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Controversial topics in Greek children's books: the painful memory

Children's literature is written by adults who transfer their personal life experiences - insecurities, fears, dreams and other emotions- onto children. The "childness" in children's books is, to a great extent, manufactured out of an adult's memory of what it was like to be a child. Childness is composed of the grown-up's memories of childhood, of meaningful continuity between child and adult self (Hollindale 1997). The outcome is often an embellished and false perception that is adjusted to their adult needs as regards the meaning of what it is to be a "child." The transference of memories is the object of study of history. When, however, it is applied to children's literary narratives, it becomes the object of the theory of children's literature. The transference of such traumatic memories often clashes with the optimistic nature of literature for children. Children's books, even when dealing with violent and/or traumatic experiences and painful themes, undergo a process of embellishment governed by one major principle: they must lead children to optimistic conclusions. Whatever is bothersome is soothed over and whatever is traumatic is "rationalized" (Higonnet 2005). The debate revolves around the question of whether children's books apart from presenting a positive and optimistic picture of life should also aim at a more realistic portrayal of it. Striking a balance between the two opposing views presents a controversial topic for authors of children's books. My main concern in this paper is looking into whether, and to what degree, the antithesis between the presentation of the historical event or the unpleasant historical memory and the optimistic outlook so crucial to child rearing is preserved or not. Memory studies have shown that collective memory is social. The remembrance of (historical) events- through literary narratives- is a reconstruction of the past into the present and it is through this prism we will attempt to study it (Halbwachs 1925/1994, Mandoglou 2010). I will restrict my study to a few representative Greek children's books especially those set in the not too distant past.

Keywords: memory, memory studies, trauma, childness, shadow text.

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