p. 77). And the second praises the equity among men, generous individualism, the importance of riches, “the pragmatism of the actions, the fraternity and paternalism of the rich, to reduce the suffering or deprivations of the poor, etc.” (COELHO, 1897, p. 77).

In West, Andersen was recognized through the texts intended for children. In Denmark and eastern countries, adults were the audience initially attracted by the enchantment of his writings, and later he was loved by the children as well. As he was known in many countries, Andersen's works suffered a lot of changes due to translations and adaptations. Those who were interested in studying the author's works showed concern for these processes, because of this high rate of modifications; they knew that even with the changes made through time and language, nothing would be able to prevent the seduction produced by children's texts from being compromised (DUARTE, 1995).

His fictional work is the result of the combination of different currents of thought that intersected in his time. The context in which his works are a part is the beginning of the 19th century, period post-French Revolution and consequently Napoleonic Period, which was from 1804 to 1815. Denmark was going through a chaotic phase of transition between the ending of the Classical Period and the onset of the Romantic Period. The classical and aristocratic Age of Reason ended and the Era of popular romantic feeling started. On this subject, Duarte (1995) states that

Andersen's tales appeared in the last phase of Romanticism, when popular and realistic tendencies started being noticed. So when the writer released his tales, he was moved by a sense of actuality. The child as a transmitter of fantasy, in contrast with the classic concept that gave it adult clothing, or rationalist sinking it into a waiting time. (DUARTE, 1995, p. 72).

For Tatar (2013), the tales written by the Danish (unlike traditional fairy tales and wonderful tales) do not always provide the usual happy endings, pompous marriages, or the safe departure and return home after the challenges faced by the characters. These difficulties reveal not only the suffering the author himself experienced throughout his life, but also the ones he witnessed from up close, as he lived through a period of economic ascension that happened by means of industrial

expansion and the emergence of the Working Class. All of that created contrasts, the abundance of those with better living conditions alongside the paucity of those who did not have them. He himself was a part of this social spectrum - the system-organized poverty and his stories show that his reaction to these circumstances was not of indignation in the face of social injustice but resignation and a refuge in religious faith.

All of these questions regarding suffering and pain are also part of the narrative of *The Story of a Mother* that will be analyzed here. The tale was written around 1847-1848 and features a curious plot in which a mother searches for her son taken by Death. For the author, the death is seen as the complete realization of life. For this reason, the way he writes about the subject involves a lot about redemption, sensibility, romanticization and dramatization surrounding this moment.

In the 19th century, the way people dealt with death went through two main phases: the first one saw death as a beautiful thing, as an object of praise, and the second repulsed it. (ARIÈS, 2012). In this tale, the repulsiveness towards the act of dying prevails, especially because the protagonist lives moments of sadness, desperation, and constant pursuit for her abducted son. There is no glorification of death, but only to pain. The construction of this text does not revolve around the ending of the boy's life, but around the suffering of a mother who relentlessly searches for him in an attempt to bring him back into her arms.

The plot begins at the moment the woman and her son experience their last minutes together, which shows a reality common to children in the 19th century: premature death predominantly of the poor. Many were affected by diseases and died even before turning five years old. The present text does not introduce the age of the kid, but we believe that designations such as "little son", "little one" and "little being", used by the narrator to refer to the boy, give us an idea on how young he was. The following excerpt shows what we mentioned:

A mother was sitting next to her little son, very anxious and afraid that he would die. The boy was quite pale, his teeny eyes had closed, and he was sucking the air in so lingeringly and so deeply it was as if he sighed. The mother glanced more distressed than ever at the little being. (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 300).

At the moment she is observing the sick boy, someone knocks on her door. At first, the narrator only mentions that it is a poor old man looking for shelter from the

cold, and only after a few periods of text he claims that the old man is Death. At this point we come across something different than usual: the description of the character is not the same as the ancient iconography of death – a slender and skeletal being with a scythe and a black cape –; but it is “[...] a poor old man, wrapped in a large horse blanket, because it warms up well, and he really needed it as it was a very cold winter.” (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 300).

For the protagonist, that man was just a poor traveler. However, her opinion changes when, after three sleepless nights, she falls asleep for a moment and, as she gets up shivering from the cold, realizes that she is alone in the house. There was no sign of the old man nor the kid. Shocked, the woman realizes her reality:

"What is this?" said, looking all around. The old man disappeared and so did the boy. He had taken him. Right in the corner of the room, the old clock buzzed, the huge weight of lead slid almost to the floor. Bam! Silence. (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 301).

At this moment, the solitude in the house makes room for the suffering and despair of loss. Therefore, we understand the first depiction of death and grief itself as an abrupt moment that brings with it loneliness and pain. The narrator's description of the scene emphasizes the noise of the clock sliding its pendulum to the ground, and the silence that comes after. That contributes to the construction of the ambience in which the scene takes place. And it also brings out the despair of the character, who comes out of the house screaming for her son.

And in this exit, the narrator initiates a series of apparitions in the story that can be acknowledged in two forms: the first one is the lifelong challenges faced by those who lose someone and have to learn to deal with grief and absence, and the second one is the endurance test through which the woman would have to pass if she wanted to have her son back.

These two ways of looking at the following moments, appear through the people she meets along the way, and through other beings that start to appear and indicate the course the woman would have to go through to get her child back. It is interesting to highlight that, so far, there is no mention that the boy has died, but only that he was "abducted" by Death. The narrator does not reveal what actually happened, he only states that Death had visited the house searching for the child. Death is seen by other

characters and acts like a human being, rushing "faster than the wind that never gives back what it takes away". (ANDERSERN, 2011, p. 301), which demonstrates the idea that death can come suddenly and immediately for some people, and that it is irreversible.

When the poor mother notices her son's absence, she leaves the house running and screaming, then she is surprised by a woman who, as if by magic, is found in the cold sitting in the snow wearing a long dress. Till then, the boy's mother does not know that the old man was the one who took the child and that he was Death. And this new character brings the information. In this passage of the tale we notice that another nonhuman element is personified to communicate with the character. This element is the night represented by the woman wearing the long black dress.

At this moment in the narrative a sequence of negotiations starts. The Night is the first to give the mother instructions to find the missing child: "I know what direction he took! [...] However, before I tell you, you must sing to me all of the songs that you have sung to you son! I like them, I have heard them before. I am the Night and I saw your tears when you sang them." (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 301).

Her encounter with the Night starts all the other encounters the protagonist of the story will have during her pilgrimage, and her request will also be the first among many that will be made in the plot. The other characters who appear will also make their requests as a way of "negotiating" with the desperate mother who in search of her stolen child. They will give her new instructions, always asking for something in return. As soon as the Night asks the woman to sing the songs, she sings them, and then she receives the following instruction: "Go to the right, into that forest right there, that is where I saw Death take the path with your boy!" (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 301).

As she arrives into place the Night guided her, she finds a hawthorn tree with no flowers nor leaves, and she asks about her son. Once again, another inanimate being is personified and interacts with the protagonist. This interaction reflects something very recurrent in the universe of wonderful tales, the fact that supernatural creatures, trees or objects can speak with humans without any strangeness. In the present story, elements of nature constantly talk to the woman:

Have you not seen Death passing by with my son?
"Of course I have!" said the hawthorn tree.

"But I will not tell you which direction it took before you warm me in your chest!" "I am freezing to death and will turn to ice soon." (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 301).

The new character imposes on the protagonist a suffering beyond what she was already going through, because a greater challenge would be placed before her. Now it was necessary to wound her own flesh to have her son back, and she does that. The dramatic situation experienced by the character of the story makes us wonder how the idea of losing someone was perceived in the 19th century. The main character of the tale here analyzed does not accept the departure of her son, and because of that she goes through many challenges to have him back home. Even if he was sick, his presence was what mattered.

The fact that this mother wanted so deeply to have her child back, demonstrates both the way people dealt with death in the 19th century, and how strong the relationship between mother and child is. As pointed out by Ariès (2012), this feeling is driven "by emotion, crying, supplication. And, obviously, the painful expression of the ones who stay is the result of intolerance to the new separation." (ARIÈS, 2012, p. 68-69). All of this intensity is also directly connected to the image given to being a mother and to the romantic ideals of the period. This woman was expected to suffer the pain of loss and she was expected to do everything in her power to have the child in her arms again, and she does that.

Even with the dangerous request made by the hawthorn tree, she squeezes it and hugs it, until her flesh is punctured by the thorns, making her blood drip. She allows herself to be hurt again, now in the physical spectrum, and while she feels pain in her body, the warmth and love in her heart make the plant flourish: "From the hawthorn tree fresh green leaves popped and then, beautiful flowers sprouted in that the cold winter's night, so warm was the heart of the desperate mother." (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 302).

As this happens, the hawthorn tree guides her to the next location and challenge. The next stop would be a lake, and there, a new problem emerges: it would be impossible to cross it, since there was no boat from its shores to make it possible. It is in this moment, as she thinks about how to solve the problem that she decides to do something even more unlikely for a human: drink all the water from it. Again, we see the woman acting against her own sanity, all in order to be able to interrupt the natural

cycle of life. Believing she would have her son back even if he had been taken by Death. Then she decides to lie by the shore, when she is suddenly interrupted by the lake (which is another personified element of the narrative) saying the following words:

No, you will never achieve anything by doing that! -Said the lake. Let us see if we can come up with an agreement! I like collecting pearls and your eyes are the most beautiful I have ever seen. So if you cry until your eyes fall into my waters, I will lead you to a big greenhouse where Death lives and cultivates flowers and trees. Every single one of them is a human being. (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 302).

A new challenge arises and this time it is crueller than the others; losing her own eyes is the condition to finding her son. The whole story is impacted by the feeling of loss, and by the grief that is connected not only to the missing child, but to everything the woman loses along the way. At this moment of the tale we see a metaphorical development surrounding Death and life, and we can notice a strong characteristic of Andersen's writing, which is the construction of symbolic associations about death, as we saw in the previous passage.

Death is compared to a gardener and the people's lives to the flowers to be cultivated. What can be understood from this is that as these flowers are ripped from the garden, they would also be removed from the earth to be taken to paradise. Another representation directly linked to death featured in almost all texts written by Andersen that deal with this subject, will be better described thereupon.

As she now knows that she will find the flower that represented her son and resolute in her decision; she begins to cry until her eyes fall off into the bottom of the lake and turn into two precious pearls. When this happens, the lake magically puts her on the other side of the shore where a strange house is located. Though the mother cannot see anything around her, she asks out loud where she can find Death, who took her son.

Then a woman answers the question, the narrator describes her as the old woman from graveyard, caretaker of the great greenhouse of Death. Startled with the fact that the woman had found the way to the house even before Death itself had arrived, she questions about who had helped her, and as an answer she gets: "It was Our Lord who helped me! He is merciful and so you shall be." (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 302). It is in this passage that we notice another trait of the writer's works: the religious aspect. These ideals of faith appear in the lives of characters who suffer for something, and they find

relief for their suffering in God or in heaven. Many of them have a life marked by pain or live a trauma (just like the character here analyzed) and they see in the divine the solution to their conflicts and the relief to their souls. In this tale, not only is the mother related to God, but Death itself is under His command, which proves the relationship between deaths as a result of His permission and will.

As she arrived at the place she was guided to, there was a big garden of flowers and trees. The caretaker of the graveyard stated that many plants died that night and that Death would arrive to transplant them. The old woman says that each of those flowers is someone's heart, so the mother should look for the flower that beats the heart of her little boy, only then she would be able to find him among so many others. However, just like the previous characters, the old woman also asks for something in return; the poor mother's long black hair and she does not hesitate to give it to the woman. Then they both enter Death's big greenhouse of, there the desperate woman “[...] would bend over all the smallest plants and would listen to the beating of the human heart within them, and among millions, she recognized her little son.” (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 303).

In this excerpt we notice what was previously mentioned regarding the power of the maternal relationship shown in the tale. It is possible to see that in the fact that a blind woman could find the flower that represented her child, and not because she saw it but because she recognized the beating of his heart among so many others. It is the love and the need to have him back that makes her withstand all the challenges faced by her until she meets him, even if symbolically.

Nevertheless, when the flower was found she could not touch it, nor could she allow Death to do so, because if that happened her son would be truly dead. The old woman advised the mother to follow the further steps: “[...] Do not let Death remove the flower, make a threat, say that you will remove the other flowers in case your son's flower is extracted, this will make Death afraid. No flower can be extracted without God's permission” (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 303). Once again, we see something quite common to not only the 19th society, but all those that were tied to religious concepts. Death was attributed to God's will and was at the disposal of his sovereignty, either as a punishment or as a relief from misfortune. This connection is mainly because “most fairy tales were created in periods when religion was a very important part of life;

therefore, they deal directly or by inference with religious themes.”(BETTELHEIM, 2014, p. 22).

Getting on with the story, suddenly, a cold breeze passes inside the greenhouse and both notice the presence of Death, who questions how the woman could get there and immediately directs its hand to the little flower, which was protected by her mother. As Death sees the "obstacle," it blows into the poor woman's hands, a breath colder than the wind itself, and they fall helplessly. With that, Death argues about its strength and sovereignty combined with divine will. The understanding that dying was something prepared by God or gods was an idea from Western society. Rodrigues points that because there is a belief that “[...] life and death are divine gifts, one fears death, consciously or not, as a manifestation of God. It is commonly explained with the use of phrases such as “That is God's will” or “the Lord summoned him” (RODRIGUES, 1998, p. 14). This correlation can be seen in the following passage:

[...] As you see, you can do nothing against me! [...] I only do what God wants! -Said Death. "I'm God's gardener!" I take all of His flowers and trees and transplant them to the great garden of Heaven in an unknown country. (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 304).

At this point in the tale, the fact that the mother begs for her child, emphasizes again the exaggeration in the face of loss, and for Ariès (2012, p. 73), as mentioned, this exaggerated sentimentality of mourning in the 19th century has many meanings. One of them is the non-acceptance of death, and it is through this rejection that the protagonist submits herself to so many difficult situations, without caring about any evil that could befall her. The life of the child was the most important, not her own life. And this attitude proves what Rodrigues (1983, p. 174-175) says. Since the 18th century, it is common for people to show extreme pain and sadness when losing someone, since, at that time, the despair of separation gains new dimensions in the West: “[...] people moaning, screaming, fainting, saying they want to die, or they want to go with the dead person [...]”. These feelings are, in many cases, real and justified by the social structures of that period. For this reason Andersen describes this mother's desperation in such detail, painting a portrait of a moment in history when death was seen as a great emotional spectacle.

Attempting to negotiate with Death, the grieved woman holds two flowers, which makes the other character desperate. Seeing the mother's distress and also her

blindness, Death, who saw eyes shining in the lake, hands them over to the owner and explains the reason for its concern. As she acquires her sight back, the woman is instructed to look into a well, and there sees two roses; one becoming a blessing to the world and the other a misery, filled with horror and disgrace. Then Death explains that both are God's will for someone on earth, a flower of fortune and the other of misfortune, the mother questions who these people could be. Without hesitating, Death confirms that one of those flowers was her son's, but does not point exactly which one. Desperate with the uncertainty, the mother breaks away from everything we had hoped for throughout the text. She begs that death actually takes her child from her, to protect him from the possible reality of misfortune. She gives up the only good she owned:

[...] - Which one is my son? Tell me! Save the innocent! Save my son from all this misfortune! Take him away! Take him to the kingdom of God! Forget my tears and my pleas; forget everything that I have said and done. (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 305).

The previous passage completely changes the closure expected for the story. The ache from the pilgrimage, the losses in her own body and the suffering no longer seem to make sense when she sees the possible outcome for the life of her beloved son. Now there was no need to have her son back again, the only thing that remained was the longing to protect him from a future of pain and bitterness. A mother shaken by all the suffering lived in the pursuit of the child, now demonstrates her love by ridding him from a future misadventures. Death, on the other hand, is confused by the whole situation and says: “Do you want me to give you back your son or should I take him there, to this place you do not know?” (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 305). The woman, even more desperate, falls on her knees and answers to God: “Do not listen to me, in case I beseech you against your will, which is righteous! Do not listen to me! Do not listen to me!

As she begged to God about her desire, the woman “bowed her head to her lap [and] Death carried away her son to the unknown country.” (ANDERSEN, 2011, p. 305). In another tale written by Andersen, entitled *The Child in the Grave* (1859), he also mentions the “unknown country” by relating it to the sky. Therefore, it is believed that the same environment is retaken here, and now that the situation already has an outcome, there were no more searches, but only the silence of the loss. This silence is present at the beginning of the story and at the end, when Death takes the child once and

for all and adds no further information about the mother's return to reality, but only describes the scene of her head lying on the lap.

This heavy narrative about finitude and suffering is filled with symbolisms about mourning, death, and life. Such as the garden and Death (as a great gardener submissive to God's will), the characters found along the way, and the meanings that each of them may have, all of them make us wonder not only about how many misfortunes a distressed mother went through to get her child, but how, out of love and fear, she left him to ensure that his future would not be disastrous, handing him over to Death as a form of protection her final choice to let her child go shows not only her love for him, but also her understanding of death and its unwanted arrival. Through this narrative, Andersen makes us think that death will come for everyone and even if we do everything we can to prevent it, there will be a moment when it will not be possible and the only thing left to do will be to accept this universal truth.

Among all the questions understood from the text and analyzed through it, we realized that much of Andersen's ideals of faith are implicit in his works, and not just in this tale. Although it deals with pain and loss, the author writes about these themes in a romanticized and sensitive way, not only because of his melancholic character in his work, but also because he drank from the romantic ideas of the period in which the narrative was written and where there was the exaltation of the pain and the drama.

Many of Andersen's narratives portray Death as one of the prominent characters in a euphemistic, metaphorical and exemplary way; also, in various texts he criticizes social disparities, man's lack of altruism, exacerbated poverty and the abandonment of the underprivileged. What can be seen in this text is that, despite the fear and suffering caused by the loss of a beloved one, love moved the protagonist's actions, both in an attempt to find the lost child - submitting to misfortunes that cost her the skin, her eyes, her hair and all the strength she had- as well as when she gave him to Death to spare him from future pain.

Conclusions

This article aimed to analyze the place of death in the narrative *The Story of a Mother*, through compositional and linguistic elements in the text, as well as the

description of the characters, the scenes in which it (death) appears and the influence of the narrative voice in the context of the story. Throughout this study, we have seen that death has been approached in various ways during the history of literature and many of the works that represented it have undergone numerous modifications. These changes were and still are due to factors such as the social and cultural moments in which the stories were written, the writing style of each author, the cultural influences from other peoples, and also the way of sharing these narratives.

In the present paper, we have analyzed a controversial and disturbing narrative about the relationship between man and death. Mainly because, after so much suffering, a mother relinquishes her son because she fears that if he returned, his life would be of sadness and more pain. Even though it is a text that does not deal with death and the child universe, the approaches seen here make us realize how present this theme is in children's literature. Although they are narratives that have been written for centuries, these texts are still part of the imagination of young people and adults, they are stories that have not lost their place in literature and in the universe of children and young readers. With themes that involve love, hate, sadness and joy, these adventures narrated and lived by heroes, princesses, animals and magical elements make room for fantasy and illogicality in a unique way.

The story here analyzed brought death as a character of the text and not just as an event in itself. We can see how the marks of the 19th century were present in the plot, is it in the role play, in the pain of mourning and in the way of looking at death as a whole. The greatest beauty of the narrative lies in the pain of the mother who suffered countless ills to try to free her son from death and who, having the opportunity to see the possible future of pain he would face if he remained alive, begs for Death to fulfill his initial function, which in the text is described as God's will. The outcome of the story, as we have seen, goes against all the incessant pursuit seen in the course of the text. All because the old man, character who represents death, leaves the position of villain to friend, and at the mother's request, stays with the small child. Bringing his ideals of faith, Andersen shows that every death is a painful but necessary transition in life.

From the descriptive path chosen here, we can understand how important is the discussion about death in the literary texts, though in an allegorical or inferential way.

Mostly because it is through the literature that the reader can experience plots that use symbolism, metaphors or illogicality to make their stories attractive. The listeners or readers find in the imaginary characters (that populate the narratives) similar situations to those they face in their daily lives. Probably, the story of that mother here analyzed, was the story of many others of the time when it was written; not because they met stranger characters to reality along the way, but because they faced challenges and pain in the face of loss and had to fight with everything they had to endure the pain and make the best decisions.

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