Research Children and Philosophy

Duck , Death and The Tulip Wolf ErlBruch

The imagery is purposefully sparse and leaves space for the reader to create alternate narratives and to wonder about the relationship between the two characters. The visual language is understated and death is represented as a character that is part human part skull . In an animation of the book , the characters are both represented as female and the backgrounds are both bleak and unsettling but the relationship between the two characters is depicted with sensitivity and a resigned acceptance of the fate of Duck. They spend a little time together and when the time comes , there is no suggestion of a struggle. The inclusion of Duck being placed in a moving river leaves the ending a certain ambiguity in terms of what happens next and in the animation we see duck gently being carried by the river away from us , with the tulip having been gently placed on ducks torso. A sensitive handling of the subject matter , containing plenty of ambiguity for a dialogue to opened up between parent and child about the transcience of life and our intimate relationship with death.

Throwing up questions about death – why it happens –the relationship between life and death – what happens next ?.

Plenty of quiet moments in the text and images for reflective thinking..

Where does duck go ?

How does she die ? What is her relationship to Death ?

The death itself is devoid of violence and drama .

Duck embraces death.

The symbolism and significance of the tulip + perfect love

The journey of duck and Death

Mention kitty Crowthers book about The Little Death . The Lovely Girl in the story does not fear death like the others who receive a visitation. There are certain parallels between both books about Death, the embracing of death…Crowthers version is less dark perhaps , but once again opens up possibilities for conversations about the Human experience eg Where do we go when we die ? Is it scary ? Death’s intertwining relationship with life.

The book was nominated for the 2008 [Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutscher_Jugendliteraturpreis); the jury praised Erlbruch's "soft-philosophical *Pas de deux*" and his sparse illustrations: "the radical reduction of the images underlines the dramatic subject matter in a fulminant manner."[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck,_Death_and_the_Tulip#cite_note-3) [Meg Rosoff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meg_Rosoff), in a review for [*The Guardian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Guardian), called *Duck, Death and the Tulip* an "outstanding book": "There is something infinitely tender in the way Death strokes her ruffled feathers into place, lifts her body and places it gently in the river, watching as she drifts off into the distance."[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck,_Death_and_the_Tulip#cite_note-rosoff-2) Sieglinde Duchateau, in a review of the Dutch translation, also praised the book: "The atmosphere is warm, intimate, and full of comfort. In the masterpiece a difficult theme is made accessible for children in an idiosyncratic manner with a touch of humor."[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck,_Death_and_the_Tulip#cite_note-4)

Sean Tan The Red Tree Could be a metaphor for depression , but there is a lot of ambiguity – could be about Ennui / Boredom which are states a child mignhjt experience frequently as the days seem to be endless and time goes on into infinity – nicely encapsulated by the child sitting on the snail shell , with a spiral ( a metaphor for infinity ?).

David Hume was the Philosopher who argued against the existence of God and built his Philosophy around this. Most contemporary Philosophers base their scepticism around God on whether or not God’s existence can be proven.

In the book ‘ Yellow and Pink ‘ ,we are presented with two puppets who we come to learn as representative of holding two opposing views about the nature of God and of our human existence. The Yellow puppet is sceptical about the existence of God, whilst Pink believes in the existence of a Divine Creator. The two puppets begin to question( age old and fundamental Philosophical question ) how they might have come into being and thus ,an argument ensues , with Yellow using a system of questions used to open up an enquiry based on rationality and reasoning , whilst Pink espouses a position which is more or less rooted in uncertainty and faith.

Pink uses as an example to back up his position ,that only a Master Practitioner could create the wonderful elements of design that we see in the world around us, and he provides examples of the order and beauty of the world and the astounding symmetry of certain designs and muses about how all these intricate pieces fit together. Philosophers from as early in history as Plato have asked such questions and provided examples of the order of the universe and postulated about the significance of mathematics and how it is seemingly underpinning nature.

‘In the *Timaeus* Plato presents an elaborately wrought account of the formation of the universe. Plato is deeply impressed with the order and beauty he observes in the universe, and his project in the dialogue is to explain that order and beauty. The universe, he proposes, is the product of rational, purposive, and beneficent agency. It is the handiwork of a divine Craftsman ‘…

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>

Steig produced cartoons for The New Yorker magazine as well as being prolific in his creation of writing and illustrating books for children (check ).

Pink , in his debate with Yellow , brings attention to the fact that as there is so much order in the world and patterns that seem to fit together so cohesively , there must have been a conscious designer. ( see Platos theories ).

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**Plato's *Timaeus***

*First published Tue Oct 25, 2005; substantive revision Wed Mar 13, 2013*

Yellow proposes that we came about as a series of coincidences ( see Darwins theories of Evolution ).and that over time , the similarities that humans share in terms of biologies have evolved over long periods of time. The puppets discussions about whether or not a God exists , continue , with one offering challenges to the other about not simply having blind faith , but asking potent questions as a means to testing this. Darwin suggested that we appeared out of nothingness and that the species have evolved over long periods of time and humans evolved from animmals – mutations that evolve – survival of the fittest . Opening this up as a subject for further discussion in the classroom might include new theories which are challenging Darwin’s theories –eg

Due to advancements in the field of Molecular biology , we now know that previously thought simple organisms contain almost infinite complexities

There is a twist introduced at the end of the book , whereby a long haired human character comes and lifts up the puppets and takes them away , once the paint has dried. We might perceive the role of this character as being God Like.

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Molecular biologist Michael Denton wrote, "Although the tiniest bacterial cells are incredibly small, weighing less than 10-12 grams, each is in effect a veritable micro-miniaturized factory containing thousands of exquisitely designed pieces of intricate molecular machinery, made up altogether of one hundred thousand million atoms, far more complicated than any machinery built by man and absolutely without parallel in the non-living world." <http://www.darwins-theory-of-evolution.com/>