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ASTRID LINDGREN – BREAKING THE MAGIC CODE AND ESTABLISHING A NEW ONE – SOUL JOURNEY

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Resumen

En la obra *Mio My Son* y *The Brothers Lionhearts* Astrid Lindgren rompe las reglas del género fantástico, especialmente en la tercera fase de su viaje heroico cuando Mio y los hermanos, Jonathan y Kart no regresaron al cronotopo real (al tiempo y lugar real) y se quedaron en el cronotopo fantástico (tiempo y lugar fantástico). Con esta ruptura del código tradicional de la fantasía, Lindgren creó un nuevo diseño en el género fantástico en *Mio My Son*: El hogar (calle del norte número 13 en Estocolmo), -lejos (La tierra del más allá), -más allá (La tierra exterior de *Outer land*) y en *The Brothers Lionhearts*: El hogar (el segundo piso del edificio Fackelrosen), lejos (salto a la fantasía 1 Nangiylima) mas allá (salto a la fantasía 2 Nangiilima). Esta ruptura del código tradicional de la fantasía se convierte en un concepto moderno del niño y la niñez que rechaza el concepto romántico del niño en la literatura infantil.

Palabras Clave: fantasía, cronotopo, códigos, ruptura.

Abstract

In *Mio My Son* and *The Brothers Lionhearts*, Astrid Lindgren broke the rules of the fantasy genre, especially in the third phase of the heroic journey when Mio and

the brothers – Jonathan and Karl did not return to the real chronotope (real time and place). Instead, they remained in the fantasy chronotope (fantasy time and place). With this rupture of the traditional fantasy code, Lindgren created a new modern pattern in the fantasy genre in *Mio My Son*: home (Thirteen North Street in Stockholm) – away (Farawayland) – far away (The land on the other side or Outer Land) and in *The Brothers Lionheart*: home (2nd floor at Fackelrosen building), away (jump out to fantasy 1 Nangiylima) and far away (jump out to fantasy 2 Nangilima). This rupture of the traditional fantasy code grew out of the modern concept of child and childhood, which rejected the traditional romantization of child and childhood in children's literature.

Key words: fantasy, chronotope, codes, rupture.



1. Introduction

This is an explicit example of breaking the traditional magic code (home-away-home pattern) in children's literature in order to articulate the author's non-nostalgic point of view in a modern magic code (home-away-far away pattern). At the same time, this also represents a non-ideological point of view that does not consider childhood as protected, innocent, and safe. While breaking the traditional fantasy code, Lindgren established a new code of modern fantasy that was based on an ahistorical point of view in children's literature. Nikolajeva in *From Mythic to Linear* (2000) called this the collapse of children's literature where there is no turning back. The characters in *Mio My Son* and *The Brothers Lionheart* have multiple time and place perspectives (Stockholm – Farawayland – Outer Land and Fackelrosen – Nangiylala – Nangilima) with a post-modern open end.

2. *Mio My Son*

The primary chronotope in *Mio My Son* is Thirteen North Street in Stockholm, the 15th of October last year at 6 P.M. before yesterday. The main character in the first fantasy is an orphan child, nine-year-old Karl Anders Nilsson, with fair hair, blue eyes, brown shorts, a grey pullover, and a small red cap. The red cap is intended as a symbol. The magic passage from primary to secondary world takes place through flying. Both secondary worlds seem like paradise. The secondary world in *Mio* is

more mythic and Mio and Pompoo play the flute as a symbol of utopian life in Arcadia.

3. *Mio My Son* and Intertextuality

Using a first person narrative, Mio tells the reader about his travels through the three realms of the world (real world, Faraway Land, and Outer Land). His guide through Faraway Land is Pompoo, who functions like the poet Virgil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The ascent of the mountain or Sir Kato's castle from the Garden of Roses recalls Dante's Garden of Eden. This place is meant to return one to a state of innocent that existed before the original sin of Adam and Eve. In *Mio My Son*, Karl Anders gets the red apple that changes to a golden apple from Mrs. Lundy, and is expelled from the primary to the secondary chronotope or the Garden of Roses. As Virgil took Dante only up to the height of Mount Purgatory, Pompoo takes Mio through the Forest of Moonbeams, through the Deepest Cave and the Blackest Mountain, through Dead Forest, the Dead Lake, to Sir Kato's castle on the cliff. The guide through the Outer Land is Miliman, who is like Beatrice. The last word in each of the three parts of the *Divine Comedy* is "stars." *Mio My Son* also concludes with "Do stars care if you play to them." Dante passes through the Gate of Hell, on which is inscribed the famous "Abandon all hope, you who enter here." In "The Bewitched Birds" Mio entered the dark narrow gateway. Dante and Virgil reach the ferry that will take them across the river Acheron, while Mio and Pompoo cross the Dead Lake in the black boat. Outer Land in the first fantasy has circles like the circles of hell in Dante's *Inferno*. The two characters, Mio and Pompoo, escape by climbing through the centre of the evil. From Mount Purgatory, only Beatrice could guide Dante to Paradise like Miliman guides Mio. Goethe echoed Dante's vision with "Eternal Feminine leads us above" (*Faust*, 1832).

The function of sorrowbird resembles the function of the chorus in Greek tragedy. In Greek tragedy, the chorus consisted of about four-eight people who would stand in the back wearing black. Sorrowbird like the Chorus expresses emotions and predictions. The essence of the tragic fantasy *Mio My Son* lies in Mio's struggle for Freedom against fate – freewill against unbending destiny. The sorrowbird place plays a vital part in the fantasy. Lindgren assigned to it singing (prediction the future/oracle/fate/destiny/prophet) integrated with the action. Sorrowbird comments on the action and events.

The tragic fantasy, *Mio My Son*, depicts the downfall or soul's journey of a noble hero, through some combination of fate, and the will of the gods as the soul's ascent from Inferno to Purgatory to Paradise. Karl Anders Nilsson in the real chronotope, later Mio in the first fantasy chronotope and finally Prince Mio in the second fantasy chronotope, has a powerful wish to achieve some goal but inevitably encounters limits, usually those of human flaws, the gods (prophets, fate) or nature. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero should have a flaw and /or make some mistake (*hamartia*), but Mio has neither. Mio as a tragic hero achieves revelation and recognition of personal growth and maturation: ("Mio, my son, I do believe you've been away!" said my father the King. "I think we shall have to put a fresh mark on the kitchen door tonight"). *Mio My Son* is a tragic fantasy that imitates action, which has serious implications. Mio is the tragic hero because he neither is an archetype of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real evil or wickedness, but rather because of a mistake (orphan child). The plot in *Mio My Son* is both simple and complex, has suffering and includes reversals in which a situation seems to be developing in one direction and then suddenly reverses to another (e.g. Milliman died to rescued Mio and then a wonderful thing happened). The recognition scene at the end reunites long lost father and son. It arouses pity and fear because the Sorrowbird is singing, which means that he stayed in the far away world and did not return to the real world.

Having survived the depths of hell in Outer Land, Mio and Pompoo ascend out of the under gloom and the Mountain in Sir Kato's castle. The Mountain is on an island like Dante's Purgatory. Like Dante, Mio also meets a group of excommunicates or the bewitched Birds that Sir Kato captured (Nonno's brothers, Totty's little sisters, and all the others). Mio is shocked by Miliman's death much as Dante is pained by the death of Beatrice. However, in children's literature, wonderful things often happen; Miliman opens her eyes and looks at Mio. In the Outer Land, Mio becomes Prince Mio as the final stage of the individualization process. In the primary world, his name was Karl Anders Nilsson, in the secondary world or Farawayland he becomes Mio and in the tertiary Outer Land, he became Prince Mio. Every stage of the maturation process is signalled by initiation with a new name. As in Dante's Divine Comedy (1308-1321), this is a modern view into the afterlife of children.

Dante drinks from the River Lethe, which causes the soul to forget past sins, and then from the river Eunoe, which affects the renewal of memories of

good deeds. Mio drinks from the Well That Quenches Thirst. *Mio My Son* can be described as an allegory or soul journey. Each of the episodes contains many alternate meanings like Dante's allegory. *Mio My Son* outlines other levels of meaning besides the allegory (the historical, the moral, the literal, and the anagogical). The structure of fantasy, likewise, is quite complex, breaking traditional patterns in children's literature. Just as Dante and the ancient world considered the happy ending to be an everyday vulgar subject, so Lindgren too chooses to end *Mio My Son* without a happy ending.

4. *The Brothers Lionheart*

In *The Brothers Lionheart*, the real setting is on the second floor in the town Fackelrosen building, last night as primary world (home). The main characters in the fantasy are brothers, ten-year-old Karl Lion, named Kalle, or Rusky (*good for nothing*) and his thirteen-year-old brother Jonathan Lion, who looks like a prince in a saga. Their mother, Sigrid Lion is very busy with sewing. Their father Axel Lion went to sea and is an absent character. The male characters are orphan children on a symbolic level or, according to Jung, archetypes of the orphan child in miserable circumstances, with a single mother and immersed in illness and poverty. The secondary or fantasy chronotope in the first part is the Garden of Roses and in the second is Knights Farm in Cherry Valleys.

In *The Brothers Lionheart*, Nangiyala (away) is a secondary world and Nangilima is a tertiary world (far away). The initial situation consists of misery in the primary world for the orphan characters. In *The Brothers Lionheart* Rusky (Skorpan in Swedish) lies alone in bed deathly ill. Old Rusky or Little Karl becomes brother Lionheart and looks to the Earthstar – “you can't see it from here”. In the secondary world in *The Brothers Lionheart*, we have three generations: Rusky, Jonathan and the children, adults Sofia, Orvar, Jossi, Hubert, Antonia, and the third generation of old men or grandfather Mathias and Elfrida. Children represent good and adults represent evil. The enemy Tengil lives in Karmanyaka, the country up in the ancient mountains. On the side of the children are the pigeons Violanta, Paloma, and Bianca as symbols of peace and innocence. *The Brothers Lionheart* is similar to the poor-brothers-knights of knighthood. The brothers swear an oath and Jonathan is nearly always dressed like a prince in a saga or like a knight.

5. *The Brothers Lionheart* and intertextuality

The name Lionheart and optionally the surname Lion is the given name of an honorific order of knights. *The Brothers Lionheart* portrays the process of gaining the knighthood, which begins before adolescence, inside the prospective knight's home, around the age of seven, for at seven years he would be sent away to serve a grander as a page (Rusky). Instead of falcons, they have pigeons. Jonathan was a chivalrous knight who was brave in battle, loyal to his brother and willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. He was merciful, humble, courteous, and protective toward his brother, good people and animals.

The Garden of Roses and Cherry Valley are presented as paradise at the beginning of fantasy. Jonathan uses horns, battle horn, and magic horn as the sign of loyalty and heroism as in a saga. Jonathan prefers action to reflection and the exploration of inner motives and tragic dignity. This is similar to Icelandic sagas. The reference to an instrument called a battle horn or lure comes from Icelandic sagas where they are described as war instruments. In ancient times, they were believed to cast magical spells. Katla is afraid of his battle horn; when he blows it she obeys blindly. Jonathan, Rusky, Elfrida, and others hear the saga of the dragon in Katla's cavern and the sea serpent in Karma Falls many times in childhood, for adults have always frightened children with tales of this kind.

6. Comparison between *Mio My Son* and *The Brothers Lionheart*

The difference between the two fantasies lies in the fact that *Mio My Son* is based more on myth, while *The Brothers Lionheart* is based on sagas. In *Mio My Son*, the basic pattern is based on a prophecy that a male child of royal blood would ride on a white horse with golden mane, and with one friend would win over cruel Sir Kato. Pompoo said to Mio that he could not change what has been foretold for a thousand years that Mio would win the battle against Sir Kato and liberate the captured children who have been bewitched into birds by Sir Kato. In *The Brothers Lionheart* the basic pattern is based on ancient concept of setting. Lindgren prefaces everything in the novel with the description "ancient." *The Brothers Lionheart* is a children's fantasy about brotherhood.

As in Icelandic sagas, *The Brothers Lionheart* focuses on what is real and what is fictional. Relationships between characters are characterized as brotherhood.

Motifs are not explained for in the world of saga, it is what must be done. *The Brothers Lionheart* is similar to heroic saga, the highest form of classical Icelandic saga writing. In both fantasies, Lindgren allows the child's victory over evil, represented by adults, but rejects the possibility that Andy/Mio, Rusky, and Jonathan did not stay in the fantasy worlds, because they died, as she explicitly wrote about both fantasies.

As Klingberg pointed out in *The Fantastic Tale for Children* (1970), the mythical world, a fully structured world outside the real, is already found in *Mio My Son* in Faraway Land and in Outer Land. Klingberg assumed that Lindgren had presumably meant that all the adventures are the fantasies of a boy in despair. The people in the secondary world or Faraway Land resemble people in Stockholm in the primary worlds; e.g. the King of Faraway Land had the face of Ben's father. Pompoo's mother looks like Mrs. Lundy, and the horse Miramis has the same eyes as the old brewers' horse Charlie. Miramis is like Pegasus. In *Mio My Son* the first person narrator constructs his parallel idealized fantasy world. In the real world he is an orphan child archetype with foster parents – Aunt Hilda and Uncle Olaf (King Faraway Land), a positive character is his friend Ben (in fantasy Pompoo), and Mrs. Lundy (Pompoo's mother).

The basic pattern in *The Brothers Lionheart* is brotherhood in the form of medieval knighthood. The novel portrays the eternal battle between good against evil, and human beings against nature. The first person narrator Rusky says at the beginning that he is going to tell us about his brother. In fact, the story is much more about Rusky himself because he undergoes a change, gaining knowledge, insight, and physical and internal maturation. In *The Brothers Lionheart*, we also have a sophisticated self-conflict as inner struggle in Rusky and his internal battle or soul journey from Hareheart to Lionheart.

7. From traditional to modern fantasy genre

In a closer look at *Mio My Son* and *The Brothers Lionheart*, we discover that the traditional fantasy genre home-away-home pattern is broken into a home-away-far away pattern. The books are also adventure stories with a quest. They are based in a magical fairy tale tradition. The hero's journey in both novels includes departure, the call to adventure, and supernatural aid, the crossing of the threshold, initiation, and return. They are also modern psychological stories with clear bildungsroman allusions to father-son and sibling relationships.

8. From traditional home-away-home to modern home-away-far away pattern in fantasy genre

If we compare *The Brothers Lionheart* with J. Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, we find the motifs of departure, initiation, and return. The departure and initiation are not problematic because they fit in the hero pattern. However, the return is problematic in both fantasies (e.g. in the first novel *Mio, My Son* his father the King said: I do believe, you have grown while you are been away! In addition, in the second novel we find "Are you going to die again, Jonathan?". Lindgren said that the title characters died. Between the two fantasies are approximately twenty years (1954 and 1973) in which Lindgren developed the modern fantasy code into a home-away-far away pattern with the main character remaining in the fantasy world. We find through comparative methodology analysis that Lindgren uses the traditional well-trying fantasy form, breaking it into something radically new: a highly literary, complex modern fantasy, not an adventure, not a fairy tale, not a quest but a fantasy novel and new magic code with insight into children's afterlife, less hero's journey and more a soul's journey. The brothers complete the last phase of the maturation process or individualisation. Jonathan Lionheart and Rusky from the real chronotope became Rusky Hareheart in Nangyala in the first fantasy chronotope and Rusky Lionheart in Nangilima in the second fantasy chronotope.

Conclusion

The fact that Lindgren broke the traditional fantasy genre and home-away-home pattern stems from a new concept of childhood in the modern world. Childhood is not idealised or romanticized, but problemized. Lindgren respects children and declares that children deserve the best. The best means for preparing them for real life is to present life as it really is, without ideology or romance. Children deserve the best. In both fantasies that the characters mature; they both become knights who enter a holy space and drink from the Holy Grail... They reach maturation and complete the individuation process but are not happy to return to the primary world. Lindgren also challenged conventional codes of children's literature in her later works. Her novels *Mio My Son* and *The Brothers Lionheart* brought up the taboo of the death and the doctrine of reincarnation. *Mio My Son*, is coloured by suggestive folk tale rhythm, derived from sources such as the Bible, Dante's *Inferno*, folk tales, and lyric poetry. *The Brothers Lionheart* is written in deep grief at an emotional

pace, derived from such sources as sagas, knight's epics, and ballad poetry. The use of intertextuality and literary allusion in both fantasies enriches them and allows readers to read on both the level of children's and adult fantasy.

Both novels are fantasies without a happy ending and both present a children's afterlife. Lindgren show great artistic mastery in *Mio My Son* and *The Brothers Lionheart*. Previous criticism overlooks the fact that these books deal with feelings of self-conscious melancholy, death, pessimism, and grief. Lindgren broke traditional magic codes and established modern ones to illustrate that children need to be moved and motivated by art, and should not always be protected by utopian, idealised stories. Children need to be confronted by emotions, including joy and sorrow, love and death.

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