"Life Has Become a Sickness That Only Death Can Heal”

Representations of Death in Astrid Lindgren’s *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*

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Abstract

Astrid Lindgren is one of Sweden’s most beloved writers of all time and many of her works include many hard topics, such as for example death. It has not always been as common to include such difficult topics in children's literature as it is today. The change in the sociopolitical attitude during the late 1960s brought in a new level of awareness and aspects of reality in children’s literature which is thought to be noticeable in works by Lindgren. This thesis aspires to explain kinds of representations of death prevalent in *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, and what these representations make visible in relation to the theoretical background based on what literary representation is and how it is constructed mostly by culture.

Despite the fact that both books share similar representations of death and those feelings associated with it, the overall perception is that *The Brothers Lionheart* depicts death as a salvation, something to find hope in and not to be scared of to a greater extent than *Mio’s Kingdom* does, where death is portrayed as dark and inescapable. Furthermore, this thesis concludes that Lindgren has incorporated the standards of social realism into both of these stories and that they originate from personal experiences.

Keywords: Death, representation, Astrid Lindgren, children's literature, Mio’s Kingdom, The Brothers Lionheart
Introduction

"I believe in children's need for consolation. When I was a child, people believed that when you die you go to heaven; that was not one of the most amusing things one could imagine, to be sure, but if everyone went there... That would at least be better than lying in the ground and not existing any more. Today's children no longer have this consolation. They no longer have this tale. So then I thought: one could perhaps give them another tale that can provide them with a little warmth while they wait for the unavoidable end."

- **Astrid Lindgren** to Egil Törnqvist, 1973

Astrid Lindgren is one of Sweden’s most beloved writers of all time, known all over the world for her imagination and creativity in writing children’s literature. One of the most noticed features of Lindgren’s writing is how she often incorporated important topics such as poverty, death and illness into her stories, despite them being heart-warming at their core. This is what has sparked the interest for this essay, as the aim is to analyze how death is represented in two of her most famous works; *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*.

Lindgren was an innovative author, by breaking barriers of how children’s literature was supposed to be written and what it should contain, and thereby established new traditions and tendencies in writing for a younger audience. Her aim was to entertain, but also to not shy away from difficult topics while providing comfort by introducing characters and fates that children could relate to. This aspect of her writing has been praised and cherished by many, as well as criticized by some. During Lindgren’s extensive career, she was a respected creator of public opinion as well as an advocate for children’s rights and her political convictions and social critique can be detected in many of her books.

Two of Lindgren’s most beloved stories, *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, are both driven by a dark theme, perhaps the darkest of all; death. This theme is always
present: even though it takes many different forms, ultimately it is what drives the story forward. The question of why death plays such a big part in these two stories could be understood from Lindgren’s own expressed reasons of incorporating death in children’s literature. As the epigraph to this thesis shows, Lindgren argued that she provided children's with an alternative consolation when the idea of heaven was no longer an option. She claims that the idea of heaven was not amusing or comforting, the only upside being that everyone eventually ended up in the same place, which was better than lying underground. The most important thing about heaven is that it is comforting to know that it will not be nothing. The aim of providing children with another consolatory story, more active and exhilarating version of life after death was understandably what drove Lindgren to write *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*.

Although it might be hard to imagine how serious and difficult topics have not always been integrated into literature for children, before the 1960s it was exceedingly more uncommon that it is today. An explanation for the change in what children’s literature could entail was the growing political awareness and the many protests and demonstrations that was revolving around questions such as sexism and racism in the 1960s. The change in the sociopolitical attitude also brought in a new level of awareness and aspects of reality in children’s literature. It became more common to include more realistic components in fiction for children and books written without any political, realistic or moral connotation were seen as outdated and there was a new need for change in what literature children should take part of (Elleman, 413-415).

This change is noticeable in works of Lindgren, considering how many of her works include realistic and moral components, which is stated by Vivi Ekström in her book *Astrid Lindgren och Sagans Makt*; a depiction of the background to Lindgren’s stories and how the stories were sprung from Lindgren’s own life experiences (Edström, 185). Many of
Lindgren’s stories aim to include components of reality that are not only happy and blissful. Eva-Marie Metcalfe argues in her article "Leap of Faith in Astrid Lindgren's Brothers Lionheart", an article analyzing The Brothers Lionheart with focus on complexity and ambiguity, that Lindgren’s aim was, other than providing consolation, to introduce children to what life can consist of for many people; death, poverty and misery as well as to give children a helping hand in resolving their own dilemmas by being able to identify with the traumas, anxiety and despair visible in the destinies of the character’s in her stories (167). Edström, in Astrid Lindgren – Vildtoring och Lägereld, in which she analyzes Lindgren’s authorship in order to concretize what made her so successful in writing for children, claims that Lindgren’s own view was that she wanted to create a humane attitude amongst those children reading her books (18). It is concluded that Lindgren's main aspirations of including tough issues into her stories was to console as well as ethically advise.

Lindgren’s intentions for writing stories inspired by reality but with fairytales components were cherished by many, but some argued that her stories were anachronistic and presented a simplified depiction of the battle between good and evil. The criticism, foremost regarding The Brothers Lionheart, is compiled in Ulrika Ramstrands article "Vilka Äventyr Borde Få Finnas? Bröderna Lejonhjärta och Kritiken". In this article, she shows that for the critics, Lindgren was propagating for the blissfulness of death and thereby also suicide as the solution for dilemmas (Ramstrand, 45). Lindgren was also criticized for not taking the responsibility to think about how children could be affected by reading about these adventures that critics meant, "were not supposed to exist” (Ramstrand, 43). Collectively, the negative criticism also argued that there was no explanation for the evil that was appearing in her fictional worlds. In a newspaper article written by a group called ”Barnboksgruppen” and published in Dagens Nyheter in 1973, her depiction of evil is questioned: "Shouldn't a book that deals with the struggle between the evil and the good carefully and honestly examine the
root of the evil?” (Ramstrand, 44). However, the majority of critics were hugely positive and embraced her way of including reality into her books, by stating how she was unique in her way of so easily and harmoniously including depictions of death and suffering into her stories (Ramstrand, 43).

Even though Lindgren’s books have been analyzed from many different standpoints, a sole focus on the representation of death has not been carried out before. Instead, many of the studies of Lindgren’s works have been written from a pedagogical perspective and with the aim of examining how her works influence children, or what the moral lesson in them is.

This essay will, by an extensive reading of *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, focus on how death is represented and how it could be understood with support from the theoretical background of what literary representation is: how has death been represented in literature and what do we base those representations on. The focus of this thesis is to understand how death is represented and furthermore interpreted and what the most significant similarities and differences in the representations of death in *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart* are. In the first chapter, I will discuss the most visible representations of death in *Mio’s Kingdom*. In the second chapter, I will discuss the understandings of death in *The Brothers Lionheart* and furthermore compare those to what has been found in *Mio’s Kingdom* in order to understand how the books are similar and/or different from each other in terms of representing death. Finally, my argument is that, despite the fact that both books have similarities in what images are thought to represent death, there are significant differences in how those images of death can be understood as *Mio’s Kingdom* proposes a darker illustration of death than *The Brothers Lionheart*. 
1. Theory and Background

1.1 Representation and the Cultural History of Death

Death can be represented in various ways with just as many different ideas as to explain how these representations can be read, understood and theorized. In analyses of children’s literature, representations of death and how death is dealt with is often explained from a pedagogical standpoint, i.e how books about or including death written for children can be used for explaining children’s perceptions of death and how it then can be beneficial for teachers, parents or child psychologists in their work or daily life. This paper does not aim to analyze Lindgren’s novels from a pedagogical perspective, but rather aspires to explain kinds of representations of death prevalent in *Mio's Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, and, furthermore, what these representations of death make visible.

In order to make it clear how the representation of death is understood, a need for grasping the meaning of representation is key. One of the most useful explanations is found in Ananta Charana Suklas’ *Art and Representation: Contributions to Contemporary Aesthetics*, where Sukla theorizes over representational issues and applies theories on representation to various types of art. He points out that the word ”represent” comes from the Latin word ”repraesentare” which can be translated as “to make present or manifest or to present again” (Sukla 2). Sukla further define representation as ”(. . .) an ocular concept that explains the dualistic nature of human experience. It refers to the relation between two items in our experience—the internal and the external, the mind and the world” (1). This can be understood by thinking of the internal as abstracts images and the external as material phenomena. Representation can therefore be explained as giving significance and concrete meaning to an image of something complex. Seen from a wider perspective, we ultimately
give meaning to the abstruse image of death through the way we as humans symbolize or embody the concept which we are trying to explain in a more concrete way (Sukla, 2).

In *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*, Kathryn James argues that representations of death in adolescence literature are regularly associated with gender, sexuality and power (175-178). She also claims that there are certain commonly known symbolic representations of death in literature which include examples such as coffins, graves, tombstones, skulls, skeletons, the grim reaper (James, 10).

Micheal C. Kearl argues in his article "You Never Have to Die!: On Mormons NDEs, Cryonics, and the American Immortalist Ethos" that death should be understood and described as a "socially constructed idea": "The fears, hopes, and orientations people have regarding it are not instinctive, but rather are learned from such public symbols as the language, arts, and religious and funerary rituals of their culture" (22). What Kearl here is saying is that nothing that we think we know or believe about death is natural, rather we learn it through our culture, and therefore people have different perceptions as to what death could mean or how it could be represented; it all depends on the culture we have as a setting for that understanding.

Observations and ideas concerning how death can be read and understood in the history of Western culture is then perhaps best offered by Philippe Ariés, who has examined death’s relationship to cultural representation in his work *Images of Man and Death*. Ariés claims that images of death are arguably "the richest and most direct means that man has of expressing himself [when] faced with the mystery of the end of life", and then goes on to propose that, arranged in a chain, the images of death will create a “continuous film of a series of historical cultures” (1). According to James in her work, Ariés ideas of these images of death thus explain how death is understood due to the fact that a culture’s representations
of death may be read collectively as a text to give insights into a wide array of its functions, values, social order, and systems of meaning (James, 11-12).

Notions of death have gone through a considerable change throughout history. According to Ariés in *The Hour of Our Death*, death was, historically, seen as more familiar, public and collective than it is now (77). Further, Ariés argues that ”(. . .) the prevailing mythology liked to think of death as a desirable and long-awaited refuge “where one could eat and sleep and take one’s ease” as well as that ”the traditional idea of repose was combined with other, more recent ideas of eternity and fraternal reunion” (1217). According to Ariés, before the thirteenth century death has been something that has been almost longed for, or at least not feared, because it was in many ways connected to strong beliefs of an afterlife (1812). Death was nothing to be concerned about because it in many ways was going to let you experience good things; you were able to see the ones that had left the world before you, there was no pain and nothing to be afraid of (Ariés, 1427). However, over time, death has become more increasingly connected with being individualized, traumatic and unfamiliar, according to Micheal Kearl in *Endings: A Sociology of Death and Dying*. In this study on how death shapes our culture and social life, it is argued by Kearl that the change from death as a familiar and tame phenomenon to one associated with trauma, shows how “cultural shifts in the relationship between individuals and social structure are measured by changes in conceptions of death” (29). Kearl concludes that the changes in our culture present an image of how we see and think about death, which will also be visible in, for example, language (30).
1.2 Changing Attitudes Towards Children's Literature and Death: Before and After the 1950s

How death is then represented is established by culture and therefore, by extension, also connected to reality in a sense that representations of various concepts are presented in order to view the reality which the author is living in or wishes to represent. However, it has been questioned why serious topics such as for example death are incorporated into stories meant to be read by and for children. Why should children be exposed to these topics? Judith P. Moss, in her article ”Death In Children’s Literature,” analyses how death is dealt with in various children’s books. She argues that literature provides a way for children to familiarize themselves with the abstract concept of death and that offer a chance for adults and children to communicate about it. To shield children from this, Moss argues, would be ”dishonest and damaging to the emotional and intellectual development of the child” (530).

However, death as a topic has not always been acceptable. Barbara Elleman, in her article ”Current Trends in Literature for Children,” shows that between 1918 and the late 1950s, ”children’s books enjoyed a relatively stable period characterized by predictable plots, essential decency, and restrained good fun” (413). A change happens in the early 1960s, where it became progressively more common to broaden the content of children’s literature due to the fact that more people, particularly the American population, developed a greater interest in expressing political values and interests (416). As a result of this, large numbers of demonstrations took place, and correspondingly, political awareness began to spread across other Western countries as well. Demonstrations and protests regarding political issues such as sexism, racism and military involvement in particular, influenced people’s need for new dimensions of literature, and the sociopolitical climate also demanded changes in children’s literature, an evolvement that has continued to progress and expand to this day (Elleman,
The classic fairytale without any political nuances or topics related to reality began to be criticized when the social realism trend expanded during the 70s. Even though the elements associated with fairytale writing were kept, they were developed to fit the new demand politicization.

Conclusively, the aim for including serious topics into children’s literature was to include the youth in the reality of life and introduce them to different perspectives of reality by not keeping them in the dark of what life could entail for people of different classes, genders and backgrounds (Elleman, 418). It is also argued, by Vivi Edström in her book *Astrid Lindgren och Sagans makt*, that covering different perspectives of realities can be a way of sparking a political interest and that it rests on the conception of the invincible, which in turn can be argued to allure to people’s desire for freedom. This desire can in turn create a demand for positive change and improvement as well as it can strengthen peoples’ abilities to believe in their dreams and make them stronger in their capacity to reach them (108).
2. Summary of the Analyzed Works

2.1. *Mio’s Kingdom*

Karl Anders Nilsson, Andy, is a boy who lives in Stockholm with his foster parents. He is not well taken care of because he is unwanted, and does not have many friends. One night, Andy is sent to make a purchase, he is given an apple by the kind shopkeeper. When he stops to eat his apple by a bench in a park, he notices something weird underneath it. It is a bottle containing a genie. Andy frees a genie from the bottle and is asked to make a wish, but soon the genie spots the apple in Andy’s hand and recognizes he is the lost son of a king in a far-away kingdom. Andy is taken on a dreamlike journey to Farawayland. When he finally arrives, he is reunited with his true father, the king of Farawayland, who reveals that Andy’s real name is Mio. Mio finds out that there is an evil knight, called Sir Kato, living in the land called Outer Land which is adjacent to Farawayland. Sir Kato, with an iron claw instead of a right hand, and with a heart made out of stone, steals children away from their homes and magically turn them into birds. Mio learns that he is the only one who can defeat Sir Kato and sets out on a dangerous mission together with his new friend PomPoo and his horse Miramis to destroy Sir Kato once and for all. Mio knows he is in desperate need of a sword which he receives in a hidden cave not far from Sir Kato’s castle. When Mio ultimately finds Sir Kato and confronts him in a final sword battle, Mio triumphs and Sir Kato falls to his knees, begging Mio to aim for his heart. Mio stabs Sir Kato through the heart made of stone with his sword and all that is left of Sir Kato is a pile of stones. The darkness outside turns to light and the children who were birds are brought back to life.
2.2. *The Brothers Lionheart*

Karl, 10 years old, is very sick in tuberculosis and knows he is going to die soon. His older brother Jonathan tries to calm him down by telling him about Nangiyala, a place beyond the stars where people go in the afterlife. When a fire suddenly breaks out in the brothers’ home, Jonathan saves Karl by jumping out the window with his brother on his back, but ends up dying in the fall. When Karl ultimately passes from his illness, the brothers are finally reunited in Cherry Valley in the land of Nangiyala. Karl finds out about the evil Tengil and his fire-breathing dragon Katla, who rule the nearby Thorn Rose Valley. There is a silent movement of resistance among the people of Thorn Rose Valley, which the people of Cherry Valley support. As one of the leaders of the resistance is captured, Jonathan feels the urge to help free him. After two days of worrying, Karl follows him, scared to lose him again.

Karl is first alone and scared as he realizes Thorn Rose Valley is a dangerous place to be alone in, but finally finds Jonathan. Together they travel to where Tengil keeps his evil dragon to save the leader of the resistance, and also find out that Katla is controlled with a special trumpet. As the battle between Tengil’s forces and the resistance begins, Jonathan manages to steal the trumpet from Tengil and uses it to make Katla kill her own master. However, Jonathan is badly burned by Katla’s fire. Jonathan tells Karl about the place one goes after Nangiyala, called Nangilima, which is a place where only happy adventures exist. Karl is scared by the thought of being separated again and this time, he is the one who carries his brother on his back and jumps down a cliff, taking them both to the land of Nangilima.
3. Representations of Death in *Mio's Kingdom*

3.1 The Embodiment of Feelings Towards Death

The Sorrowbird in *Mio's Kingdom* can in many ways be interpreted as a metaphor for death, both by it being a solitary bird and its appearance as well as the feelings it evokes in Mio when it is present. Sorrowbird is big, majestic, black bird that sings in a sad, haunting way which at first is something that scares Mio (17). Just like death initially can be something that induces fear, the Sorrowbird is also scary for Mio as he does not understand why it sounds sad or why it is always alone. The Sorrowbird’s sad melody makes Mio not want to listen to it, because despite its song being beautiful it is also distressing: "The whole Garden of Roses was still. But in the top of the tallest poplar, a great black solitary bird sat singing. It sang more sweetly than all the white birds put together. It felt as if this bird sang only for me. But I didn’t want to listen, because its song was so eery” (17). Mio is almost spellbound by the bird, but at the same time he is scared. Hence the bird can be seen to give a voice to the feelings related to death; death is intimidating yet fascinating, so much that we want to actualize and familiarize it but at the same time keep it as far away from us as possible and not experience it before we absolutely have to. Eventually, Mio asks a woman he meets on his quest to defeat Sir Kato what the bird is singing about: "Why is Sorrowbird singing?’ I asked again. ’He is singing about my little daughter,’ said the Weaver, crying more bitterly. ’He is singing about my little daughter who was stolen’ (53). Mio then understands: ”Now I knew. He sang about all the stolen ones, of the Weaver’s little daughter, of Nonno’s brothers and Totty’s sister and many, many others whom the cruel Sir Kato had captured and taken to

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1 This has been argued in the BA paper; "Bättre att dö med ett lejonhjärta än att leva med ett hjärta av sten" by Linnéa Hane. However, that paper has a different approach as it is using a metaphor analysis that focuses on the rhetorical function of metaphors.
his castle” (54). The bird and Mio’s feelings towards the bird incorporate many of the same feelings associated with death; the denial, the fear, the pain and the mourning. This can be connected to the ideas previously expressed in the theory section; that abstract concepts can be understood through embodied material. The strong feelings the bird evokes are the same that death does, and in this way the abstractness of death becomes concretized. Feelings of sadness, fear and convalescence are embodied through the Sorrowbird, expressing the feelings of how it is to lose someone.

In addition to that, in the same way that death is inevitable, the Sorrowbird is still in the vicinity of Farwayland after Sir Kato is gone, reminding us that death is inescapable: "In the top of the tallest silver poplar Sorrowbird sat singing to himself. I don’t know what his song is for, now that the lost children have come home. But I think that Sorrowbird will always have something to sing about” (130). Although that Sir Kato is defeated, Sorrowbird is still singing, which, this thesis claim, can be interpreted as a reminder how death is forever present in our lives, no matter how hard we wish it was not.
3.2 The Evolvement of Feelings Towards Death

The battle taking place in *Mio’s Kingdom* is essentially a battle between good and evil, and in this case also argued to represent a battle between life and death. Mio is here argued to be the bringer of life, since he frees the people from the evil of Sir Kato. Furthermore, Sir Kato is argued by this thesis to be a representation of death by means of his actions and his heart of stone. Firstly, he seizes children and bewitches them, which can be compared to death in the sense that death could be understood as someone being taken from life and turned into something else; a memory, spirit or angel, depending on cultural or religious beliefs. Sir Kato's actions can be comparable to murder in this sense due to how he knowingly steals children from their homes to bewitch them, in turn also robbing them of their freedom. Secondly, Sir Kato also has a claw of iron instead of a right hand, which he uses to tear the hearts out of people’s chests (90). This is also comparable to death considering that the heart is vital for survival, and tearing it out could be comparable to murder.

The feelings Mio has towards Sir Kato further support the interpretation of Sir Kato as a representation of death. When Mio first hear about Sir Kato, he is scared because he does not know much about him. As the story progresses, Mio finds more and more courage in himself to defeat him and does so by him taking control of his emotions and slowly learning how to understand the threat he soon has to face. Thus, Sir Kato represents feelings revolving around death, much like the Sorrowbird.

The first time Mio is exposed to the story of Sir Kato, Sir Kato is only mentioned in passing, as living on the other side of the Bridge of Morninglight, and is it is implied that he is shattering the happiness of the people (25). However, Mio is still unaware of how:
Greenfield Islands.’ 'Why?’ I asked. 'Who would come at night?’ 'Sir Kato,’ said Pompoo. The moment he said it I felt an icy wind, and Misaims began trembling. It was the first time I’d heard Sir Kato’s name. 'Sir Kato’ I said to myself, and the sound of it made me shiver. 'Yes, the cruel Sir Kato,’ said Pompoo.” (25)

What is seen here is a fear of the unknown; even though Mio does not know exactly what makes Sir Kato so cruel, he still feels uneasy about his existence. Thus the fear of Sir Kato grows in Mio by learning more of what Sir Kato is and does, but he tries to deny his feelings by not thinking about him: "Yes, there was only one danger — Sir Kato. He was the one I was scared of. So scared, so scared. But I tried not to think about him any more” (49). The closer Mio gets to Sir Kato, the more his feelings develop. They are still mostly connected to fear and doubt, but instead of denying his feelings, Mio rather tries to control his fear: "The evil eye staring over the lake frightened me, although I had made up my mind not to be afraid” (62). We can see that Mio is initially afraid of Sir Kato due to how little is known about him, and that the fear increases the more he finds out about Sir Kato’s crimes. But ultimately, Mio starts to long for the battle between him and Sir Kato and the fear has turned into a determination: "And more and more I began to wish it was finally time to fight Sir Kato” (90), "(…) I didn’t want to wait any longer. I longed to meet Sir Kato, even if it meant I would die” (97). As the battle approaches, Mio's fear has vanished: "I was no longer scared. I have never been less frightened” (116). The closer Mio gets to facing Sir Kato, his fear evolve into determination and courage. This thesis argues for that this evolvement of feelings occur because Mio familiarize himself with Sir Kato and his actions. Thus, this evolvement of feelings towards Sir Kato, is comparable to the feelings that could be argued are revolving around death: the more Mio accepts his fate, the less fear he feels.
In conclusion, Sir Kato’s heart of stone and iron claw can in themselves be seen as metaphors due to how having a heart of stone is comparable to being devoid not only of human capacity for empathy and feeling, but also of life. The claw of iron is the weapon with which Sir Kato murders people. Hence Sir Kato embodies a dark, scary, cold and murderous notion of death. Mio’s journey to Sir Kato can thus be understood as an emotional exploration of the negative feelings revolving death. This evolvement of feelings is thought support the understanding of Sir Kato as frightening, despite them evolving into determination towards the end of the story. This thesis argues that the maturation of feelings towards Sir Kato illustrate how the feelings of fear towards of death have to dealt with eventually in order for death to be accepted.
3.3 Finding Emotional Peace

_Mio's Kingdom_ begins with a boy have disappeared from a park in Stockholm: "Did you listen to the radio on October 15th last year? Did you hear the news about the boy who disappeared? ( . . ) Yes, so they said. But no-one had information about Karl Anders Nilsson. He simply vanished. No one knows what happened to him” (1). When the reader first get into the story, many months has gone by since this was announced on the radio and still no one knows where Karl (Mio) is. This thesis interprets this as a first sign of how Mio has willingly left life on earth for the afterlife, due to how his disappearance has not been solved by the police after such a long time. In addition to this, it is learned that Mio was unhappy as he missed many of things that many people need in order to feel fully contended. He had no family who loved him and very few friends. Sometimes, Mio would lay in bed crying for his father he wished he had (3) and Aunt Hulda always said that it was an unlucky day when Mio came to their house (2). It is also learned how exactly Mio ended up with Aunt Hulda and Uncle Olaf:

"I was out Hulda and Uncle Olaf’s foster child. I went to live with them when I was 1 year old. Before that I lived in the Children’s Home. Aunt Hulda found me there. She really wanted a girl, but there weren’t any she could have. So she took me, though Uncle Olaf and Aunt Hulda don’t like boys” (2).

Mio was clearly unwanted from the beginning and he desperately wished for a better life. When Mio arrives in Farawayland, he is finally given all of those things he missed in Stockholm, and more. He suddenly has a father, many friends, a horse of his own and
eventually also given a purpose for his existence as he was the only one who could defeat Sir Kato. All of his dreams came true when he left the physical world for Farwayland.

The fact that Mio finds peace and purpose in Farawayland is a metaphor for death; finding peace is often used as a saying to ease mourning for those who have lost someone. Farawayland is distinguished by being bright, colorful and flourishing. For Mio:

“Everything was good here, not only the people. The forest and fields and streams and green pastures were good too, and not dangerous. The night was good and kind like the day, the moonlight like a gentle sun, and the darkness was a peaceful darkness. There were nothing to be scared of” (49).

Farawayland where everything is good, blissful and peaceful, is in short, a heaven.

In contrast, in Outer land nature is dark, wilted and lacking seeable life (60). Grass and leaves are now dark bare, the mountains do not have any visible presence of life, and the sea has a very dark color as well as uncontrollable waves that are always raging (93). Even though the surroundings of Outer land are described as dead, its spirit is very much alive in helping Mio in his quest of defeating Sir Kato. This is shown in several ways: a tree embraces Mio and his companion in its trunk, protecting him from being captured by Sir Kato’s spies: ”An old black tee trunk right next to us opened up, and I saw that it was hollow. Before I knew how it happened, we crept inside the hollow trunk, Pom poo and I, and sat there trembling like two baby birds hunted by the hawk” (74). The ground, too, makes a shelter for the boys to hide inside: ”A hole in the ground opened before us, and I saw a burrow there. Before I knew how it happened, Pom poo and I crawled down in a crowded heap into the burrow, trembling like two baby rabbits hunted by the fox” (76). The sea calms down so Mio and Pom poo can arrive safely to Sir Kato’s castle: ”Just as we thought we
would die, the waves calmed down and became still. They became completely still. They carried our boat gently past all the dangerous reefs and pushed it gently towards the black rugged rocks below Sir Kato’s castle” (96). The nature is suffering due to Sir Kato's governance and therefore help Mio who is the bringer of life, to defeat the taker of life that is Sir Kato (96), further demonstrating the battle between good (life) and evil (death).

Furthermore, Mio’s journey through Outer Land illustrate how he learns to accept death by facing it; the closer he gets to Sir Kato on his travels through Outer Land, the less fear he feels about facing Sir Kato in battle.

Conclusively, the fact that the police still haven't found Mio after such a long time, Mio's overall feeling of being alone and rejected from the emotional abuse of his guardians as well as the fact that Mio gets what he so desperately wishes for when arriving in Farawayland is believed to be an indication of that the story Mio is telling is a version of an afterlife and that Mio died on the bench in the park. Farawayland is therefore considered to be a metaphor and, by extension, representation of death because of it being the place where Mio finally finds peace after a long emotional struggle in his life on earth. Outer Land illustrates the emotional evolvement of coming to term with the fear of death, further supported by the earlier presented interpretation of Sir Kato demonstrating the evolvement of feelings towards death as the real journey begins in Outer Land.

The representations of death in Mio's Kingdom combined are thought to paint the evolving of feelings related to death, and the final conclusion that is argued in this thesis is that Mio ultimately come to terms with and learns to accept death. His story of Farawayland and the adventures through Outer Land are interpreted as a way for him to resolve the feelings he has about dying. Although Sorrowbird is still singing in the trees, its sight or song does not scare him any longer as he has through his adventures learned to accept death.
The metaphors found in the text explain and give meaning to the abstractness of death and the feelings surrounding it. In *Mio’s Kingdom*, what is argued to be most distinctive is Sorrowbird, Sir Kato and his heart of stone and claw of iron as well as the world of Farawayland. Sorrowbird is a metaphor for its embodiment of the feelings surrounding death in it at first being scary and unintelligible but later becoming understandable. It is also a representation for death in it always present: just because the direct threat of an oppressor is gone, dying will not be escapable for anyone. Therefore, it works as a constant reminder of death being the only thing we can be certain of will happen to all at some point. Sir Kato is in himself a metaphor for death due to him having a heart of stone and therefore is only capable of evil. Because of this, he represents death in the way he embodies the feelings such as hopelessness, fear and anger, known feelings associated with death. Combined with the journey through Outer Land which is interpreted as Mio’s emotional journey to accept death, Farawayland is considered to be a metaphor for death in a sense that it embodies how it is the place where peace can be found, thus representing how death can be a way of finding peace.
4. Representation of Death in *The Brothers Lionheart*

4.1 The Comforting Death

In *The Brothers Lionheart*, one of the most distinct representations of death is the one of the snow-white pigeons. They are first introduced in a song that Rusky hears his mother sing:

> "If I die at sea, dear, perhaps there’ll be a day,
when a snow-white pigeon comes from far, far away;
then hasten to the sill, dear, it’s my soul that’s there;
wanting to rest awhile, here in your arms so dear" (6).

The song becomes important for him as he believes that his mother is singing the song as it reminds her of the boys’ father who is away, and probably lost, at sea. When Jonathan initially tells Rusky about Nangiyala he says that perhaps Rusky will come flying to visit him too from Nangiyala, in the form of a snow-white pigeon: "And please don’t forget to sit there like a snow-white pigeon on the window-sill, will you?” (6). This image of the soul of a lost one taking the form of snow-white pigeon to visit its loved ones is an image Rusky holds on to and it gives him comfort. When he learns that he too can visit his brother from the other side in the form of a white pigeon, his anxiety about being alone in Nangiyala is eased. As Jonathan accidentally dies before his younger brother, Rusky holds on to the hope that Jonathan will visit him in the form of a pigeon, which he does. As Rusky is wretched with grief over his brother’s death, a snow-white pigeon comes to sit in his window-sill (13). Thus the image of the snow-white pigeon represents the soul of the dead and ultimately works as a way to comfort Rusky in his emotional distress. This image, together with the vision of
Nangiyala, is what makes death feel bearable for Rusky, for he believes that even though one is dead, one can live on in another. In this way, much alike how the Sorrowbird is seen as an image of death in *Mio's Kingdom*, the snow-white pigeons in this story also works as a way of representing death as they are, in a sense, the main character’s first encounter with death.

However, there are differences between the Sorrowbird and the snow-white pigeons. Firstly, the snow-white pigeon's presence do not make Rusky feel uneasy, it rather consoles him, unlike the Sorrowbird in *Mio's Kingdom* which presence continuously scares Mio. Secondly, the snow-white pigeons do not sing in a sad tune as opposed to the Sorrowbird, but rather expresses comforting cooing. The snow-white pigeons in *The Brothers Lionheart* are interpreted as visitors from beyond the graves and thus displays a brighter and more optimistic image of death, whereas the Sorrowbird is interpreted to represent the darkness in knowing that death is inescapable and unfailingly present.
4.2 Death as a Sickness

It is possible to make the claim that Tengil and Katla could be understood as a euphemism of the oppressive forces that lead to the second World War, and furthermore interpreted as a symbol of the Nazi movement. This due to how Lindgren, in her diaries written during the war in 1940, has described Germany as a monster amending from its cave to reap new victims, which is disclosed in Margareta Strömstedt’s biography about the life of Astrid Lindgren (Strömstedt, 232). This essay acknowledges that this interpretation is a fair one to make and agrees with it, but would in addition to that like to add other approaches as to how Tengil and Katla could be interpreted as representations of death.

Tengil himself is, in this essay, argued to be a metaphor for death as he can be likened to Rusky’s deathly illness. By ordering his soldiers to carry out his commands, Tengil is limiting the freedom of the people in Cherry Valley’s neighboring area, Wild Rose Valley. The diminishing of freedom is executed by seizing and/or executing the people of Wild Rose Valley when they are not obeying orders and forcing some to hard labour as well as limiting the access of entering and exiting the valley:

”It was terrible, too, to see how things were with the people in Wild Rose Valley, how pale and hungry and unhappy they all were, at least those I saw as I rode along, so unlike the people of Cherry Valley. But then we had no Tengil in our Valley, who enslaved us and took from us everything we had to live on” (77).

The restraint of freedom induced by Tengil can be compared to how Rusky’s deadly illness had control over his life and reduced his possibilities of living a normal life. The feelings Rusky has towards Tengil are very much similar to the ones he initially has about his
imminent death; he is scared of Tengil (40) and sad for the people of Wild Rose Valley (77),
in the same way he was afraid of dying (3) and sad over the fact that he had to die at such a young age (2). Seen from this perspective, Tengil is a representation of death as death limits the possibilities for life altogether in the same way that Tengil does to the people of Nangiyala; the threat Tengil proposes for life can be comparable to the threat death poses.

There are arguably similarities between Tengil and Sir Kato, as they are both cruel, unsympathetic oppressors that limits the freedom of people. However, what is thought to be the biggest difference between the two is that Sir Kato has a heart of stone which makes him cruel, thus Sir Kato’s cruelness is not chosen, as opposed to Tengil who's actions are believed to be carried out by a longing for power.

Katla, the monstrous dragon that is controlled by Tengil, is in itself also understood as a symbol of death, much like Sir Kato's heart of stone and iron claw. "Yes, she’s a monster," said Jonathan. 'A female dragon, risen from the ancient times; that’s what she is and she is as cruel as Tengil himself.' (135) Katla, being an enormous, black, evil dragon who causes death by breathing her fire can because of that be interpreted as a symbol of death as the idea of death can be associated with similar attributes such as being dark, evil, frightening and inescapable. She lives in a cave and rises from the dark only to harvest new fatalities, which can be likened to how death can be represented as an image of the grim reaper emerging from darkness to reap new victims. The fire Katla breaths is so deadly that it does not take more than a taste in order to be affected by it: "( . . . ) A tiny little lick of Katla’s fire is enough to paralyze or kill anyone." (185) which also is believe to support the idea of Katla being a representation of death as it depicts the darkness and trauma that death can be associated with.

Katla can be, as stated earlier, compared to Sir Kato's heart of stone and iron claw in a sense that there is no other result than death when being confronted with them. However, this
thesis argues that what is thought to set them apart is the fact that Katla is a thinking creature who, even without being controlled by the horn, still choose to be evil (175) whereas the iron claw and heart of stone have no possibility of choosing good.
4.3 The Alternate Afterlife

In *The Brothers Lionheart* the image of the land of Nangiyala is what is thought of as most distinctive when it comes to representations of death as it essentially can be interpreted as an alternative adaptation of the afterlife. The interpretation for this is based on a combination of several things; that knowing there is another form of life waiting after death is comforting, that in this next world it is possible to do everything one ever wished one could do as well as the hope of that one will be reunited with loved ones again. These main aspects are what consoles Rusky the most as he learns that he is going to die and what is thought to possibly characterize the image of an after-life. This can further be supported by the theoretical background presented earlier in the essay describing the historical view of death and how that death was not seen as frightening considering the prevailing religious beliefs of an afterlife, which contained the same things that Nangiyala does.

In comparison with Farawayland, which also is interpreted as a form of adaptation of the afterlife, Nangiyala and Nangilima shares many similarities. All locations provides the main characters with a life free of pain, where they are given what they have been longing for and missing on earth. However, the main difference is that Nangiyala and Nangilima is interpreted as places that everyone resides to after death. Farawayland is thus interpreted as more of an individualized fantasy shaped after Mio’s specific wishes.

Jonathan’s depiction of Nangiyala is so captivating that Rusky ”almost felt like flying there at once” (2). Jonathan reveals to Rusky that Nangiyala is a place on the other sides of the stars and that is from there all the sagas take place and when being there, he could take part in adventures from morning till evening and even during the night (2) and that he would even be strong and beautiful (3). When Rusky ultimately dies in his kitchen in Stockholm and leaves the physical world, he finally arrives in Cherry Valley, Nangiyala. As he is reunited
with Jonathan, the two brothers feels such joy, so much that it felt like something was boiling inside of both of them (16). Rusky is no longer sick with cough and now looks strong, beautiful and healthy and his whole body felt: "so happy that it seemed to be laughing all over" (17). Everything is beautiful and special in Cherry Valley: "Oh, that valley, it was white with cherry blossoms everywhere. White and green, it was, with cherry blossoms and green, green grass. And through all that green and white, the river floated like a silver ribbon." (18). The whole valley is surrounded by big mountains and water falls and even the air is special as it is so pure and clean, so much that one even felt like drinking it (18). The reader is

presented with an image of how marvelous this new place is, free from sickness and misery and full of fun endeavors and beautiful scenery, again resounding with various ideas of an afterlife. The interpretation of Nangiyala being a substitute to ideas of an afterlife is also supported by Lindgren’s own acknowledged reasons of writing this book, as she claimed that the story was a way of providing children with comfort concerning death in the way that she believed that the stories she had grown up with was not relatable or possible for children to believe in anymore.

However, it can be argued that the interpretation of Nangiyala as an alternative version of the afterlife is too obvious considering Lindgren’s own reasons for writing it. This essay would therefore like to present another approach to understanding the story of Nangiyala.

The reader can easily detect how much Rusky looks up to his brother:

"Jonathan really did look life a prince in a saga. His hair shone like gold and he had beautiful, dark blue eyes which really shone, and beautiful white teeth and perfectly straight legs. And not only that. He was kind too, and strong, and he knew everything
and understood everything and was top in school, and all the children in the yard hung around him, wanting to be with him” (3).

In this quote, Rusky’s admiration for his brother is what stands out. It is just as easy to also detect Rusky’s poor self-confidence: "Yes, he liked me, Jonathan, and that was strange, for I’ve never been anything else but a rather ugly, stupid, and cowardly boy, with crooked legs and all” (3). It is interpreted that Rusky’s admiration mainly derives from that he thinks Jonathan is his direct opposite, which is a product of his low belief in himself.

Initially, Rusky’s admiration of his brother is what makes him believe in the story of Nangiyala and the hope that it is a life after death is the only thing that is giving him comfort. But when the fire brakes loose in their apartment and Jonathan saves Rusky by jumping out the window and tragically dies, Rusky starts to feel responsible for Jonathan’s death as it was a direct result of him trying to save his little brother. Rusky is devastated by this tragic accident: "It’s difficult, I can’t, now I can’t tell you. But this is what it said in the paper afterwards (…)” (9). Rusky feels so much grief that he cannot even bring himself to tell the readers how it happened in his own words. It is also disclosed by Rusky how he thinks everyone around him probably thinks it would have been better is he was the one who had died instead of Jonathan, like it was supposed to be due to him being sick (10). After Jonathan’s death, Nangiyala thenceforth becomes a fantasy that Rusky starts to occupy when laying in his kitchen sofa, waiting for death. The fantasy of Nangiyala becomes a way for Rusky to repay his brother for what he did and by extension a way to ease his guilty conscience.

In Nangiyala, Rusky takes risks and embodies those attributes he admired about Jonathan: "(…) I was glad, and for once I felt really strong and brave.” (51), makes
sacrifices for his brother: "(...) sometimes you have to do things that are dangerous, otherwise you weren’t a human being, but a bit of filth" (50), help him in his quest of saving the leader of the resistance from imprisonment and defeating Tengil and Katla. Moreover, when Jonathan is scorched by Katla’s fire and becomes paralyzed (185), Rusky is the one who saves Jonathan from his agony by taking his brother on his back and jumps down a cliff: "'Jonathan, I’ll take you on my back,’ I said. ‘You did that for me once. And now I’ll do it for you. That’s only fair’ (. . . ) If we jumped down there, then at least we’d be sure of getting to Nangilima, both of us” (187). Nangilima is explained as a place where people go after Nangiyala, and the two places are very much similar to each other. The main difference is that there is no evil in Nangilima: "(. . .) Jonathan said that it was not the days of cruel sagas in Nangilima, but days that were happy and full of games” (183).

This essay would like to argue that, despite how Nangiyala could be interpreted as an alternative representation of the afterlife, it also could be read and interpreted as a fantasy in which Rusky starts to live out his wishes in and where he has the chance to live the life he always wished he could but was not able to because of his illness, much similar to how this thesis interprets Farawayland in Mio's Kingdom. In Nangiyala, Rusky is finally seen as brave and strong and he also has the opportunity to repay Jonathan for saving him from the fire. Rusky and Jonathan’s final leap into the new and better world of Nangilima could therefore be interpreted as Rusky dying from his sickness in Stockholm and taking a leap into the obscurity of death which in turn reduces the story of Nangiyala and Nangilima to just that; a story. Hence, the idea of Nangiyala is interpreted as a representation of death in the sense that it embodies the feelings of fear and hopelessness many feel towards death and ultimately, after Rusky has the chance of processing his fears and conscience, becomes a liberation. In ”Världens Bästa Påhitt”, where Jørgen Gaare and Østein Sjaastad proposes philosophical interpretations of works by Astrid Lindgren, it is said that in The Brother’s Lionheart: ”Life
has become a sickness that only death can heal” (66) and this is thought to further clarify what is trying to be conveyed here. Since Rusky’s life on earth is wretched with illness and tragedy, Nangiyala, here understood as death, becomes the salvation in a sense that it is what liberates him from the feelings of guilt, fear and misery.

*The Brothers Lionheart* has many explicit descriptions of death: Rusky’s dying from his illness, Jonathan’s accidental death as well as the deaths occurring during the battle for freedom. However, what is believed to be the most distinctive representations of death is the image of the snow-white pigeons, Tengil and Katla as well as the illustration of Nangiyala. Although Tengil and Katla are believed to be what represent the darkness of death, the snow-white pigeons and Nangiyala are considered to suggest that there is a hopefulness as well, which establish a balance in the interpretation. Death can be seen as dark and frightening, but can also be liberating depending on situation.

The snow white pigeons is thought to represent the soul taking another form and Nangiyala is interpreted both as a fantasy in which Rusky resolve his destructive feelings of guilt as well as an alternate adaptation of an afterlife. Tengil and Katla are thought to manifest the darkness due to how they are only capable of evil. Tengil is comparable to Rusky’s deathly illness by limiting the freedom of his subjects in the same way Rusky’s illness controls him and his freedom. Katla is thought to embody the attributes mostly associated with death by being dark, big, indestructible and evil, features which is thought to be acceptable to describe death with.
Conclusion

These two books, *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, both have prominent representations of death which are similar to each other, those being; the birds, the evil oppressors and worlds in which peace is ultimately found. They are also similar in their structure as they both revolve around a miserable and lonely main character who finds their true purpose and happiness by residing to another world of fantasy. The fantasy world can both be understood as an alternative adaptation of an afterlife, as well as portraying how both of the protagonists only experience what is told in their imagination. What the fantasy then provides is a way of resolving the problems that was overriding their lives on earth; the feelings of hopelessness, fear and loneliness. Thus the fantasy of Nangiyala and Farawayland becomes a way for the main characters to experience what they were withheld from in their lives on earth thus providing them with a chance to obtain what they always wished for. This is thought to be supported by the fact that peace is only found when exiting this world and entering another and that it is believed to be impossible for the main characters to have what they wish for while still being in the physical world; Mio will never have a father because he is long lost and Rusky cannot cure his illness. The representation of death is thus understood as somewhat romanticized due to how true happiness is only found in another life not taking place on earth, and the quote from Gaare and Sjaastad’s presented earlier supports this. ”Life has become a sickness that only death can heal” can be applicable to both *Mio’s Kingdom* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, as both protagonists experience that they only resolve their problems by ending life on earth, residing to another.

The representations of death do however conduce different definitive interpretations of the overall meaning of the books, as this essay finds *Mio’s Kingdom* to serve a darker interpretation of death as opposed to the image which is provided by *The Brother’s Lionheart*. 
Despite the fact that both books have similar metaphors and representations of death and those feelings associated with it, the overall perception is that *The Brothers Lionheart* depicts death as a salvation, something to find hope in and not to be scared of to a greater extent than *Mio’s Kingdom* does. In the book about Mio, death is mostly depicted as something distressing, destructive and sad, which is manifested by the fact that Sorrowbird is still singing in the trees even after Sir Kato is gone in contrast to how when Tengil is defeated, life in the valleys is great again.

Because of the books being written with a significant amount of time in between them, *Mio’s Kingdom* being published in 1954 and *The Brothers Lionheart* in 1973, it could perhaps be speculated in whether this different approach to death had something to do with Lindgren’s own attitude towards death changing as she became older. This is also thought to be supported by what was stated earlier in the theory section; that representations often resides in the authors own experiences, culture and feelings. Nevertheless, this difference could just as easily be a result of the fact that death have always been something that generates a lot of questions, especially for children, due to it being sad and hard to accept and perhaps it is because of this, that new ideas of what could be interesting to rely a story upon occur.

This essay would also like to point out that Lindgren has incorporated the ideals for children’s literature which the wave of social realism urged. Despite the fact that these stories are situated in settings inspired by fantasy, we are introduced to realistic elements in the form of both sick and lonely children, absent fathers and most of all; death.

However, there are limitations to every study. In this case, because the two books are so similar in their structure and what is thought to represent death, there is a possibility that the ideas presented are thought to be reiterated. This thesis has tried to show how they differ, but because of the limited space it has been problematic to do so at length.
Moreover, although much has been done, there is still plenty to research when it comes to the works of Astrid Lindgren. For example, it could be interesting to explore how Lindgren’s depictions of gender and/or ethnic groups differ from contemporary literature and furthermore how representations of death differ between those different groups.
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