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“... until the day she found an empty chair’: The representation of death in selected picturebooks.”

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1. Introduction

Dad said, “She’s gone forever.”

I knew that she wasn’t *gone* – she was dead and I would never see her again. They were going to put her in a box and then in the ground, where she would turn into dust. I know very well that dying means that you’re never going to come back. (*The Scar*)

Death is a sensitive subject and talking about death to children is even a taboo. Euphemistic language, such as “to be gone forever” (see above), is frequently used by adults when delivering death news of a beloved one to a child. The passage above is taken from Moundlic and Tallec’s picturebook *The Scar* (2011) and implies what several studies confirm: even very young children have an understanding of death (Kastenbaum 48 ff.; Slaughter and Griffiths 526 ff.). Apparently, adults tend to avoid speaking openly about this matter with children, however, scholars in the field of developmental psychology point out that the better children are informed about death and dying the less fearful they are towards it (Slaughter and Griffiths 533 f.). Therefore, I feel it is vitally important to find a way to directly and honestly approach this subject together with young people, which brings me to the focus of this thesis: death-themed picturebooks.

According to internet forums and conversations with people in constant contact with children, be it privately or professionally, it seems obvious for many adults to consult picturebooks when discussing death and dying with bereaved children. Picturebook stories about experiences of death and sorrow may be of comfort to children who are confronted with the loss of a loved person. Considering the unquestionable popularity of picturebooks and the influence death-themed books may have on children in their search for answers and consolation, the question arises as to what picturebooks about death there are and how they go about introducing this delicate issue.

During my research, I encountered numerous picturebooks that deal with death in a variety of ways. My final selection of seven picturebooks published in English (either originals or translations) between 2004 and 2014 consists of the following: *Duck, Death and the Tulip* (Erlbruch, 2007), *The Heart and the Bottle* (Jeffers, 2010), *Remembering Crystal* (Loth, 2010), *The Scar* (Moundlic and Tallec, 2011), *Michael Rosen’s Sad Book* (Rosen and Blake, 2004), *The*

Dandelion's Tale (Sheehan and Dunlavey, 2014), and *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* (Demas and Hoyt, 2004). The sample of these seven death-related books is because of their differences from one another. They differ in their format, style, word-image relationship, and most importantly, they are all heterogeneous in terms of their strategies to representing death.

In my analysis of the selected picturebooks I am concerned with the following questions: What means of representation of death and dying can be identified in the picturebook sample? How do the verbal and the visual text introduce the experience of loss? What techniques are used to illustrate aspects related to death, such as the passing of time, love, transience, and emotions of anger, sadness and sorrow?

From what I have observed, people tend to define picturebooks as books for young children, which is not altogether wrong. However, picturebooks are not necessarily created for children only, but in many cases for sophisticated adults alike (Nikolajeva and Scott 21; Nodelman 21). Furthermore, I would like to highlight that picturebooks are not literature of minor value, but in fact complex artistic creations. Consequently, my work is based on what Perry Nodelman says, who maintains that “[a picturebook] is serious art, and it deserves the respect we give to other forms of serious art” (x).

Structurally, my thesis is comprised of two main components: a theoretical and an analytical approach. I will commence by providing an overview of relevant theories in chapter 2, which shall be further divided into two subchapters -- the first introducing attitudes toward death in Western societies, children and death, as well as the theme of death in their respective literature, and the second dealing with picturebook theory and insights from earlier studies on death-themed picturebooks. Building on this theoretical framework of death in fields such as sociology and developmental psychology and the tools from literary studies, I will analyze selected picturebooks in chapter 3. At the beginning of chapter 3, I will illustrate my choice of books and methodology, and subsequently present five identified strategies of representing death in picturebooks. Finally, in chapter 4, I will summarize distinguishing features of the subjects under scrutiny and give concluding remarks on the thesis. The front covers of the picturebook sample are included in the appendix.

Theories about death, such as death as a social construct, children's understanding of death or grief work can only be discussed in general terms. Due to spatial limitations, the thesis cannot claim to present a complete picture of the strategies of representation used in death-related picturebooks. My primary aim is to examine the picturebooks' verbal and visual representation, to state my own interpretations and to imply what effects the individual representations might have on potential readers.

2.Theory

2.1 About Death

2.1.1. Death as a Social Construct

The inevitability of death and the mystery behind the end of life have motivated generation after generation to look for answers in religion, philosophy, art and literature. Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer addresses death as “the real inspiring genius”, without which there would be no philosophy (463). As Schopenhauer points out, all philosophical and religious systems revolve around the question of the end of life, however, their approaches to death vary immensely (463). Not only each religion, but also each society or culture has its own beliefs and ritual practices regarding death and dying. This section will be looking at both the historical and contemporary context of attitudes toward death in the Western society.

Before focusing on the history of death as a social construct, I shall distinguish between death and dying with respect to the general content of this paper. The following definition provided by Frank Eyetsemitan makes a very clear distinction between the two terms:

The difference between dying and death is that in dying, the individual goes through a process of gradual termination before death occurs. In death, this process is absent (like the person who passes away in his sleep) or is relatively short (like the person who bled to death from a gun shot wound). In both cases, the loved ones are left behind to go through the grieving process. Whereas the grieving process begins before death occurs in the case of a dying person, it begins after death has occurred in the case of sudden or unexpected death. (3)

In the case of a terminally ill person, close relatives and friends are aware of the approaching death of their loved one and have time to mentally prepare themselves to make their last farewells. Not only the survivors, but also the dying person has a chance “to take care of unfinished business”, which is not the case for sudden death (3). Coping with bereavement is therefore considered easier for all parties if death was foreseeable over an extended period of time. Every culture has its own ways of dealing with the dying and the dead, based on particular sets of beliefs. However, those cultural rituals and beliefs towards death and dying may change and develop over time.

In "The Hour of our Death" (40-48), Philippe Ariés provides a history of death of Western societies and describes five different models: "the tame death", "the death of the self", "the remote and imminent death", "the death of the other", and "the invisible death" (41). The first model, the tame death, describes attitudes towards death in times where death was perceived as an integral part of the community and not as an individual act. In both sex and death, nature prevailed and people tried to exercise control through culture in the form of ritual practices and ceremonies. In other words, they aimed at taming death. In this model, life after death is associated with dormancy, depending on the person's past life, whether peaceful or disturbing. The second model of the death of the self is best described as "a shift of the sense of destiny toward the individual" (42). This model was first supported by monks and later by the elite of the eleventh century. With growing individualism in the Middle Ages, an interest in drawing up wills awakened. Furthermore, the conception of the afterlife changed from a state of peace to the release of an immortal soul. The most important ceremony was not the scene at the deathbed any more; instead, a new ritual, the funeral, replaced it. In contrast to the deathbed ceremony, where the dead body was visible, the corpse was then covered at the funeral and death became a taboo. Further changes followed at the end of the sixteenth century and the once "immediate, familiar, and tame [death] gradually began to be surreptitious, violent, and savage" (44). Ariés also mentioned the appearance of taphephobia, the fear of being buried alive; and defines death in this modern era of progress as a "remote and imminent death" (44). The fourth model, the death of the other, describes attitudes towards death in the nineteenth century and refers to the importance of relations to others instead of individualism and the rising desire for privacy. Moreover, the perception of the afterlife changed from an immortal soul to a reunion with dead friends and family members. The last model, which is called the invisible death, is a model of extremes:

Intimacy must be either total or nonexistent. There is no middle ground between success and failure. It is possible that our attitude toward life is dominated by the certainty of failure. On the other hand, our attitude toward death is defined by the impossible hypothesis of success. That is why it makes no sense. (46)

In this contemporary model, death is invisible on the one hand, and wild on the other. Death has been removed from the community and is now hidden in hospitals and other institutions. Doctors prescribe medicine for soothing pain, give injections and perform complex surgery on their patients behind closed doors. Death is not evil anymore and thus, does not need to be tamed. According to Ariés, the vanishing necessity of taming death “has restored death to its savage state” (47). As shown, attitudes of death have changed over time, and we can assume that external factors, such as technological advances in medicine, have promoted these alterations. Since death is a social construct and societies are subject to constant change, people’s attitudes towards death will probably not remain the way they are.

I claim that we, in our Western society, find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. The theme of death is omnipresent, but still a taboo. We are confronted with pictures of violent death scenes in the news, in movies and in computer games on a daily basis, but we use euphemistic language when talking about someone’s “passing away”. I have experienced parents who buy their 7-year-old children ego-shooter games for their birthdays and others who let them watch violent movies where people get killed. Paradoxically, those very same parents would probably regard a serious discussion about death with children as inappropriate. In their 2014 study, Ian Colman and his colleagues investigated 45 children’s animated films released between 1937 and 2013, and concluded that two thirds of the analyzed films for children included cruel scenes of death and murder (Colman et al. 2). Yet another main outcome of their survey, which I consider particularly shocking, was that more children’s movies than dramatic films for adults contained on-screen death (3). Despite all this, I am convinced that at least as many adults as children of Western societies are exposed to death and murder on television on a daily basis. On the one side people choose to watch movies full of images of death and destruction, and on the other side they avoid talking about it, because it makes them feel uncomfortable. This could imply that there is fear and at the same time an innate desire to “face death”.

Furthermore, different funeral practices in Europe and North America provide insights into people’s fear of dead bodies in real life and the social taboo surrounding death. While in most European countries, the deceased person is

in a fully enclosed coffin or urn at the funeral and not visible to the mourners; the carefully prepared and beautified corpse is openly presented, almost looking alive for the final farewell, in the United States (Ariés, *The Reversal* 566 ff.). According to Ariés, this exhibition of the corpse to the public and the unpopularity of cremation in American culture might be due to their “denial of the absolute finality of death” (566). However, I would argue that both the beautification and the hiding of the dead body are forms of repression of the horrors of death. Researchers who mention the taboo of death in our Western society even refer to the “pornography of death” (Gorer 49) and “death [as] the new sex” (Foltyn 153). Sex does not shock people anymore, but death does. Apparently, this phenomenon has also been recognized by the media, as the subject of death and dying in television greatly increased in the 1980s and in the 1990s (McIlwain 58).

I propose that Ariés’ fifth model of death is still the case in Western society; death is partly invisible and wild (*The Hour* 46 f.). However, small changes are noticeable. While repressing the possible death of loved persons, people cannot get enough of cruel scenes of strangers’ final suffering and death. This is confirmed by the success of the YouTube execution video of Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein in 2006 (Foltyn 157). Yet, contrary to this, another aspect should be taken into account: the emergence of death “as a physical reality and philosophical concept” in children’s literature since the 1970s (Clement 2). Before then, the subject of death in children’s literature was primarily used as means of didactic purposes (as further explained in section 2.1.3. *Death in Fairy Tales or Children’s Literature*).

Picturebooks or children’s literature about death might generate a gradual change in attitudes towards this traditionally taboo subject. The current problem with the theme of death in the Western society is that “people need to be given a reason [...] to speak about it”, however, “when given permission to do so, people rise to the challenge principally because it is meaningful for them to do so” (McIlwain 3). Especially young children should have enough possibilities to address their concerns about death and dying. The subsequent section will expand on this idea, illustrate children’s understanding of death at different stages of childhood and underline the importance of death education in order to reduce their fears.

2.1.2. Children and Death

2.1.2.1. Children's Understanding of Death

Many children experience death at very young ages; be it the loss of a friend, a family member or their favorite pet. Some even suffer through a severe illness themselves. As death is not a solely adult issue, the following questions arise and are considered in this section: What is young children's conception of death? At what age do children develop a biological understanding of death?

The study of children's comprehension of death has a long history and can be dated back to the 1930s (Speece and Brent 1671, Tamm and Granqvist 203 f.). Since then, numerous surveys have been conducted using different methods (interviews, death-related pictures, drawings, essays, questionnaires), all revealing similar results (Speece and Brent 1676 ff.). Children's understanding of death changes throughout the course of their development. Apparently, when examining individuals' alterations of death understanding, their overall level of cognitive comprehension cannot be ignored. In their review of over 100 studies, Speece and Brent mention several researchers who stick to Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development and concentrate on the differences of death comprehension regarding children's age (1680). In his theory, Piaget describes a sequence of four stages "through which each person passes on the way to adult intellectual functioning"¹ (Feldman 178), however, his theory cannot "provide a complete picture of children's conceptions of death since it emphasizes the development of context-independent reasoning abilities" (Speece and Brent 1683). According to Speece and Brent, all of the studies lack empirical investigations regarding a relationship with Piaget's stages -- Piaget himself never conducted any research concerning children's death understanding (1680). Moreover, Piaget has repeatedly been criticized for his stage theory as being "too vague, too broad and too dependent on faith" (Feldman 175). I therefore distance myself from the Piagetian stages in this context and focus on the varying death conceptions between children of different age, gender, and death experience.

¹ for further information on Piaget's theory, consult Piaget and Inhelder, 1969

Research refers to death as a concept consisting of different subcomponents and uses an adult's biological understanding as a standard, the so-called mature understanding. Children seem to have a mature comprehension of death, as soon as they grasp each of the subcomponents of the concept:

1. A dead body will never be alive again (“irreversibility” or “finality”);
2. All parts of the body stop functioning at death (“nonfunctionality” or “cessation”);
3. Dying is universal for all living organisms and cannot be avoided (“universality”, “applicability” or “inevitability”);
4. People die because vital parts of the body stop functioning (“causation”) (Slaughter and Griffiths 526; Speece and Brent 1671 f.).

Not all studies use the same terms or the same amount of subcomponents for their analysis. For instance, some researchers use “inevitability” separately (i.e. Slaughter and Griffiths 526) and others entirely ignore “causation” (i.e. Speece and Brent 1671f.).

It was found by scholars in this field that an awareness of irreversibility occurs first in the acquisition of a mature death concept. Children as young as age 5 already know that death is final and only later the other subcomponents are apprehended (Slaughter and Griffiths 526). For toddlers, before the subcomponent finality is achieved, death is frequently perceived as equivalent to sleep, sickness or going away on a trip (Speece and Brent 1673). Moreover, very young children tend to believe that only old and sick people die and they exclude themselves and their family members from such a fate (Slaughter and Griffiths 526, qtd. in Speece and Brent 1676). According to Slaughter and Griffiths, the following is typical in preschool-aged children who just became aware of death:

Young children tend to conceptualize death as an altered state of living, either in heaven, or under ground in the tomb, and so often assert that the dead still need oxygen or water, and that the dead can hear, dream and so on. At this age children do not understand the causes of death, other than to link dying with internal or external agents such as poison, guns or fatal illnesses. (526)

Slaughter and Griffiths' description above is taken from their 2007 article and agrees with the first stage of children's death development of a much earlier study by Maria Nagy. In her pioneer work in the 1930s, the Hungarian

researcher Maria Nagy interviewed 378 children aged 3 to 10, analyzed drawings and essays and identified three main stages of development of the death concept (qtd. in Kastenbaum 51 ff.). The first stage applies to children aged 5 and younger and suggests that they consider death as a temporary status. In stage two (age 5 to 9 years) children seem to understand the finality of death, but not its inevitability for living beings. The last stage includes children from age 9 and up and at this stage, wherein children are noticeably able to already comprehend finality, inevitability and universality of death (qtd. in 51 ff.). The more recent study by Slaughter and Griffiths points out that causality of death is the most abstract and complex part for children to understand and confirms Nagy's finding about the acquisition of the whole concept before age 10 (527).

According to study outcomes, children's idea of death does not only depend on their age, but also on gender and past experiences (Bonoti, Leonardi and Mastora 51 ff.; Tamm and Granqvist 217 f.). Researchers in this field who had children draw about death and then talk about it received various depictions and identified three main categories: "biological", "psychological" and "metaphysical death concepts" (51 ff.; 208 ff.). Drawings categorized as a biological death concept represent the state of death, the moment of dying or a violent incident. The category of a psychological death concept refers to illustrations of emotions associated with death such as sorrow, grief, and the feeling of emptiness. The last superordinate category, the metaphysical death concept, includes mostly abstract artwork about heaven, a dark tunnel or the afterlife as well as personifications of death. Tamm and Granqvist state that younger children (9-12 years) primarily depict aspects of the biological concept and older ones (15-18 years) tend to present more abstract and metaphysical understandings of death (217 f.). Interestingly, there was a predominance of violent depictions, especially murder, amongst the 9-year-old boys, whereas girls prevalently represented accidental death when drawing violent scenes. The study also indicates that even though the personification of death is more prominent in drawings by male participants, it occurs in illustrations among all examined gender and age groups (219).

More recent researchers (i.e. Bonoti, Leondari and Mastora 51 ff.) who used the same classifications of the death concept in children's drawings arrived at

similar results regarding age-specific depictions of the three categories. In addition, their study focused on the influence of the participants' past experiences on their representations of death. While none of the children with personal death experience depicted violent deathly scenes such as a gunfight or assassination, more than half of the children without such an experience did include violence. "Almost all children [...] with personal death experience drew scenes of the dead person, the funeral, or the grave" (53), and it was assumed that children's drawings mirror what they have seen and heard on television and in other digital media, or experienced personally (56 f.).

While the aforementioned studies have focused on human and animal death, Nguyen and Gelman hypothesize that children's perception of plant death provides information on their overall biological understanding of death (495). Understanding death in relation with plants might be more complex than human or animal death. Some plants have a lifespan of several centuries (e.g. trees), others are highly resistant to chemicals (e.g. weeds) and most plants are alive, even though parts, such as leaves, are dead (Nguyen and Gelman 496). Interestingly, "[their] results suggest that children have a concept of death that includes plant and animal death, [and] that important changes in understanding take place between the ages of 4 and 6 years" (Nguyen and Gelman 495 f.). Furthermore, children's judgments regarding accuracy of the individual death components universality, inevitability, finality and causality varied between the plant types flowers, weeds, and trees (see 500). Both the finality and the causality subcomponent seem to be intelligible for children regarding trees and flowers, but not weeds (see 511). Finally, I would like to point out that one of the identified strategies of representation of death in picturebooks, described in the second part of this thesis, is about the death of a plant in *The Dandelion's Tale*.

So far, I have illustrated children's biological understanding of human, animal, and plant death. Before moving on to the next section about death education and grief work, I would like to mention yet another study about children's fears towards death, which suggests a connection between children's death understanding and their death fears. A study conducted by Slaughter and Griffiths with 90 children between 4 and 8 years, using a death interview and a death anxiety scale for children as well as a parent report questionnaire, proposes a positive correlation between age and death understanding and a

negative correlation between a mature death concept and fear of death (528 ff.). To be more precise, the older children are, the better they understand the concept of death, and the more biological knowledge they possess, the less fear they have of it. However, there is no definite evidence that a mature understanding of death must reduce fear. Other factors, such as “cognitive, social and/or psychodynamic” (533 f.), seem to affect children’s anxiety of death as well. Lane and Gullone’s 1999 study, which presents the most common fears among 439 adolescents, points out that 11- to 18-year-olds’ greatest worries refer to death and danger, especially to the death of a family member (194 ff.). As mentioned above, adolescents and young adults at this age should already have a mature understanding of death. Still, I agree with Slaughter and Griffiths that explaining the concept of death to young children and helping them understand it in biological terms may reduce their fears. However, adults frequently avoid talking to children about death. This fact and children’s grief work will be elaborated in the following subsection.

2.1.2.2. Death education and grief work

Several scholars indicate that teachers, parents, and other people working with children should be open and honest with them when discussing death and dying (see Gaab, Owens and MacLeod 701; Slaughter and Griffiths 534). Unfortunately, educators seem to underestimate children’s understanding of death and therefore believe it is inappropriate to discuss such a serious issue with them (Gaab, Owens and MacLeod 700 f.). However, as discussed earlier, children who are well informed tend to show less fear towards the subject. The subsequent paragraphs draw on the importance of death education and later focus on the picturebook as a therapeutic instrument for grieving children.

Parents cannot hide the theme of death from their children forever. The picture conveyed by the media, especially Disney movies, in which “typically the evil, immoral, criminal person dies as part of the triumph of good over evil, of law over crime, of morality and love over immorality and hate” (Lichten 872), might lead to the assumption and fear that hatred and immoral deeds can result in death. Also, euphemistic language commonly used by adults when talking to children can create misunderstandings. Sayings such as “he went on a long trip”, “she died because she was old and sick”, “she fell asleep and will never

wake up”, “God took him away” might seem harmless, but children who take these metaphorical expressions literally, might believe in the returning of the dead person, show fear towards medical institutions and towards sleep or God (see Salladay and Royal 209; Willis 224). In order to protect children from such erroneous beliefs, I would recommend open discussions of children’s questions and concerns about death. Such conversations are part of so-called “*death education* [which] is [...] a shorthand expression for education about any death-related topic”, such as funerals, spiritual views, biological death, assassination and grieving (Corr and Corr 292 ff.). One option mentioned by Corr and Corr is “[providing children] with books about death-related topics that they can read by themselves or along with an adult” (293). This can be a great help for people who do not feel confident talking with children about death. Also, children usually love picturebooks and enjoy reading them over and over again. They can then ask specific questions whenever they feel ready.

Not to be ignored is the situation of actual death experience and the usefulness of children’s literature when dealing with bereaved children. Insecurity in dealing with the death of a loved one is quite normal even for adults. The process of grieving must be all the more difficult for young children who do not yet fully understand what dying means. Grieving is something very personal and children as well as adults differ in their process of sorrow. The fact that young children under 10 years of age do not have a mature understanding of death makes their grieving very different to adults’ sorrow (Willis 221). Also, children lack life experience and cannot know that stages of grief end eventually. They do not have this concept of time, which adults possess (222). According to Carole Norris-Shortle and her colleagues, the impact of the loss of a loved person on children is frequently not taken seriously enough (736). Nevertheless, death can cause a number of strong emotions and reactions in children, as “separation anxiety, ambivalence guilt, and hostility” (Salladay and Royal 208).

According to Salladay and Royal, children as well as adults have to pass through different stages of grief work, namely “denial, depression and acceptance” (208). However, a recent article by Christopher Hall (2014) about developments in bereavement theory suggests that stage theories are outdated and do not find enough support in research about grief work. Instead of “the

navigation of a predictable emotional trajectory, leading from distress to ‘recovery’”, Hall points to grief as “the response to the loss in all of its totality – including its physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual manifestations” (7). Hall provides a brief outline of existing theories and first mentions Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*, a groundbreaking work about grieving published in the 20th century. Freud’s model emphasizes “the importance of ‘moving on’ as quickly as possible to return to a ‘normal’ level of functioning” (Hall 8). Building on another well-known model by Kübler-Ross in her theory *On Death and Dying*, five stages of grief have been developed. Unlike Salladay and Royal’s suggestion of three stages of grief work, the five-stage theory adds a phase of “anger, resentment and guilt” and a phase of “bargaining” between the stages denial and depression (Hall 8). According to Hall, recent scholars in this field refrain from the suggestion to move through a strict sequence of stages, since the stage theories are “incapable of capturing the complexity, diversity and idiosyncratic quality of the grieving experience” (8). New models of bereavement refer to the uniqueness of moments of grief and ongoing research focuses on the influence and possible benefits of perpetuating a continuing bond with the deceased person (9). Regardless of whether there are mourning children involved or just adults, I agree with Hall’s point that “[t]hose who help bereaved people must recognise the unique reactions, needs and challenges as individuals and their families cope with loss” (9). Naturally, just as adults, children also vary in how they deal with grief and need to find their own ways of dealing with their feelings. Some children ask questions and want to talk about their loss, others “silently” cope with their sorrows in their play and drawings (Salladay and Royal 207).

The dimension of children’s sorrow is influenced by several factors, including their relationship to the deceased person and their surrounding (Norris-Shortle, Young and Williams 737 ff.). If the death of a loved person results in life changes such as moving to another place, it is even more difficult for children to deal with the loss. Also, mourning parents may have a huge impact on children’s grieving if they are left without explanation. According to Norris-Shortle, Young and Williams,

[a] hundred years ago children may not have been given any more of a detailed explanation of death and grieving, but they were much more

likely to observe it as a part of the family's home life. Family members were usually nursed at home until they died. Their funerals usually occurred in the home, and many extended family members provided support. Children actively participated in grieving. (739)

If children are not integrated in the funeral ceremonies, but left behind without further explanations, they might think they themselves upset their parents and are the cause for their tragic condition. Most saliently, parents should not to ignore children in situations of grief and stay patient even when they keep asking the same questions (Willis 223).

Picturebooks leave room for multiple interpretations, "guide children's thinking, shape their behavior, and even help solve problems" (Lucas and Soares 138), which makes them useful tools for therapeutic practices. With reference to the potential benefits of using children's books in a therapeutic context, Goddard points out that "[b]ooks provide a safe medium for children to explore different concepts, feelings, and attitudes while allowing them to better understand their environment, community, and societal expectations" (57). The approach that uses books as therapeutic instruments is called bibliotherapy and was first introduced by S. M. Crothers in the 1920s (Goddard 57). Bibliotherapy is a type of therapy carried out by professionals, such as trained educators or psychologists, who select appropriate books and engage in a process of reflection with the patient (Lucas and Soares 139). Naturally, employing death-themed picturebooks as tools for grief work are not reserved solely for professionals. Picturebooks about death might be helpful for anybody who is experiencing loss and can also be implemented by adults who have no knowledge of bibliotherapy. Nevertheless, it would be advisable to obtain information about the different means of representation of death picturebooks beforehand. To be more precise, a large body of children's literature is available on the subject of death using various strategies for illustrating the loss of different beings (see chapter 3. *Analysis*) and it probably makes sense to choose a picturebook that relates to the particular situation of the affected child. In other words, when dealing with a child who suffers from the loss of a grandparent, it might be most helpful to also choose a book that contains grandparent death. This request to carefully select from the choices available may be justified by Levine's statement about the processes that are activated in children while reading or listening to stories: "At the conscious level the child is

focused on the content of the actual narrative, while at the unconscious level a search is performed for the child's experiences which *parallel* the narrative" (145, *emphasis added*). Moving beyond children's understanding of death, death education, and grief work, the following section presents the emergence of the theme of death in children's literature.

2.1.3. Death in Fairy Tales or Children's Literature

Once upon a time, children and adults shared the same literature and together understood what there was to be understood about death. That time was from the beginning of literature up until the end of the seventeenth century, when a separation began to take place between the literature of adults and that of children. (Butler 104)

Today, children's literature is a genre in its own right, targeted at very young children up to adolescents (Zipes, *Foreword* vii). Before its emergence at the end of the 17th century, as stated by Francelia Butler, children read and heard about death in literature in "Bible stories, fables, legends, ballads, [and] folk tales" (105). Although fairy tales are frequently considered as part of children's literature today, they were originally meant for adults (Johnson 295; Tatar 39, 92). The majority of Bible stories, fables, and fairy tales deal with the hope for eternal life and tell stories of dead people who return to earth in different bodies. Most of them reincarnate as animals or lifeless objects.

The Grimm brothers' collection of fairy tales is full of cruel death sentences, homicide, and reincarnation. A case in point would be "The Juniper Tree", which is a Grimm tale about a boy, who is reborn as a bird after he was killed by his stepmother and eaten as stew by his father (Butler 106). The boy's stepsister secretly collects his remaining bones, buries them under a juniper tree and thereupon does a bird fly out of the tree. The bird transforms into a boy again, after killing his stepmother and singing the following lines about his murder:

'My mother she killed me,
My father, he ate me.
My sister, Marlene, she made sure to see
my bones were all gathered together,
bound nicely in silk, as neat as can be,
and laid beneath the juniper tree.
Tweet, tweet! What a lovely bird I am!' (Zipes, *Fairy Tales Grimm* 161 f.)

In this fairy tale by the Grimm brothers, the two subcomponents of the biological death concept (see section 2.1.2.1. *Children's Understanding of Death*), finality

and nonfunctionality, are violated. First, the bones of the dead boy continue to function and enable reincarnation. Second, after his reincarnation as a bird, the once chopped up boy returns to the living, and thus, we can postulate that death is presented as temporary. As typical for other fairy tales as well, good overcomes evil and conquers death at the end of "The Juniper Tree". Adults, who have a mature death understanding, cannot be fooled into thinking that good behavior and love can resurrect the dead, but it might be difficult for children to grasp such stories' deeper meaning.

According to Bruno Bettelheim who argues, "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale", fairy tales directly address the fear of death and the quest for immortality (5, 10 f.). In this context, he claims that fairy tales do not try to deceive us regarding our wish for eternal life. Instead, particular phrases such as "they lived happily ever after" accentuate the bonds of love and communicate that immortality can only be achieved through true love (10 f.). He proposes that even young children understand the real meaning behind such references to immortality, which I very much doubt, because it seems to me that young children are incapable of distinguishing between literal and figurative meaning. Furthermore, up to a certain age, children do not understand the finality of death, but regard it as a temporary state (Speece and Brent 1673). Whilst I shall not be entitled to and do not wish to make any assessment of whether fairy tales are beneficial or harmful for children's development of a mature death perception, I would like to state that fairy tales definitely present a convoluted picture about what death really means. Hence, fairy tales should probably not be the only stories children read about this subject, as some characters stay dead, while others miraculously return to life or reincarnate. Bettelheim expresses his view on the appropriateness of fairy tales for children several times in the introductory part of his book (5 ff.). Clearly, he is very much in favor of introducing fairy tales to children as, according to him, they convey crucial messages, contain meaning and facilitate personality development.

In the preface to her work, Maria Tatar rejects Bettelheim's psychoanalytic interpretation of fairy tales and later in her book identifies a "link between death and disobedience" (25). According to her, death is brutal in these tales and represented as the consequence of sin and disobedient behavior. In this

context, Tatar refers to fairy tales' didactic function and their "pedagogy of fear" (22 ff.), which contradicts Bettelheim's claim that not morality, but potential success, is the subject of fairy tales (Bettelheim 10). Even today, where there is a wide selection of stories written especially for children, fairy tales are read and told, albeit rarely in their original versions, but modified by Disney and others.

Most of the literature for children about life crises, such as death, had been published after the 1970s. Remarkably, the majority of the pioneering works are aimed at fairly young readers (ages 4 to 9) (Hormann 559, 564). According to several scholars, Margret Wise Brown and Remy Charlip's picturebook, *The Dead Bird* (1958), and Judith Viorst and Erik Blegvad's storybook, *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (1971), are among the first children's books dealing with death (qtd in Gibson and Zaidman 232; Hormann 564; Johnson 293).

Meanwhile, death has become an established theme in children's literature of Western societies and is treated in different ways (as illustrated in chapter 3). The following section is intended to first introduce the picturebook as a particular type of children's literature, and second, discuss existing studies on contemporary death-related picturebooks.

2.2. About Picturebooks

2.2.1. Picturebook Theory

In this section, I will introduce the picturebook as such, briefly comment on its development in history, and draw on academic theory to describe its unique feature, the text-picture relationship. The current book market offers picturebooks in different formats on a wide variety of themes. The images in picturebooks vary in style from highly abstract to almost photorealistic, and use a range of media such as watercolor, pencil, and digital design. Picturebooks as they exist today are highly popular among children and adults. This popularity of the modern picturebook is reflected in a growing academic interest, which has been observable over the last two decades (see Nikolajeva and Scott 2-6 for an overview of approaches to picturebooks). Nevertheless, some authors of recent studies seem to have very little awareness of what constitutes a picturebook and treat the illustrations as if they were of a purely decorative nature (see section 2.2.2. for a literature review about studies on picturebooks dealing with death). Images in picturebooks are not mere decorations, but are essential elements in this type of book as they contribute just as much to the narrative as the words. The purpose of this section is to trace the unique word-image interaction, the historical development of this genre or medium, and some picturebook terminology.

We probably all have childhood memories of our favorite picturebooks, but tend to forget that this type of book with its colorful illustrations has existed for less than two centuries. According to Goodman, “[i]llustrated children’s literature has been available in Europe in various forms since the early beginnings of print technology in the fifteenth century” (296). The earliest versions of illustrated books for young children consisted of simple black and white woodcuts, followed by engravings at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before the eighteenth century children’s books were held in low regard in society and were expected to be cheap. This attitude towards children and children’s books seems to have changed in the eighteenth century, accompanied by a rising demand for children’s books, which had a considerable impact on the quality and quantity of production. From the 1830s onwards, a variety of manufacture methods existed, which allowed the production of fairly large quantities.

However, it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that color prints appeared (Whalley 300 ff.). The illustrated book is the predecessor of the picturebook. What once started with a story accompanied by crude woodcuts has developed into a mass produced, color printed picturebook. But why exactly is this called “picturebook”? Or is it “picture-book”, or rather “picture book”?

Before elaborating on the unique characteristics of picturebooks, I would like to clarify the issue of spelling. There seems to be no agreement on spelling among scholars in the field of picturebook theory and all three versions above are used in literary criticism. I personally prefer the spelling “picturebook” and agree with David Lewis (xiv), who justifies his choice with “the compound nature of the artifact itself”. It is this small space or hyphen between the words “picture” and “book” in “picture book” and “picture-book” that seems to almost negate the close relationship of the text and the pictures. In order to provide further justification for my choice, I intend to draw an analogy. While a “black board” is any board that is black, the compound word “blackboard” describes a particular kind of board. Similarly, a picturebook is not just any book that contains pictures, but a particular kind of book distinguished by its word-picture relationship. Therefore, I would suggest “picturebook” is the most appropriate term and I will stick to this way of spelling.

After this brief discussion of variants of spelling, I would like to turn to the remaining question: what exactly is this thing called picturebook? A definition provided by Perry Nodelman (vii) in his 1988 pioneering work *Words about Pictures* states that picturebooks “tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight text or no text at all [and] are unlike any other form of verbal or visual art”. This uniqueness of picturebooks, which is indicated in Nodelman’s statement, is also described by Nikolajeva and Scott who further elaborate on the combination of verbal and visual representation in picturebooks (1f.). In *How Picturebooks Work*, Nikolajeva and Scott (1f.) introduce semiotic terminology when referring to words and images in picturebooks as complex conventional and iconic signs:

The function of pictures, iconic signs, is to describe or to represent. The function of words, conventional signs, is primarily to narrate. Conventional signs are often linear, while iconic signs are nonlinear and do not give us direct instruction about how to read them. The tension

between the two functions creates unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image in a picturebook.

A variety of terms indicating this interaction between the two signs are found in picturebook theory. Lawrence Sipe refers to the word-image interaction as “synergy”, W. J. T. Mitchell uses “imagetext”, Kristin Hallberg insists on “iconotext” and David Lewis introduces “picturebook text” (Lewis xiv; Mitchell 9; qtd in Nikolajeva and Scott 6; Sipe 98). In my analysis I will use “words” or “text” for the verbal narrative, “pictures”, “illustrations” or “images” for the visual narrative and “iconotext” when referring to the whole; the word-image interaction. The above scholars suggest that the special feature of a picturebook is its iconotext. In the quote above, there is mention of infinite options of interactions between iconic and conventional signs. Some possibilities of iconotext varieties will be described after a brief introduction to picturebook typology.

Picturebook typology distinguishes between picture dictionaries, picture narratives, illustrated books, and the traditional picturebook (Nikolajeva and Scott 6). While picture dictionaries contain words and images, but are non-narrative, the picture narrative tells a story in pictures with hardly any or no words. A case in point is Raymond Briggs’ wordless picture narrative *The Snowman* (1978), which tells the story of a boy who enters the world of phantasy and becomes friends with the snowman he built. Unlike the picture narrative, the images in illustrated books are secondary and the text is completely independent from the pictures’ content. In contrast, the verbal and the visual representation in the “traditional” picturebook are of equal relevance. Although text and picture are equally important, the interaction between the two can vary greatly.

Perry Nodelman discusses precisely this latter text-image relationship of the traditional picturebook with regards to irony (222 ff.). According to him, “[i]rony occurs in literature when we know something more and something different from what we are being told” (223). By an ironic relationship between verbal and visual narrative, he means that each representation unveils different, additional or even contradicting information, but is incomplete in itself. The “symbiotic relationship” between words and images, as Nodelman calls it, leaves scope for interpretation (225). He claims that “all the relationships

between words and pictures *are* ironic” (227), however, I would argue irony alone is not sufficiently specific to explain the different variations of word-image interaction in picturebooks. Regarding a picturebook’s iconotext, Nikolajeva and Scott provide a more detailed description and identify several categories (11 ff.). Picturebooks can be “symmetrical” as words and images tell the same story, “complementary” (verbal and visual narrative fill each other’s gaps), “enhancing” (text depends on images), “counterpointing” (verbal and visual narrative tell contradicting stories) or “sylleptic” (“two or more narratives independent of each other”) (12). Examples for some of these categories are included in the analytical part of this paper (section 3.2.).

Especially the production of picturebooks that are not “symmetrical” requires “a close collaboration between author and illustrator, in which the author leaves gaps for the illustrator to fill with visual images” (17). The situation is quite different with regard to stories that are written and illustrated by the same person as is the case with *Duck, Death and the Tulip* (Erlbruch, 2007) and *The Heart and the Bottle* (Oliver Jeffers, 2010), which are both included in my analysis.

With respect to my investigation of selected picturebooks, some key terminology has to be clarified (for a comprehensive overview cf. Graham 213 f.). Compared to other book categories, picturebooks do not contain page numbers. Further, illustrations in picturebooks frequently spread over an entire double page. Thus, researchers in this field refrain from discussing individual pages, but instead point to “doublespreads” in their analyses. A “doublespread”, “spread” or “opening”, consists of a “verso” and a “recto”, which are terms used to describe the left-hand page and the right-hand page. There are conventions regarding the placement of elements (verbal or visual) on the verso and recto. In many picturebooks, “the verso establishes a situation, while the recto disrupts it” or “the verso creates a sense of security, while the recto brings danger and excitement” (Nikolajeva and Scott 151). It can be stated that the interaction of the verso and the recto of a doublespread creates tension and conveys information about movement, time, and cause (151). Aside from the doublespreads, both the covers (front and back) and the inside covers, so-called “endpapers”, are of significance for a detailed picturebook analysis as

they frequently contain elements that somehow relate to the story (Graham 213 f.).

Even though people might suggest that we should not judge a book by its cover, we probably form a view on books before taking a glimpse at its verbal and visual representation (Nodelman 48). Our first impression of a picturebook is influenced by its appearance, including size. Very small books are frequently for toddlers and we expect their content to be simple and childlike. Whereas large picturebooks also tend to be associated with a fairly young audience, those of medium size are expected to contain more complex themes and representations (44 f.). The decision as to what type of paper to use for a publication must not be underestimated as well. Different paper grades may trigger various associations. While paper with a glossy finish evokes an effect of distance as the readers' attention is easily distracted away from the clear colors by the paper's brilliance and the reflections, matt-coated paper with a rough texture "seems to invite our touch and in that way supports an atmosphere of involvement and intimacy" (47 f.).

Apart from size and paper stock, a comprehensive analysis requires a consideration of the artist's choice of color, tone, placement of elements, framing, and style. The illustrator's purposeful use of tone, shapes, and colors may emphasize the relationship between characters and convey emotions (Nodelman 156). For instance, we interpret a picture differently whether its elements are depicted rounded or angular, red or blue, light or dark. The same is true for placement. An element has a different effect located on the left, right, bottom or top of a page. Western societies read from left to right and regarding visual narratives, "we assume that time moves as our eyes move, from left to right" (135). We expect that figures heading towards the right are on the move and the ones turning to the left either stand still or return to some point (163). Moreover, objects placed on the top half of the picture seem to be more salient than the ones on the bottom half (134). Obviously, all of this is based on convention and people speaking right-to-left languages might not understand the meaning of movement and placement in Western picturebooks (166).

Another aspect I will consider is framing. Frames in picturebooks have a separating function regarding the two "realities", inside and outside the

picturebook (Moebius 318). They create a certain order, set limits to the picturebook world, and signify objectivity (Nodelman 50). A lack of frames, on the other hand, may allow the reader to fully immerse in the world of fiction (Moebius 318).

Concerning audience, there is a well-entrenched belief that picturebooks are written specifically for children. It is, of course, true that most picturebooks are to be considered as children's literature and that children generally take great pleasure in this medium. Early picturebooks by Randolph Caldecott at the end of the nineteenth century and by Beatrix Potter in the early twentieth century were immensely popular among children, who were the intended audience (Nodelman 2 f.). However, as Nikolajeva and Scott (21) put it, "[m]any picturebooks are clearly designed for both small children and sophisticated adults, communicating to the dual audience at a variety of levels". This has also been identified by Nodelman, who points out: "it is part of the charm of many of the most interesting picture books that they so strangely combine the childlike and the sophisticated" (21). However, some picturebooks are not targeted at any specific audience. For instance, the writer and illustrator Shaun Tan claims to create his picturebooks without having any particular age group in mind. His picturebooks are for everybody, he insists (Johnston 423).

Parents, preschool teachers, and others dealing with children have probably been asked to read a picturebook repeatedly and have wondered why children desire to continually hear the same story. While adults are used to focusing on words and treating pictures as secondary, children who cannot yet read devote their full attention to the pictures and discover something new with each rereading. In relation to this phenomenon, Nikolajeva and Scott point out that "[children] do not read the same book; they go more and more deeply into its meaning" (2). It is this combination that constitutes the picturebook, the linearity of the text and the interpretative value of the pictures. A deeper understanding leads to a higher appreciation and enjoyment (Nodelman x-xi), and in order to go in depth, one needs to repeatedly read the picturebook's text and images. I would argue that many children still have the necessary composure to completely and fully engage in the visual narrative of picturebooks.

Regarding the development of children's basic literacy skills, Nodelman addresses the question "Why are there [...] picture books at all?" and discusses the advantages and drawbacks of picturebooks for children who learn how to read (1). On the one hand, images distract the young reader from the words, but on the other hand, visuals also provide a supporting function (2 ff.). Pictures can clarify the verbal narrative and motivate children to carry on reading. However, just like reading words, the reading of pictures also has to be learned to some extent (7). Being able to interpret images in picturebooks is a competence that involves several cognitive processes. People often tend to think that what we see in pictures is solely a replica of real life, but what we perceive as "reality" depends on our culture (16). Different cultures interpret pictures differently, as stated earlier in relation to left-right placement. Before children are able to read the images in picturebooks, they need to learn some of their culture's picture conventions and acquire basic visual literacy skills. According to Nodelman (26 f.), readers of images have to get used to the fact that the two-dimensional objects in pictures are smaller than in "real life" and often contain thick black outlines. Not all objects in images are completely depicted, but cut off and placed at the edge of the image or partly covered by other overlapping elements. Images are iconic signs and in order to interpret images, one has to know how to read these signs.

As stated earlier, the book market offers a wide variety of picturebooks. Naturally, not every picturebook that is sold in a bookstore is of high intellectual value. A few picturebooks are probably tasteless, trashy, and cheap productions. Strange as it may appear, some of those books become children's favorites. Reading a picturebook is a very personal experience and we are often unable to understand what particular aspect of the picturebook makes it appealing to somebody. Sometimes it is the theme, another time the personality of a character or the coloring that captivates us at first glance. In this respect I would like to point to my analysis of picturebooks about death, which might not be a subject that comes to people's minds when they think about typical children's topics. The theme of death is controversial just like sexuality and violence, yet it appears in several picturebooks for children. The second part of thesis contains my own study on death picturebooks with reference to the theoretical foundations of picturebook analysis by Nodelman and Nikolajeva

and Scott as illustrated in this section. However, before moving forward into this subcategory, a literature review on existing research about death-related picturebooks will be provided.

2.2.2. Existing Studies on Picturebooks about Death

According to Erik H. Erikson, a developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst of renown, children are fascinated by picturebook characters, which often become their heroes (258). Another psychoanalyst, Bruno Bettelheim, accentuates the importance of stories about serious issues like death, as children require “suggestions in symbolic forms about how [to] deal with these issues [in order to] grow safely into maturity” (8). Apparently, the representation of death and dying in picturebooks can have an influence on the child’s development. According to scholars in the field of developmental psychology, children’s understanding of death varies greatly between those aged 4 and 6 years (Nguyen and Gelman 495). This period is an age in which most children cannot yet read, enjoy looking at picturebooks together, and being read to. Children have different standards of knowledge and death experiences, just as picturebooks tell different stories in a variety of ways.

A large body of literature has investigated children’s perceptions of death and determined changes in their understanding during their cognitive development (Slaughter and Griffiths 526, 531; Speece and Brent 1671, 1673 ff.). By comparison, significantly less research has been conducted regarding the representation of death and dying in picturebooks. Nevertheless, there are some articles on death-themed picturebooks (Clement, 2013; Seibert and Drolet, 1993; Wiseman, 2013), the representation of grandfathers’ death in picturebooks (Malafantis, 2013), spirituality and afterlife in children’s literature and the frequency of occurrence of death-related concepts in sentences in picturebooks (Lee et al., 2014; Poling and Hupp, 2008). All except one article have been published within the last ten years. This might be due to the recent growing interest in picturebook theory, the fact that death-themed picturebooks represent an extended market, or a newly awakened realization that death should not be tabooed anymore, but discussed with children. This literature review intends to compare and contrast the aforementioned articles and to

incorporate conclusions that can be drawn from them about the representation of death in picturebooks.

The article “Death Sentences: A Content Analysis of Children’s Death Literature” by Poling and Hupp (2008) examines the depiction of biological facts (irreversibility, nonfunctionality, inevitability and causation), cultural practices (ideas of afterlife and funeral rituals) and emotional reactions (e.g., sadness, longing) regarding death in 24 U.S. picturebooks, and 16 storybooks, published between 1986 and 2004. In assessment of their results, they discovered that all books, except one, included emotional responses such as sadness, anger, and longing. Moreover, U.S. children’s literature about death seems to include more information about emotions than about cultural concepts and biological facts (170). Another aspect of this study I would like to discuss is its method of content analysis. Poling and Hupp (167 f.) considered the frequency of occurrence of the three death-related concepts (i.e. biological, sociocultural and emotional) in the verbal representation in each book, and thus, totally neglected the visual level of the picturebooks. This gives rise to criticism, since picturebooks contain words *and* images and their interaction and relationship is what constitutes this book type (see section 2.2.1.).

Taking up Poling and Hupp’s method of analyzing the content of individual sentences, a recent study by Lee et al. (2014) investigated 40 Western European and East Asian picturebooks concerning the coexistence of biological and supernatural explanations of death. Their results showed no significant difference regarding the presence of biological facts between the two cultural contexts, however, almost twice as many Western European as East Asian picturebooks contained supernatural concepts. Naturalistic explanations were prevalent in picturebooks of East Asian countries (542 ff.). Even though Lee and his colleagues seemed to acknowledge the importance of images in picturebooks and deliberately excluded storybooks from their study (see 540), I must assume that they also ignored the representation of death in the illustrations. To stress the importance of considering both verbal and visual representation in picturebook studies once again, I would like to accentuate that words and images do not necessarily contain the same information, but often fill each other’s gaps or provide contradicting information (see Nikolajeva and

Scott 17), and ignoring the content of the images may result in one-sided results.

In contrast to the preceding articles, *Death and the Empathic Embrace in Four Contemporary Picture Books* by Lesley Clement (2013) and the analysis by Konstantinos Malafantis (2013) about the representation of grandfathers' death in picturebooks focus on both verbal and visual representations of death. In her research, Clement conducted a qualitative analysis of four Hans Christian Andersen Award winning picturebooks about death. Her discussion of Erlbruch's *Duck, Death and the Tulip* is of especial interest and value for my research topic since this picturebook is also part of my own analysis. Interestingly, all four picturebooks seem to refer to the continuous cycle of life and death, while no clear dividing line between life and death is presented (7). In reference to *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, Clement points to the relationship and interdependency between life and death: "As Life and Death journey together, Life will always be an ally of Death, providing Death with the illnesses, accidents, and predators that Death needs to continue their journey" (8). Here life is part of death, just as death is part of life. Contrary to Clement, Malafantis concentrates on the representation of grandparents and grandchildren in two death-themed picturebooks. He found that the grandfathers are portrayed in a way that makes the whole scenario reminiscent of a dream state. Furthermore, the grandparent's death is justified by the fact that death is a natural phenomenon (37). Both articles by Clement and by Malafantis reveal similar outcomes, namely that death is not presented as an ending, but as an integral part of the natural cycle of life. Malafantis even demonstrates that the visual and verbal representation of death in the selected picturebooks might be interpreted as a "[negation of] the dominion of death upon life" (37).

An earlier study, which also identifies the representation of the continuous cycle of life and death and mentions the recurring idea in picturebooks that "life goes on and death is a natural part of life" (Seibert and Drolet 89), has been carried out by Seibert and Drolet. In their 1993 article, they investigated a sample of 65 picturebooks and focused on positive and negative presentations of death with respect to death education and child development. Even though the article states as its aim to analyze whether the selected picturebooks are appropriate for children aged 3-8 according to existing research about children's

understanding of death, it lacks clearly defined criteria for what they term “positive and negative presentations of death” (86 f.). The authors discuss the most frequently occurring topics in death-themed literature for children and describe that while the majority of books addressed the finality of death, less than a third of the sample contained inevitability (87 ff.). Among physical details, burial was included most frequently, followed by a representation of the dead body. Place and cause of death remained mostly unmentioned. They concluded that

[d]eath was described realistically. Books included more adult deaths than child deaths, with the adult death usually involving a male in the grandfather age group. [...] Direct language was used with few metaphors. (90)

Their findings concerning the representation of child death are in conformity with a more recent study by Wiseman (2013), who considered the portrayal of loss experience in text and image and also suggested how picturebooks may serve as a means of support for bereaved children. While the first part of Wiseman’s analysis provides a rather brief review of 89 death-themed picturebooks published between 2001 and 2011 (5 ff.), the second part consists of a more detailed analysis of three books on the following subjects: (1) death of a sibling, (2) pet loss, and (3) death and dying from a Mexican perspective (7 ff.). In her work, Wiseman incorporated past research on children’s grieving process as well as literature about picturebook illustrations. Concerning image analysis, she focused particularly on Sipe’s theory (for further information cf. Sipe 1998) about literary, artistic and semiotic elements in picturebook illustrations (Wiseman 7). According to her results, the majority of death picturebooks are about human death, in particular the death of an adult. Ten years later Wiseman confirmed what Seibert and Drolet had already described in their 1993 article; namely that only a minimal part of the books about human death dealt with child death. Additionally, Wiseman discovered sibling loss to be an underrepresented theme in picturebooks and that in both picturebooks about human and animal death, male death rates were higher than female ones (6,12). The author also identified different cultural approaches to the depiction of loss, grief, and heaven (6). Unfortunately, the article only provides a few examples and no detailed analysis. A list of the reviewed picturebooks as provided by other authors such as Lee et al. is lacking in both articles described

in this paragraph, but might be of great interest for other researchers in this field.

After having discussed several articles about the representation of death in contemporary picturebooks, two studies focusing on spiritual themes in children's literature will be introduced. In his article about spirituality in children's death-related literature, Corr (2004) points out his aim of closing a research gap, shows the presence of aspects of spirituality in picture- and storybooks, and provides some examples. However, a later study in this field about heaven and the spiritual afterlife by Malcom seems to be of more relevance for my own work since it contains strategies of representation. In her 2010 research, Malcom carried out a qualitative analysis using a dataset of 49 death-related picturebooks. Her discovery of the idea of a continuation of life in heaven as a common characteristic of picturebooks containing information about the spiritual afterlife complements both Clement and Malafantis' findings that death is not presented as an ending, but rather a part of the circle of life. Malcom also puts forward that the majority of the illustrations in the selected picturebooks refer to heaven as a place up in the sky:

Numerous illustrations provide [...] evidence that heaven is located somewhere above the earth. For example, several books combine their discussions of heaven with pictures that show living people on earth looking upward. [...] [Some even] reveal that when we look up, we might actually see our deceased loved one's image. [For example, one illustrator] provides a picture of a dark sky gradually giving way to an outline of the deceased grandfather's face. (60 f.)

Additionally to its location high up in the sky, heaven is commonly presented as full of light, angels and clouds. However, the depictions of heaven vary depending whether a child, parent, grandparent or pet died. While pets and children are engaging in fun activities in heaven, parents and grandparents watch over their children and family left behind on earth. Instead of an eternal cycle of life and death, Malcom documents the idea of death as a continuation of life in heaven in picturebooks about heaven and spiritual afterlife.

There is a variety of death picturebooks for young children and the above articles point to frequently occurring themes and different strategies of depiction. In terms of methodology, I can distinguish between two approaches that researchers applied in order to examine the representation of death and

dying in picturebooks. The first approach has a quantitative focus and consists of a frequency count of death-related concepts and themes. Some of the authors define their method as “content analysis”, which I find somewhat misleading in the sense that this approach is not concerned with a deep analysis of content, but characteristic features of verbal representation. The second approach is of purely qualitative nature and involves analyzing words and images of individual picturebooks in great detail. Even though quantitative studies grant insights into common themes, frequencies of occurrence, and underrepresentation, it is the qualitative approach that I find most valuable, as I am particularly interested in personal interpretations based on picturebook theory (see section 2.2.1. for theoretical background on picturebook analysis).

While all studies seem to be promising at first, an analysis of the articles reveals that some researchers neglect the visual representation in the selected picturebooks (i.e. Lee et al.; Poling and Hupp) and others neither provide a detailed analysis (i.e. Wiseman) nor a list of the primary sources (i.e. Seibert and Drolet; Wiseman). Clement focuses on a small dataset of only four Hans Christian Andersen Award winning picturebooks about death compared to other researchers, such as Wiseman, who investigates a sample of 89 children’s picturebooks. Nevertheless, Clement’s article turns out to be the most helpful source in this field as it is highly informative and reveals an in-depth analysis of four different means of death representation in picturebooks. Clearly, there is scope here for more research; especially qualitative studies that offer an in-depth analysis of recent picturebooks on the visual and verbal representation of death and dying would be of significant value for potential researchers who intend to intensify their expertise in this field. This is what I intend to convey during the remainder of this thesis.

3. Analysis

3.1. Methods and Tools

In the scope of this thesis, the investigation is limited to picturebooks dealing with issues of death and dying. A total of seven picturebooks serve as the primary sources for the qualitative analysis presented here. Before elaborating on my choice of picturebooks and the different aspects included in my review, I would like to discuss my research methods and selection criteria.

I identified appropriate picturebooks by searching online bookstores, lists of primary sources included in existing studies about death-related children's literature, and internet sites and forums concerning picturebooks used in bibliotherapy. First, I wanted to have an overview of available death-related children's books and the strategies of representations of death and dying used in these picturebooks. General selection criteria are as follows: (a) whether the samples are death-themed picturebooks, (b) traditional picturebooks contrary to picture narratives and illustrated books (see section 2.2.1. *Picturebook Theory*) or (c) whether they are written in English or translated to English from other languages. Furthermore, I deliberately omitted picturebooks with religious or spiritual contents as well as guide or activity books for children used to understand death. Much to my surprise and delight, it appeared that numerous picturebooks have been published on this subject. This vast number of books I found was then further delimited by accessibility in libraries and bookstores. Even though some of them were out of print, I still looked through a great number of books and constantly discovered new material. At some point, I realized that I had already discovered a much larger sample than I could possibly include in my study. It seemed as if I had found an endless field of research and I accordingly stopped searching for further picturebooks.

Following the initial search, I intended to assign the individual books to different categories of representation, and to select one picturebook for each category for a detailed analysis. This turned out to be more challenging than expected, as some of the picturebooks could not be allocated unambiguously. Also, due to the scope of this thesis, the number of picturebooks included in my qualitative analysis had to be reduced to a minimum. However, my intention was to present as complete a picture of the different means of representation of death

and dying in picturebooks as possible with the resources at hand. Finally, I identified five classifications with a few subcategories of strategies of representation (see subsequent section) and decided to deal with seven death-related picturebooks in my personal analysis. The following sample of books has not been chosen on the basis of an objective selection procedure such as year of publication, award winners or target audience, but is a purely subjective selection:

- *Duck, Death and the Tulip* by Wolf Erlbruch
- *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers
- *Remembering Crystal* by Sebastian Loth
- *The Dandelion's Tale* by Kevin Sheehan and Rob Dunlavey
- *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* by Corinne Demas and Ard Hoyt
- *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake
- *The Scar* by Charlotte Moundlic and Olivier Tallec

All of the included picturebooks happen to be contemporary and have been published between 2004 and 2014. Even though I had no specific publication period in mind, it turned out that the majority of death-themed picturebooks that are currently accessible have been published within the last fifteen years. My initial intention was to also theorize Margaret Wise Brown and Remy Charlip's classic, *The Dead Bird* (1958), but soon discarded this idea since their book had been published more than 40 years prior to the other picturebooks of my choice and differs much in size and page layout. *The Dead Bird* is more a booklet rather than a book. Furthermore, its verbal and visual narrative about children who find a dead bird and bury it is presented on separate doublespreads, which distinguishes it considerably from the other selected picturebooks. I am particularly interested in word-picture interactions and therefore decided to exchange *The Dead Bird* with a contemporary picturebook about the death of an animal, *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, which consists of a text and image combination. All sample picturebooks contain between 14 and 27 doublespreads, excluding endpapers and title page. While some of them have been written and illustrated by the same person, others are products of author-illustrator cooperation.

The books will be analyzed in light of what I have dealt with in the preceding theoretical part. Works by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2001) and Perry Nodelman (1988) will function as a basic framework for my interpretation. Only

occasionally other scholars such as William Moebius (2009) and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001; 2006) will be consulted. I will also consider insights gained from developmental psychology about children's understanding of death and implications from death-themed studies by other scholars in the field of picturebook analysis.

Illustrators frequently include symbols in their pictures. Symbols are not only culture-dependent, but may also change their meaning according to the surrounding elements. Therefore, symbols are never unique. The different meanings of individual elements in illustrations are particularly apparent in my interpretation of the deep red tulip in Erlbruch's *Duck, Death and the Tulip*. Apart from the meaning of the color red, which is frequently associated with danger, blood and love, while even flowers or tulips in particular may be interpreted differently. Symbols have various meanings and my interpretation is one out of many possibilities without any absolute claim for truth and completeness.

As stated in the preceding section, I am more interested in personal interpretations than discussions of quantitative outcomes, and it is therefore a qualitative approach that I will pursue. Since the objective of my thesis is to identify and explore representations of death and dying in selected picturebooks, I will discuss each picturebook in isolation rather than compare and contrast strategies and contents. Each picturebook will be treated as a unique artwork. Even though my analysis is based on theory, it is a personal interpretation and therefore highly subjective. Furthermore, the small sample of only seven picturebooks cannot be representative and I am convinced there are yet more strategies of representation of death and dying. Despite all these limitations, I will hopefully be able to make a contribution, albeit small, to the current discussion of death-themed picturebooks.

What follows is a brief introduction into the means of representation of death and an in-depth analysis. I will discuss aspects of verbal and visual representation, such as the literary style, syntax, word-picture relationship, usage of colors, positioning and size of elements, framing or tone. In addition to the books' contents, paratextual elements such as the design of the cover page

and endpapers, the book title, the format, and the type of paper will be taken into account².

3.2. Means of Representation

Each book included in this analysis focuses on particular variations of death: the death of a person (*The Scar*, *The Heart and the Bottle*; Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*), the death of an animal (*Saying Goodbye to Lulu*; *Duck*, *Death and the Tulip*; *Remembering Crystal*) or the death of a plant (*The Dandelion's Tale*). However, they differ greatly in their means of representation. After close consideration I recognized the following five main strategies of dealing with death and dying in these picturebooks:

- Personification of death
- Euphemism
- Anthropomorphism
- Pet loss
- Death of a person

Anthropomorphism is then further divided into the subcategories anthropomorphized animals and anthropomorphized plants, and the category "death of a person" distinguishes between a child and an adult point-of-view. These variations of representation will become particularly apparent in the following subsections, which review the selected picturebooks separately.

3.2.1. Personification

According to Ricoeur's definition, personification is a "metaphorical transfer from the inanimate to the animate" (59). In other words, it is a figure of speech similar to metaphor, which humanizes objects or abstract beings by attributing to it human characteristics "like beliefs, desires, intentions, goals, plans, psychological states, powers, and will" (Turner 175). Furthermore, personification is frequently used synonymously with anthropomorphism. Research has shown that at age 5 to 9, children frequently personify or anthropomorphize death in their drawings (qtd. in Bonoti, Leondari and Mastora 49; Tamm and Granqvist 204). They illustrate death as "the bogeyman, the grim reaper, a skeleton, a ghost or a shadow [...] hunting people" (Tamm and Granqvist 204). Although personification appears to be a common feature of

² for information on paratexts cf. Nikolajeva and Scott 241 ff.

young children's drawings of death, it is rarely employed in death-themed picturebooks. This is not particularly surprising. Children's books are usually written and illustrated by adults and death in the form of a skeleton or the like is not exactly what most parents would appreciate finding in their children's picturebooks. In my own research, I have encountered only one picturebook that presents a personified death: *Duck, Death and the Tulip* by Wolf Erlbruch (2007). This section takes a close look at Erlbruch's unique picturebook and introduces personification as one strategy of representing death and dying in books for young children. After a brief introduction to author/illustrator and plot, I will comment on the cover page, layout, and coloring of individual elements, and discuss individual doublespreads according to their visual and verbal representation.

Wolf Erlbruch is a German writer and illustrator, and the creator of *Ente, Tod und Tulpe*, which has been translated into *Duck, Death and the Tulip* by Catherine Chidgey. With his absolutely minimalistic design, his artistic drawings and his witty passages, he has managed to address the topic of death with great sensitivity. *Duck, Death and the Tulip* tells the story of the friendship that develops between Duck and Death. When Duck first acquaints Death, she is scared. But after Death explains to her that he has been around all her life and that he means no harm, initial fears gradually dissipate. Eventually, they become friends and take care of each other. They go swimming together and when Death is cold afterwards, Duck warms him. They go climbing and Death comforts Duck when she expresses her fears of death high in the treetop. Death even makes jokes about dying. At the end of summer, Duck dies and Death pays his last respects to her. He gently carries her to a river, places her into the water and puts a tulip on her dead body. Then Death waits until Duck has floated away on the river.

The cover page (see *Appendix* p. 101) includes the author and illustrator, the picturebook title, the publisher, and an illustration of Duck, who is centered and looks up to the title. According to the cover illustration, Duck is the main character in this picturebook, which is again emphasized by the portrait format. Though the title indicates the topic of death, the cover does not reveal any information that might lead us to conclude that there is a personified death in the story. Another interesting aspect is the literary stylistic device of alliteration

in the picturebook title. The first two words in *Duck, Death and the Tulip* have the same first consonants and form into alliteration. This alliteration represents Duck and Death as a pair and makes them dependent on each other. Also in the story, Duck and Death are presented as a team, as friends. A different alliteration can be detected in the original German title *Ente, Tod und Tulpe*. Due to the shift of the alliteration from “Duck, Death [...]” to “[...] Tod und Tulpe” in the German title, not Duck and Death, but Death and the tulip belong together. While the English title seems to treat the tulip as secondary, the German original highlights it, which possibly puts Duck in the background of our attention. Also relating to the German title *Ente, Tod und Tulpe*, the consonant “t” is present in all three nouns, which imparts a certain rhythm and regularity to the title, like the cyclical rhythm of life and death.

Regarding layout and coloring, every doublespread is a picture montage of individual elements, which are arranged on a monochrome background without perspective and frames. The tone quality of the ecru background is almost equivalent to that of the subjects. Only the opening that informs us about Duck’s death contains an image of Duck, Death and the tulip on a dark blue background on the recto. Here, the color of the background emphasizes the sadness of Duck’s death, and at the same time creates a calm and serene atmosphere (“Blau”; Nodelman 63). Quoting Bang (68), “[w]hite or light backgrounds feel safer to us than dark backgrounds because we can see well during the day and only poorly at night”. While the beige color tone may be associated with natural daylight, a snow-white background color would probably appear too bright and too optimistic in tone. The pure fact that Death is approaching Duck at daytime is somehow comforting. Apart from the background, the drawings are also kept in beige with a few details highlighted in red, yellow, blue, black, and green.

The most salient elements in this picturebook seem to be the white duck, the personified death, the deep red tulip, the black raven, and the blue river. To begin with, Erlbruch’s version of a personified death is a skeleton with a comparatively big skull, dressed in a checkered loose-fitting garment, black shoes, and gloves. Duck is slim and large and has white plumage, and here I strongly suggest the color of her feathers has been chosen deliberately as white signifies hope and represent death (see Bang 69). While some cultures wear

black at funerals, others prefer white. We could also say that Duck is dead white. She is very pale and the color of her skin reminds me of a corpse. Clearly, both characters, Duck and Death, are personified or anthropomorphized. They are presented as thinking, caring, emotional, and humorous beings. But how exactly do the verbal and the visual depictions emphasize these characteristics and what do the representations imply about the relationship between the two protagonists?

The first doublespread presents Duck and Death's first encounter:



Fig. 1 *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, 1st doublespread.

The verbal representation in figure 1 above creates the impression that Death had been following Duck for a while. Apparently, the proximity of Death triggers concern. Duck feels persecuted and asks Death about his intentions. However, Death reminds me more of a secret lover rather than someone dangerous, as he is depicted with a peaceful expression on his skull face hiding a deep red tulip behind his back. As will be explained later, the red color of the tulip might be associated with both danger and love. For now, I would like to concentrate on placement of the elements in the montage above. The position of the characters leaves room for interpretation and should certainly not be overlooked. William Moebius (317) accentuates the "codes of position", which is best explained in his own words:

A character that is on the margin, 'distanced' or reduced in size on the page, and near the bottom will generally be understood to possess fewer advantages than the one that is large and centred. [...] As with the stage, it matters whether the actors are shown on the left or the right. A character shown on the left page is *likely* to be in a more secure, albeit potentially confined space than one shown on the right, who is likely to be moving into a situation of risk or adventure.

Duck and Death are depicted opposite each other on two different pages. Duck is placed on the verso facing a wall but turning her neck towards Death, who is on the recto. It seems as if two forces stop Duck from moving out of the story or out of her life. The first force would be the wall and the second one, paradoxically, Death. The wall could also signify that Duck cannot escape her fate. What should not be overlooked in this context is the fact that there are three dandelions positioned between Duck and the wall. Dandelions are a "common Christian symbol of grief" ("Dandelion"; "dandelion"). According to Moebius' suggestion about the meaning of the position of characters in picturebooks, Duck would be in a safe place and Death in a situation of danger or adventure. But then, Death is in an advantaged position as he is centered compared to where Duck is, who is positioned on the left, closer to a wall. In addition to the blank space between them, a plant positioned in the gutter marks a boundary between the two pages. I would suggest this indicates that something has to be removed or clarified before they may come closer to each other. Duck has not yet accepted Death as her companion. Whether or not Erlbruch was aware of these codes of placement and had chosen the position of his subjects deliberately, I would propose his depiction symbolizes the following: Duck is worried as she notices something is happening to her. There is no going back as there is a border in front of her, and eventually, she has to face Death. However, there is no reason for concern as Duck is secure even as Death approaches. His arrival indicates the beginning of an adventure or maybe her last adventure. Death has come to help her cope with the present circumstances. As Death is presented on the recto, it seems as if he is coming from the future. This and the lack of perspective in the picturebook background may lead to the conclusion that Death exists outside of space and time and puts him in the position of God. Another theory about left-right distinction in images by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (*Reading Images* 51 ff.) may be mentioned in this context. According to them, "the elements placed on the left

are presented as Given, the elements placed on the right as New” (*Reading Images* 53). What is placed on the right might include a controversial theme and, therefore, requires special attention. In terms of *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, one may assume that the potential reader recognizes the animal presented on the left as a duck without reading the text first. The contrary is probably true for the skeleton in a gender-neutral, long garment on the right, which represents Death. Obviously, the positioning of elements is conventional and the codes described apply to Western cultures, which traditionally read from left to right (*Reading Images* 64).

Several scholars point to the size of individual elements with respect to salience and the overall effect of the image (Bang 10 ff.; Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 49, 82; Moebius 317). As Death and Duck are about the same size in most of the illustrations, neither of them appears to be more salient or powerful. They meet at eye level, in a literal sense. Death’s skull is tremendously huge compared to the proportions of his body and to Duck’s tiny head. However, due to the calm and friendly facial expression, the big skull does not look scary. Round forms, as skulls are, appear softer and less frightening to us than sharp objects (Bang 10 ff). Moreover, the illustrator has omitted any trace of teeth and one could argue that Death looks more like a toothless, old person in a nightgown. Only in two images is Death slightly taller than Duck, namely at the beginning when Duck realizes Death’s identity and near the end when Death is carrying the deceased body. At the verso of the second opening, Duck is frightened and the fact that Death is represented slightly taller than her puts some emphasis on the terrifying nature of Death. Duck’s helplessness is represented in both text and image. The text “Duck was scared stiff, and who could blame her? ‘You’ve come to fetch me?’” is symmetrical to the depiction of an upright Duck with a rake-thin and stiff body. Ambivalent feelings are produced through the depiction at the end of the picturebook.

On the one hand, the size of Death in the verso of the thirteenth opening (see fig. 2) might imply death’s dominion over life. But, on the other hand, the whole composition of Death gently carrying Duck with her head hanging vertically downwards on one side and the red tulip in his mouth on the other side resembles someone mourning for the death of a loved one. Death’s sad facial

expression and the fact that “he was almost a little moved” at Duck’s death, underline Death’s human characteristics.

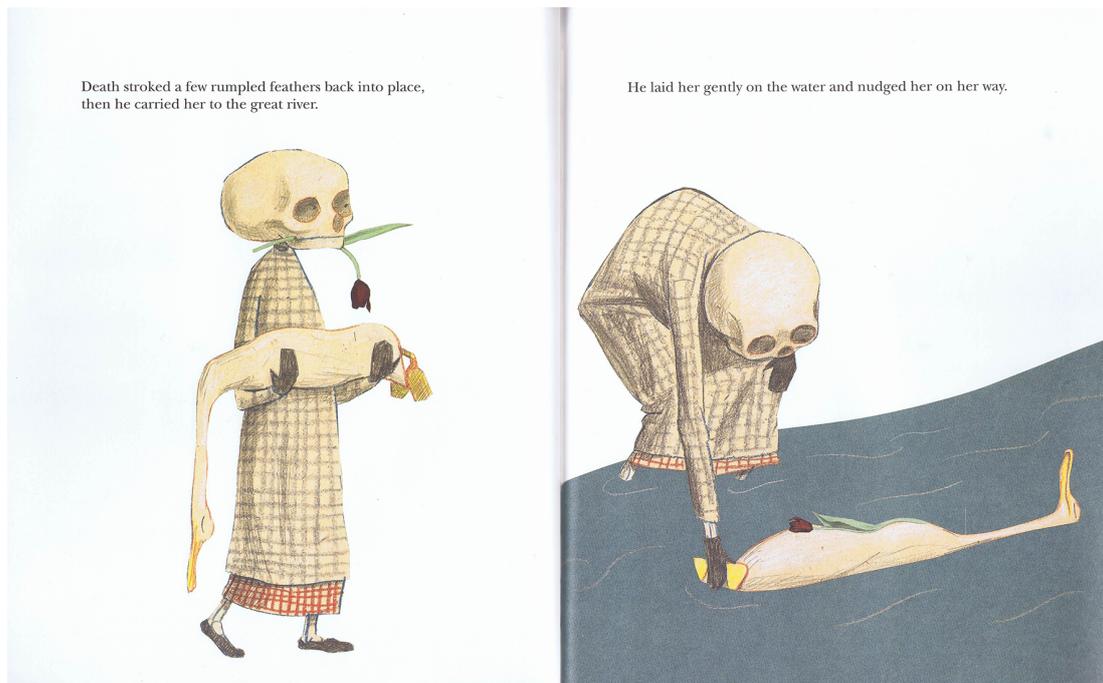


Fig. 2 *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, 13th doublespread.

Another interesting aspect is Death’s aversion to cold and wetness, which Clement interprets as a fear “of completing his business in Duck’s natural habitat” (5). When Duck asks him to accompany her to the pond, Death’s happy face changes into a face of concern. Later in the pond he expresses his feelings and tells her “I really must get away from this damp”. Afterwards Death left the pond and Duck offers to warm him with her body. The image of Duck warming Death almost joins them together into a single unit. It seems as if the revelation of Death’s weakness has strengthened their friendship and may be regarded as a contribution to gaining the trust of Duck. Additionally, Death appears almost as an outsider and we feel pity for him since “[n]obody had ever offered to do that for Death.”

Aside from the ability to show emotions, Death is also represented with a sense of humor as he jokes about dying when Duck wakes up, feeling happy and relieved to be alive: “I’m not dead! She quacked, utterly delighted. ‘I’m pleased for you,’ Death said, stretching. ‘And if I’d died?’ ‘Then I wouldn’t have been able to sleep in,’ Death yawned”. With the last statement, Death tackles Duck’s problem with humor. During their journey, Death seems to prepare Duck for

death in the sense of trying to take away some of the fears she has towards dying and what is happening after. Therefore, I would argue, Death is presented as Duck's last companion and later in the story plays the role of an undertaker. In the third doublespread, Death informs Duck that he does not have any power over life, but that "the coughs and colds and all the other things that happen to you ducks" are responsible for their deaths. Duck gets annoyed when Death admits that he does not know what happens to ducks after death, but is relieved when Death tells her "When you're dead, the pond will be gone, too – at least for you." because for her that means "[she] won't have to mourn over it". Right before Duck dies, she asks Death to warm her and the picture on the recto shows Duck and Death holding hands. Duck has accepted her fate and finds comfort in the proximity of Death. Whether we perceive them as friends, lovers or simply allies, Duck and Death are metaphors for life and death. They are opposites and yet belong to the same principle, namely the eternal cycle of life and death.

Besides Duck and Death, there are several other elements that are worth analyzing. First, I would like to turn to the tulip, a symbol that leaves room for multiple interpretations. I should mention beforehand that my interpretation of the tulip might not be consistent with Clement (5), who describes the "exotic black tulip" as "an emblem of farewell to someone dearly loved". I would dare to suggest the color of the tulip is deep red instead of black. Even though the red color of the tulip in the first doublespread is very dark and almost black, it appears slightly brighter in the subsequent illustrations. According to my perception, however, even in the picture on the first opening the tulip is dark red and not black, which is important for my interpretation as black and red evoke very distinct associations. In my analysis of the deep red tulip I will consider flower symbolism as well as color associations and conclude that the meaning of the tulip changes in the course of the story. There is no mention of the tulip in the verbal narrative; it only exists in the images. Interestingly, it disappears in the fourth doublespread and only reappears in the illustration of the death scene. It is generally known that colors convey specific associations of ideas and may evoke feelings in the viewer. The meaning of a particular color varies depending on the context. In visual art and in literature, red is frequently used as a symbol of love, vitality, passion, blood, danger or power (Nodelman 60 ff.,

141; "Rot"; Runk 146). A flower is a literary symbol for transience, due to its sudden blooming and fading, and for love ("Blume"). With regards to tulips, cut ones are well known for wilting very quickly and a red tulip signifies a "declaration of love" (Greenaway "Tulip, Red"). On the basis of all these meanings, various interpretations are possible. In the course of my analysis, I decided on the following: At the very first opening Death is depicted hiding the deep red tulip behind his back. Only on the recto before the tulip disappears from the images, does Death hold the tulip in front when Duck is looking away. It seems as if Duck never catches sight of the tulip. I would suggest that at the beginning of the story the red tulip symbolizes the power of Death over all living beings. Power, because transience is in his hands, both literally and figuratively. Death could be hiding the tulip and thus his power over Duck in order not to scare her off. The red tulip could be interpreted as a warning at the beginning of the picturebook and a symbol for the actual occurrence of the predicted danger, dying, at the second appearance. It is on the fourth doublespread, where Duck seems to overcome her fears towards Death, that the tulip is no longer present in the drawing. On the recto of the twelfth doublespread, the red tulip is suddenly there again, lying parallel to the deceased duck. In my view, the meaning of the deep red tulip changes from a symbol of transience into a symbol of love, esteem and grief the moment Death puts it on top of Duck's dead body. This is probably because Death and Duck have become friends and also because flowers are always part of funeral rituals in Western cultures.

Another interesting depiction is a flying, pitch-black raven. Just as with the tulip, there is no mention of the raven in the verbal representation. In literature, a raven is frequently used as a symbol for wisdom, death, evil, sin, and the demonic. In the bible in the story of Noah and his arc, for instance, a raven is sent out by Noah to find land, but does not fulfill its duties ("Rabe"). Another example is Edgar Allan Poe's choice of a raven as the bearer of ill news in his *The Raven* (1884). In *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, the raven is portrayed on the recto, and it seems as if it has flown over Duck and Death, who are depicted lower on the verso. The importance of the raven is stressed by the fact that it is the only element depicted on the recto, and that it is placed on the top half of the page. Moreover, it is a black bird on a contrasting background in ecru and according to Kress and van Leeuwen (*Reading Images* 74), "areas of high tonal

contrast [...] have high salience". Apart from the color black, the open beak of the raven adds some drama to the picture, since it seems as if it is making an announcement. It is known that animals, especially birds, feel danger in advance and react with making a deafening noise. On turning the page, we learn that it is the end of summer and Duck's approaching death that the raven has announced. This combination of the open beak, the color black, which is generally associated with death, and the sharp contrast between the ecru background and the pitch-black raven, generates tension.

I now turn to the meaning of the river, which Clement (7) calls "Erlbruch's great river into the unknown". The river in *Duck, Death and the Tulip* is not just any river but, according to the text, "the great river". I find it very interesting that Wolf Erlbruch has the corpse of the Duck carried away by the flow of a river, since in Greek mythology it is also a river that separates the world of the dead from the world of the living ("River"). A river signifies a threshold and, according to Homer, once in the river there is no longer the possibility of turning back ("Fluss"). It is unknown where the river ends and this uncertainty about what comes after death is further underlined by its color, blue, which symbolizes melancholia, death, mystery, transcendence and soul ("Blau"). The question of what comes after death is not only present in the visual representation of the river at the end of the picturebook, but has already been introduced earlier in the verbal narrative:

'Some ducks say you become an angel and sit on a cloud, looking over the earth.'
'Quite possibly.' Death rose to his feet. 'You have the wings already.'
'Some ducks say that deep in the earth there's a place where you'll be roasted if you haven't been good.'
'You ducks come up with some amazing stories, but who knows?'
'So you don't know, either,' Duck snapped. Death just looked at her.

Returning to the final part of the picturebook, Death appears powerless in the face of the mighty river. The small Death, alone and watching Duck floating away, has fulfilled his duty and his presence does not seem to be as relevant any more as before. This is emphasized by his size or rather the whole composition in the last opening. While the great river covers almost the complete doublespread, Death is shown from a distance and positioned on the margin of the verso. After the death of his friend Duck, his individual character seems to have lost some of its importance as "[s]howing people from a distance

(in a 'long shot') can also decrease their individuality and make them more into types" (Kress and van Leeuwen, *Handbook* 96).

The fundamental idea of the picturebook that death is a constant companion in life is summed up by the image of the back endpaper, which shows Death surrounded by a fox pursuing a hare (see fig. 3). The ending of one story is at the same time the beginning of another one.

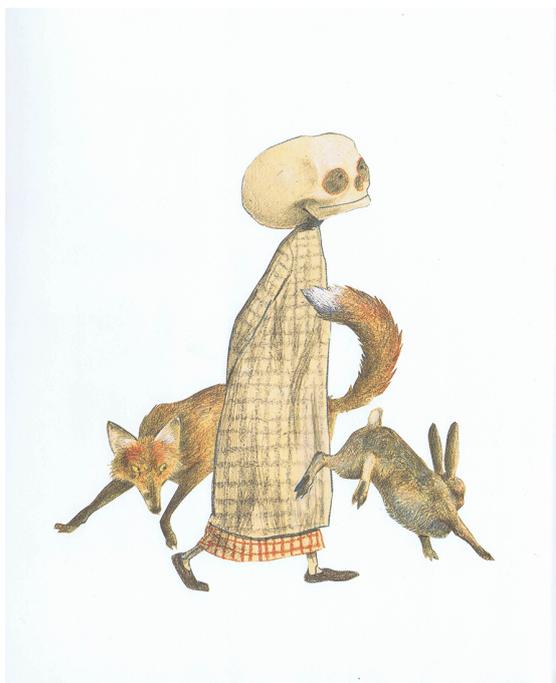


Fig. 3 *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, back endpaper.

As stated in section 2.2.2., in the context of Clement's (2013) investigation, Wolf Erlbruch presents death as an integral part of the natural cycle of life. Using the strategy of personification, the author and illustrator of *Duck, Death and the Tulip* has managed to present death as a figure we no longer need to fear.

3.2.2. Euphemisms (or "... until the day she found an empty chair")

In sharp contrast to *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, which directly addresses the issue of dying and includes a personification of death, books such as *The Memory Tree* by Britta Teckentrupp (2013), *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch and Sheila McGraw (1986), and *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers (2010) discuss the issue of death and dying without explicitly stating it in the text. More specifically, the text in *The Memory Tree* states that "[f]ox closed his eyes, took a deep breath and fell asleep forever", the illustration towards the

end of the picturebook *Love You Forever* shows a grown man rocking his old mother to “sleep”, and both visual and verbal representation in *The Heart and the Bottle* tell the story of a young girl who is confronted with her grandfather’s empty chair. What these three distinctive picturebooks have in common is that they use verbal and/or visual euphemisms of death. According to the definition provided by the Oxford Dictionary of English, a euphemism is “a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh [...] when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing” (“euphemism”). The same shall apply to visual euphemisms, only they are images and not expressions. Just as “falling asleep forever” or “going to a better place” are verbal euphemisms for “dying”, a picture of an empty chair is used instead of a portrayal of a dead human body. I shall return to visual euphemisms later when I discuss the depiction of the empty chair. In this section, I will use Jeffer’s *The Heart and the Bottle* to exemplify the usage of visual and verbal euphemisms as a strategy to represent death in picturebooks.

The Heart and the Bottle is a contemporary picturebook written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers, which focuses on life, love, and loss. It tells a story about a young girl, who shares her delight about the world around her with a gentleman, likely her father or grandfather. The gentleman appears solely in the visual representation and their degree of relationship remains unmentioned. Since the gentleman is depicted with gray hair and a gray moustache, with a walking stick and a hat, all which make him appear rather old, I have decided to refer to him as her grandfather. The two of them spend their time reading books, observing stars or playing at the sea. But one day, when the girl rushes to show her grandfather a drawing, she finds that he has gone. His chair is empty. From that day, her cheerfulness turns into sadness. In order to protect her heart, she puts it into a bottle to keep it safe. This seems to work at first, however, as the girl grows older with her heart still locked away, she loses her sense of wonderment. Eventually, she meets a young girl who reminds her of herself and how she used to be. The young girl makes her realize that although the bottle is protecting her heart from being hurt again, it is also holding her back and keeping her from experiencing the joy the world has to offer. With the help of the girl she is then able to release her trapped heart and the now grown woman takes her grandfather’s place in what used to be his chair. The book ends

poetically with the two lines “[a]nd the chair wasn’t so empty anymore. But the bottle was”.

Like many picturebooks, *The Heart and the Bottle* is available in hardcover and in paperback. What is special about this picturebook, is that the inside cover of the hardcover version and the picturebook jacket differ in their design. While the inside cover consists of a collage of images repeated inside the book in its penultimate spread, the book jacket contains the author’s name, the title and a unique picture (see *Appendix* p. 102 f.). Since the paperback cover comes in the same design as the hardcover’s jacket, I will solely analyze the hardcover version. Nevertheless, I am aware of the fact that “we [tend to] respond differently to the same story in different formats; what might seem forbidden and respectable in hardcover often seems disposable and unthreatening in soft” (Nodelman 44).

The eye-catching, bright yellow jacket creates a cheerful atmosphere, which on the one hand conflicts with the theme of death, but on the other is consistent with the story’s happy ending. The front of the book jacket shows a little girl touching an oversized glass bottle, which encloses a human heart. Due to its size, its centered position, and its high-gloss varnished surface printed on mat paper, the bottle is the most salient element on the front cover. Its smooth and shiny coating is imitating glass and might be interpreted as a reference to its fragility or, in a metaphorical sense, to the fragility of human life. It seems as if the girl is reaching for the heart in the bottle, but is being kept back by the solid glass wall and by her own shadow. Due to the varnish layer, access to the trapped heart is also denied to the potential reader. Firstly, the glossy surface of the bottle reflects the light and arouses a sensation of distance (see Nodelman 47 f.). Secondly, the lacquered surface of the bottle feels cooler compared to the mat surface of the remaining book jacket, which is very soft and pleasing to touch. By way of concluding what has already been said, a transparent substance is partially coated to a mat paper resulting in a visual and tactile contrast to the rougher textured surface, which invites the viewer’s touch.

Since the bottle is depicted much smaller inside the book, one can assume that its large depiction on the front cover has been chosen deliberately, and hence, is meaningful. The following discussion dealing with the bottle’s size and shape

in the book jacket illustration is based on Molly Bang's work *Picture This: How Pictures Work* (70 ff.). If we equate the size of the individual elements with their power, it seems very reasonable to me that the smallest element, the heart, is protected by the largest element, which is the bottle. Even though the bottle appears powerful, it does not seem threatening next to the little girl. This could be explained by the fact that it is an inanimate object and that it has a rounded shape, which, according to Bang, elicits associations of security and comfort on the part of the viewer. Moreover, a bottle may also take on a symbolic meaning of salvation ("bottle"). The bottle helps the girl to protect her heart from being hurt again. Nevertheless, the massiveness of the bottle also points to the girl's hopeless condition. The obstacle is clearly too great for her and without any outside help she cannot set her heart free again. In my view, this picture suggests what young children might feel after the death of a loved one: small, alone, helpless, and at the mercy of fate and their circumstances.

On the back of the book jacket (see *Appendix* p. 103), we see a man walking towards the upper left corner with his back turned on the little girl. He is walking out of her life and we can only assume where he is going. A 2010 study by Nancy Malcom about spiritual afterlife and heaven in selected picturebooks documents that the majority of picturebook illustrations refer to heaven as a place up in the sky (60 f.). This leads me to conclude that the direction of the grandfather's movement on the back cover indicates that he is about to enter heaven. Even though the book jacket includes several visual metaphors of death and loss, such as a trapped heart, dark shadows of death and a man walking away from the girl towards heaven, I maintain that neither the cover illustrations nor the title, *The Heart and the Bottle*, refer to the theme of death. This fits well with the verbal and the visual representation inside the book, since neither of them directly addresses the gentleman's death.

As mentioned, the design of the book jacket is different from that of the inside cover. Interestingly, the front and the back inside covers (see *Appendix* p. 104) contain a collage of different images taken from a thought bubble in the penultimate doublespread, which may be considered a turning point as the young woman finds her pleasure in life again. An analogy can be drawn between the book's physical appearance and the storyline. Just as the girl has to get rid of the bottle and free her heart to realize and appreciate the beauty of

life, we readers have to remove the book's protective jacket to discover what the authorial narrator calls "all the curiosities of the world".

In picturebooks, front and back endpapers are frequently alike, "[h]owever, they can be used to emphasize the changes that have taken place within the book" (249). Such a change is apparent in the endpapers of *The Heart and the Bottle*, which are not identical. The front endpaper consists of thirty-five sketches, which are seven different and repeating images arranged in five horizontal lines. The actions, the gentleman, and the young girl who perform in these small pictures are not included in the storyline. This might suggest that the two have experienced much more together than what is mentioned inside the picturebook, and additionally emphasizes their close relationship from the outset. In contrast to the front endpaper, the back endpaper shows a labeled drawing of the anatomy of the human heart with the posterior view on the verso and the anterior view on the recto. While the first part of the story puts emphasis on the protagonists' shared activities and their relationship, the second part deals with the girl's trapped heart. It may therefore be recapitulated that the design of the endpapers mirrors the change of focus in this picturebook's storyline.

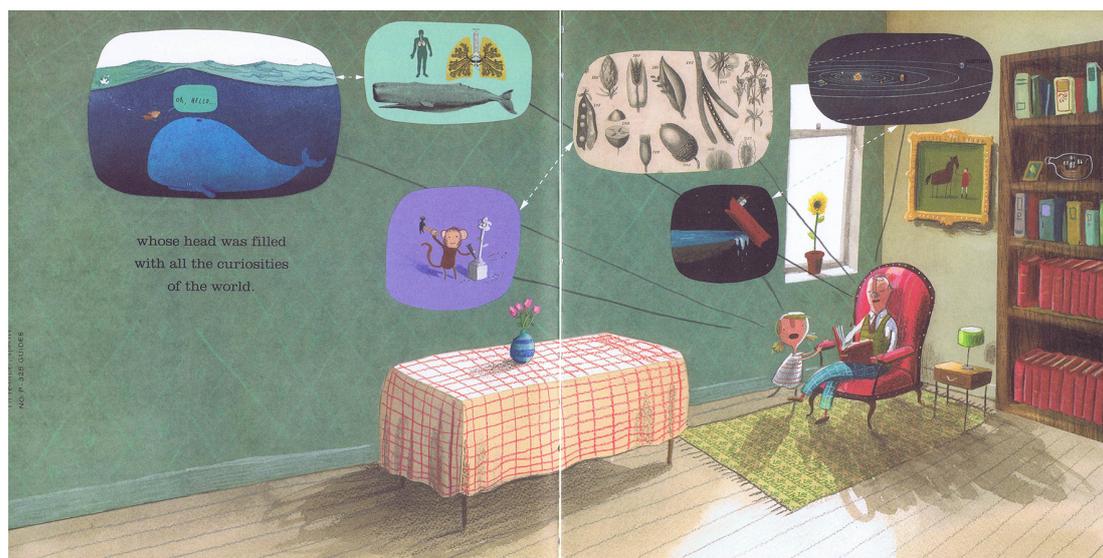


Fig. 4 *The Heart and the Bottle*, 2nd doublespread.

The story begins with the words, "[o]nce there was a girl, much like any other," and depicts the girl and her grandfather in the woods. The fact that the sentence is not completed leads to the expectation that it will be continued on

the subsequent opening, which adds to what Barbara Bader defines as “the drama of the turning of the page” (1). Nikolajeva and Scott use a different term, namely “pageturner”, which is similar to a cliffhanger in a novel and according to them “encourages the viewer to turn the page and find out what happens next” (152). On turning the page, the illustration (see fig. 4) shows the girl and her grandfather at a different location, specifically in the living room of a house, and the words “whose head was filled with all the curiosities of the world” finish off the sentence of the preceding doublespread.

In the portrayed scene in figure 4, the grandfather is depicted reading a book to his granddaughter. Here Jeffers cleverly introduces us to the protagonists’ mind through visualizing their thoughts, connecting them with lines to the character’s concerned, and using arrows to juxtapose the child’s fantastic ideas to the adult’s “realistic” ones. To be more precise, the protagonists’ thoughts are represented via visual thought bubbles, and hence, small pictures within the picture. Additionally, one of the thought bubbles, which portrays the girl approaching a whale in the ocean, contains a speech bubble saying “Oh, HELLO...” Apart from the different layers, which are a speech bubble inside a thought bubble inside a picture, it is worth pointing out that there is a verbal representation besides the standard text. A text that is embedded in an image, “creating a subtext within the pictures that competes with the standard text”, is termed “intraiconic text” (Nikolajeva and Scott 73). According to Nikolajeva and Scott, this technique of placing words inside pictures is an inherent characteristic of advertisements and its usage in contemporary picturebooks mirrors the spirit of the time. This is best explained in their own words:

In these books, the words’ migration into the visual pictorial setting redefines the experience of the environment, reflecting characteristics of the modern world by including the verbal cacophony (oral and visual) of today’s life, the constant intrusion of advertising into our senses, and the clutter and distraction of our experiential relationship with the world around us. (74 f.)

I would propose that the role of visual thought bubbles, as found in the second doublespread, is more or less analogous to the role of intraiconic texts. The thought bubbles are embedded in a larger image and somehow compete with the image. I would therefore refer to them as intraiconic images or pictures.

After this short terminological digression, I would like to continue with the content analysis of the second doublespread. While the grandfather seems to be reading or looking at pictures about the respiratory system of humans and marine mammals, plants, and about the solar system, his young granddaughter is listening to his stories and imagining greeting a whale in the ocean, a monkey carving a flower in stone, and a giant vessel tipping over at the margin of the world into outer space. The visual representation of this doublespread captures the girl's infinite imagination and provides a brief glimpse inside her mind. With little words and illustrations that cover the whole doublespread, also the subsequent openings stress the natural curiosity of the child and her joy in the discovery of her own world and the one that is yet unknown to her.

The sixth doublespread is wordless and presents the girl without her grandfather's company for the first time. She is depicted twice; once on the verso, drawing a picture with crayons, and a second time on the recto, heading towards the right edge of the page with the finished drawing in her hand. The fact that the same character is depicted twice, while drawing and with the final product, implies a temporal relationship between the verso and the recto. The facial expression of the girl on the recto suggests that she is proud of her artwork and enthusiastic to show it to her grandfather. The image on the recto clearly functions as a pageturner, as one expects the grandfather to receive the girl's drawing on the following page and may get excited about his reaction. However, the next opening proves to be a disappointment for the protagonist and probably also the reader (see fig. 5).

Still holding the drawing in her hands, the girl stares at an empty chair and realizes that her grandfather has disappeared. The words "... *until* the day she found an empty chair" (*emphasis added*) imply that nothing will be the same for her after this day. While the blank white background of the verso further accentuates the grandfather's absence and the resulting emptiness, the contrasting dark tone of the recto stresses the seriousness of the situation. In the recto, the girl is still positioned in front of the empty chair with her gaze directed towards it; with the only differences that she is seated and that it is already nighttime. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this change from a daylight setting on the verso to a nighttime setting on the recto, is that much time has passed and that the girl has been waiting all day long for her beloved

grandfather to return. At this point of the story the reader might already suspect that the girl's grandfather is never going to come back and that the ominous empty chair might be a euphemism for his death. The empty chair is present in the verbal and in the visual representation. It is, thus, a case of a verbal and visual euphemism. One might argue that the depiction of the empty chair solely emphasizes the verbal euphemism on the verso of this doublespread, but as text and images are considered to be equally important in picturebooks (see section 2.2.1. Picturebook Theory), I would regard the illustration as a visual euphemism in itself.

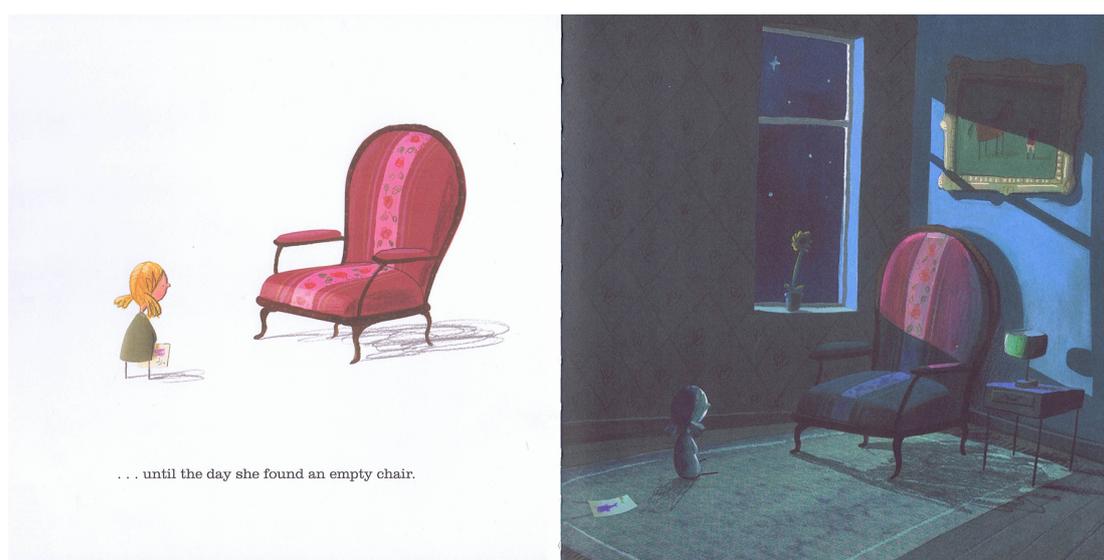


Fig. 5 *The Heart and the Bottle*, 7th doublespread.

The man's sudden disappearance remains unexplained in the rest of the picturebook. Instead, the focus is on the girl's great suffering caused by her loss, which is expressed in a metaphorical brilliance. In the following sections, I will elaborate on the human heart in the glass bottle, the absence of the girl's mouth in the visual representation, and the depicted tools used to get the heart out of the bottle, with regards to their metaphorical meaning.

Apparently, the girl is overwhelmed by the whole situation and not able to cope with all her feelings right away. As a protective mechanism, she suppresses her feelings and locks her heart away in order not to get hurt again. This is beautifully expressed by way of the glass bottle metaphor. To be more specific, the pictures on several openings show the girl carrying around a glass bottle that contains her heart, and the text on the eighth doublespread describes "the

girl thought the best thing was to put her heart in a safe place. [...] So, she put it in a bottle and hung it around her neck". The verso of the eighth opening, which is introducing the metaphor of the heart and the bottle, is with a deep red background. As illustrated in my analysis of the deep red tulip in *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, the color red is a symbol of love, pain and blood. Additionally, in this context, I associate the deep red color with the human heart, and the rich saturation of the color with the girl's intense feeling of suffering.

The girl's inner pain and her silent mourning are also emphasized by the sudden absence of her mouth in the visual representation. In the initial illustrations, the girl is depicted smiling or with an open mouth, but after her grandfather's death, both her heart and her mouth are closed, literally and figuratively. She locks away her feelings, withdraws herself from the outside and stops talking. The moment her heart is set free, the smile returns on her face, which leads me to the last metaphor of her attempt to get her heart back with the help of different tools.

One day the girl realizes that keeping her heart hidden away is not a solution and "at that moment she decide[s] to get it back out of the bottle". The pictures show the girl operating with a pair of pliers, a saw, and a hammer, but nothing works. I would propose that the meaning behind these tools and the girls' efforts is that it is very difficult to open up again after a long period of loneliness and seclusion, and that this process cannot be forced. It takes someone special that we know will not harm us, to win over a withdrawn heart. In this case it is a little girl who gently removes the heart from the bottle without damaging either of the two.

Another interesting aspect, which has already been touched upon, is coloring. I would like to stress the change of atmosphere created through the different background colors. The meaningfulness of background coloring might become particularly evident when comparing the different effects of the blank white background color with the deep red, gray, and light pink variations. To begin with, the monochrome white background of several doublespreads creates a dream-like atmosphere as there is a lack of geometric perspective and the context around the picture seems to be missing. My contention is that a lack of coloring enhances the feeling of emptiness. The deep red background has

already been discussed in this section, and I shall therefore proceed to the gray one (ninth doublespread), which is quite a contrast to the dark red color. It seems as if the intensity of the pain has decreased with the passing of time, and transformed into gray sadness and depression. Lastly, the pink background (fourteenth doublespread) has a drastically different impact than the deep red one earlier in the book. I would even say it has a soothing and peaceful effect on the viewer, which is probably underlined by the fact that the girl is finally getting her heart back in this picture. It should also be noted that in this picture with the pink background both characters wear green dresses, which is a symbol for hope (“green”). Clearly, color associations are highly influenced by the context and vice versa.

Turning our attention from the selection of colors to the main character, we notice that the little girl is growing up in the course of the visual narrative. In the pictures on the eighth spread she is still the little girl she was at the beginning of the story, however, on the immediate subsequent opening, she is much taller, her hair has grown, and she looks like a young woman. This creates the impression that years have passed. With respect to the preceding opening, the background color of the verso has transformed from an emotionally charged red to a depressive gray. Furthermore, the thought bubble, which contains a picture of her grandfather’s empty chair, reveals that the girl is still thinking about the deceased. The words that accompany this picture are, “[s]he was no longer filled with all the curiosities of the world and didn’t take much notice of anything...” and the recto of this spread, showing the girl eating and doing her dishes, emphasizes verbally “how heavy and awkward the bottle had become”. From the visual and the verbal representation of the 7th and 8th doublespread it follows that it takes a long time to get over the death of a loved one.

At the end of the story, the chair is not empty anymore as the young woman takes her grandfather’s place, implying the natural cycle of life and death. A framed photograph of the dead grandfather on the table next to the chair, which is absent in all the other pictures, signals that although the protagonist is moving on, her grandfather will never be forgotten.

In summing up, this picturebook covers a subject people of all ages have trouble dealing with; it is personal loss and separation. The underlying idea of

this death-related picturebook seems to be to take comfort in the things we love and not to lock away our hearts after encountering any kind of trauma.

3.2.3. Anthropomorphism

Without wishing to repeat what has already been stated about anthropomorphism in connection with personification, I would nevertheless like to make an additional comment upon the depiction of animals and inanimate objects in children's literature, picturebooks in particular. Anthropomorphic animals or "humans who look like animals", as Nodelman defines them, are a common feature in children's books (113). Nikolajeva and Scott explain the frequent occurrence of humanized animals in picturebooks as follows:

[Animal characters'] popularity in children's literature suggests that little children, from an adult's perspective, have much in common with small animals, and that their behavior is closer to that of animals than of civilized human beings. [...] To represent main characters as animals or [inanimate objects] is a way to create distance, to adjust the plot to what the author believes is familiar for child readers. This may often be a stereotypical and obsolete attitude toward children. (92)

The clichéd belief that many picturebooks contain animal characters, *because* children love animals is also addressed by Nodelman, who further suggests that children's interest in anthropomorphic animals probably stems from their regularity in books and not vice versa (35). Bearing in mind the popularity of humanized animals and objects in children's literature, it is not surprising that anthropomorphism is also found in several death-themed picturebooks. While Susan Varley's *Badger's Parting Gifts* (1984) and Debi Gliori and Alan Durant's *Always and Forever* (2003) describe the loss of a member of a family-like animal community, Sebastian Loth's *Remembering Crystal* (2010) is about the sudden death of an animal friend, and Kevin Sheehan and Rob Dunlavey's *The Dandelion's Tale* (2014) includes a dying anthropomorphic plant, to only name a few examples. For my discussion of anthropomorphic animals and plants in picturebooks about death, I have chosen the latter two books, *Remembering Crystal* and *The Dandelion's Tale*. The examination of these two picturebooks shall demonstrate that there are different gradations of anthropomorphism depending whether animal/plant or human qualities prevail.

3.2.3.1. Animals

Remembering Crystal (2010) by the German author and illustrator Sebastian Loth was first published under the original German title *Jolante sucht Crisula: Die Geschichte einer unendlichen Freundschaft* in 2009. Unlike the German title, which points to the everlasting nature of friendship, the word “remembering” in the English version already includes a reference to the picturebook’s theme of loss. Regarding the main characters, their names have also been translated into English, so that the German Jolante and Crisula turned into Zelda and Crystal. The two protagonists are anthropomorphic animals and their story is about generational friendship, coping with death, and remembering. With relatively little text and simple, yet expressive, illustrations, Sebastian Loth presents the experience of loss in a way even the youngest readers may understand. I will first provide a brief plot summary and next elaborate on the assumed target audience and the verbal and the visual representation of the humanized animal characters Zelda and Crystal.

Remembering Crystal depicts a friendship between Zelda the goose and Crystal the aging turtle. Despite their age difference, they are best friends and spend much time together. They enjoy reading books, swimming together, taking trips, and discussing anything and everything, including their anxieties and hopes for the future. One day, when Zelda comes to play, Crystal is gone. She is not in her garden as usual. The other geese gently try to explain to Zelda that Crystal was very old and died, but Zelda refuses to believe this. She is convinced that her dear friend is hiding and sets out to find her. During her search, good memories of Crystal come up, which make Zelda’s trip a touching tribute to her friend, the old turtle. At the very end, the goose accepts her friend’s death, treasures their friendship and realizes that Crystal the turtle will always be with her in her memories and her heart.

Loth’s picturebook appears as a hardcover edition in a small landscape format. Due to its very small size, the first impression might be that it is targeted at a fairly young audience, as we expect small picturebooks to be “the simplest in content and in style” (Nodelman 44). Also the illustration of the two animals on the front cover (see *Appendix* p. 105) seems to strengthen our initial assumption regarding the book’s primary target audience. To elaborate on this,

the front picture shows a turtle and a goose asleep, sharing a blanket. The goose uses the tortoise shell as a cushion, which evokes a loving embrace. Altogether, the cuddling, the sharing of the blanket, and what seems to be a relaxed and peaceful sleep, remind me of the innocence of childhood. On the basis of the book's outer appearance, I would expect it to contain a story suitable for the youngest, i.e. toddlers. Although after reviewing the content I am convinced that the story of Zelda and Crystal can be relevant and meaningful for people all ages who experience loss, I still believe it is intended for a fairly young audience for reasons other than the ones mentioned above, which I shall discuss in the following.

First, due to the illustrations' simplicity and the lack of details, the visual narrative appears child-oriented, as simplification is a characteristic feature of children's own drawings. To be more precise, the illustrations in this picturebook are simple in the sense that they have no shadowing and no depth. Instead of a detailed, naturalistic representation of a goose and a turtle, we get a rather abstract and conventional depiction with broad black contours. Kress and van Leeuwen would probably describe Loth's portrayal as "a conventional visual arrangement, based on a visual code" (*Reading Images* 25). This basically means if the viewers are familiar with real living turtles and geese, they presumably recognize these abstractions of the animals as such. To illustrate what I have just said, a picture of the main characters taken from the book is presented below.

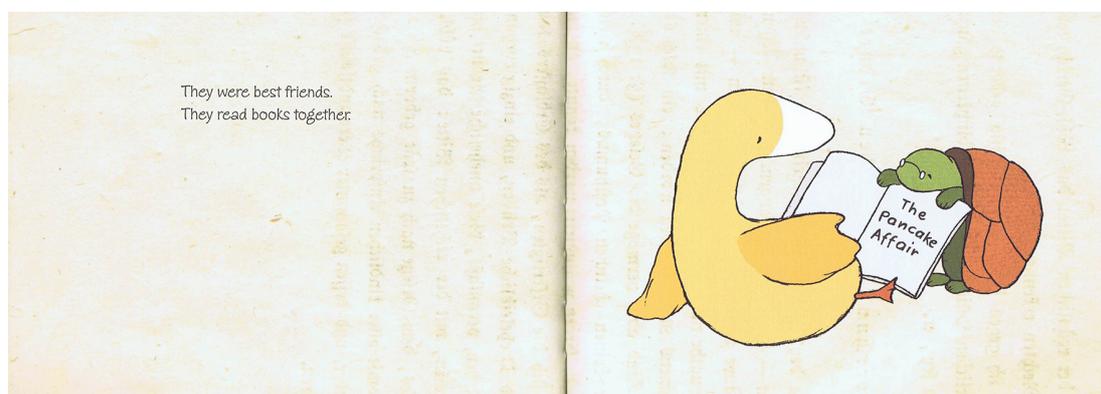


Fig. 6 *Remembering Crystal*, 3rd doublespread.

Second, the simple and repetitive style of writing might be especially appealing to children. The verbal narrative consists of short and simple sentences, such as, “They were best friends. They read books together.” (third doublespread) Furthermore, the text is redundant on a syntactic, lexical, and grammatical level. Redundancy particularly applies to the verbal narrative from doublespread 19 to 21, when the third-person narrator reports about Zelda’s memories of her friend Crystal: “She remembered how Crystal had taught her about music. She remembered how Crystal had taught her about art. She remembered how Crystal had taught her about the world.” It seems as if the author is trying to make it as simple, repetitive, and short as possible so that the implied child reader has time to think and appreciate while reading. Another aspect of interest is the use of baby talk, as in “[t]hat night Zelda curled up in her *blankie*” (*emphasis added*) on the 25th opening. The usage of “blankie” instead of “blanket” might seem irrelevant to some; however, it contributes to the impression that an adult is telling the story to a very young child.

Thirdly, the picturebook contains typical childhood fears. According to Eleonora Gullone’s extensive review of the 20th century’s fear research, common early childhood fears include darkness and surreal creatures (431 ff.). The picture on the seventh doublespread shows Zelda the goose surrounded by pitch-black darkness and unidentifiable red creatures (see fig. 7).

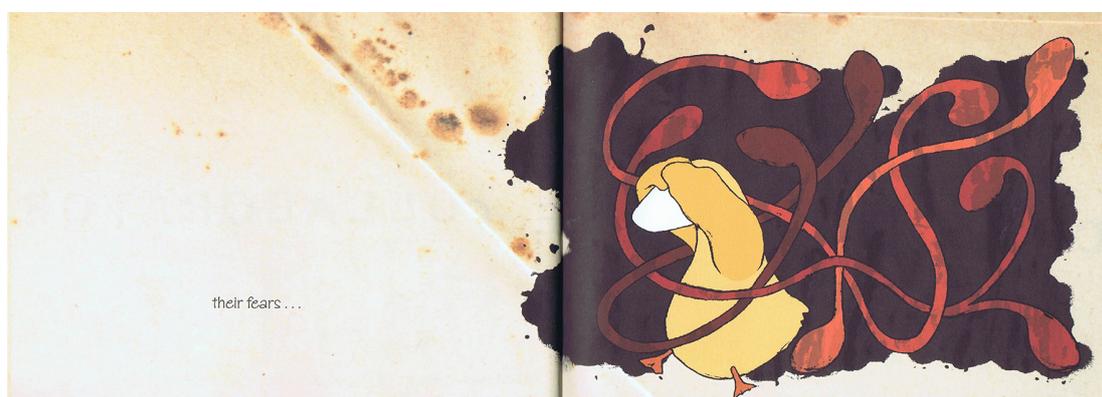


Fig. 7 *Remembering Crystal*, 7th doublespread.

The words, “And they talked about everything: life ...” on the preceding opening and the continuation of the sentence, “their fears ...”, on the verso of the seventh doublespread inform us that the picture on the recto represents Zelda’s anxieties. Although the creatures are depicted without eyes and a mouth, their

forms resemble snakes, which evokes the association of animate beings. Also, the color red seems to signify danger and hence, these snake-like shapes appear menacing. The snake is, inter alia, a symbol of the evil and in Greek and Roman tradition, snakes were associated with disaster, bad omen and death (“Schlange”). The absence of faces and the round forms in the image of the figure above, in turn, make them less threatening, which, in my view, again indicates that it is created for younger readership. I would also suggest that this rather abstract illustration leaves room for the imagination of the viewer.

One last aspect I would like to consider with respect to the assumed target group is Zelda’s confusion over Crystal’s death. Zelda’s reaction when she learns about her friend’s passing away might be familiar to anyone who has ever delivered such a notice to a child:

‘Crystal was very old,’ the other geese tried to explain.
‘She had a long and happy life.
Now it was time for her to die.’ (10th doublespread)

‘No!’ said Zelda.
‘Where are you hiding, Crystal?’ (11th doublespread)

According to the verbal representation, Zelda the goose either lacks an understanding of death and dying or is not ready to accept the sad truth, yet. The depiction on the eleventh doublespread, in which the protagonist expresses her doubt of Crystal’s death in the verbal text, shows Zelda with her arms crossed and her head turned towards the right, as if she is trying to avert her eyes from the harsh reality by turning away from the other geese, which are depicted on the preceding recto. It is worth noting that one of the red snake-like creatures, which have already been discussed in connection with childhood fears, is also present in the picture and might symbolize the goose’s deepest fears of death. In my interpretation, this illustration of Zelda’s body’s posture and the imaginary creature in the background signifies that the protagonist is scared that what the other geese said might be true. She ignores the geese’s words in the verbal representation and avoids facing the ominous creature in the visual text, which indicates that she tries to temporarily escape the situation.

Moving beyond the verbal and the visual style of narration, childhood fears and Zelda’s doubts regarding the death news, I would like to concentrate on the anthropomorphic characters and their human as well as animalistic features.

The two animal characters show features of both humans and animals. While the goose is depicted riding a scooter, reading a book, producing human language, showing emotions and more, she is also able to fly and most importantly, she is depicted without clothes. The turtle seems to have an idea of music and art and also engages in human-like activities, however, she lives in the garden between lettuce heads. Without the pictures and the initial statement about Zelda being a goose, we would not know that the story was about animal characters. Including anthropomorphic animals “gives the creator the freedom to eliminate or circumvent several important issues that are otherwise essential in our assessment of character: those of age, gender, and social status” (qtd. in Nikolajeva and Scott 92). Regarding the protagonist’s gender and age, the text reveals that both are females and that Crystal is of old age. They are described as “best friends”, which is not very specific as people are also friends with their pets and family members. According to the potential readers’ needs, they may interpret it as a story about the impact of losing a friend, pet or grandparent.

Even picturebooks that deal with serious issues such as death may have humorous moments. A case in point is *Remembering Crystal*, where the iconotext of the fifteenth doublespread draws humor from its depiction. At this point of the story, Zelda is denying her friend’s death and performing a search. After looking for him “on the highest mountain” in the picture on the former spread, she is now, according to the verbal narrative on the fifteenth spread, searching “in the deepest ocean”. However, the picture shows something else, which makes the whole situation comical; namely Zelda sticking her head inside a wooden barrel. I would propose that the word-picture relationship here is not only humorous due to its ironic meaning, but also indirectly reveals something about the picturebook’s character’s personality trait. In other words, this representation tells us about Zelda’s rich imagination and probably also about her young age.

In the last two openings the goose accepts her friend’s death and realizes “that she would always remember Crystal, and that Crystal would always be with her wherever she went, right there in her heart” (ultimate doublespread). What we get here is a counterpoint between verbal and visual representation. While the text makes it clear that Crystal has died and will only be present in Zelda’s heart and memories, the pictures show the goose and the turtle’s reunion. An adult

reader will likely immediately understand that these depictions represent Zelda's mind, but children might feel confirmed in their belief of the temporary nature of death (see 2.1.2.1. *Children's Understanding of Death*). They possibly interpret these illustrations as "real" reunions.

A last remark concerns implicit references to aging and transience. To put it more precisely, two elements in the illustrations and the background design refer to the transitory and ephemeral nature of objects. To begin with, the first opening shows Zelda with a red flower in her beak. The flower is losing its red petals, which are carried away by the wind. As already mentioned in my analysis of the deep red tulip in *Duck, Death and the Tulip* (see 3.2.1. *Personification*), a cut flower symbolizes transience. Another aspect that creates an atmosphere of evanescence is the arrival of autumn, which is indicated by brown leaves on the doublespreads nine and ten in this book. The fallen leaves appear in the openings when Zelda notices her friend's absence. Additionally, the orange endpapers are decorated with leaves. I would thus suggest, that these autumn leaves have been used purposefully and are a motif of transience. Lastly, marked, creased, and aged paper serves as the background for Loth's simple and poignant images (see fig. 7). In fact, it is an imprint of yellowed paper, which gives the pages an old-looking tone. This might remind us that everyone and everything, even this book, has an expiration date. Therefore, the theme of aging and transience is not only present in the storyline, but also in the background design and in individual elements of the illustrations. This shows once again that picturebooks are complex art works that create meaning on several different levels.

Recapitulating, in *Remembering Crystal*, Sebastian Loth addresses the complex issue of death with great sensitivity and delivers a positive image for remembering someone at the end of the story. His plainness and simplicity of style result in a poignant picturebook that broaches the experience of loss in a way that is mostly comprehensible even for very young readers.

3.2.3.2. Plants

The Dandelion's Tale by Kevin Sheehan and Rob Dunlavey tells the story of an anthropomorphic dandelion, who is wilting and wishes to be remembered after her death. It is not only a story about the fleetingness of life, but also about

providing succor for someone dying, sharing one's memory through words and the idea of a continuation of life in our descendants.

One day, Sparrow hears a dandelion crying and after asking the almost withered flower for the reason of her sadness, she explains her worry of not being remembered after she has lost her last ten seedpods and stops existing. Sparrow feels sorry for the old dandelion, tries to comfort her and when she tells him her happy memories, he writes them in the mud for everyone to read. That night there is a heavy storm and on the following morning, when Sparrow checks on his friend, the worst has happened; the dandelion has not survived the stormy weather. Sparrow is sad about the loss and even miserable when he finds out that the summer storm has not only killed the dandelion, but also washed away her story. Eventually, Sparrow finds a new way to help the dandelion be remembered after her death as he notices that he can recall her story without the text. Some time later, when he encounters the dandelion's progeny, ten baby dandelions, he tells them her story so that "[s]he would always live on in the bright yellow petals of her children, and their children, and so on until the end of time" (ultimate doublespread).

Since the characters in this picturebook are capable of human language and have an awareness of the past, the present and the future, they are undoubtedly anthropomorphic; nevertheless, they contain more animal and plant qualities than human ones. First of all, both protagonists are depicted in their natural habitat of wild fauna and flora. Moreover, they neither wear clothes nor any other human accessories, as is frequently seen in many picturebooks containing humanized characters. While the dandelion cannot move as she is rooted, or, according to the words on the fourth doublespread, "planted in the ground and ha[s] no arms or legs", which is a typical property of plants, the sparrow, flies around freely, rests on the branch of a tree, spends the night in his nest, and twitters. None of this seems extraordinary for birds and plants. What is it then that makes these picturebook protagonists anthropomorphic? First and foremost, Sparrow's interaction with the dandelion is beyond everything we would expect from an animal or a plant. It is not the chirping bird, but the combination of a bird conversing with a talking plant that makes the subjects appear humanized. Not only do they speak a common language, but also, Sparrow is able to transcribe his friend's memories in the soil. Their

communication and the bird's transcription of his friend's words are evocative of human speech and writing. It is noteworthy mentioning that the picturebook characters distinguish themselves from people by referring to human literacy at this point of the story:

'Wait! I have an idea!' Sparrow exclaimed, hopping from foot to foot. 'I could write your story in that patch of dirt by the tree.' 'It would be just like a book!' the dandelion said with glee. 'I once saw a young mother read to her little boy there. The story was wonderful, and I was so envious that people have something as marvelous as books.' (sixth doublespread)

The text above and the illustration on the subsequent spread, which shows Sparrow scratching a pattern of lines and dots in the dirt, different from letter or words humans would use, might give the impression that the picturebook characters' intention is to imitate the behavior of human beings. Besides, this is an instance where words and images are filling each other's gaps. While the text tells us that the bird is writing down the dandelion's tale, the images illustrate that Sparrow is using some kind of bird or animal language. Although the bird is not using any human writing system, I would propose that the pure fact that he is transcribing his friend's words makes him anthropomorphic after all. Besides the portrayed written and spoken language, the two characters are able to articulate their feelings, demonstrate problem-solving skills and seem to possess a concept of time and a long-term memory. Sparrow feels sympathy for the wilting dandelion, comforts her and somehow provides terminal care.

Interestingly, the first letter of "Sparrow" is always capitalized in the text, whereas "the dandelion" is in lower case and with an article. Only on the twelfth doublespread, when Sparrow finds his friend dead and says "'Poor, poor Dandelion. I will miss you [...]'", does the protagonist appear capitalized. This difference of upper and lower case spelling seems to influence the degree of anthropomorphism. The capitalized "Sparrow" is an indication of the animal species and at the same time functions as a proper name. The dandelion, however, may appear predominantly as a type of plant rather than an individual being due to the lower case spelling.

Unlike the picturebook characters from *Remembering Crystal* in the preceding section, anthropomorphism is hardly noticeable in the illustrations of *The Dandelion's Tale* and the only visual indication is probably the dandelion's face (see fig. 8).

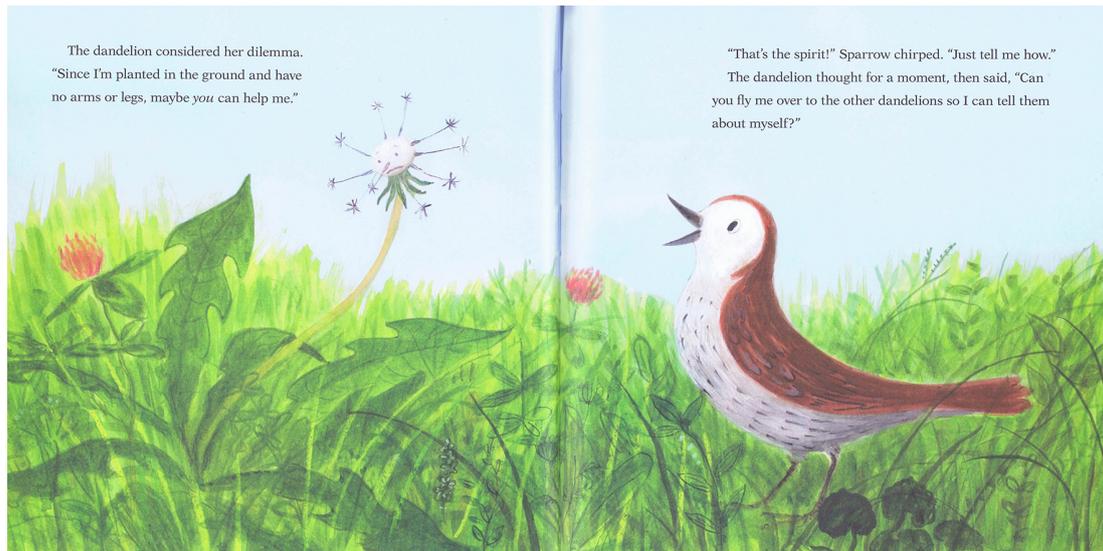


Fig. 8 *The Dandelion's Tale*, 4th doublespread.

Neither the title nor the front cover design indicates that this picturebook contains the theme of dying. Both protagonists, Sparrow and Dandelion, are depicted and the dandelion's facial expression in the picture on the front cover differs from the one in the illustrations inside the book. Whereas the flower looks sad in each of the pictures in the story, she is depicted with a smile on the front cover picture (see *Appendix* p. 106). On the one hand, we could say that the cover depiction contradicts the content of the story, however, on the other, it reflects the picturebook's prevailing positive spirit created through the choice of colors, the bright tone, the soft contours, the sunny season, and the happy ending. Throughout the book, the illustrations are kept in bright colors with a domination of greens. Bright green may be associated with life, nature, immortality, peace, joy and hope ("green"). As a result of the bright tone and the choice of coloring of the watercolor and pencil drawings a warm and cheerful atmosphere is created. To put it more precisely, the pictures with their smooth outlines and soft edges are rich in details and almost romanticize nature. Not a single cloud is in the pale blue sky and even the day before the storm, the sky is miraculously clear. The only two doublespreads that are dark and deviate from the rest are the ones representing the thunderstorm in the night. While in many picturebooks, death is linked to autumn and the onset of winter, it is a summer storm at nighttime that brings death in *The Dandelion's Tale*.

The twelfth doublespread shows the morning after the storm and the words "[t]he storm had been too powerful for the fragile little flower" informs us readers

about her death. Although the death of the dandelion is presented as a sad event, in the end, the importance of remembrance seems to outweigh grief. The picture on the twelfth doublespread shows a sad Sparrow with his eyes closed and his head bowed and the text on the recto of the following opening says, "Sparrow closed his eyes and wept. As the breeze blew gently through the trees, he said, 'I promise I will never forget you.' [...]". The rest of the story, however, the bird does not appear sad anymore. Instead, he is happy to share his friend's memories with the young dandelions. The dead dandelion lives on in the stories of her friend the sparrow, which concurs with the symbolic meaning of the bird as a wandering soul ("bird", *Symbols and Imagery*).

Visual and verbal representations of the dandelion's memories are presented on the sixth, seventh, and eighth doublespread. The flashbacks are visualized with the use of circular surfaces that are surrounded by light crystals and white space. The individual circles stand out from the rest of the illustrations as they are in different color tones. Shades of red and yellow displace green, which is the dominating color in the images throughout the picturebook. The rounded forms, the crystals, and the white space around them, and the change in tone create a dream-like atmosphere, which aligns with the circles' content that consists of the dandelion's daydreams of the good old days. The images are accompanied by verbal analepsis, as, for instance "[w]rite how much I've enjoyed hearing the laughter of children as they play in the meadow, and the fun I've had talking with the squirrels as they look for food in the morning" (seventh doublespread).

Another interesting aspect to discuss is the dandelion as the dying plant protagonist. Due to the choice of this plant type, an ambivalence of transience and immortality is created for reasons explained in the following description. In this story, the dandelion is presented as a unique flower with a limited life expectancy, who is aware of her immanent end, which is indicated by the words "a short while ago, I was strong, and the brightest yellow you've ever seen. Now I'm white and fuzzy and I've lost most of my seedpods. If the wind starts to blow, I'll lose them all and no one will know I was ever here" (fourth doublespread). The dandelion mourns over her momentariness, which is interesting, because a dandelion itself is a symbol of grief ("dandelion"; "Dandelion). However, resulting in a certain contradiction, dandelions are

commonly referred to as weeds, which means that dandelions are resilient and always grow back again. In this sense, they are almost immortal. The rapid growth of weeds is apparent in the last three spreads that portray Dandelion's descendants, which Sparrow encounters only "[a] few weeks later" (14th doublespread). Resolving this apparent ambivalence and combining transience and immortality, I would propose the following interpretation of the dying dandelion: Death is inevitable and final, however, after death we continue to live in our descendants, which in some sense makes us immortal. To conclude, this picturebook discusses death and the eternal cycle of growth, blossoming and decay.

3.2.4. Pet Loss

Pet loss seems to be a frequent theme in picturebooks about death. A possible reason might be that pets are important for children as they build up a special relationship to them. Furthermore, for many children the loss of a beloved pet is probably the first realization of the pain of death. Remarkably, four out of five contemporary picturebooks I encountered concerning the loss of a pet include the natural death of a dog: *Goodbye Mousie* (Harris and Ormerod, 2001), which is the exception and deals with the death of a mouse, *Good-bye, Sheepie* (Burleigh and Catalanotto, 2010), *Goodbye, Brecken: A Story about the Death of a Pet* (Lupton, 2013), *Sammy in the Sky* (Walsh and Wyeth, 2011) and *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* (Demas and Hoyt, 2004). Pets are often regarded as family members with whom the children spend much time playing and cuddling. Children probably enjoy the unconditional love of dogs and their frequently relegated role as protectors of the family. To put it briefly, pets, and dogs in particular, seem to be important companions for children, and hence, their death is a sad event for them. This section will focus on the verbal and visual representation of the latter in the list above, *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*.

Corinne Demas and Ard Hoyt's picturebook *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* (2004) tells a story about the death of a young girl's dog, Lulu. As Lulu ages, she has severe impairment of sight, hearing, and walking. The young girl adores her elderly dog and takes care of her with much compassion and love. One day, the dog stays in her bed and refuses to eat. The whole family knows that their loved pet is soon going to die, they look at old photographs together and the

young girl remembers their shared fun activities. The next day, after the girl returns home from school, she hears the sad news of her dog's death. She takes a look at Lulu's dead body and cries. The family honors Lulu by burying her in their backyard and later planting a cherry tree by her grave. Eventually, still remembering her old dog, the girl is ready to get a new puppy.

The front cover includes the names of the picturebook creators, the narrative title and a frameless illustration (see *Appendix* p. 107). The main subject, the dog, is placed at the center of the page, which together with the title *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, clarifies that this picturebook is about the farewell of a dog named Lulu. In the illustration, the dog is on a sidewalk and it seems as if she is either walking in front of or away from us; this is open to interpretation. I would say that she is leaving us, knowing that eventually we will have to follow. Just as she dies, one day we all have to die. Her posture, with her head turned and facing the viewer, might imply that she is bidding farewell. Apart from the word "Goodbye" in the picturebook's title, other visual aspects refer to death and dying, namely the dog's shadow, the autumn-colored, fallen leaves on the sidewalk, and the white fence. Shadows in pictures as symbols of death will be discussed in great detail in the subsequent section, as they are prominent in the images of the picturebooks discussed there. Red fallen leaves indicate that winter will follow next and for certain plants and animals the cold winter season means death. Further, the high white fence can be interpreted as a symbol for the dog's near end, as she has arrived at the border of her life and cannot evade death. For her, there is only one way left, which leads to an unknown place of salvation.

Contrary to Sebastian Loth's simple illustrations in *Remembering Crystal* that are conventionalized rather than naturalistic with their solid and bold contour lines, Ard Hoyt's drawings in *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* consist of meticulously drawn objects, which generate the illusion of three-dimensionality and depth in the two-dimensional drawings. The delicately penciled black lines, the subtle shadings, the bright tone, and the soft pastel colors promote a calming effect and provide a contrast to the narration's atmosphere of sadness and sorrow. Even though I do not want to enter a discussion about what reality is, as it is a complex and controversial issue especially in connection with art, I would

suggest that the illustrations in this picturebook are reality-oriented compared to ones that contain imaginary or invented creatures.



Fig. 9 *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, 6th doublespread.

Most illustrations in this picturebook cover a whole page or opening. Only occasionally are the pictures framed by blank white space. The frameless images, which are frequently close-ups, enable us viewers to immerse into the picturebook characters' world. The sixth doublespread (see fig. 9) is one instance where the visual representation imparts an immediate intimacy between the viewer and the portrayed figures. In the picture, we see the mother and her daughter from behind, looking at old photographs of their dog as a little puppy, and their elderly dog sleeping in her dog bed in front of them. This perspective creates the illusion that we as viewers are in the same room with the protagonists. We can witness everything from very close. Even without reading the text, we can guess that the puppy in the black and white photograph and the full-grown dog in front of the fireplace are one and the same dog, and that the two people are probably talking about Lulu as a newborn puppy. From reading the verbal text, we learn that the poor condition of the old bitch reminds the girl's mother how vulnerable and weak she used to be when they got her: "One day, Lulu couldn't stand up. She slept all day. She didn't eat. She wet her bed. 'It's like when she was a newborn puppy,' Mommy said. [...]". Although there is some kind of redundancy, I refrain from saying that words and images are symmetrical here, as there are certain elements that

are either present in the visual or in the verbal representation. While the text informs us that the protagonists are comparing the condition of a sick old dog with the one of a newborn puppy, the image tells us that the protagonists are on a couch in the living room, looking at pictures. It is the combination of the words and the image, the so-called iconotext that creates the full meaning.

The twelfth doublespread looks like the inside of a personal photo album and reminds me of the one present in the sixth doublespread. The two pictures show a toddler next to Lulu on the verso and a young girl hugging the same dog on the recto. We recognize them as photos as they are black and white pictures attached on a brown background with photo corners. The fact that the photographs show the girl once as a toddler and another time several years later next to Lulu, stresses their long and close relationship.

Concerning the temporal duration in *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, the discourse's time is briefer than the storytime due to the frequent use of ellipsis in both verbal and visual text. Nikolajeva and Scott point to the difficulty of ascertaining the relation between storytime and discourse time of images as, on the one hand, pictures are static, which suggests a pause in the storytime, but, on the other, they may also imply movement, which contradicts a storytime of zero (159). Therefore, I will focus on the implicit visual ellipsis between spreads rather than on the duration of individual pictures in this book. While the temporal ellipses within (between verso and recto) or between doublespreads seem to vary from a view minutes to several hours until the family buries their dog Lulu, the time intervals between the images seem to be longer in the last six openings. This effect is achieved through seasonal changes in the last spreads. While the depictions on the first nine doublespreads take place in autumn, the tenth doublespread shows that winter has arrived, the 11th spread indicates springtime and in the 13th one it is already summer. Autumn and winter are only present in the visual representation; however, their change to spring and summer is clearly stated in the verbal text as well. The first part of the story -- before Lulu's death -- focuses on the dog's ageing process and the bond between her and the young girl. Since the weather is pretty much the same in the initial picture and in the burial scene it seems as if only a few days pass between the beginning of the story and the

dog's death. This gives the impression that Lulu's physical degradation process progresses rapidly. By contrast, the fast alteration from autumn to winter, to spring, and to summer within a few doublespreads in the second half of the story implies that much time must elapse in order to overcome the pain of loss.

It seems as if the basic idea the creators of this picturebook want to deliver regarding death and sorrow is that time is the great healer. To be more precise, children have a very limited life experience and do not realize the concept of time, and hence, they might not understand that their grief ends eventually (Willis 222). *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* seems to address that suffering and the pain of loss subside with the passing of time. This idea of time as the great healer, however, is implicit, which shall be illustrated by two concrete examples from the book. In the fourth doublespread, the girl's father proposes to "get another dog after Lulu" and the girl responds that she does not want another dog, but instead "want[s] Lulu back, the way she used to be". This desire of a repetition or continuation of the shared past with her loved dog is intensified in the verbal and visual analepsis of the subsequent spread, which informs us about activities the I-as-protagonist and her dog had engaged in together. Although the words on the fourth doublespread signal that the girl can by no means think about getting another dog, she seems to be ready for a new puppy on the last two openings. She is depicted with a smiling face and gently holding a newborn puppy in her arms, and the text on the ultimate spread says, "You're not Lulu,' I whisper to him. 'Still, I'll love you, too.' But I think he already knows that." This probably demonstrates that what seems unconceivable at first may turn into a welcome solution in the end, and that after some time of mourning, someone is ready for a new beginning with a new pet.

Another aspect, which may be interpreted as a reference to time as a healer, is the girl's final farewell to Lulu. When she hears about her dog's death, she wants to see her for the last time to say farewell: "[...] I wanted to say goodbye to Lulu, but all I could do was cry." This last sentence of the eighth doublespread is repeated in almost the exact wording on the recto of the following spread.

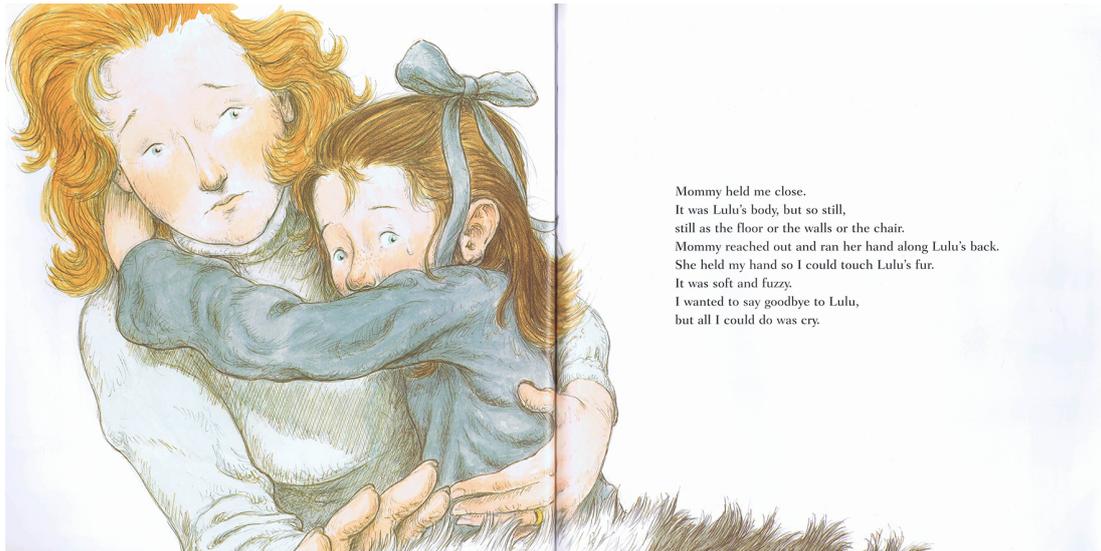


Fig. 10 *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, 8th doublespread.

A close-up of the mother holding her crying daughter with one hand and touching the dog's fur with her other hand accompanies the text (see fig. 10). We are deprived of a portrayal of the carcass of the dead animal and only get to see a minimal part of the fur on the bottom of the spread. It seems as if the mother is reaching for us while we are watching the girl looking at her dead dog. Why are we not allowed to see the dog's carcass? This is a question of perspective. While the text is a first-person narrative from the point-of-view of the child protagonist, the illustrations are presented from the perspective of a third person. Moving beyond narrative perspective, I would want to conclude that both verbal and visual representation enforce that the girl is grieving deeply and cannot let go of her beloved pet, yet. In spring, however, after the family plants a cherry tree by Lulu's grave, the girl is ready to say good-bye to her dear friend and dog, Lulu.

The blooming cherry tree is also depicted on the back endpaper and may be appreciated as a positive ending. The death of a loved one can be very painful, but eventually we will overcome our grief and carry the blooming memories around in our hearts.

3.2.5. Death of a Person

Several strategies of representation of death and dying have already been discussed in the previous subsections. This fifth and final part of my analysis deals with picturebooks' portrayal of the death of humans. Most picturebooks in

this category were found to contain parent death, sibling loss, and the death of someone's child or a deceased grandparent. To provide some examples, Moundlic and Tallec's *The Scar* (2011) is about the loss of a child's mother; *Ben's Flying Flowers* (2012) by Inger Maier and Maria Bogade describes the experience of sibling loss; *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* (2004) written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Quentin Blake is about an adult grieving over the death of his son; and *Is Grandpa Wearing a Suit* (2007) by Amelie Fried and Jacky Gleich discusses the death of a boy's grandfather. All of the above picturebooks differ primarily with respect to the relationship between the main character and the deceased person. Furthermore, one can distinguish between the different narrator perspectives. In the following final sections of my analysis I will focus on first-person narrations from a child's and an adult's perspective. Cases in point are *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*, which describes grief from the perspective of an adult, and *The Scar*, which views death experience through the eyes of a child. Therefore, I intend to focus on these two picturebooks.

3.2.5.1. Adult perspective

Written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Quentin Blake, *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* addresses sadness, depression, and bereavement. The story is autobiographical and portrays the grief Michael Rosen experiences following the loss of his son Eddie, who died of meningitis at the age of 18 in 1999 (Hattenstone). The story reveals about the protagonist's son that he died, but no more than that. There is no mention of the age of the dead boy or the cause of his death. Strictly speaking, this picturebook is not about death, but rather about mourning. The protagonist and first person narrator describes how he is coping with the loss of his beloved son and it seems as if telling this story acts as a kind of catharsis for his feelings of grief. He copes with grief in many different ways. Sometimes the protagonist favors talking about his feelings, other times not. Sometimes he behaves in a silly way, other times badly. Sometimes he fights against his feeling of sadness, other times he allows himself free rein for his sad thoughts and feelings in a poem. The combination of Rosen's deeply personal narration and Blake's hauntingly beautiful illustrations make this picturebook special. Blake's images in cartoon style capture the feelings expressed by Rosen's prose and with its straightforward

honesty in coping with grief, *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* is a book of its own kind; it is sui generis.

The cover page (see *Appendix* p. 108) includes a framed picture in black and white, the book title and the names of the author-illustrator team. The title *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* consists of the author's name and the theme, which points to the book's autobiographical origin. The picture on the front cover is unique in the sense that it is not taken from the picturebook's narrative. It shows the walking figure of Michael Rosen, a dog, and a garbage can lying on the ground with litter next to it. The large bag on his back might have a figurative meaning and can be interpreted as the heavy burden of sorrow he is carrying with him. Around this somber picture, there is a dark yellow and rather thin frame, which appears almost cheerful, like a spark of hope. Interestingly, yellow is not only a symbol of life, but also of illness, sorrow and transience ("Gelb"). The second broader frame is grey-blue, which may reinforce the image's melancholic atmosphere. For me, the yellow frame represents both the character's memories of happy days and the illness of his dead son, which we know is the reason for his sorrow. In my suggestion, the framed picture on the front cover indicates that Michael Rosen allows us readers an insight into his private life since "frames on [...] title pages [can be] like doorways inviting viewers into another, different world" (Nodelman 50).

Another aspect I would like to briefly discuss is the cover page's mat paper surface. In consideration of Nodelman's (48) suggestion that mat paper "supports an atmosphere of involvement and intimacy" as "it seems to invite our touch", I would propose that the mat surface of the cover page goes well with Michael Rosen's personal story, since he introduces the reader to his most intimate thoughts.

While some pictures are very colorful, others are kept in different shades of gray. The initial image is in bright colors and shows a frontal portrait of Michael Rosen with a friendly, large smile, which makes him look as if he is full of the joys of life. In connection with this image, the first sentence, "[t]his is me being sad", is unexpected and comes as a surprise. However, the remainder of the text clarifies this contradiction:

Maybe you think I'm being happy in this picture.
Really I'm being sad but pretending I'm being happy.
I'm doing that because I think people won't like me if I look sad.

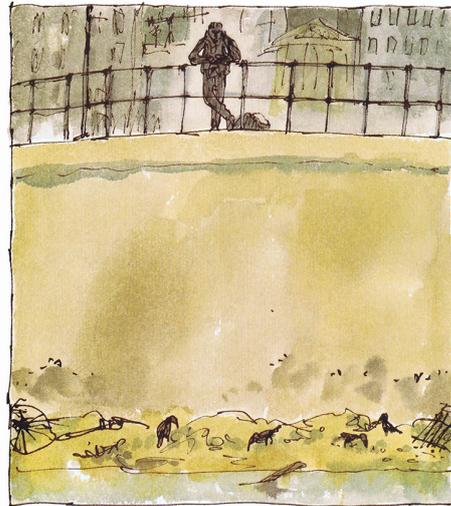
Here the author and the illustrator do not only introduce their readers to the main character, but also refer to social conventions and to the irony of pictures. To be more precise, in our Western society, we are used to hiding our feelings of sorrow and sadness in public. The passage above could even be an implicit reference to the taboo of talking about death and mourning. Other interesting aspects are the word-picture relationship and irony in this first opening. Regarding its iconotext, the verbal representation comments on the visual one and without the text, the reader would not be able to detect the picture's ironic content. Interpreting a picture ironically means, "we believe we know more and different information from what the picture shows us" (Nodelman 223). In this sense, words and pictures depend on each other.

Although the text on the first doublespread brings up the subject of sadness, the illustration of the smiling face in warm colors and the picture's bright tone create a mood that is anything but sad. This cannot even be altered by the light shadow in the background, which I would call the shadow of death. The cheerfulness of the visual representation of the initial spread constitutes a high contrast to the depressive atmosphere present in the pictures on the subsequent one. Only after turning the page will the reader realize the seriousness of the situation. The two illustrations on the second doublespread are in gray and the lack of color might be associated with a lack of joy. In both of them, the figure of Michael Rosen is present. The text on the verso describes that "[s]ometimes sad is very big. It's everywhere. All over me", and the full body shot shows a walking man with a slightly stooped body posture and his hands in his pockets. The thin, comparatively small figure of Michael Rosen is depicted in the bottom part of the picture. The fact that his feet are cut off makes the image look like a photograph and also evokes the impression that the protagonist is sinking deeper and deeper into the soil until sadness overcomes him completely. In the picture, Rosen is surrounded by gray emptiness, which very well underlines the words "[sadness is] everywhere". Here, the illustrator uses the dramatic effect of space. We are watching the protagonist from a distance. His small size and the gray background make him appear lonely and sad. He is

caught in his loneliness and does not have any choice other than trying to move forward, which also implies the passing of time. In the following, I will analyze two instances of the representation of time and movement in *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*.



Sometimes I want to talk about all this to someone.
Like my mum. But she's not here any more either. So I can't.
I find someone else. And I tell them all about it.



Sometimes I don't want to talk about it.
Not to anyone. No one. No one at all.
I just want to think about it on my own.
Because it's mine. And no one else's.

Fig. 11 Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*, 4th doublespread.

The illustrations in the figures 11 and 12 represent the passing of time, though by different means. The image on the recto of the fourth doublespread (see fig. 11) shows Rosen resting on a railing, free of the burden of his bag, which is placed on the floor next to his feet. He is looking down onto what seems to be crows and garbage on a sand bank and a river. We can assume that unlike Michael Rosen, who is depicted in a resting position, the birds and the river are not standing still. Seeing him watch the flow of the river and the birds' activities reminds me that time never pauses. Both the visual portrayal and the text, "[s]ometimes I don't want to talk about it. [...] I just want to think about it on my own. [...]" indicate that occasionally the I-as-protagonist needs time and space for reflection. The high, light brown wall provides space between the protagonist and the riverbank, which could mean that he tries to distance himself from everything and everyone. In this picture he is even smaller than in the one on

the verso of the second doublespread, however, he is positioned in the upper section, which has a totally different effect. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, elements that are placed on the lower part of a picture are presented as real and the ones on the upper part as ideal (*Reading Images* 58 ff.). Even though I would argue that Michael Rosen's condition is far from ideal, in this position he does not appear as helpless anymore. Instead, he seems to be thinking about the death of his son and looking at the issues from above. The river could be a metaphor for the flow of life and hence the passing of time, the garbage for his problems and the birds for spiritual beings and the immortality of the soul ("bird", *Symbols*).



Fig. 12 Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*, 6th doublespread.

According to Nikolajeva and Scott, "[a] way to convey movement and thus the flow of time in picturebooks is by means of a sequence of pictures" (146). The series of images on the sixth doublespread of *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* (see fig. 12) is a case in point. At first sight it may look as if it is always the same background since in each picture Michael Rosen walks past a tree and buildings. However, at closer inspection one notices that it is never the same tree nor the same building. His position in the picture does not vary much, but

what differentiates the pictures on the verso from the ones on the recto are Rosen's body posture, the coloring, and the presence or absence of people in the background. Also, the bag Rosen carries around is becoming larger and larger from picture to picture. On the verso, the main character keeps upright while walking, but in the recto, he is walking with a stoop. While in the pictures on the left, the background is in color; it is shades of gray and brown in the one on the right. Not only the elements in the background, but also the weather changes in the images. While the first two illustrations of the series seem to represent a sunny day, the third one depicts stormy weather, which shows how powerless humans are in the face of nature. The fourth image could be interpreted as the stillness after the storm. The only person left after the storm is Michael Rosen himself. Over time he has lost the most important people around him, and this change is also stressed by the words, "[life is] not the same as it was a few years ago". The picture sequence could also be interpreted as a representation of the four seasons. As time passes the seasons change, the protagonist, however, is still walking around carrying the burden of his son's death. This illustrates that overcoming grief may be a long process.

In this picturebook, framing is not consistent, but changes from thin black frame lines and white space around the illustrations to frameless images that cover a whole page or doublespread. The first four openings are designed in the style of a private photo album and one might imagine that the narrator himself is looking at these photographs while telling his story. The seven small pictures on the third doublespread show Michael Rosen's dead son at different ages and are evocative of snapshots. The last and eighth image on the recto is left blank and accompanied by the words "[...] [h]e doesn't say anything, because he's not there anymore". Here, text and images are filling each other's gaps. We know that the boy in the pictures must be the narrator's son Eddie since he is introduced in the text on the preceding doublespread. However, all we ever learn about Eddie, apart from the fact that he died, is mediated through the illustrations. There is no mention of his looks or hobbies in the verbal representation. Another framing device used is white space around the pictures. The change from thin black frame lines to white space frames evokes the impression that the I-as-protagonist is not looking at photographs anymore, but is reflecting upon his own behavior and his feelings. Throughout the whole

picturebook, there are only three images that cover a whole page or doublespread and are without frames. The penultimate and the ultimate doublespread contain such frameless pictures, which will be examined in the following in detail.

Michael Rosen's Sad Book neither contains a moral nor a happy ending, but simply illustrates the profound emotions the adult first-person narrator goes through. Instead of a chronological story that has an introduction, a climax, and a conclusion; a sequence of thoughts and memories of the protagonist are strung together. The text on the first ten doublespreads contains short, mostly complete sentences with a simple syntax. This changes after two thirds of the picturebook, when the sentences become incomplete and start to resemble trains of thought. Below is an excerpt from the text by Michael Rosen that shall demonstrate its daydream-like character and his informal writing style towards the end of the picturebook:

And then I remember things: [...]
Eddie walking along the street,
laughing and laughing and laughing. /
Doing his old man act in the school play.
Us playing saves on and off the sofa. /
And birthdays ... I love birthdays.
Not just mine – other people's as well.
Happy birthday to you ... and all that. /
And candles.
There must be candles. (11th - 14th doublespread)

Clearly, his narrative style gives the impression that the narrator is lost in thought, which is also stressed by the illustration on the ultimate opening (see fig. 13). In the last spread, Rosen is depicted with a pencil in his hand in front of a photo frame, hopelessly staring at a burning candle. I would suggest that this doublespread, which has no verbal text, happens on a meta-level and might be interpreted as a revelation. In other words, at this point of the story it is confirmed what has been indicated in the cover page, namely that the author and the first-person narrator are one and the same person. The image shows the protagonist Michael Rosen writing down his thoughts, his self-reflection or rather the picturebook story. The final doublespread could give rise to the impression that the picturebook is Michael Rosen's private notebook.



Fig. 13 *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*, ultimate doublespread.

Towards the end, the openings contain less and less verbal text and the penultimate doublespread, which consists of the words “And candles. There must be candles” and an image showing a crowd of people behind cakes and lit candles, prepares the reader for the wordless final. There is a smooth transition from birthdays and candles on birthday cakes to the single candle on his desk in both verbal and visual representation of the last three doublespreads. The meaning of the silent ending might be that there is nothing more to say, which is again enforced by the empty endpapers in monochrome beige.

Still focusing on the picturebook's ultimate doublespread, light, darkness, and shadowing will be discussed. In this picture (fig. 13), candlelight illuminates the room. However, a certain part remains dark. The dark spot is the shadow Michael Rosen casts. In some cultures, shadows are associated with “fleeting, unreal and mutable things” and death, and the absence of shadows signifies “moment[s] of inward peace” (“shadow”). Gray shadows are present in several illustrations of this book and I would suggest that the death of his son produces a shadow in Michael Rosen's life, which haunts him.

Another element that is frequently linked with death is the burning candle. We do not only use candles on our birthday cakes, but also have them on graveyards and occasionally light candles for the deceased. A burning candle becomes smaller over time and symbolizes the “fleetingness of human life” (“Candle”). Once a candle extinguishes, all reverts to darkness. This is a picture of light and shadow, or of life and death. Just as there can be no light without a shadow, there can be no life without death. These opposites belong together. Even Michael Rosen’s good memories, which lighten up his episodes of sadness and depression, will eventually fade. As soon as he stops thinking about the good times with his son, he returns to his hopeless situation, surrounded by sadness. Even though there is no happy ending, the last doublespread might provide hope, as there is at least a little light in the dark.

3.2.5.2. Child perspective

The Scar by Charlotte Moundlic and Olivier Tallec has originally been published in French under the title *La Croûte*, which means “the scab”, and captures the pure and raw experience of loss. Told from a child’s perspective, this story about dying includes the death of a mother, wife, and adult daughter. It seems to reflect an authentic experience as it includes issues discussed in psychological papers about children’s comprehension of death and bereaved children, such as the use of euphemism, an understanding of finality, stages of grief work, and mourning parents (see section 2.1.2. *Children and Death*). This subsection will trace each of these issues, but first provide a brief summary of the plot and a discussion of the title, cover, and coloring.

This picturebook tells the story of a young boy grieving for his recently deceased mother. When the boy wakes up in the morning, his mother is dead. He is not only angry and sad, but also worried about his father’s miserable state. The protagonist knows that death is permanent and he desperately tries not to forget his mother’s looks, voice, and scent. He remembers her comforting words whenever he would get hurt, so he scratches open a scab on his knee and imagines he can hear her words soothing him. One day the boy’s grandmother arrives. First he perceives her visit as an additional burden as he is concerned that now he has to take care of his father *and* his grandmother. However, the boy’s grandmother turns out to be of great support to both of

them. Finally, with her help, the little boy learns that his mother will always be in his heart. Time passes and just as the situation at home is improving, the wound on his knee is healing up, leaving behind a small scar.

Neither the unique image on the front of the cover (see *Appendix* p. 109) nor the title *The Scar* reveals the picturebook's theme of death and dying. There is some kind of redundancy of image and title. The picture shows a boy looking at his injured knee and the title also refers to a wound, however, a completely healed one. Hence, I would argue the front cover gives the impression that this picturebook tells the story of a boy who cuts his knee and whose injury is healing, nevertheless, leaving a scar behind. This is of course true, but more in a metaphorical sense. Although there is no mention of the main theme of death in the book title, I would still regard it as a "narrative" type of title as *The Scar* "in some way sums up the essence of the story" (Nikolajeva and Scott 243). Time is a great healer and all kinds of wounds, visible or invisible, will heal eventually. However, the death of a loved parent may leave a scar on their children forever.

Still focusing on the front cover, it is worthwhile to note the utilization of a limited color palette. The predominant color is red with some details in black and white. Even though the red spot on the knee is tiny, it stands out on the boy's solid white body, which is placed on the bottom half of the picture, vertically centered. Everything else, meaning the couch, the cushion and the background, is red. In other words, the boy focusing on his tiny wound is completely wrapped in red. Knowing the picturebook's content, I would interpret this brilliant red color of the background as another wound, which is much bigger and too painful to accept as the reality. The young boy is caught in the middle of red, associated with love, warmth, and blood (Nodelman 60, Runk 146). I shall have more to say about the limited choice of colors and their interaction later on and would now like to turn to the graphical design of the title.

The picturebook title is located at the upper half of the page, written in a fairly large font size (80 points or more). The large size and the sharp contrast between the red background and the light yellow characters make the title almost as salient as the portrayed little boy. But the most interesting aspects of the title on this cover page are the typeface and the shadow. The typeface used, evokes a visual illusion to something brittle, damaged, and incomplete, as

the individual characters are full of holes and interruptions instead of smooth lines. As pointed out by Nikolajeva and Scott (1 f.), words have the function to describe and pictures to represent. However, this example shows that occasionally words may be treated like pictures, as the typeface of words can be meaningful in itself. Just as the boy in the picture, also the letters of the title are “injured”. A further aspect the title and the depiction of the protagonist have in common is the shadow. The black shadow might be associated with the shade side of life, namely moments of death, farewell, and sadness. All together, the mood of this layout is influenced by the choice of coloring, placement, and the typeface including the shadow.

Returning to color design, it cannot be overlooked that the overall tonality is vermillion red and that cold colors such as blue and green are almost completely left out. Due to the use of a limited color palette, one can assume that the colors have been deliberately chosen. According to Nodelman, “[t]he emotional implications of colors are particularly clear in those picture books in which one color predominates.” (60) The same is true for the complete absence of a specific color (63). In *The Scar*, the background color of the individual doublespreads changes between red, yellow, and white and so does the suggested mood. Both red and yellow are warm colors. While yellow is associated with happiness, red is the color of blood, love and intensity (61). Red may also seem threatening or express anger. In general, the achromatic color white is used to emphasize purity, innocence, emptiness, and sterility (Runk 160). Interestingly, all the openings with a monochrome white background lack a geometric perspective. Hence, I would suggest the usage of white in this particular picturebook mainly symbolizes emptiness, namely the emptiness the boy feels after his mother’s death. A case in point would be the fourth doublespread, which shows the young boy against a white background. The verbal narrative indicates that his mother’s death has left a vacuum, which the boy fears his father will not be able to fill. This vacuum is reflected in the lack of geometric perspective in the visual representation. By contrast, the background of the preceding opening contains some sketchy objects and is colored yellow, which creates a more positive and friendly atmosphere. Therefore, I would interpret the doublespreads with yellow backgrounds as moments of hope and of new beginnings. By continuously changing the color of the background and

by deciding on a limited selection of colors, the illustrator has managed to capture fluctuating emotional states and at the same time create a general atmosphere of suffering and grief, which runs like a *red* thread through the whole artistic work. Each time a page is turned, the prevailing sentiment changes respectively between red pain and red love, monochrome white emptiness and an almost encouraging yellow, which provides a ray of hope in this sad story.

As stated earlier, *The Scar* is written from the perspective of a child. This, however, only applies to the verbal narration. Words and pictures tell the same story, but from two different perspectives. In this sense, this picturebook is an example of counterpoint between verbal and visual narrative. The first-person narrator is a young boy, but the pictures do not show the world through his eyes, instead, the boy is present in the visual representation. In other words, the first-person verbal narration is in contrast to the omniscient visual perspective. Nonetheless, the primary concern of the images is on the I-as-protagonist and his feelings. In the majority of the images, the little boy has high salience as he stands out well against the background. If the background color is white, the main character, who is also the narrator, is depicted with differentiated red nuances and vice versa. The described contrast and the shift in perspective have powerful effects. For me, the visual contrast of the background and the protagonist stresses the experienced intensity of emotions. The shift in perspective between verbal and visual text allows the potential reader to be participant and observer at the same time. While reading, we share the most intimate thoughts of a bereaved child and watch him struggling with his deep emotions.

Concerning layout, a consistency in the placement of text and images is found throughout the whole picturebook. The text is on the verso and the illustrations are on the recto, whereas the pictures either extend into the verso or spread over the whole opening. However, the most salient pictorial elements are probably on the recto. Interestingly, the majority of the characters positioned on the recto are looking towards the verso. Based on theory about the tension between the two pages of a doublespread including information about the given and new, and security and risk (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 51 ff.; Moebius 317), I would propose the following about this picturebook

character's position: The death of a loved one has disrupted the family's daily life and put them into a new situation. Now, they are a single-father family and no one knows how to fill the gap left by the mother or wife's death. The characters on the recto have troubles mastering the challenges of the present and are not yet capable of moving on. Instead, they are full of sorrow and hold on to the past.

Considering that neither the book title nor the cover illustration make any reference to death and dying, the first doublespread may come as a surprise. The first sentence of this picturebook is, "Mom died this morning." It is clear upon reading this opening line that Moundlic and Tallec's *The Scar* deals with the most serious issue, death. The illustration of the first opening shows a young boy lying on his bed facing the ceiling. His arms and legs are stretched out and his body posture seems calm and focused as if he is trying to digest the recent incident. Also the verbal representation on the verso indicates that the child has just been informed about his mother's death:

Mom died this morning.
It wasn't really this morning.
Dad said she died during the night,
but I was sleeping during the night.
For me, she died this morning. (first doublespread)

Due to its simple syntax and repetitive vocabulary use, the opening paragraph above is particularly authentic and one can almost hear the young boy's voice. It seems as if he is arranging his thoughts and trying to process what had happened. Each sentence is clear, short, and powerful in the sense that it immediately grabs the potential reader's attention.

On turning the page, the verbal narrative switches into the form of a flashback or analepsis. Additionally, the prevalent background color changes from red to white and the syntax becomes more complex. While the verbal representation informs us about a conversation the boy had had with his mother the day before she died, the pictures solely present the child's changing emotional state of sadness and anger. The mother is not depicted and without the text there would be no flashback. As noted by Nodelman in connection with flashbacks, "[s]ome aspects of pictorial meaning are particularly in need of the clarifying presence of texts." (215) This is definitely the case here. The pictures contain only part of the text's meaning and show the little boy in different sizes with a hanging head,

an angry face or shouting, which underline the meaning of the words “I cried” and “That made me mad, and I shouted” (second doublespread). The variations in size and position probably imply the passing of time, which is not described by the text. In this respect, words and images are filling each other’s gaps. The analepsis continues on the next page, where the narrator describes how he learned about his mother’s death.

Another aspect of verbal representation I consider worth discussing is the way the protagonists talk about death and dying. While both adults, the mother in the flashback of the second doublespread and the father in the fourth doublespread, use euphemisms when talking to their child about dying, the young boy addresses the issue directly. The night before her death, the mom explains to her child “that she was too tired, that her body couldn’t carry her anymore, and that she was going away forever” (second doublespread). The boy’s response, “I told her that she could come back after she was rested, that I would wait for her” (second doublespread), seems very natural in the sense that it reminds me of something a young child would say. Furthermore, the child protagonist’s statement reflects what researchers found out about children’s comprehension of death. They suggest that young children understand death as a temporary state, and that they have difficulties understanding euphemistic expressions (Salladay and Royal 209; Speece and Brent 1673; Willis 224). The proceeding lines of the boy’s review of the conversation with his mother illustrate that she clarified the impossibility to return, and eventually, he seemed to understand that “[his mom] was really going to die” (second doublespread). The verbal text of the fourth doublespread is another instance of euphemism used by an adult:

Dad said, ‘She’s gone forever.’

I knew that she wasn’t *gone* – she was dead and I would never see her again. They were going to put her in a box and then in the ground, where she would turn into dust.

I know very well that dying means that you’re never going to come back.
[...]

The author managed to introduce the theme of finality of death in a way that is both honest and delicate, which makes it deeply touching. The child protagonist knows that death is permanent and shows disappointment towards his father,

who circumscribes “dying” and therefore refrains from using concrete language. Even the illustration indicates the boy’s anger as he is depicted with raised eyebrows and crossed arms. He is sitting at a table and in front of him we see a piece of bread with an almost straight line of honey on top. This piece of bread seems irrelevant at first sight, but after reading the text one realizes that it represents the boy’s innermost fears. The depiction of the bread with honey and the words “How will Dad know how to make my toast the way I like it, cut in half with the honey in a zigzag?” express the protagonist’s worry about a future without his beloved mother. His fear concerning the honey toast preparation might seem irrelevant for an adult reader, but is probably absolutely understandable for any child reading this story.

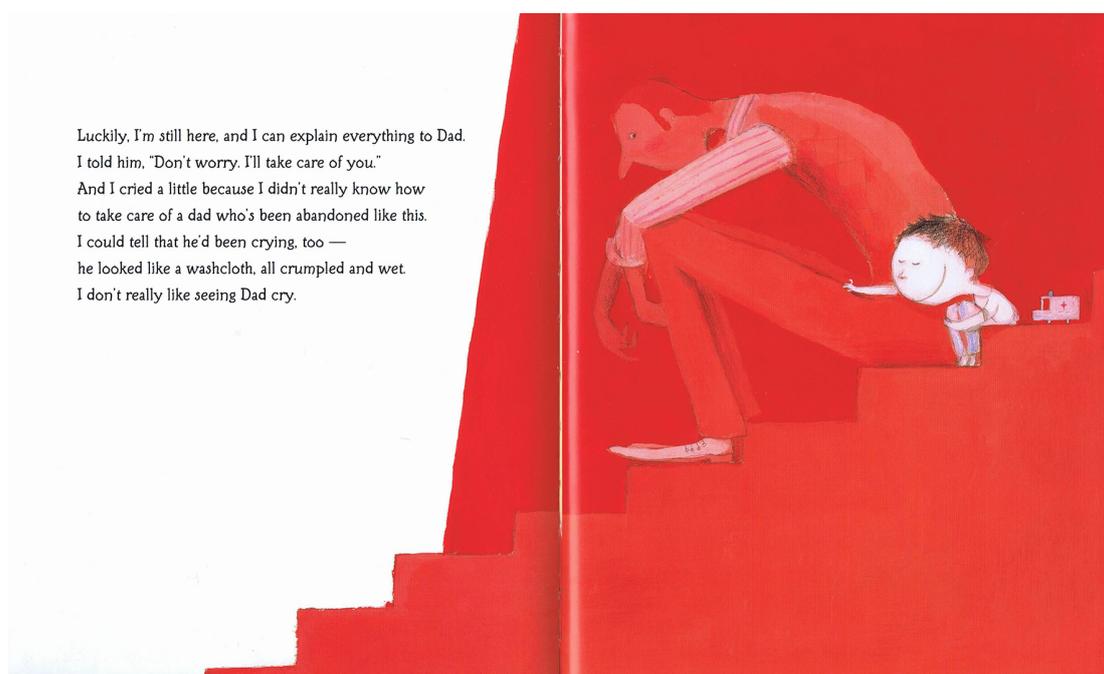


Fig. 14 *The Scar*, 5th doublespread.

In the case of losing a family member or close friend, children do not only have to cope with their own grief, but also come to terms with mourning adults. Even bereaved parents suffer from this twofold burden to “simultaneously confront their own grief while helping their children to manage as well” (Salladay and Royal 211). This issue of double load is addressed directly in *The Scar*. The illustration of the recto of the fifth doublespread shows the father and his son sitting on stairs next to each other (see fig. 14). The red figure of the father almost disappears in the background of the same color. Although the young boy

appears tiny next to his dad, our attention is directed towards the boy due to the high color contrast. The boy is portrayed in white, wearing light blue pants. He has a broad grin on his face, his eyes are closed and he seems to be stroking his father's thigh with one hand. The visual and the verbal representation deliver contrasting information. According to the picture of the smiling boy, he is calm and happy. The text, however, reveals that he had been crying and that he is worried about his father.

Regarding the iconotext of this doublespread, I have proposed a counterpointing relationship between words and images; however, another suggestion would be that they are filling each other's gaps. To be more precise, although the child protagonist neither looks sad nor worried in the depiction, as mentioned in the text, we might conclude that the image conveys additional rather than contradicting information, namely that the boy is hiding his real feelings from his father. While there is no mention of a staircase or the boy stroking his father's thigh in the verbal narrative, the visual one totally neglects the boy's innermost fears and feelings. The combination of text and image then communicates that the little boy made it his business to comfort his mourning father and for that reason he does not allow himself to show any sign of weakness or grief. Also, the words on the next opening, "I have a bit of a stomachache, and I haven't been able to take care of Dad" (sixth doublespread), indicate the child protagonist's burden of caring for his father. Furthermore, at this point of the story it becomes clear that the young child takes some share of the blame for his father's bad condition upon himself as the text says, "I think it hurts him to look at me because I have my mom's eyes." Clearly, both characters, father and son, have troubles coping with their situation of grief and while the young boy is trying hard to support his father, the dad is not in the condition to help his son.

As illustrated in section 2.1.2.2 *Death education and grief work*, theories about different stages of grieving have been criticized for being outdated. Nevertheless, I am now going to focus on the three stages described by Salladay and Royal, namely "denial, depression and acceptance" (208), as the main character of the story seems to go through precisely these stages. In the visual and verbal narrative of *The Scar*, there is no clear dividing line between the individual phases, instead, they intertwine and overlap. Salladay and Royal

suggest that in the stage of denial, children are upset if their normal routine is disrupted (208). Also in *The Scar*, the boy seems to hold on to his daily routines and reacts to changes in a hypersensitive manner. For example, he wants his toast exactly the way his mother used to prepare it.

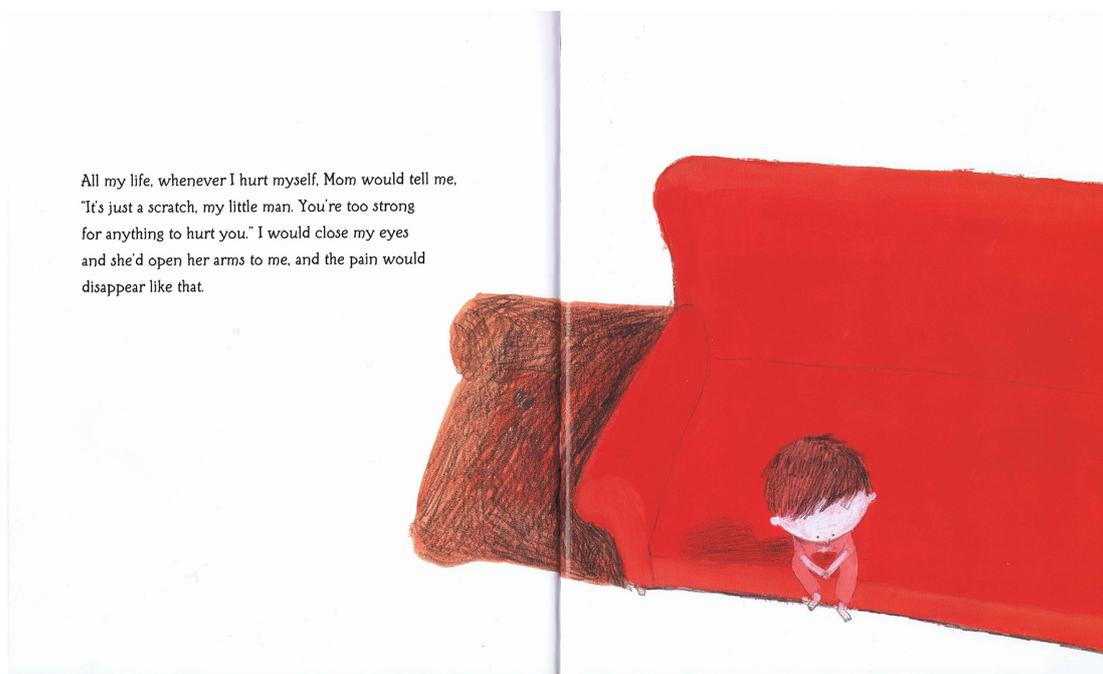


Fig. 15 *The Scar*, 8th doublespread.

Regarding the second phase, depression, the picturebook presents moments of withdrawal, insomnia and outbursts. The little boy does not seem to be talking about his feelings to anyone for a long time, but appears isolated. He keeps all the windows shut and cuts himself off from the outside world, because he wants to prevent the fading away of his mother's scent. In the ninth doublespread, the boy injures his knee and bleeds. His wound hurts, but when he hears his mother's voice soothing him, he is happy for the first time since she died. As the boy is scared of forgetting what his mother looks and sounds like, being able to imagine her voice is a comfort and so he scratches open the scab again and again. In the article by Salladay and Royal, there is mention of a similar phenomenon, namely that "[s]ome children may demonstrate a strong attachment to objects which represent and remind them of the deceased" (206). The young boy is attached to his wound, because it makes him feel his dead mother's closeness.

The picture of the 8th opening (see fig. 15) is another instance of the child character's isolation. He is depicted in the bottom half of the recto, sitting on a red couch, and appearing rather tiny compared to the massive furniture and its broad, dark shadow. The fact that the whole scenario is illustrated from a birds-eye perspective makes him seem even smaller and lonelier.

In addition to isolation there is reference to insomnia and outbursts of temper. The words on the sixth doublespread "I don't want to sleep anymore" imply that the boy suffers from sleep deprivation. Cases of emotional outburst are found in the images of the second doublespread, where the boy is depicted screaming and kicking, and in the verbal text of the fourth opening in, "Well, good riddance! I yelled to Dad. I couldn't believe she'd left us."

After having discussed the stages denial and depression, the implied reference to the stage acceptance is illustrated. In the eleventh opening, the young boy confronts his grandmother with his fears for the first time:

And that's too much for me. I shout and cry and scream, 'No! Don't open the windows! Mom's going to disappear for good. . . .' And I fall and the tears flow without stopping, and there's nothing I can do and I feel very tired.

The passage above, where the boy finally shares his worries, the visual and verbal narrative on the following doublespreads show that the boy has entered a new phase of grieving, acceptance. His grandmother tells him that his mother will always be in his heart, his father learns "how to make the honey zigzag" (13th doublespread), and in the end the young boy even accepts that his wound has healed and turned into a scar.

The fourteenth opening shows father and son on two opposing pages. For the first time, both characters are smiling. Also the verbal text, "[...] I smelled coffee and heard a voice on the radio say that it was going to be a nice day", points to a positive change. I would suggest that the story moves beyond grief with humor and grace when the boy jokes, "'It's me!' I shout [...], which is dumb, since Dad knows that we're the only two here, but it makes him smile". The illustration at the very end shows the boy sleeping peacefully, and the story finishes off where it began, in the boy's bedroom.

4. Conclusion

In entering the realm of “picturebook narratology”, the focus of the thesis was on picturebooks that deal with the most delicate issue of all: death. After a comprehensive analysis of seven contemporary death-themed picturebooks based on theoretical foundations from sociology, developmental psychology and literary studies, I return to my initial research question: What means of representation of death and dying are found in selected picturebooks? For purposes of answering this question and as part of the conclusion of my thesis, I will first summarize my findings concerning the picturebooks’ different strategies of representing death, secondly, outline the techniques used to illustrate aspects related to death - such as the flow of time, transience, and emotions - and lastly, refer to the picturebooks’ similarities.

With regards to answering my research question, I shall briefly rehearse my approach to this matter. The starting point of the thesis was to explore the field of death-themed picturebooks and to classify the encountered works into categories. I further decided on a limited sample of seven picturebooks that represent different ways to deal with death in this medium. The range extends from a personified death as a main character, visual and verbal euphemisms of death, anthropomorphic animal societies losing a valuable family member, and a humanized plant, which wishes to be remembered, to a person mourning over the death of a close relative. With respect to the personification of death, it turned out that although it is a frequent feature of young children’s drawings about death, it rarely occurs as a literary figure in picturebooks. The only picturebook I encountered that can be attributed to this category is Wolf Erlbruch’s *Duck, Death and the Tulip*. In this picturebook, death is presented as a friendly companion of life, whom we should not fear. Euphemistic expressions of death, however, seem to appear frequently in death-themed picturebooks. A book that uses a verbal and visual euphemism instead of addressing the issue directly is *The Heart and the Bottle*, by Oliver Jeffers. Through its verbal and visual depiction of “an empty chair”, this picturebook communicates that the sudden death of a loved person leaves behind a painful vacancy. Furthermore, anthropomorphic animals and inanimate beings, as in Sebastian Loth’s *Remembering Crystal* and Kevin Sheehan and Rob Dunlavey’s *The Dandelion’s Tale*, tend to be popular in picturebooks in general, which seems to

be no different with death-themed books. As illustrated in my analysis, the relationship between anthropomorphic characters is not always clear and leaves room for interpretation. To be more precise, the dying animal may either be perceived as a friend, sibling, parent, child or grandparent, depending on the potential reader's needs. In contrast, the type of relationship is clearly defined in picturebooks belonging to the category "pet loss" and "death of a person". Just as in Corinne Demas and Ard Hoyt's *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, the majority of the picturebooks I detected detailing pet loss focus on children mourning over their deceased dog. Concerning picturebooks about the death of a person, it has been illustrated that depicted emotions and worries differ whether the book is written from the perspective of a child or an adult. While *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake is reminiscent of a grown man's catharsis of his feelings of sorrow and depression, *The Scar* by Charlotte Moundlic and Olivier Tallec emphasizes a child's uncertainty about a future without the dead person and the burden of a mourning parent, which additionally exacerbates the pain of loss. The verbal text of *The Scar*, *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* as well as *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* is written from a first-person perspective. However, the visual narratives of these three picturebooks show the protagonist's world from the perspective of a third person. This counterpoint in perspective is particularly noticeable in *The Scar* and *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* as they are written from a child's point-of-view, but the visual world presented to us is not through the eyes of a child.

Among other things, I have illustrated different ways to convey temporal movement, transience, and emotions in my picturebook selection. While in *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* the flow of time is expressed through a sequence of pictures and changing weather conditions, it is the different seasons in *Duck, Death and the Tulip* and *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, a girl becoming a young woman in *The Heart and the Bottle*, a healing scar in *The Scar*, and a journey in *Remembering Crystal* that signifies the passing of time. Moreover, several picturebooks make use of visual symbols to emphasize transience and the fleetingness of life. The most prevalent examples are a cut flower, a burning candle, and autumn leaves. Emotions, however, are represented primarily by different colors. The meaning of the dominant color in *The Scar*, which is red, changes accordingly from pain and anger to love. Unlike melancholy blue and

depressive gray, as in *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*, the color green, which prevails *The Dandelion's Tale*, evokes a feeling of hope. Furthermore, it has been illustrated that white space is associated with death in the sense of the immense void the deceased often leaves behind.

One further point which I shall address in the concluding part of my thesis is the detected relation between the psychological studies of the theoretical part (see 2.1.2. *Death and Children*) and the representation of fear and grief in the analyzed picturebook sample. While *Remembering Crystal* includes a depiction of typical childhood fears of darkness and surreal creatures, the idea that the pain of loss subsides with the passing of time is found in *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*. This idea might be linked to the scientific observation that children do not have this concept of time that adults possess. In my analysis of *The Scar* I have illustrated that the child protagonist has difficulties coping with his own grief and his mourning father, a fact that is similarly proven by a number of psychological studies. Moreover, the protagonist of the same book seems to go through different stages of grief identified by scholars in the field of psychology.

Although the selected books are all unique art works and tell different stories, they are nonetheless similar in two respects. First, they all approach the theme of death with great sensitivity, and second, they present death as a natural part of life. Primarily in *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, *The Heart and the Bottle*, *Saying Goodbye to Lulu* and *The Dandelion's Tale*, the continuous cycle of life and death is a prevalent theme. These books demonstrate that life continues after someone has died and that every end is a new beginning. With this natural cycle of life and death in mind, I would like to end my thesis as I began, by quoting from a death-themed picturebook included in my analysis:

Something had happened. Death looked at the duck. She'd stopped breathing. She lay quite still. / [...] He laid her gently on the water and nudged her on her way. / For a long time he watched her. When she was lost to sight, he was almost a little moved. *But that's life, thought Death.* (*Duck, Death and the Tulip* 12th-14th doublespread, *emphasis added*)

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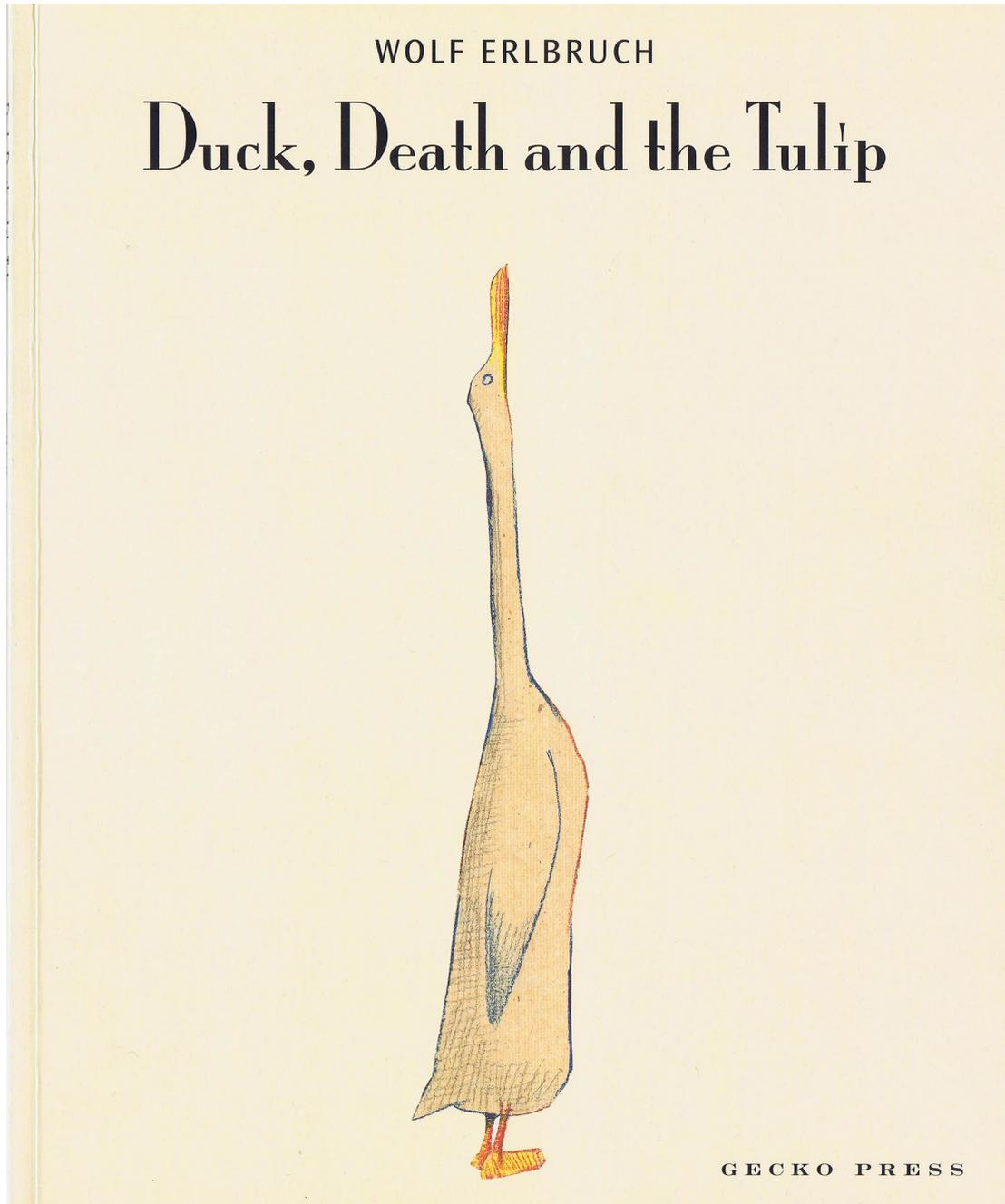
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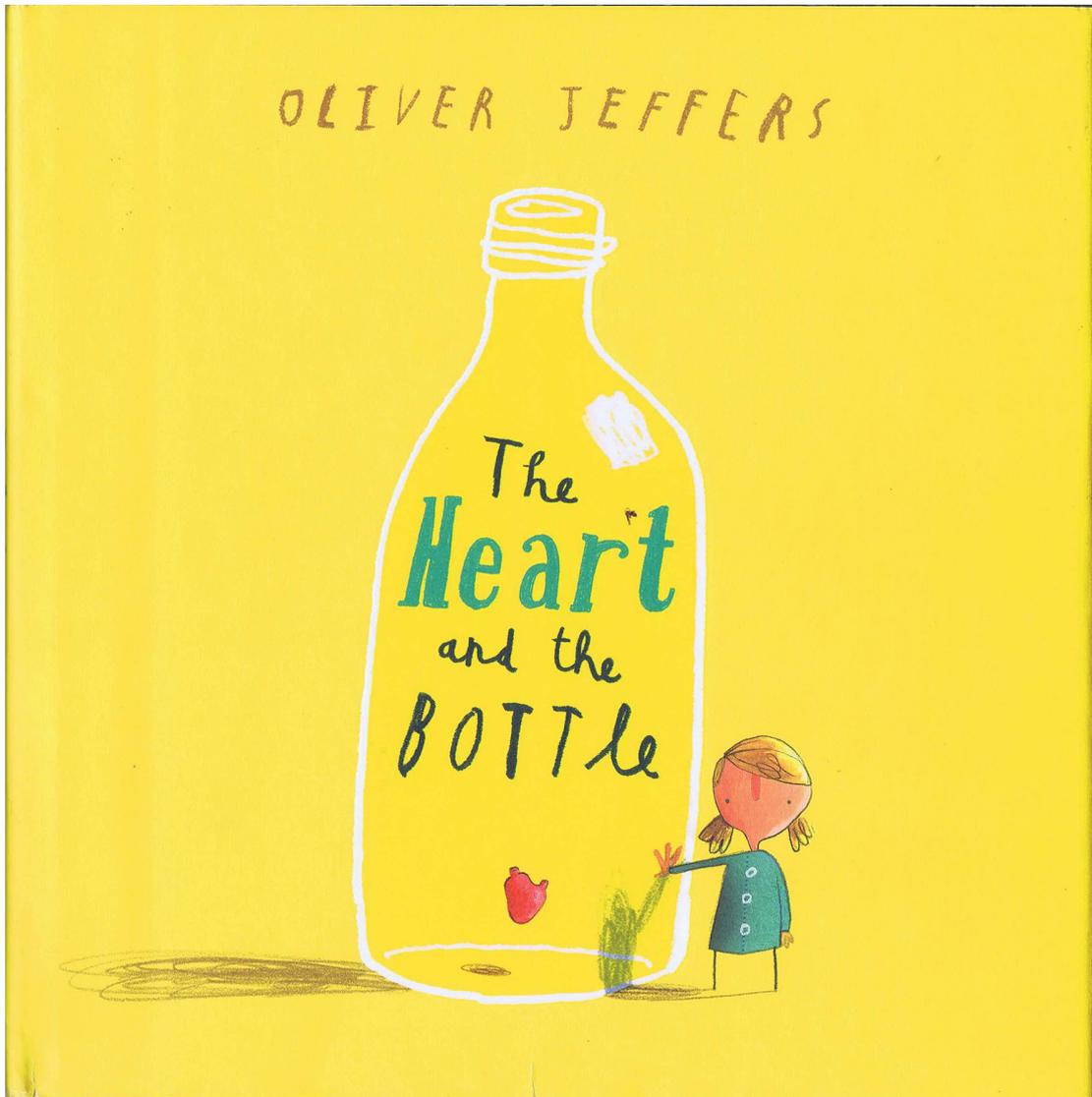
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Appendix



Erlbruch, Wolf. *Duck, Death and the Tulip*. (Front cover).



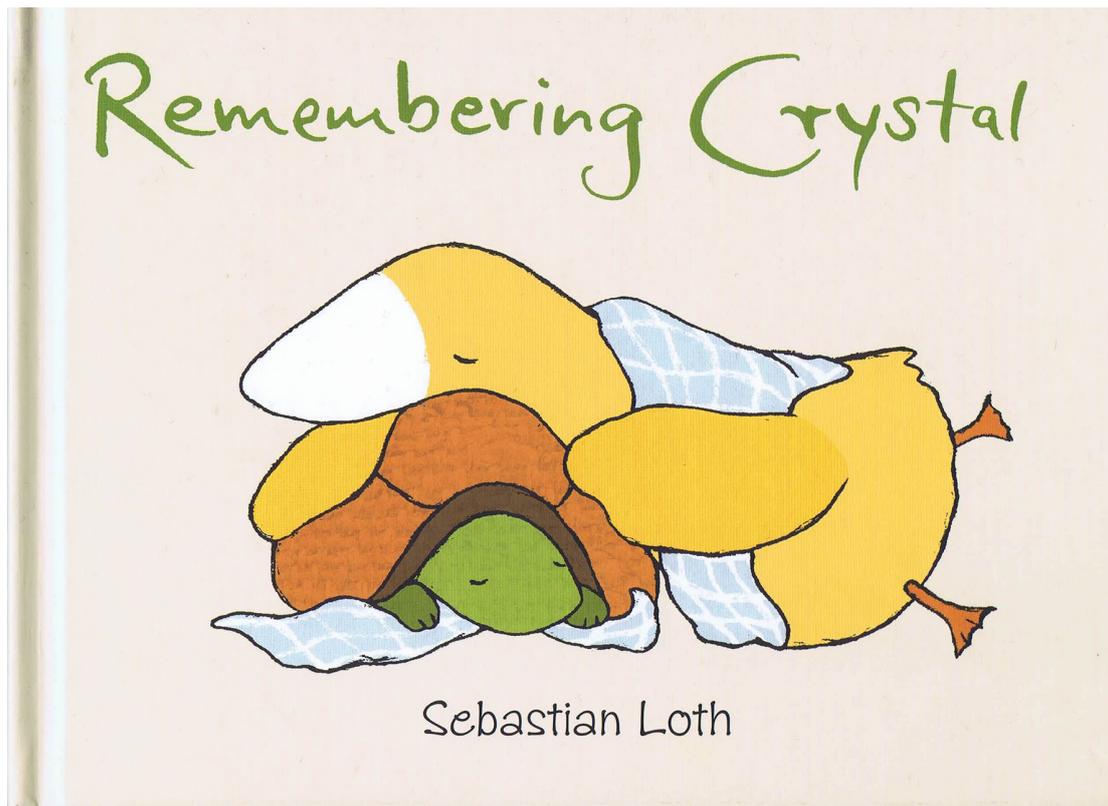
Jeffers, Oliver. *The Heart and the Bottle*. (Book jacket, front).



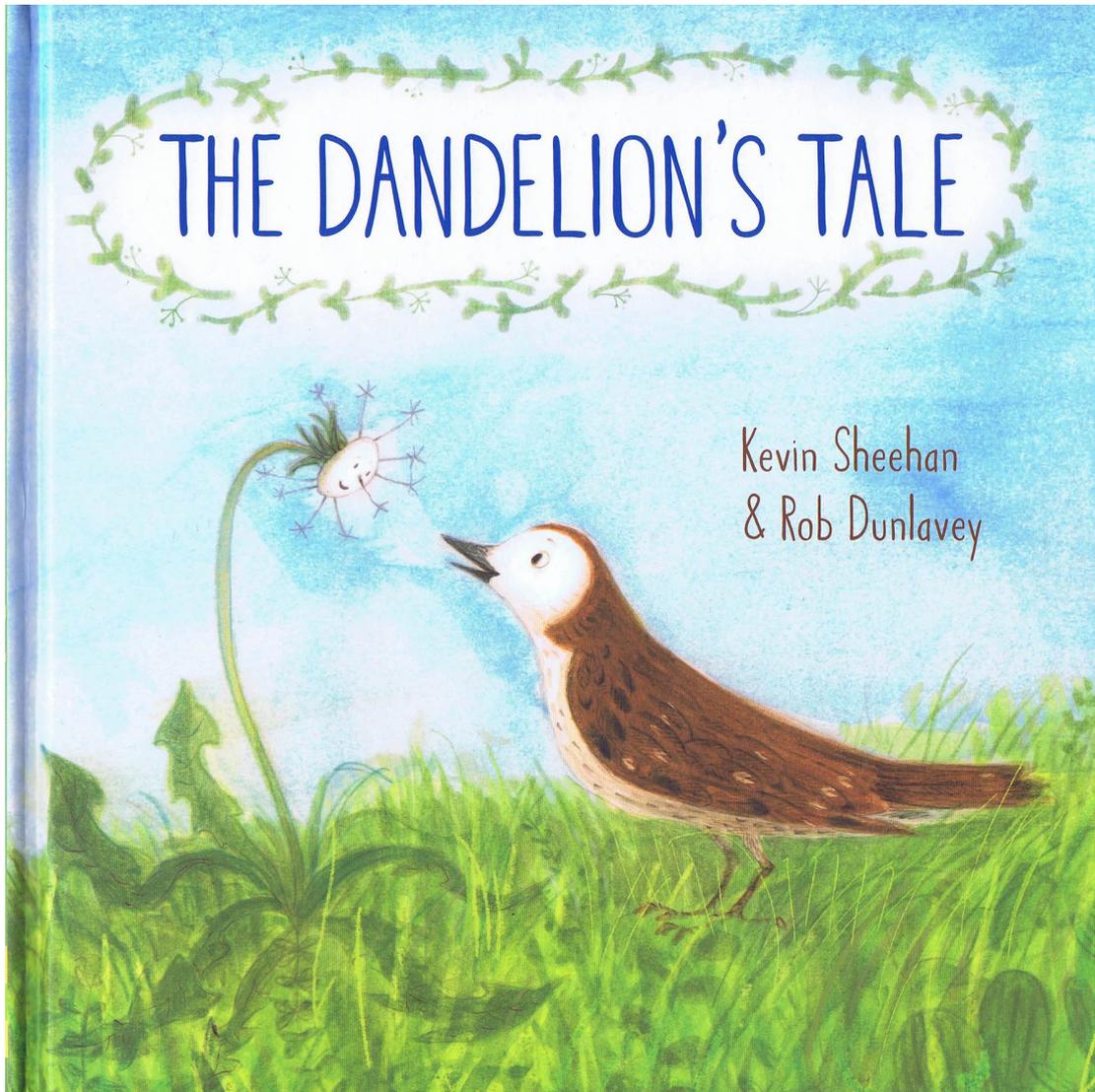
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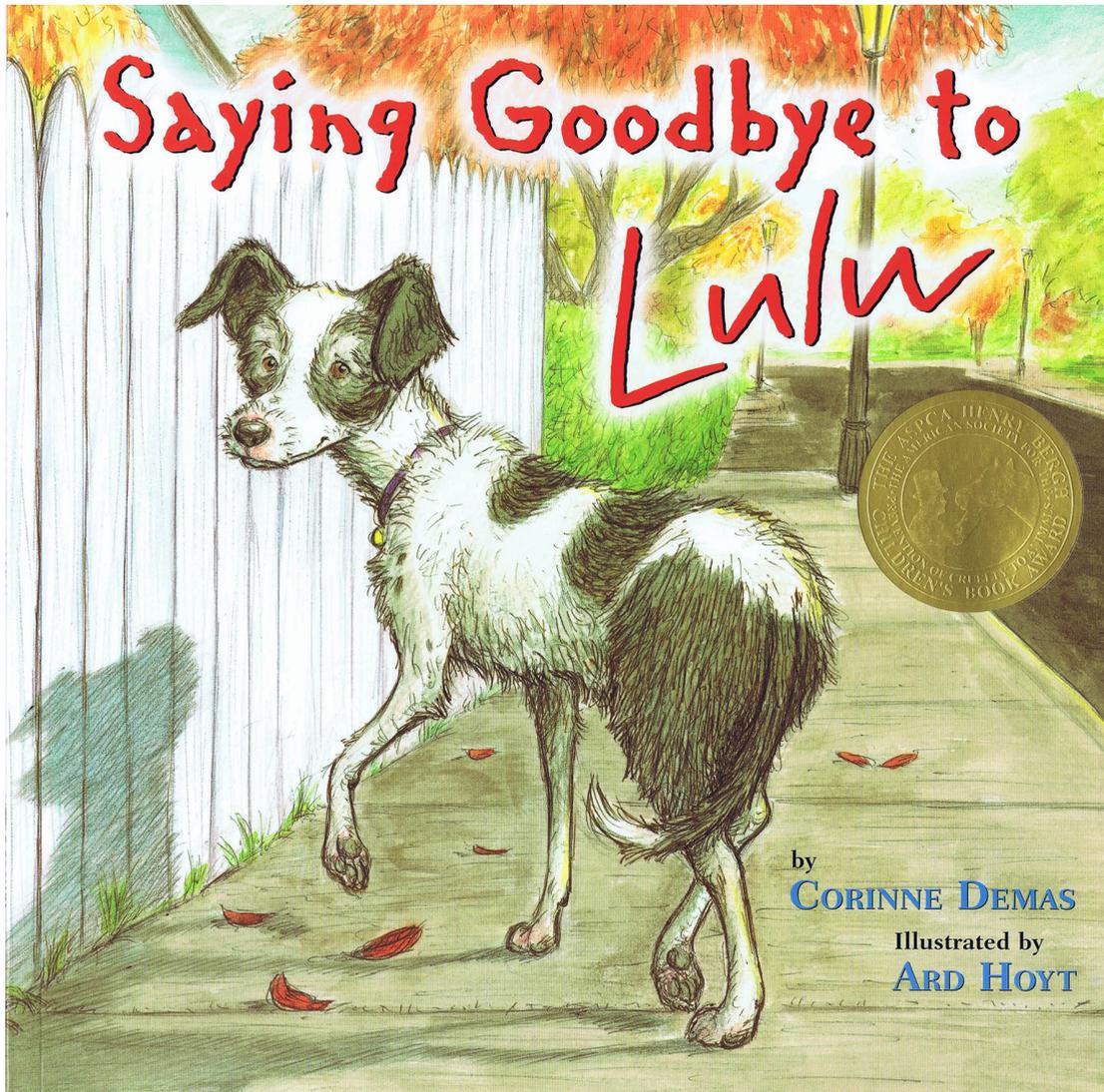
Jeffers, Oliver. *The Heart and the Bottle*. (Hardcover, front).



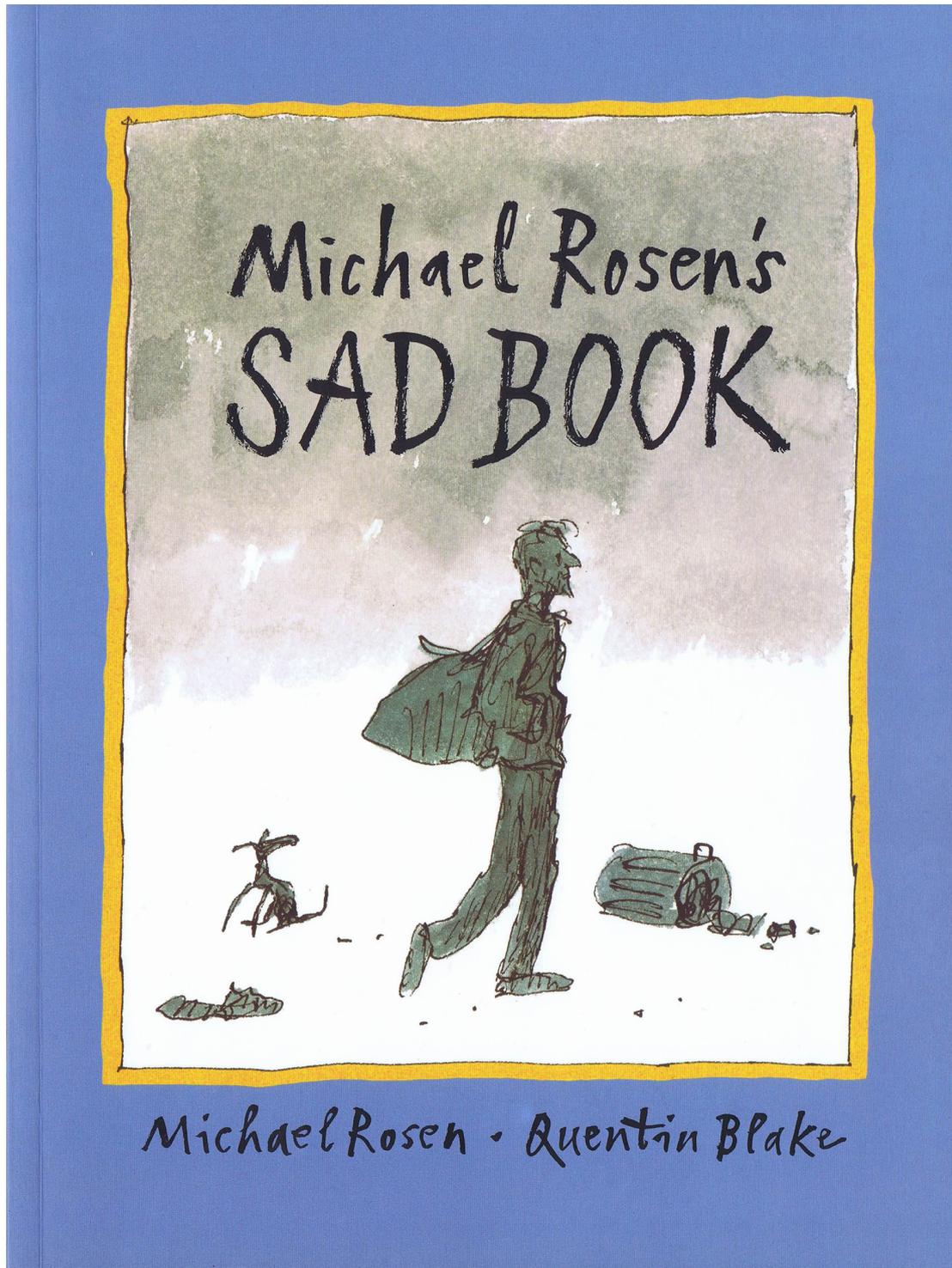
Loth, Sebastian. *Remembering Crystal*. (Front cover).



Sheehan, Kevin, and Rob Dunlavy. *The Dandelion's Tale*. (Front cover).



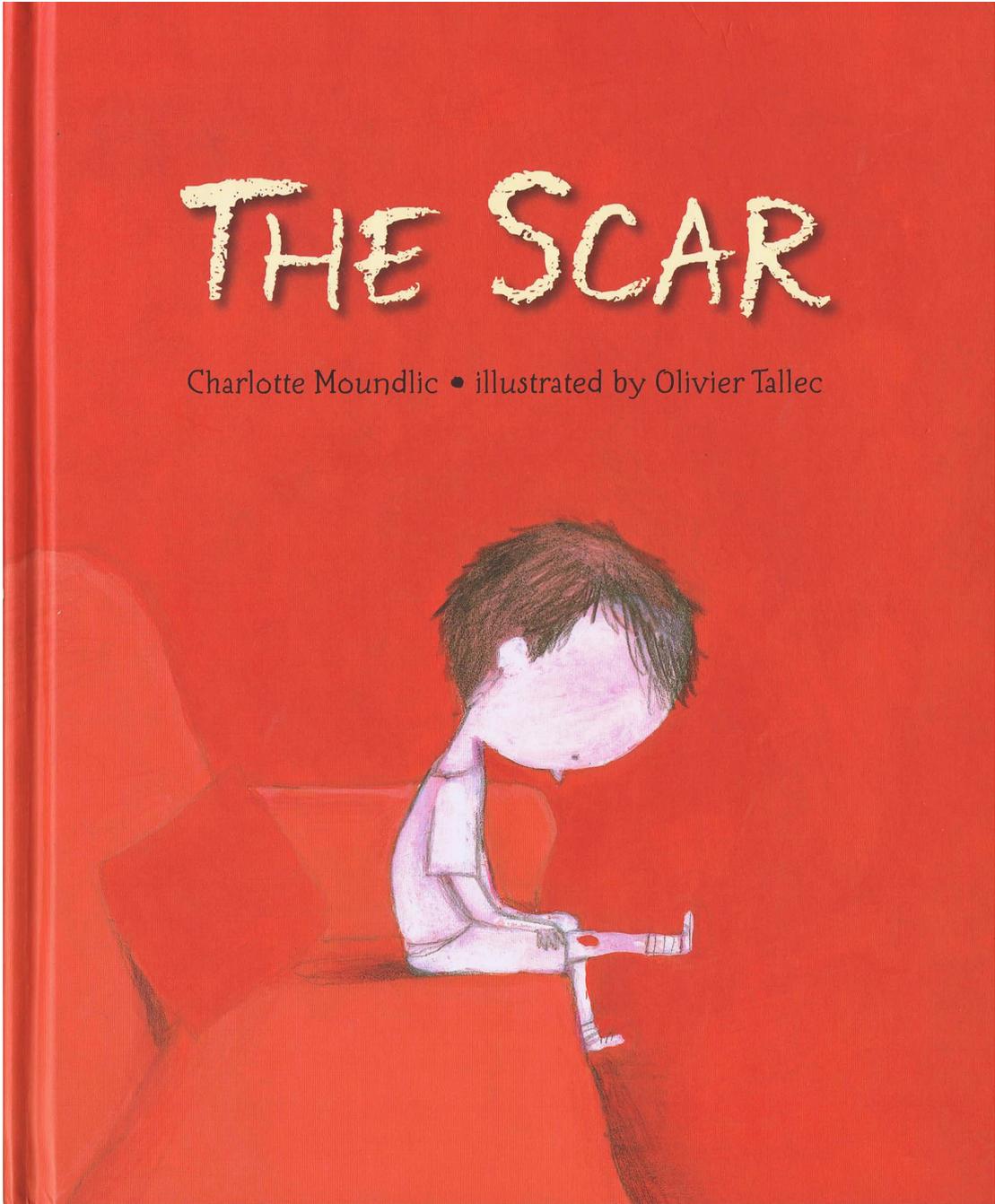
Demas, Corinne, and Ard Hoyt. *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*. (Front cover).



Rosen, Michael, and Quentin Blake. *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*. (Front cover).

THE SCAR

Charlotte Moundlic • illustrated by Olivier Tallec



Moundlic, Charlotte, and Olivier Tallec. *The Scar*. (Front cover).

Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

Der Tod ist ein sensibles Thema, insbesondere in unserer westlichen Gesellschaft, und noch problematischer erscheint es mit Kindern darüber zu sprechen. Menschen in enger Zusammenarbeit mit traumatisierten Kindern befinden sich womöglich in Situationen, in denen sie sich fragen, auf welche Art und Weise trauernden Kindern Trost gesendet werden kann. Bilderbücher über Tod, Verlust und Traurigkeit können in Zeiten der Trauer hilfreich und tröstlich sein. Angesichts der Bedeutung von Bilderbüchern für Kinder in ihrer Suche nach Antworten und Trost, gilt mein Interesse der Frage wie Bilderbücher das Thema Tod und Sterben aufgreifen. Welche Bilderbücher über Tod sind vorhanden und welche unterschiedlichen Darstellungsweisen werden herangezogen?

Eine Auswahl von sieben zeitgenössischen Bilderbüchern wird eingehend analysiert und den identifizierten Kategorien der Repräsentation entsprechend zugeordnet: *Personifikation*, *Euphemismus*, *anthropomorphe Tiere / Pflanzen*, *Verlust eines Haustieres* und *Tod eines Menschen*. Wenngleich noch viele weitere Bilderbücher über Tod verfügbar sind, konnte aufgrund der gewählten Methode einer qualitativen Interpretation nur eine begrenzte Anzahl von sieben Büchern selektiert werden. *Duck*, *Death and the Tulip*, *The Heart and the Bottle*, *Remembering Crystal*, *The Dandelion's Tale*, *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, *The Scar* und *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* konfrontieren die Leserschaft mit dem Thema Tod auf verschiedenste Weise.

Obwohl es sich bei den analysierten Bilderbüchern um einzigartige Kunstwerke handelt, die sehr unterschiedliche Geschichten erzählen, weisen sie dennoch Parallelen in zweierlei Hinsicht auf. Zum einen nähern sie sich dem Thema Tod mit äußerster Sensibilität und zum anderen präsentieren sie den Tod als selbstverständlichen Teil des ewigen Kreislaufs von Leben und Tod. Ferner scheinen die meisten untersuchten Bilderbücher über Tod zu suggerieren, dass das Leben nach dem Tod eines Geliebten für die Hinterbliebenen weitergeht und jedes Ende zugleich einen Neubeginn darstellt.

Im Zuge meiner Diplomarbeit recherchiere ich auf den Gebieten Bilderbuchanalyse, Entwicklungspsychologie und Kinderliteratur. Alle ausgewählten Bilderbücher werden in Hinblick dessen analysiert.

Zudem konzentriere ich mich vor allem auf die Text-Bild-Interaktion und die Bedeutung, die Wort und Bild gemeinsam generieren. Ist der Tod verblümt mit Euphemismen dargestellt oder wird dieses Thema direkt angesprochen? Sind Tod und Sterben sowohl in Wort als auch in Bild vorhanden? Das Hauptziel meiner Diplomarbeit ist es, Einblicke in die mannigfaltigen verbalen und visuellen Repräsentationsmittel des Todes zu gewähren.

Abstract (English)

Death is a delicate topic, especially in our Western society. It is even more difficult when discussing it with children. People in close contact with traumatized children might find themselves in situations where they wonder what may provide consolation to children in times of sorrow or distress. Picturebooks about death, loss and sadness may be helpful and comforting. Considering the importance of picturebooks for children in their search for answers and solace, I am interested in the question of how picturebooks introduce the theme of death and dying. What picturebooks about death are there and what means of representation are being employed?

A sample of seven contemporary picturebooks is analyzed in detail and assigned to one of the identified categories of representation: *personification*, *euphemism*, *anthropomorphic animals / plants*, *pet loss*, and *death of a person*. Even though there are many more death-related picturebooks available, only seven are selected in order to allow a qualitative analysis. *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, *The Heart and the Bottle*, *Remembering Crystal*, *The Dandelion's Tale*, *Saying Goodbye to Lulu*, *The Scar* and *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* confront their readers with death choosing very distinctive approaches.

Although the selected books are all unique art works and tell different stories, they are nonetheless similar in two respects. First, they all approach the theme of death with great sensitivity, and second, they present death as a natural part of the eternal cycle of life and death. Furthermore, most examined picturebooks about death appear to suggest that life continues after someone has died and that every end is a new beginning.

As part of my thesis, I am conducting research in the field of picturebook theory, developmental psychology and children's literature. All selected picturebooks are analyzed with regards to the relationship between words and images and the meaning they create. Is death depicted in an allusive form including euphemistic language or is it addressed directly? Are death and dying present in both word and image? It is the main aim of this thesis to provide insights into different means of verbal and visual representation of death.

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PERSONAL INFORMATION

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2009-2015	Student at the University of Vienna (English, Psychology and Philosophy with a teaching degree)
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Oct 2014, Apr 2015	Course leader and mentor of Austrian apprentices in St. Julians, Malta – a project by IFA (International Young Workers Exchange)
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LANGUAGES

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