

## Binary Opposition of Life vs Death in H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales

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### Abstract

*When analysing the binary opposition of life vs Death in the famous fairy tales of H.C. Andersen semiotic approach is used. The aim is to reveal how this binary opposition is used in fairy tales to create meanings, as it serves both as an element of the plot and as a means of expressing values. It has been observed that the conceptual opposition pair of Life and Death is often associated with Up vs Down opposition. The dichotomic category of Life vs Death in part of the fairy tales is presented in the context of religious themes. It turned out that Andersen followed the concept of death, considering it as a continuation of natural life, in many cases romanticised, more qualitative and happier than the real reality marked by scarcity and lack of love. Thus the boundaries between life and death are erased, giving life the connotations of death, and vice versa.*

**Keywords:** H.C. Andersen, fairy tales, binary opposition, life and death, semiotic approach.

## 1. Introduction

In H.C. Andersen's oeuvre, letters and diaries, the theme of death is one of the dominant, thus there is found a constant recurring desire to be dead, usually determined by specific circumstances of the time (Gustaitiené, 2009). It should be noted that of his 156 fairy tales, even one-third, i.e. 56 stories end with the death of the main character, and the motive of death itself is found in a series of fairy tales.

The fact that Andersen often depicts death as a character or a plot element in his literary fairy tales is not unusual. Folk tales often depict death: the death of a negative character usually allows the positive character to feel happy and is presented as a victory of good over evil. However, during the period when Andersen wrote his works, there was a noticeable change in human attitude towards death. If, since ancient times, a person accepted death as natural and prepared for it, thinking about his or her life, sincerely remembering loved persons and things, apologising to all friends and finally addressing God, the changing consciousness gradually established a new perception of death as something wrong, painful and frightening (Gustaitiené, 2009).

Although death is depicted as a significant plot event in a rather sentimental and sensitive way, what was typical of Romanticism literature, according to D. M. Segabinazi & J. de Sousa Barbosa, "For children and even for adults, the narratives that talk about the theme of death, portray how it is an inherent part of life and how it is possible that there are so many considerations regarding its existence" (Segabinazi & de Sousa Barbosa, 2019). In his works, Andersen allows not only and not necessarily bad characters to die, thus death is not inevitably the end of the evil done by negative characters. In some fairy tales, on the contrary, death becomes a way out of difficult or disastrous living conditions, while the transformation it provides often shifts to a happier reality.

This article explores the role of the binary opposition of Life vs Death in Andersen's fairy tales through a semiotic approach. The article aims to reveal how this binary opposition is used in fairy tales to create meanings, as it serves both as an element of the plot and as a means of expressing values. It is assumed that binary oppositions are the bone of structural analysis of the stories and the key to decoding their meaning.

It was found that Life vs Death opposition depicted in Andersen's fairy tales lacks studies, which makes this publication original from a methodological point of view: the combination of semiotic and conceptual theoretical approaches reveals the dialectical relationship between the opposition concepts of Life vs Death in Andersen's fairy tales.

## 2. Literature review

The origin of the term 'binary opposition' is associated with the name of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structuralism. According to Saussure, "binary opposition is how the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined in reciprocal determination with another term, as in binary code. It is not a contradictory relation but, a structural, complementary one" (Fogarty, 2005).

In other words, binary oppositions are pairs of opposite terms and concepts. From the point of view of the theory of structuralism, the individual elements of language in the process of perception have no absolute meaning or value, their meaning and value relate to other elements. It is not possible to analyse individual elements, regardless of the relation between them. To comprehend one element, we need to understand the whole system of relations, i.e. the structure. It is the opposition that represents the paradigmatic relation between language

units with different attributes. Thus, binary oppositions are one of the systems that enable the human mind to comprehend the meaning of a concept or idea (Barry, 2014).

As binary opposition is a phenomenon of human thinking, language is not the only area in which the principles of the theory of structuralism can be applied to the analysis. The French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss saw the paradigmatic pattern of binary oppositions in the forms of human culture: myths, fairy tales, rituals, primeval art. According to Lévi-Strauss, the myth or other narrative, like language, has its own structure, i.e. 'grammar'. By understanding this 'grammar' we will understand the 'message' the narrative communicates. Therefore, Lévi-Strauss was not interested in the sequence of the narrative, but in a structural pattern that gives it meaning. The model of binary opposition is the basic structure of the human mind, i.e. the structure that governs the way human beings shape their institutions, artifacts, and forms of knowledge (Selden et al, 2013).

The model of binary oppositions has been applied to the analysis of narratives in the works of representatives of the discipline of semiotics, such as Peirce, Barth, Greimas, Lotman and others (Danesi, 2009). Binary oppositions are certain conceptual mechanisms that carry an axiological load as they reflect the cultural values of our civilisation. Some of the key binary oppositions are 'up' and 'down', 'right' and 'left', 'near' and 'far', 'front' and 'back', while the directions 'up, right, near, front' are considered positive, 'down, left, far, back'- negative. This evaluation is influenced by our bodily and cultural experiences, e.g. we get up to live, we are in a horizontal position when sick or dead, we use the right hand more often than the left, 'close' implies something easier to get, more defined, and we interact with the world with our face turned forward (Kuczok, 2010).

For example, the opposition Up vs Down identified in music, when the concept of happiness is expressed in high tones, and sadness -in low tones. This Up corresponds to joy and happiness, and Down to the sadness in the entire cultural codes network. According to Grigoryeva (2014), the up-down dyad is a culturally significant metaphorical opposition, whose primary semantics are associated with the expression of spatial relationships, which are one of the main types of relationships perceived by people and reflected in language forms. Based on the structure of the human body, attention is drawn to the importance of the upper elements (eyes, head, heart, etc.) in classifying them as 'spiritual'. Thus, by associating the upper part of a body with positive connotations and the lower part with negative connotations, this principle is transferred to the external and internal world as well.

Opposition Up vs Down in linguistic consciousness is expressed as a special way of understanding the world, a certain measure of reality through which physical space is perceived and valued as good or bad. According to various sources, it can be said that the up-down dyad is based on the interpretation of emotional, ethical, religious, social, epistemological phenomena of life. The Up vs Down binary opposition's primary semantics is associated with the expression of spatial relationships. Metaphorically, being down is associated with the fall, death, matter, earth, lying position, depressed mood, low social layer and, similarly, the upper dimension is usually associated with life, ascent, heaven, standing position, elevated mood, high social status, etc. Based on Christian and pagan ideas, upward movement is seen as positive, and downward movement as negative (Grigoryeva, 2014). In connection with this vertical axis with religious beliefs, it can be said that Up is perceived as the heavenly abode of God, and Down as the abyss, hell. Thus, the movement of a soul after

death, according to the believers, is possible in two directions: Up as an ascension to heaven or paradise and Down like a fall, ending up in hell.

Although Andersen's oeuvre is renowned in many cultures and appreciated by many generations, there are still not many analytical scientific works devoted to analysing the role of binary oppositions in Andersen's literary work. Maria S. Draga-Alexandru (1999) has analysed binary oppositions in fairy tales from the value aspect. The author aims to show how the universal oppositions (good/evil, beautiful/ugly, true/false, etc.) inherent in folktales function in Andersen's fairy tales. At the same time, she revealed what symbols are used to represent them and what ethical values they reveal.

Life vs Death binary opposition in Slavic prosaic folk narratives (in fairy tales, proverbs, riddles, etc.) has been analysed by Naumova et al., who revealed the origin of this opposition in pagan Slavic culture. According to the authors, the dualism of the opposition is embodied by the personified figures of Baba Yaga and Koschei Immortal, the dual symbolism of water and dryness (Naumovska et al, 2021).

### 3. Methodology

Life vs Death binary opposition is analysed through a semiotic approach. Applying a semiotic approach to the analysis of selected fairy tales helps to identify the role of Life vs Death binary opposition in the whole meaning of creation allowing for a revelation of the deeper meaning of these fairy tales.

According to Putri and Sarwato (2016), "binary opposition is indeed indispensable and fundamental in every field of study including literature". On the one hand, the reconstruction of thematic binary oppositions allows the reader to recognise the implicated meaning of the text, to choose a variant of interpretation. On the other hand, the binary opposition allows the author to express his/her ideas in the text. Thus, binary opposition is equally important to both the author and the reader. For authors, binary oppositions help to establish, integrate, highlight ideas, decode the author's intentions, get a picture of the whole text, as well as understand what is happening in the text (Putri & Sarwato, 2016).

Four fairy tales of H.C. Andersen were chosen for semiotic Life vs Death binary opposition analysis: *A Rose from Homer's Grave*, *The Little Match Girl*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Child in the Grave*. In all these fairy tales, the theme of Life vs Death is dominant, thus it becomes not only the key for plot analysis of fairy tales but also provides a basis for culture-idea analysis. With the help of this opposition, symbols and signs, which embody human values accumulated in the process of mastering the worldview, are conveyed.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1.A Rose from Homer's Grave

The rose, sprouted on the grave of the famous ancient bard Homer, becomes a symbol of life and vitality, expressing what is beautiful, passionate, and viable. Meanwhile, it is opposed to death, as the name of the fairy tale already includes the motif of the grave, thus the death category in this binary opposition contains such meanings as cold, stagnation, immobility, ugliness, etc. At the same time, one can talk about the idea of temporality, which is opposed to eternity, therefore the semantic field of the opposition of Life vs Death is expanded to include new meanings.

The symbolism of the red rose in this fairy tale can be interpreted in two ways, i.e. as a symbol of eternal love and at the same time in the context of Christian symbolism, the red rose conveys the allegory of sacrifice as shed blood and the wounds of Christ (Žvironaitė, 2005). After being picked and placed in Homer's book, as if placed in a sarcophagus, a rose becomes a symbol of life, sacrifice and eternal love.

Thus, in this narrative, the duality of life and death is expressed through the prism of love, as in a certain sense the fairy tale portrays the triangle of love: the rose dedicates its love to the famous poet, while the rose itself is loved by a nightingale. However, the rose does not answer the love of the bird, thus the bird dies of longing for love. The motif of the burial of a bird in the grave can be regarded as a manifestation of the notion that death is a journey down: And the nightingale sang himself to death. Then came the bearded camel driver with his laden camels and his black slaves. His little boy found the dead bird, and in pity buried it in the grave of the great Homer while the rose trembled slightly in the wind<sup>1</sup>.

The second part of the fairy tale consists of the content of a dream of the rose and its transformation into reality: the poet from the Northern country picks the rose and puts her in a book written by Homer, like a souvenir and a memory of the famous place visited, i.e. Homer's grave. At the end of the fairy tale, the situation is established, emphasising the transition of the rose from the life dimension to the one of death:

The rose rests now like a mummy between the leaves of his Iliad, and as in her dream she hears him say as he opens the book, "Here is a rose from Homer's grave!"

This transition is based on the fact that being alive the rose cannot unite with the object of love, which is dead, thus the transition from life to death opens the opportunity to be closer to the object of her love. The rose is compared to the mummy, which becomes a conserved fine thing looking alive and remaining protected in the book as if in the sarcophagus.

Life vs Death binary opposition is also echoed by Vigilance vs Dreaming opposition, which is also mentioned in the fairy tale. Dead rose in a way is sleeping and dreaming, which alludes to a recognisable symbolic situation of being down. The rose is linked to the downward direction by the horizontal position of a sleeper, which is associated with the position of the deceased's body.

The fact that the rose is picked up and placed in a book like in a grave corresponds to the direction down, i.e. marking its physical death. The vertical axis can be seen in the episode when the bard from the North puts a picked rose into the Iliad book and takes it to his home country. From a cartographic perspective, the movement from Asia to the North symbolises moving upwards. Thus, the rose's afterlife being, i.e. immortality, is conceptualised upwards and acquires a positive meaning.

Another important theme of the fairy tale is the relationship between creation and related eternity. It is a creation that acts as an important factor, paradoxically turning the opposition of Life vs Death upside down, as deceased bards and poets acquire immortality through their creation, thus remaining living forever. The very concept of immortality is like a network of many assumptions and cultural meanings, in which the religious, philosophical, aesthetic and other dimensions of the concept of eternal life intertwine. The idea that works of art can be eternal and at the same time eternalising the artist himself and thus giving him the gift of immortality, is old and deeply rooted in our culture.

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<sup>1</sup>The Hans Christian Andersen Centre. [https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/ARoseFromHomersGrave\\_e.html](https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/ARoseFromHomersGrave_e.html)  
Accessed on 15 August 2021.

The nightingale, by sacrificing her life for love and the act of creation, metaphorically combines the figures of the poet from the Northcountry and Homer himself, highlighting the idea of the immortality of artistic creation. Immortalised in this Andersen's fairy tale, she subsides in Homer's grave next to the poet. Therefore the divide between life and death is relatively erased with the help of art.

#### **4.2. The Little Mermaid**

The dramatic story of love and sacrifice, immortalised in the popular tale of the Little Mermaid, has captivated generations of readers. In a transformed version of Hollywood and other cinematographers, the little mermaid dies, turning into a seafoam. Since she does not win the prince's love and does not marry him, she has to die as such is her agreement with the witch. However, in the original version of H.C. Andersen's fairy tale, the end of this fairy tale is somewhat different, i.e. the fairy tale does not end up turning the mermaid into a seafoam. When the little mermaid undergoes transformation, she notices that she is surrounded by cute creatures, so-called daughters of the air. They explain to her that life after death does not end and that the little mermaid has the opportunity to obtain an immortal soul:

You, poor little mermaid, have tried with your whole heart to do as we are doing. You have suffered and endured, and raised yourself to the spirit world by your good deeds, and now, by striving for three hundred years in the same way, you may obtain an immortal soul.

Since the little mermaid dreamed of an immortal soul while still living on the bottom of the ocean, and it was one of the motives that led her to become human, such a turn of destiny opens her way to the eternal life of the soul. Thus in this fairy tale, the binary opposition of Life vs Death is extended by Up vs Down binary categories (corresponding to the Up vs Down opposition), which form the basis for the entire semantic structure of the fairy tale.

Although in the fairy tale the underwater world is portrayed as beautiful and harmonious, being at the bottom dimension the little mermaid associated it with loneliness and symbolic death without finding love, meaning and purpose in life. The author expands the semantic field of the category of Life into the Non-life category, strengthened by the use of the category Down. Similarly, the episode of the drowning prince manifests the view that death is a movement down, and his rescue expresses the idea that going back to life is moving up.

The human world, which emerges on the vertical of the Up dimension, is not only a place of life and love but also a place of suffering. The little mermaid silently suffers pain while walking and dancing, she suffers seeing how the prince chooses another lady as his bride. However, the little mermaid must leave this dimension by experiencing the transformation that is assimilated to death. Becoming a seafoam would seem like losing her body, personality, and individuality.

However, the fairy tale is a fairy tale, thus the writer moves his protagonist to an even higher dimension, while returning her to life, thus the binary opposition of Death vs Non-death often varies, and the concept of life is extended to the category of eternal life. It is noteworthy that the writer deliberately chooses to end the work with a demonstration of infinite divine mercy, a paradox of mercy that is incomprehensible by the mind (Bøggild, 2005). That is why the narrative of the little mermaid is based on a two-way movement: the little mermaid goes on the path of defeat as she has to take it, and the next path is the path of salvation, and this is the path of victory. Therefore the mermaid resigns but has the opportunity to be saved, which follows the basic principle of the Christian worldview: a person is subject to insurmountable demands in life, but still awaits mercy and salvation, which depends on grace, and grace reaches man as a miracle, at the most unexpected moment. Nevertheless, the little mermaid

earns salvation as she herself demonstrates generousness and mercy: she saves the prince's life, even though she knows that for this she will have to sacrifice her own:

The little mermaid lifted her glorified eyes towards the sun, and felt them, for the first time, filling with tears. On the ship, in which she had left the prince, there were life and noise; she saw him and his beautiful bride searching for her; sorrowfully they gazed at the pearly foam as if they knew she had thrown herself into the waves. Unseen she kissed the forehead of her bride, and fanned the prince, and then mounted with the other children of the air to a rosy cloud that floated through the aether.

In summary, it should be noted that in this fairy tale, the opposition of Life vs Death is presented as liquid, with both meanings overlapping. In other words, the little mermaid travelling up in the vertical is not fully alive or dead in either of the three dimensions. The undefined, lenient boundary between the two states reveals the diversity of the phenomenon what it means to be alive. The Christian worldview, which presupposes the idea that true and at the same time eternal life is achieved only after the death of the physical body, contributes to the idea.

From the perspective of the axiology of the Up vs Down binary opposition, the movement of the little mermaid upwards from the underwater world to the earthy, from the earthy to the celestial, corresponds to the Christian concept of spiritual growth, i.e. the renunciation of the bodily life for the salvation of the soul.

#### **4.3. The Little Match Girl**

Although considered very sad, this fairy tale is well known and is first analysed as an expression of social inequality in society, emphasising coldness, hunger, and loneliness. The storyline distinguishes several significant opposition pairs, such as Violence vs Love, Poverty vs Richness, Struggle vs Salvation and Life vs Death by presenting morals about social exclusion, religious faith and human relationships in their context (Sanders, 2016).

However, the binary opposition is Life vs Death is key, complementing the contrast between the detailed cold, uncomfortable and hostile reality to the girl, and the imaginary fabulous reality meeting her needs seen in her visions. The first vision, which appeared in the light of the match, satisfies the girl's need for warmth, which is closely related to the survival, comfort and physical safety that she most needed for that cold New Year's evening:

It was a warm, bright flame, like a candle, as she held her hands over it: it was a wonderful light. It seemed really to the little maiden as though she were sitting before a large iron stove, with burnished brass feet and a brass ornament at top. The fire burned with such blessed influence; it warmed so delightfully.<sup>2</sup>

The second vision satisfied her hunger and starvation:

On the table was spread a snow-white tablecloth; upon it was a splendid porcelain service, and the roast goose was steaming famously with its stuffing of apple and dried plums<sup>3</sup>.

In the light of the third match, the girl saw a vision that met the need for a cosy home, family and emotional security:

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<sup>2</sup>Andersen H. C. (2008). Andersen's Fairy Tales. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H_4_0017)

<sup>3</sup>Andersen H. C. (2008). Andersen's Fairy Tales. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H_4_0017)

Now there she was sitting under the most magnificent Christmas tree: it was still larger, and more decorated than the one which she had seen through the glass door in the rich merchant's house. Thousands of lights were burning on the green branches, and gaily-colored pictures, such as she had seen in the shop windows, looked down upon her<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, in her fourth vision, she was visited by her beloved deceased grandmother, whose the girl begs to take her along:

Oh, take me with you! I know you will disappear when the match is burned out. You will vanish like the warm stove, the wonderful roast goose and the beautiful big Christmas tree<sup>5</sup>!

Thus, the fourth and most important need that a girl feels is the need for care and love from her loved ones. Belonging and interrelationship are very important for the child's survival and happiness.

All these four needs express the conditions necessary for life, hence extending the semantic field of Life category, while at the same time drawing the line between life and death. Meanwhile, the lack of these conditions leads to death, which happens in the story physically. As in the above-analysed fairy tale, a clear parallel can be seen between the duality of life-death and Up vs Down opposition pair. This symbolic vertical axis separates the upward movement towards heaven as a metaphor for a full life and God's abode, thus ascending becomes an aspiration leading to love and interrelationship. While, the symbolic Down category is associated with aspects of poor earthly life, scarcity, and death:

And the matches gave such a brilliant light that it was brighter than at noon-day: never formerly had the grandmother been so beautiful and so tall. She took the little maiden, on her arm, and both flew in brightness and in joy so high, so very high, and then above was neither cold, nor hunger, nor anxiety—they were with God<sup>6</sup>.

The fact that death is identified with the direction upwards gives it a positive connotation, as it marks the end of the bodily life and the beginning of the life of the soul. The fairy tale is based on the premise 'life is a movement downwards as it is earthly, bodily life, which is consistent with the Christian view of earthly life as painful, sinful, and incomplete. Again, as in previous fairy tales, the category of Non-life is found here, i.e. when life cannot be called life due to physical reality limited by too severe shortages and unmet needs; in this way, death serves as a kind of transformation that allows the transition to a happier existence or better reality.

The opposition of Life vs Death in this fairy tale is additionally reinforced by Light vs Dark and Warmth vs Cold opposition pairs. While in Christian Western culture light is primarily a symbol of knowledge, spirit, morality, septic great virtues, as well as enlightenment (Ferber, 1999). It also symbolises holiness, goodness, truth and life (Robbins, 2017). In the fairy tale, there are several light motifs, i.e. stars and match's light, lights of the Christmas tree, fire in a large iron stove, and finally a glowing vision of the grandmother ("in the luster there stand the old grandmother, so bright and radiant"). All these motives together represent life, and when a new match is lit, the logic of a miracle begins to work, thus light, as the power of creation, gives the girl what she lacks the most. Light in this story contrasts with darkness, which

<sup>4</sup>Andersen H. C. (2008). Andersen's Fairy Tales. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H_4_0017)

<sup>5</sup>Andersen H. C. (2008). Andersen's Fairy Tales. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H_4_0017)

<sup>6</sup>Andersen H. C. (2008). Andersen's Fairy Tales. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H_4_0017)



symbolically includes cold, poverty, hunger, and loneliness. Darkness, generally speaking, represents chaos, negativity, evil, and nothingness (Ferber, 1999). In the fairy tale, darkness and cold accompany the girl both on the street and at home: “Most terribly cold it was; it snowed, and was nearly quite dark<sup>7</sup>”. Thus the girl experiences transformation and with the help of a beloved grandmother, who even resembles the Virgin Mary in the vision, is transferred to the blessed kingdom of Heaven, which becomes a metaphor for fulfilling(eternal) life.

Therefore, it should be noted that in the fairy tale, the Death vs Life opposition is enriched with additional opposition categories, expanding the connotations of life and death and supplementing them with Christian symbolism and universal cultural meanings.

#### 4.4.The Child in the Grave

This less-known fairy tale from the mother’s perspective conveys the pain of the loss of a child, whose burial is no longer a matter of reason but of emotion. Only due to magic means the mother got to know that death is not the endpoint and life continues, and the living must live (Gustaitienė, 2009).

In the fairy tale Death as a character is personified and described by certain symbols and details. It helps the mother meet the deceased child and understand the truths of eternal life. Death is also an event that led to the dramatic course of the plot.

The topic of life and death in this fairy tale is fundamental, as, on the one hand, the mother, who suffers from the pain of loss, renounces herself and chooses death instead of life; thus, in case of excessive scarcity, life again is understood as ‘Non-life’. Meanwhile, her deceased child, whom the mother meets in the grave, allows her to understand that life does not end with death, on the contrary, the afterlife is more beautiful and happier, which corresponds to the Christian worldview, thus the category of Death is transformed into Non-death category:

“My sweet, darling mother,” she heard the child say. It was the well-known, beloved voice; and kiss followed kiss, in boundless delight. Then the child pointed to the dark curtain. “There is nothing so beautiful on earth as it is here. Mother, do you not see them all? Oh, it is happiness indeed<sup>8</sup>.”

Thus this fairy tale, like the previous one, extends the boundaries of the connotative Life vs Death opposition, metaphorically portraying life as Non-life and Death as Non-death. All of this is associated with the concepts of quality of life and scarcity-abundance. For a mother, life without a beloved child becomes uncomfortable, and the scarcity and pain of loss lead to her symbolic death, which is expressed by her night journey to the grave of the child, confrontation with death and a journey down to the depths of the grave. A brief meeting with her son gives her knowledge that her son continues to live as a free happy soul whose life path goes on. This allows the mother to discover the meaning of her life again and to return to the reality of the family, i.e. her beloved husband and daughters.

As in other fairy tales, the Life vs Death binary pair is semantically linked to the Up vs Down binary opposition, traditionally depicting the vertical movement downwards as leading to death and fall, and ascent upwards as the movement bringing to life:

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen H. C. (2008). Andersen’s Fairy Tales. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1597/1597-h/1597-h.htm#link2H_4_0017)

<sup>8</sup> Andersen, Hans Christian, The Child in the Grave, <http://www.free-short-stories.org.uk/hans-christian-andersen-the-child-in-the-grave.htm> Accessed 22 September 2021.

An overpowering light streamed in upon her, the child had vanished, and she was being borne upwards. All around her became cold; she lifted her head, and saw that she was lying in the churchyard, on the grave of her child<sup>9</sup>.

The semantic category Down is characterised by the metaphor of the grave pit, with the keywords dark, night and depth. Thus the mother's journey downwards, into the world of death, is accompanied by the following signs:

The earth that covered it was drawn back like a floating drapery. She sunk, and the spectre covered her with a black cloak; night closed around her, the night of death. She sank deeper than the spade of the sexton could penetrate, till the churchyard became a roof above her<sup>10</sup>.

According to Thomas Finn, the journey to the Otherworld is characterised by three features: 1) it is associated with death; 2) it is difficult, limited in access, often going underwater or reaching underground, which often requires magical helpers; 3) the hero is often associated with fertility as a sort of antithesis to the Otherworld (Finn, 1997). All these elements are inherent in this fairy tale, further strengthening the mother's journey to the Otherworld and back to life, psychologically, emotionally and even physically reviving for further life and restoring the balance of scarcity-abundance.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the analysis of the main motives and details reveals that the archetypic opposition of Life vs Death is the dominant structural and thematic model. The journey of the mother as an archetype hero to the Otherworld marks her symbolic death; and meeting with a deceased son, the figure of whom also resembles the symbol of the reborn Christ, allows her to symbolically relive and return to life. In this case, the renunciation of earthly life is treated negatively, following the important Christian belief that there is a time for everything and that death cannot be chosen as it is a privilege of God.

## 5. Discussion

In the fairy tales analysed, it should be noted that the author develops the theme of life and death, expanding it with both plot and idea elements. Andersen is guided by the idea that death is at God's disposal and depends on His will, thus serving either as punishment for the wicked or as forgiveness and even salvation for the good-hearted from poverty and misfortune. The fairy tales reflect the Christian worldview that both life and death are gifts of God.

It should be noted that in Andersen's works the ideals of his Christian faith are assumed, and although the topic of death is closely related to pain and loss, the author writes dramatically and sensitively on these topics, primarily because of the prevailing Romanticism spirit (Segabinazi & de Sousa Barbosa, 2019). The dichotomic category of Life vs Death in part of the fairy tales is presented in the context of religious themes.

The analysis of fairy tales revealed the concept of death followed by Andersen as a continuation of natural life, in many cases romanticised, more qualitative and happier than the real reality, which is marked by scarcity and primarily scarcity of love. Thus the boundaries between life and death are erased, giving life the connotations of death, and vice versa.

Life vs Death opposition used in fairy tales encourages the reader to think about how to overcome the challenges of life when something valuable is lost and it needs to be learned to cope with the grief and pain of loss. Another meaning conveyed by this binary opposition is

<sup>9</sup> Andersen, Hans Christian, The Child in the Grave, <http://www.free-short-stories.org.uk/hans-christian-andersen-the-child-in-the-grave.htm> Accessed 22 September 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, Hans Christian, The Child in the Grave, <http://www.free-short-stories.org.uk/hans-christian-andersen-the-child-in-the-grave.htm> Accessed 22 September 2021.

the test of endurance in pursuit of your goals and practising goodness, which is inherent in most fairy tales. Despite fear and suffering, love is the main force pushing the protagonist towards his or her goal, as in the fairy tales of *The Little Mermaid* and *The Child in the Grave*. The journey to the Otherworld, as in these analysed fairy tales, occurs in most cases as a transformation of the physical body, except in the fairy tale *The Child in the Grave*. In this story, we find another important model used in mythological narratives: after reaching the bottom and directly or symbolically the deceased protagonist acquires new knowledge or new abilities and can ascend or be reborn through them. According to Campbell (2004), many cultural myths follow the same basic model of action, including separation, initiation and return. These three steps reflect the process of self-discovery, which leads to a transformation that usually involves the symbolic death and rebirth of the hero (Campbell, 2004). The opposition of Up vs Down, which forms the basis of the Death vs Life binary opposition, reveals the axiological attitude of Andersen. Moving 'up' expresses a positive attitude towards the categories of this binary opposition, while the direction 'down' - negative. There was an ambivalent assessment of the concepts of life and death, which coincided with the paradox of the Christian worldview: the death of the body is the beginning of the new life of the soul. The axiological meaning of Up vs Down scheme ('up' is positive, 'down' is negative) reveals Andersen's Christian attitudes that determine the interaction between binary life and death oppositions in the context of fairy tales.

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