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Death in *The Saga of Darren Shan*

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TABEL OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	3
1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 The Aim of the Study	6
1.2 Material	7
1.3 The Structure of the Thesis	8
2 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE	10
2.1 The Target Audience	10
2.2 Children's Fiction	12
2.3 The Definers of Children's Fiction	13
2.4 Provoking Themes in Children's Fiction	17
2.4.1 Fear in Children's Fiction	19
2.4.2 Death in Children's Fiction	23
2.4.3 Death in Fairy Tales	28
3 DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF DEATH	31
3.1 Death, Life and Fear	32
3.2 Death and Power	34
3.3 Mourning and Rituals	37
3.3.1 The Afterlife	39
4 DEATH IN <i>THE SAGA OF DARREN SHAN</i>	42
4.1 Death in Shan's Books as Opposed to Death in Other Children's Fiction	44
4.1.1 Similarities to the Presentation of Death in Other Children's Fiction	45
4.1.2 Differences to the Presentation of Death in Other Children's Fiction	48
4.2 Death as a Negative	52
4.3 Death as a Positive Force	60

4.4 Death and the Aftermath	67
4.4.1 The Afterlife	70
4.5 Death as a Transformation	72
5 CONCLUSION	78
WORKS CITED	80
APPENDICES	
Appendix 1. Darren's First Death	83
Appendix 2. Darren's First Death – The Aftermath	84
Appendix 3. Darren's Second Death	85
Appendix 4. Darren's Final Death	86
Appendix 5. Sam's Death	87
Appendix 6. Sam's Death – The Aftermath	88
Appendix 7. The Eternalizing of Sam's Soul	89
Appendix 8. Mr. Crepsley's Death	90

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ABSTRACT

Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka hur temat döden behandlas i barnboksserien *The Saga of Darren Shan (Legenden om Darren Shan)*. Denna avhandling ger insikt i hur bokserien *The Saga of Darren Shan* tar upp och behandlar döden samt försöker klargöra huruvida författarens tillvägagångssätt att behandla döden skiljer sig från hur temat generellt sett behandlas i barnlitteraturens värld.

Döden har alltid varit, och förblir, något som ligger bortom vår förståelse och då är det inget under att ett flertal forskningar gjorts inom ämnet, inte minst i de litterära kretsarna. Det är dessa studier, speciellt de som fokuserar på döden i barnlitteratur, som utgör en basis för denna avhandling. De fem olika sätten att se på döden som används i denna avhandling har härletts från tidigare studier som gjorts inom ämnen som död och barnlitteratur. Dessa är följande: likheter och oliketer kring hur döden behandlas i *The Saga of Darren Shan* i jämförelse med de metoder forskning påvisar att ofta används i barnlitteraturen, döden som en positiv styrka, döden som en negativ styrka, döden och dess följder (livet efter detta) samt döden som en förvandling.

Analysen tar fasta på teman som förekommer i samband med döden i *The Saga of Darren Shan*, bland annat förtvivlan, maktlöshet, det lyckliga slutet, metamorfos, förvandling, ondska och ondskefulla karaktärer, berättigande, förevigande samt döden som den rättfärdiga domaren. För att få en bild av hur döden i denna bokserie presenteras, kategoriseras och analyseras dessa teman noggrant. Förväntningen på resultatet var att bilden som böckerna ger av döden skulle vara relativt negativ, eftersom de vid första ögonkastet tycks behandla döden väldigt direkt och inte drar sig från att nyttja blodiga och ohämmade beskrivningar av döden. Dock kan man genom denna analys konstatera att böckerna i själva verket har en rätt neutral inställning till den döden.

KEYWORDS: Death, Dying, Children's Fiction, Children's Literature, Metamorphoses, Transformation

1 INTRODUCTION

Death is a complex and serious theme, and according to some perhaps even unsuitable for child readers. Contrastively, a number of researchers proclaim the opposite: that it is healthy for children to familiarise themselves with death in a safe milieu, for example through literature. Whatever the case, it cannot be denied that an aura of taboo seems to be attached to death.

Death has both terrified and fascinated human beings throughout the ages. It is argued that the root of this may lie in that people lack the means and capability to comprehend the nature of death, and perhaps it is this inability to fully understand and explain death that guarantees its status as a continuous source of inspiration and intrigue. As a result many have chosen to explore death by whatever means at hand and, thus, death is frequently featured not only in scientific research but also in different media, such as films, art, and literature. This thesis, likewise, strives to enrich this area of research.

In this MA thesis the focus will be death in modern day children's literature; an area which due to its target audience might seem unfit for such a heavy theme as death, but where it is featured nonetheless.

Death, which was not an uncommon theme in nineteenth century children's fiction, was nearly banned from the genre altogether during the first half of the twentieth century. Recently, however, interest in this particular theme has seen a rise, and it is slowly making its way back to the world of children's literature (Lurie 1990: xiv).

According to Alison Lurie (1990), death is nowadays considered to be one of the three topics that primarily define adult fiction, the other two being sex and money. It is not unheard of that death and money can feature as themes in children's books as well; however, if such is the case Lurie suggests that these themes are presented in a muted or hushed manner. (Lurie 1990: xiv) Consequently, whenever death is featured in children's literature, it is often spoken of in terms of metaphors or metamorphosis, and a straightforward approach to the theme is seldom used.

As my primary material I have chosen the book series *The Saga of Darren Shan* (2000–2004); a series consisting of 12 books published by HarperCollins Children's Books. These will be further introduced in section 1.2. The reason I decided to look at these books in particular is that the author seems to describe death in a rather unconventional way, applying a direct approach rather than utilizing roundabout descriptions. Death in *The Saga of Darren Shan* is often very raw and brutal, and there is no telling who the next victim will be; another factor which makes this particular book series stand out when compared to others. The reader can never be quite sure of who will be the next victim or how that person will die. Both major and minor characters, even the protagonist, are all equal in the face of death. This is something that Lurie (1990: xvi) states to be relatively rare, as children's books dealing with death tend to spare the protagonist and his or her friends.

The book series is catalogued as horror. Darren Shan, the author of the books, has stated that he as a child enjoyed reading both children's as well as adult fiction – horror novels in particular. As a result, he decided to combine his two favourite elements, thus creating a horror book series for children: “It would touch on many dark, thought-provoking adult subjects, but also be an exciting, easy read”. (Kemp 2004) According to the author, *The Saga of Darren Shan* is aimed at children aged around 11–13 (Kemp 2004); however, the perception of the targeted age group seems to vary slightly, sometimes stretching to children as young as 8 years of age.

1.1 The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out how death is described and treated in *The Saga of Darren Shan*. Do the books, despite their being embellished with gory descriptions, follow the hushed and roundabout pattern often utilised when of explaining death in modern children's literature? Is death depicted in a positive or negative light? And, lastly, does death bring about a transformation?

The focal point of the study will be the protagonist, Darren Shan, and his development

throughout the books. The subject of analysis will be the deaths Darren Shan personally experiences – his own and others’ – as well as how these deaths affect him. The deaths that are analysed in this thesis are those of Darren himself, and those of his close friend Sam Grest, as well as his mentor Larten Crepsley, and the antagonist Kurda Smalth.

1.2 Material

As my primary source material I have used books from the 12 book series of *The Saga of Darren Shan*, written by Darren Shan. The books, published between 2000 and 2004, are classified as children’s horror fiction. The books I have cited form for this thesis are: book 1, *Cirque du Freak* (2000, henceforth CF in references), book 2, *The Vampire’s Assistant* (2000, henceforth VA in references), book 6, *The Vampire Prince* (2002, henceforth VP in refereces), book 9, *Killers of the Dawn* (2003, henceforth KD in references), book 10, *Lake of Souls* (2003, henceforth LS in references), and book 12, *Sons of Destiny* (2004, henceforth SD in references).

The Saga of Darren Shan tells the story of a young boy who, through his own stupidity, has to take on the role of being a vampire’s assistant. This means that the young boy, Darren, has to leave life as he knows it behind and embark on a long journey to become a full-fledged vampire one day. The books follow – now half-vampire – Darren on his journey, which turns out to be harder and more horrible than he or his mentor, the vampire Mr. Crepsley, could ever have imagined.

Forced to leave his family behind, Darren first struggles to find his place among the strange crew of Cirque du Freak. This on-top of dealing with the issues of being a half-vampire. Yet, fighting his way through many setbacks, he manages to settle and establishes new friendships. But, as unrest starts to brew in the vampire society, Darren is forced to leave his newfound peace and comfort, and head for new challenges again. Darren must prove not only to his mentor, but to the whole clan of vampires that he is, indeed, a worthy recipient of the vampire blood – blood he did not desire in the first place. The road he is forced to walk in order to do this proves to be one iced with

betrayal, death and war, and then, perhaps, it is no wonder that Darren's life can only head in a steady downward spiral.

From the very beginning Darren's new life is lined with misery, sorrow and loss of family and friends. When he involuntarily is involved in the war raging between vampires and the vampanezes, another vampiric breed, his life takes yet a turn for the worse. Death awaits Darren and his companions around every corner, and suddenly the existence of the whole world seems to be at stake. How is one man to survive?

The author Darren O'Shaughnessy, better known under his pen name Darren Shan, was born in 1972 in London. Shan is an Irish author of children's literature who debuted with his first novel in 1999, and although this particular novel was aimed at adult readers Shan has almost exclusively written for children since. Shan embarked on the road of a writer at a very young age, placing second in a television script-writing competition for RTE when he was but 15, and committing to a life as a full-time writer when he turned 23. (Darrenshan.com 2013)

The Saga of Darren Shan was the first series that Shan wrote for children, but it was not to become his last. Since writing *The Saga of Darren Shan*, Shan has written several other series of books. Among these are: *The Demonata* (2005-2009), comprising ten books, *The Saga of Larten Crepsley* (2010-2012), a prequel to *The Saga of Darren Shan* consisting of four books, and *The City Trilogy* (1999-2010) as well as a few stand-alone novels. Currently Shan is working on his newest creation, the *Zom-B* series, which debuted in the autumn of 2012. (Darrenshan.com 2013)

1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

The topics of this study are death and children's literature. The secondary sources, consisting of previous research and articles, will therefore focus on either of these two main topics.

First, to get an idea of what children's literature comprises, it is essential that some theory on children's fiction is discussed, and Maria Nikolajeva (1997), among others, presents a good introduction to the topic. A short section explaining childhood will also be included in order to frame, and gain a better understanding of, who the target audience for children's literature comprises. This will be followed by a more detailed look on how, and why, dark themes are brought up in children's fiction. Terms such as metaphor and metamorphosis, and their importance when discussing death in children's fiction, will also be examined in this section.

From there the focus will be shifted to death and its different representations in society, media as well as literature. Death will, for example, be explored through providing theory on the rituals and social practices surrounding it, such as funerals and mourning. Death, and its different perceptions, as a part of children's fiction will then be more thoroughly explored in a separate chapter. Also, because of the close association with children's literature, studies into fairy tales, specifically those concerning death, will be looked into.

The analysis is divided into five parts: similarities to death in modern day children's fiction, death as a positive force, death as a negative force, death and its aftermath, and death as a transformation. The first part will study what similarities can be found in death as it is depicted in *The Saga of Darren Shan* as compared to common practices in children's literature. The second part will focus on death when portrayed in a positive manner, as opposed to the third part in which the negative depictions of death will be brought up to discussion. The fourth part will focus on death and its aftermath. This part will discuss how death is the ultimate end that awaits everyone, regardless of their looks, status, or alignment with good or evil. Further, it will also explore whether previous actions affect the treatment the deceased receives after death. The fifth, and final, part will study how death represents transformation, for example through the use of metamorphosis. The results of the analysis are, ultimately, summed up in the conclusion.

2 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Children's literature should contain all literature that is "written, published, marketed and treated" (Nikolajeva 1997: 9) as children's literature by a child literature specialist. This entails an extremely broad choice of books, and rather than simplifying the issue of defining children's literature the statement, according to Nikolajeva, only further complicates the matter. Furthermore, Charles Sarland suggests that the term, "children's literature", itself is under attack from society. According to him, some even go as far as claiming that children's literature does not fill any purpose whatsoever. (Sarland 2005: 30–31)

Because the term is both under hard critique and subjected to vague definitions – even though the opinions on the matter are vastly divided – Sarland recommends using the term "children's fiction" instead of "children's literature", as this will help eradicate many negative connotations that the latter term might incite (2005: 30–31). The remaining problem, then, is the intended readership – equally hard to define. Thus, in order to acquire a clearer picture of children's fiction one must, logically, first examine the target audience closer.

In order to analyse *The Saga of Darren Shan* as children's fiction, it must first be established that the book series is, indeed, children's literature. According to Nikolajeva (1997: 9) all literature that is published and marketed specifically for children is considered children's fiction, and this statement does indeed fit the book series *The Saga of Darren Shan*, as the main readership of the books are children. Although, in some countries, such as Japan, the books are marketed mainly to adult readers, this does not exclude the series from the realm of children's fiction. (DarrenShan.com 2013).

2.1 The Target Audience

The concept of childhood is a social construction. Childhood, as perceived today, differs greatly from how it was understood in earlier times. Children, for example during the

medieval period, used to be considered “little-adults”, persons who shared both the same responsibilities and expectations as the adult population. They were expected to work from an early age on and it was seen as important that they contributed to society. (Rudd 2009: 17)

Although the idea of “the child” eventually developed, it took until early twentieth century before the concept was fully established and normalised. Around the same period of time it also became normal to divide childhood into various stages. This practice aided in creating a more definite line between childhood and adulthood. (Rudd 2009: 17)

When discussing the target audience of children’s fiction it is, generally, individuals aged between 0-18 who are referred to, as this is the age spectrum many use to define childhood (Nikolajeva 1997: 9). It must not be forgotten, though, that this conception may vary depending on country and culture, and is not universally pertained; industrial and developing countries, for example, may due to presuppositions have wholly different views on what is referred to when speaking of children. Additionally, the definition of the target audience also varies greatly on an individual level, from researcher to researcher. The inability to reach a common consensus further complicates matters, as it then becomes harder to ascribe a common denominator to children – the intended readership.

Nikolajeva (1997: 8–9), however, has asserted that the audience alone cannot determine the genre of the book, as both children and adults at time read texts that are not explicitly marketed to them. The idea of double address, also introduced by Nikolajeva, further strengthens the notion that a children’s book may attain adult readership, simultaneously as it continues existing as children’s fiction (Nikolajeva 1997: 60). This is further backed up by Crago (2005: 181), who claims that the act of reading itself does not differ much between children and adults, as both are similarly affected by the emotional responses triggered by their reading.

2.2 Children's Fiction

Children's fiction often receives a rather unfavourable position in literary studies. However, Peter Hunt stresses that all literature, including the books intended for children, exert a certain social, historical and cultural influence. Every single individual has to go through the stage of childhood, which in turn implies that even the individuals who today hold the most influential positions in society have, at some point, come into contact with children's literature. (Hunt 2005: 1) Although many desire to deny the fact that they have been influenced by their childhood reading, as it is deemed inferior, Hunt (2005: 2) emphasises that it is of importance to acknowledge children's fiction because it is, contrary to common belief, extremely complex.

Hunt (2005: 3) continues by explaining that part of the complexity of children's literature lies in the fact that childhood is a rather inexplicit stage in life. The definition of childhood will vary depending on time and place, which in turn results in the change of the audience who enjoy children's books. Further, Hunt also points out that adult literary critics never fully will be capable of understanding what children discover through reading, and this in turn adds additional obstacles to the study of children's literature (Hunt 2005: 7).

Sebastien Chapleau (2009), also argues that children are far too removed from evaluating children's literature. Chapleau claims that academic literary criticism, even when its subject of study is children's literature, almost exclusively involves the adult population's opinions, whereas it out of respect to children's culture ought to include ideas and impressions expressed by child-readers likewise. Chapleau reminds the reader of that the opinions of the target audience should, and do, in fact, matter. This rule applies to all fields of literature, and thus the field of children's literature criticism should not be an exception. Therefore children should be held in higher regard when discussing children's fiction, which is not at all the case today. (Chapleau 2009: 47–48, 49)

2.3 The Definers of Children's Fiction

What, then, is children's fiction? This is a question Nikolajeva briefly attempts to answer in *Introduction to the Theory of Children's Literature* (1997). According to Nikolajeva (1997: 8), children's literature is often seen as holding a lesser position among the arts, and is therefore often brushed aside. Yet, the recent popularity of so-called crossover literature works against this statement, as it proves that books aimed at children can be enjoyed by an adult audience as well. Furthermore, everything that children read is not necessarily children's literature, as children may read magazines and books intended for adult readers. Because of this, Nikolajeva stresses that it is necessary to separate children's literature from children's reading, and further she suggests that the audience alone cannot define children's literature. (Nikolajeva 1997: 8–9)

Another feature of children's literature often brought up to discussion is its communicative features. Children's literature is pedagogical and didactic, while simultaneously also a work of art. Lassén-Seger, quoting Weinreich (2000: 123), states that it is not only children's literature that possesses the communicative and educational trait, but that this trait is in fact present in most literary works. Although the phenomenon might be easier to spot in books marketed to children, Weinreich argues that every author ultimately writes in order to interact with their audience, and is thus bound to influence the reader. The pedagogical features in books, though, are most visible in children's fiction. (Lassén-Seger 2006: 14–15)

For example, a view on children's literature is that it is literature written for the purpose of guiding children through the various stages of growth. Yet, as children are not necessarily capable of writing, the task of creating children's stories therefore befalls the adults, and thus the stories become highly influenced with what the adults feel is appropriate for children (Lassén-Seger 2008: 32). This results in fiction as being the definer of childhood, rather than the inverse, even though it might seem more natural that children, who are the experts on the subject of childhood, should be the ones who actually create the books aimed at them.

Hunt (2005: 10) also states that children's literature is commonly evaluated not only on the basis of its quality but also on the notion whether it is useful in the child's development or if it portrays a good set of morals or knowledge the child might utilize later in life. Books aimed at children, and teens in specific, often centre on the inner development of the protagonist. This involves maturing and growth, but usually also includes an instance where the protagonist is forced to come to the realisation of society's impact on him or herself. The power structure between society and the individual is revealed, and the teen protagonists are forced to face the powers that moulded them into their current state. (Lassén-Seeger 2006: 19)

Children's literature is also seen as a medium through which adults can influence children and, according to many critics, exert power over them. While this might be true, one may also claim that by defining children's literature according to this rule, books aimed at children are reduced to a mere means of control. This view thus represents a practice where no trust is put in the child reader's own abilities and knowledge. Further, this leads to a lack faith in the author, giving rise to the belief that any attempt an adult makes to create a trustworthy child character will be overpowered by adult traits. (Lassén-Seeger 2006: 16–17) As Maria Lassén-Seeger suggests in her book *Adventures into Otherness* (2006), the characters, most often children, in child fiction are constructed as “the other” by the adult author. This incites for the use of metamorphosis, or change, not least because this is what mature readers associate with childhood. (Lassén-Seeger 2006: 10)

While Hunt (2005: 3) argues that it is hard for children's literature to capture the true essence of childhood, Lassén-Seeger questions whether it could not be the other way around, so that it is not childhood that shapes children's literature, but the literature influences the concept of childhood (Lassén-Seeger 2006: 11). It is thus implied that adults, through children's fiction, exert power over children as they are free to decide how to portray the characters of a book, thus painting the pictures children are expected to conform to. In addition, a good book for children is supposed to make the reader accept certain values and ideas through emotional response. (Lassén-Seeger 2006: 13)

This is, however, a view no longer strongly supported in critical studies of children's literature, and many scholars now claim that the power relationship mirrored in children's books is a two-way process. Both parties are said to be both repressive and productive; undergoing power and exercising it. (Lassén-Seger 2006: 16–17) Lassén-Seger (2006: 18), quoting Rudd, stresses, a text is never a monologic process but a dialogic one, representing the complicated relationship between two counterparts. In the case of children's literature this is the bond between adults and children.

Also Nikolajeva brings up the connection between the child and adult in her discussion of children's literature. She argues that books aimed at children are seldom fully stripped of references for adults. This is a result of the authors being adults, and according to Nikolajeva, it is thus impossible for them not to address other adults. Ultimately, all authors do write from their own experience, opinions and ideologies. This, in turn, results in a text that cannot fully, or in the same manner, be understood by a child as opposed to an adult reader. Nikolajeva has named this phenomenon 'double address', and it can be interpreted as what we today consider and refer to as crossover literature. (Niolajeva 1997: 60)

Other things that are often seen to define children's literature are the protagonists, the set of characters, as well as a happy ending. Many define children's fiction as books where the protagonist is a child. Nikolajeva, however, argues that the age of the protagonist is of little relevance when considering whether a book should be classified as a children's book or not. There are many stories intended for adults that portray a child as the main character, but, as Nikolajeva suggests, this does not exclude children as potential readers. (Nikolajeva: 1997: 9) Based upon this it can also be assumed that the protagonist of children's books may be an adult, and that the audience, rather than focusing on the age of the protagonists, focus on their personalities and the portrayal of the characters as a whole.

The above is another factor that complicates the classification of *The Saga of Darren Shan* as children's fiction, as the protagonist is not a child throughout the novels. Darren starts out as a child, but as the series progresses he ages, and in the last book he is

already a fully grown adult. However, regarding Nikolajeva's claim that the age of the protagonist is not of importance when defining the genre of literature this could be excused. Although Nikolajeva never specifically mentions a work of children's fiction portraying an adult protagonist it can be assumed that an adult may be the main character in children's book to the same degree that children are allowed to be protagonists in novels marketed to adult readers. (Nikolajeva 1997: 9)

A happy ending has also been viewed as a standard in children's literature, but as there are exceptions to this rule, so neither this can be used as a definite denominator to children's fiction. For example Astrid Lindgren's *The Brothers Lionheart* (1973) ends with both brothers jumping off a cliff to a certain death. According to Nikolajeva (1997: 34), the idea of a happy ending is relative; it cannot be defined because the views revolving around it have change during the ages, and also, what is categorised as a happy ending highly depends upon the audience. Multiple books also apply that which Nikolajeva (1997: 34) calls aperture, an open ending, thus promoting the readers to draw their own conclusions of the outcome.

In her book *Adventures into Otherness* Lassén-Segre (2006: 199–200) also comments on the fact that while happy endings in children and youth fiction may be the norm, *fin de siècle* (the turn of the century) shows a growing trend of dystopian literature for youth and children. This is an argument supported by Heather Scutter (1999: 286), who claims that modernism has finally caught up with children's fiction, urging it to “come-of-age”. Lassén-Segre (2006: 200), however, also brings up the question whether or not it is correct for adult writers to project fears, unhappiness and disappointment in life that they feel upon young readers, or if such themes are too heavy for the undeveloped mind and might lead to loss of childhood innocence.

Children's fiction is also said to have a certain set of motives and themes that acts as its driving force. Not only is it the themes and motives that are pre-set in children's literature, but according to Nikolajeva (1997: 35), the scope of characters, too, often follows a certain pattern. If the protagonist is a child, Nikolajeva claims, there is often a need for an adult, or otherwise adult-like company, who can act as a role model to the

protagonist. As Nikolajeva (1997: 54) states, “...some secondary characters are indispensable” for the trustworthiness of the story. This stems from notion that a child, without any guidance, would not be able to cope on its own. The protagonist temporary losing, or being abandoned by, an adult-like role model character is not an uncommon feature in children’s literature, and often these instances force the protagonist to grow and develop. Yet, Nikolajeva states that once this presence of adulthood is lost there is a need to fill the gap with a new, similar presence. (Nikolajeva: 1997: 54)

In *The Saga of Darren Shan*, even though Darren matures mentally, he is under a long period of time trapped inside the body of the child he no longer is. This in turn might facilitate recognition between the child reader and the protagonist. Also, the constants presence of someone older and wiser renders Darren’s character rather childish even in adulthood, and Darren himself actually admits that he has always seen Mr. Crepsley as a father figure for him, even during his adult years (LS 10–13).

However much critics would like to assert the gap between mainstream literature and children’s fiction there are still multiple factors, as can be deduced from the above discourse, these two have in common. Furthermore, children and adults do in fact share certain features as readers. According to Hugh Crago (2005: 181), the differences between the adult and child reader is marginal when reading occurs on the level where significant emotional impact is most probable. While a pattern is, indeed, generally retraceable in children’s fiction, one must keep in mind that exceptions to the rules are not unprecedented. Hence, until a definite denominator is found, children’s fiction will remain somewhat of a grey area.

2.4 Provoking Themes in Children’s Fiction

Literature, not least for children, is a medium through which complicated subjects can be introduced to the readers. When analysing children’s literature on the whole, there is a certain, preferred, method to introducing these sensitive subjects.

Rudd describes childhood and children's fiction as highly metamorphic. The metamorphoses in children's fiction can be either physical or mental, but it is the latter that Rudd claims to be the preferred option in modern day children's literature. (Rudd 2009: 17–18) The focus of earlier children's literature, on the other hand, used to be the sudden physical growth of the protagonist; the physical metamorphosis. Nowadays, however, it is rare to depict the physical maturing of the main character in children's books. (Rudd 2009: 18–19) This inclines that psychological and spiritual growth, as opposed to actual physical growth, is regarded as the more important of the two in modern day society. Furthermore, it is often through metamorphoses that sensitive themes, such as fear and death, are introduced in children's fiction.

Literary metamorphoses are hard to define, and can, according to Lassén-Seger, be temporary or permanent, self-chosen or imposed, and they can happen for obvious reasons or no reason at all. A change from one stage into another is also classified as metamorphosis. (Lassén-Seger 2006: 21) Finnish literary critic Kai Mikkonen (1997: 2–3) makes the following statement:

metamorphosis addresses the process of ageing, changes in the body and language, identity and sexuality, birth and death. How the person may be (figuratively) threatened or born again as well as the relationship between culture and what we understand as its other (nature, the transcendent) are issues also approached through metamorphosis.

Many of the important questions of life, such as the matter of life and death, as well as the process of aging, are themes encountered in Shan's novels. Thus the use of metaphors and metamorphosis when talking of death and rebirth seem suitable.

Lassén-Seger, referring to Mikkonen (1996) uses three criteria when defining the nature of metamorphosis. The first criteria is realizing that metamorphosis in itself is a metaphor, as it fuses two opposite sides (the self/the other, life/death) with one another. This paradoxical nature of the metamorphosis challenges the figurative status of the metaphor by literalising it. Secondly, because of the difficulty to categorise the dual character of literary metaphors, it is noted that metamorphoses commonly "thematise

and problematises the relationship between sign and its point of reference". This gives birth to paradox, where metamorphosis can stand both for unification or sameness as well as change. Lastly, metamorphosis is also affected by its subject. "The subject is characterised by a sense of process or continuum [...], since the two forms involved in metamorphosis are connected not by language, but by body." (Lassén-Seger 2006: 25) The literary metamorphosis is a method to raise questions about subjectivity and selfhood, such as why, how and to whom does change occur (Lassén-Seger 2006: 26).

2.4.1 Fear in Children's Fiction

Robert Hood (1997), quoting Lovecraft, states the following: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." However, as Nicholas Tucker (1976: 115) states: "There is, undoubtedly, something fascinating about fear", as well. It is not solely fun things that are entertaining, but dark and sinister things can be made entertaining as well, and it is perhaps in the horror genre that fear can be expressed to its fullest because the aim of horror fiction is to make the reader feel uncomfortable.

Horror for children is a rather ambiguous subject, as it can be entertaining, threatening and educational. Many authors, Darren Shan among them, have taken an interest in children's horror because it presents the author with the opportunity to introduce the child reader to material they might not encounter in other works of literature. The recent upswing in children's horror has also provided a larger interest in why it is important for children to deal with difficult themes, such as death and powerlessness. Naturally, as similar themes also appear in other children's books and not solely in horror fiction, the below theory could be applied to other genres as well.

Sarah Todd (2008), argues that horror fiction provides older children, aged between eight and twelve, with good educational material and a good opportunity to learn. Still, Todd stresses the importance of the books and stories introduced to the children as having to be within certain bounds. Anything too frightening, serious or gory, she

argues, could harm the development of children, as they are yet in a vulnerable stage of their lives. Preferably, horror books for children should be lighter versions of adult horror novels, however, scenarios of complete hopelessness and death should be erased in order to protect the child. Adhering to these guidelines should, according to Todd, give the children the thrill of a good scare, yet simultaneously teach them to value good qualities such as friendship and loyalty and, more importantly, encourage them to never lose hope. (Todd 2008)

This leads to the question of whether fear is an acceptable theme in children's literature. Many might say no, as the thought of deliberately scaring children might seem unethical. Childhood is, after all, a time when children are thought to be excessively vulnerable, and they are also prone to having nightmares and sometimes even irrational fears. Todd (2008), on the other hand, argues that it is not uncommon for parents to scare their children into making the correct choices, so that they do not stray onto paths of immorality. In other words, horror fiction aimed at children could be seen to serve a similar purpose as fairy tales, which have long been used in teaching children the consequences of unwanted behaviour.

Hood is another writer in favour of horror literature aimed at children, and in the a speech he gave at Children's Books Council Conference in Australia he claims that horror, provided that it is well written, like any other literary genre can satisfy all the literary purposes. In his speech Hood also states that the most significant difference between the horror genre and other types of writing is that horror constantly toys with ideas of fear. Fear as an emotion, and the coming to terms with it, is not only a struggle that adults go through. Fear stands for a large portion of children's lives, too, and perhaps therefore, suggests Hood, it would be good if children were to be presented with more opportunities to confront their demons in a safe surrounding, for example through books. (Hood 1997)

Furthermore, in the same speech, Hood strongly emphasises the importance of coming to terms with strong feelings, such as fear, loss, and powerlessness because these feelings are unavoidable. He asserts the necessity for children to experience these

emotions, as it will aid them later in life. (Hood 1997) Nicholas Tucker (1976: 115) agrees, stating that even though fear in children's books has not been far from being considered taboo at times, reading about fearful situation will give children a means to control and managed their horrors. When discussing the fear children might experience he goes as far as stating that "reading about horrors may sometimes help put such fears at least into a more helpful context, where a child can begin to refer to them by name, and share the experience with others" (Tucker 1976: 116–117), thus, in fact, claiming that processing texts dealing with fear may prove profitable.

Catharine Storr (1976), on the other hand, stresses that one can impossibly predetermine the effect horror literature will have on children, since this is an individual matter. Yet, Storr argues that children should be presented with opportunities to feel fear, and Storr goes even further by extending her argument to pass for pity, terror and evil as well. The problem, she states, lies in how these matters are presented to children, and that the real question is not whether they should be allowed to face these feeling but how these feeling are introduced to them. (Storr: 1976: 144,146–147)

Peter Hunt (1999/2005: 197) also supports this idea, emphasising that children should not be deprived of fear, but that the main issue is in what manner fear is laid forth to them. If, however, they were to be fully shielded from the horrors in fiction, Hunt states that such overprotection of the child might in certain ways compromise, or at least affect, their development. Hunt (2005: 197) explains as follows:

"it is debatable whether or not fear of the unknown is greater than fear of the known, but in childhood so much is unknown that a child, in order to make sense of fear, must isolate and identify it; only the known can be dealt with."

Hence from can be derived that it is, in matter of fact, crucial for children to learn about fear in order to successfully cope with the emotion in real life.

Storr further emphasises that fear and evil cannot be disregarded in children's literature, but must be given proper attention. They must also become subjects of importance, as is

the norm when writing about concepts such as truth or goodness. Storr claims that it only is by granting these subject matters certain credible value that they may evoke recognition in the minds of children. Occasionally, this is neglected and, consequently, when children read about evil in books, they might perceive it only as something that is other and far away, thus failing to realise that evil is in fact also a part of them. Comprehending that also they are capable of evil does, according to Storr, strengthen the children's capacity of understanding how to regulate their emotions and realise that they hold power over this evil. (Storr 1976: 151)

Furthermore, if a child is aware of good and evil, and has enough knowledge to accept and tolerate their coexistence, this might also enrich their creative experiences. Through reading about evil, or other dark subject matters, children can come to understand that these hold good capacity of functioning as literary devices, and that without them, in fact, the literary experience might be impaired. Additionally, registering that both good and evil often are essential elements in the arts might help the acceptance of this fact in real life, too. (Storr 1976: 151–152)

How, then, are moral issues such as evil, or fearful concepts such as death and fear, best presented in children's literature? Perhaps there is no correct answer, but there is, at least, a multitude of suggestions. Storr (1976) proposes four different methods: de-humanising, exaggerative, humour and distancing.

The first method to be discussed is de-humanising. Storr argues that death and evil are less challenging for children to comprehend if presented using a natural enemy, such as a catastrophe, an illness or a predator. Fate is also a de-humanising factor because any evil that occurs due to fate is beyond the protagonist's direct influence. Storr claims that "[...] any child might learn from them something of the nature and impersonal evils he may encounter", and through this be able to face them in real life. She asserts that by assigning fate or chance the role of evil, the sensation of fear remains far more impersonal and removed from societal matters, which Storr claims are harder for children to process. Conflicts, such as war, that are stirred up by and largely depend on

the action of human beings are according to this theory better avoided. (Storr 1976: 148–149)

Another method is to present the horrific in such an exaggerative, improbable manner that it simply does not frighten the reader but simply provides them with an image of what evil could be. Humour can also be utilised in a similar manner, making the villain evil, yet laughable or otherwise ridiculous. Laughing at that which is evil immediately lessens the threatening feeling that in other instances might be very imminent. Further, distancing – the fourth method – can also be applied in order to lessen the impact of fear on children. If writing about a very distant past, or a period of time children do not link to the present, the fear presented does not prove as menacing. If the fear is not introduced as cotemporary, child readers are more likely to regard the events objectively rather than subjectively. (Storr 1976: 148–149)

It is not only how fear and evil are presented that must be taken into consideration when writing children's fiction. Charls Sarland (2005/1999: 44) warns that horror fiction, or other works involving suspension as a main theme, might inflict a faulty image of the world on children. This because the genre is prone to use stereotypes; a classic example of this would be the damsel in distress. Apart from looking out for these stereotypes when writing, Sarland (2005: 45) argues that the reactions and opinions of the intended readership should be further studied, as this might give new insights in the subject of fear in children's fiction. Only then can the genre improve, and appropriate means to include subject matters such as death and fear in children's fiction be found.

2.4.2 Death in Children's Fiction

All words are bound to follow the law of euphemism and, according to Royle (2003: 227), this is especially true for a word such as death. In particular when children are involved, death will be discussed in an evasive manner or the truth might be beautified. For example, in situations in which children will be exposed to death it is often spoken

of as going on a journey, or being in a better place rather than stating the plain truth. This is in many cases also true for death in children's literature.

Death in children's literature is no new phenomenon, but was, in fact, rather common at one point in time. The reason to why death used to be such a common theme for early children's literature, as suggested by Nikolajeva, is that death was such an everyday occurrence that it simply could not be avoided. In the 19th century, the nuclear family used to consist of not only children and their parents, but of their grandparents as well, thus increasing the likelihood of expected and unexpected death. Before the industrialization and discovery of modern health care, mortality rates were significantly higher, and it was not uncommon for individuals – adult or child – to succumb to ailments that today are fully treatable. Because of this it was, according to Nikolajeva, not uncommon for children's literature to incorporate death into the story as it would present the child with a more realistic picture. (Nikolajeva 1997: 37)

Not only the constant presence of death aided in maintaining the theme in children's literature, but religion also played an important part. Christianity inspired authors to introduce a more positive image of death, teaching people not to fear it but rather embrace it. Nikolajeva (1997: 34) suggests that this practice has its root in the Christian utopia. Reuniting with God was a very desirable goal and what people ultimately aimed for, and as this can only happen through passing, there might have been pressure to lessen the fear so often associated with it.

The urbanisation, following the Second World War, led to increased living standards and a broader knowledge of medicine. This, in turn, lowered mortality rates significantly, making death seem more unfamiliar. Whereas death had before occurred in the home, it now took place in hospitals or other facilities, thus becoming an alienated part of the lives of children. (Nikolajeva 1997: 37) The ban of death as a theme in children's literature first started to develop when death began to be attributed with negative connotations in a higher degree than earlier. Furthermore, as this occurred during a time when, in society, the thought of regarding children as children, as opposed

to “little-adults”, had begun to take root, the will to protect and hide the negatives from them grew considerably. (Rudd 2009: 17)

According to Langfeldt, the disdain for the darker themes in children’s literature might stem from the assumption that they could have increased interest towards violence and war, and especially German fairy tales were viewed as highly immoral. It was for example thought that German children, through excessive exposure to these fairy tales, had learned to take pleasure in cruelty, and that if not re-educated they would finally become possessed by the same inhuman behaviour that the Brothers Grimm liked to describe in their tales. Under a period of time during the 60s and 70s, the theme of death was even considered such a strong taboo that its presence was highly unwished for in children’s literature. (Langfeldt 1976: 56) This was manifested in the way in which Lindgren’s book *The Brothers Lionheart* (1973) became a topic of a heated discussion, as it depicts death as both symbolic and positive. (Nikolajeva 1997: 37)

Today death no longer represents as big a taboo as in earlier times. In fact, many writers see it as important to introduce children to this inescapable part of life. Although murders and violent deaths of children are still rather unexplored topics, perhaps because they are considered too extreme, the number of books centring on suicide has grown on the children’s literature market. A reason for this could be a reflection of reality; children do commit suicide, and through these books they are discouraged from following through with these thoughts. In addition to this, themes often linked with death such as war, drug abuse, disease and violence have also gained popularity in modern day children’s literature. (Nikolajeva 1997: 37 – 38) This might stem from the fact that children are exposed to these subjects through media such as television or internet, and it has again become necessary to create a more controlled medium where children can explore these themes without taking damage.

Children reading about fear are forced to confront their own emotions on the subject, and as suggested by Nicholas Tucker this in turn might make them more capable of dealing with such matters in reality. A similar approach could be applied to death in connection with children’s literature today. While in the 18th and 19th centuries death

was included in children's literature because it was a normal occurrence in the society of the time, death might be included into modern day children's books as a means for children not to become too unaccustomed to the phenomenon. (Tucker 1976: 115)

Robert Hood further expands on the reasons to why death is a relevant theme in modern day children's fiction. He introduces the topic by addressing the worry felt by adults when letting children indulge in books that circle around death. Hood insists that death is no more abnormal than any other everyday phenomenon, and states that children will at some point in life be forced to face death, no matter their parents' attempts to protect their children. Thus Hood suggests it would be better for children to create an understanding of death early on, so that they are prepared once they have to tackle the hurdle in real life. (Hood 1997)

Death in children's literature need not only focus on the actual act of dying, but Hood suggests that death as a theme can also be the key to awaken other emotions. Death can metaphorically express loss of not only life but of control, and feelings such as bereavement, insecurity and change. As a matter of fact, the spectrum of feelings that might arise through death is endless. While admitting that children might not see these patterns as clearly as adults, Hood still insists that subconsciously children will, to some extent, intercept these self-exploratory undertones. (Hood 1997)

Children might, through reading children's horror fiction, come to terms with death, loss and powerlessness, and realize that even though these emotions are real they are surmountable (Hood 1997). Moreover, death has not always been perceived as something evil or bad. According to Rättyä, when death used to be an unavoidable everyday phenomenon, people were in no need of a specific explanation to why someone died. In today's society, on the other hand, death is highly undesired, and if someone dies, there ought to be a reason why. Death no longer just happens. Rättyä stresses the very fact that a death that just happens can become a major dilemma in today's fiction, specifically children's fiction. (Rättyä 2009: 206)

In the article "barnböcker med död" (2009, children's books with death), published in

Dagens Nyheter, Ulla Rhedin confirms that death has, indeed, started to find a place in modern children's books. In Denmark, a country that prioritises the production of literature for children, books dealing with abortion, death, and handicaps have recently been published. One book tells of a funeral director humming on happy songs while attending to dead children; in another story a mother makes her communicatively handicapped son commit suicide together with her; yet another book presents a child with the dilemma of having to choose for which parent death will come the following night, and yet another tells the tale of a group of aborted children, muttering together in displeasure as they have not, and never will, receive the chance to live. The illustrated children's books may all seem highly controversial, and perhaps even too brutal for children, but they are read in many schools and nurseries in Denmark. (Rhedin 2009) While this may be cause of worry for some, others, including Elishabeth Kübler-Ross (1987: 143–145), insist that children possess an internal knowledge of death, and are in some cases able to comprehend it better than any adult.

Lurie acknowledges that the tendency to include death in modern day children's literature is growing. However, she emphasises the authors' tendencies to spare the main protagonists and their friends, and explains this by referring to our society. In our modern world the norm is that older people, those of another generation, are the ones to die, not the children. (Lurie 1990: xiv) Author Sarah Todd also supports this argument. She states that death, or harm in general, seldom fall upon the protagonist's friends, family or pets. Further, she states that it is also rather uncommon for these entities to turn against the protagonist, stressing the necessity of an evil, main villain. (Todd 2008)

In order to avoid dealing with death directly in children's literature, it can be substituted by a metamorphosis or symbolism. For example, Steig William's novel from 1969, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, tells the tale of a young boy who is turned into a rock without any specific reason. At first the narrator describes him as scared, worried and helpless, but as the story progresses the boy in the rock falls into an endless sleep, much similar to death in a sense that the boy has lost his subjectivity. Sometimes his inner voice might be represented by an outer force. An example of this is the wolf that at some point perches on the rock, howling, which can be seen as a representation of

Sylvester's inner, pained, voice. In the end, when one year has passed and spring has come again, the boy is transformed back into a human, which can be read as a symbolic rebirth. (Lassén-Segre 2006: 83–85). Royle (2003: 227) mentions that death is often spoken of softly to children, and the previous is a good example of such an euphemistic approach to death.

2.4.3 Death in Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are also said to be the origins of children's literature. They share the same pedagogical approach that can be seen in children's fiction and aim to teach their readers a lesson in morals and ethics. There are many definitions of what a fairy tale is, but according to Lassén-Seger, it can be defined as "tales including magic, wonder, and supernatural transformations" This definition covers fairy tales, folk tales as well as tales of wonder. (Lassén-Seger 2006: 28).

Fairy tales stem from an oral tradition, and were not actually told exclusively to children. It was, in fact, not until around late eighteenth century that they progressively began to be considered children's literature, at least in the western world. Today, fairy tales are marketed as children's literature. (Crago 2005: 182, Lassén-Seger 2006: 28) Another issues which Lassén-Seger calls attention to, is the fact that myths and fairy tales, at least to a certain extent, share similar features and past history with children's literature. Furthermore, it is also unarguable that many a story intended for children has borrowed elements or found inspiration from the world of fairy stories. (Lassén-Segre 2006: 27) As can be seen, fairy tales and children's fiction have similarities, and thus fairy tales can be used as material when researching children's fiction.

Still, fairy tales have at times been deemed unsuitable for children, and have been accused of being immoral or politically incorrect (the opposite of the educational children's book). Crago, on the other hand, asserts that even though fairy tales have been the subject of harsh criticism, they have also been defended for being morally instructive and valuable in the sense that they aid child readers to grow psychologically.

He compares this double aspect of fairy tales with children's literature, a genre which some regard as educational while others view it as a means to derive pleasure. (Crago 2005: 183)

Terri Windling discusses the many different roles and personifications Death plays in fairy and folk tales. Death is not an uncommon theme, and surprisingly the morale of some of these tales is to prove the necessity and indispensable nature of death. A large number of fairy tales retell stories of people successfully banishing Death, but through their actions the world or country they inhabit is thrown into misery, as everyone now is unable to die. (Windling 2006: 1)

According to Windling (2006: 1), stories following this pattern show the reader that even though death at times may be an unwelcome guest, there are others, such as the old and sickly, who will willingly accept it. Therefore the moral of the story is to show the reader the actual dire consequences that were to occur if death vanished, thus aiding in realizing the importance of death. Windling (2006: 1) further suggests that these stories could also aid in facilitating the acceptance of death, in cases where it is unexpected and unwelcomed, by proving that the phenomenon or personification of death, a variant often favoured by older tales, is ultimately not evil but a salvation.

Windling also argues that death in fairy tales has a tendency to strike at the most unexpected of moments. In a time when mortality rates were high it was necessary for the common man to always be prepared to die, and the tales thus promoted a better preparedness for this. (Windling 2006: 1) In other words, many fairy tales aimed to portray death in a relatively positive manner, as opposed to the negative one that is often associated with death today.

Another aspect of death discussed by Windling is that death is deemed to be an extremely fair creature. In the story "Godfather Death", one of the stories collected by the Brothers Grimm, a tailor is searching for a godfather for his child, as he cannot afford to raise him alone, and he refuses both God and the Devil. He declines God because he believes God favours the rich over the poor and he declines the Devil

because it is well known that the Devil will play everyone unfair. The third person the tailor comes across is a personification of Death. The man favours Death above the others because of his sense of equality, as can be seen through the following example: “‘I am Death, who makes everyone equal.’ Then the man said, ‘You are the right one. You take away the rich as well as the poor, without distinction. You shall be my child’s godfather.’” (Godfather Death 2006). The point of equality in the face of death is further established when Death later claims the life of his own godson. (Windling 2006: 1) As suggested by Windling (2006: 2), it is this unambiguous nature of death that provides it with terror, as the humans, or readers, can only know that death will strike one day but they will never know when, where and at what stage of their life it will happen.

In fairy tales death and the act of killing are not unfamiliar, and in many of the classic tales death is brought upon a party by extremely cruel methods. A good example of this is the Brothers Grimm’s “The Dog and the Sparrow”, in which a sparrow executes revenge upon the man who ran over his friend, the dog. The tale ends with the waggoner’s wife hitting the waggoner in the head with an axe, having originally aimed for the bird which she missed. (Langfeldt 1976: 61) Yet, even in this story certain equality can be found. Death has taken equally much from both parties, leaving both the sparrow and the wife bereft of their cherished companions.

A further trait of death in fairy tales, says Windling, is that it need not be final. In some stories the protagonist’s or a supportive character’s life might be brought to an end, but death might in certain instances represent change or transformation instead of a definite end. Death might be temporal, as in “Snow White” or “The Sleeping Beauty”, in other cases characters are reincarnated, and in some instances characters are brought back to life by the love and goodness of others. Even in cases where death is final, new life will, in some form, spring from this death, thus rendering death into a transformation rather than an actual finalization. (Windling 2006: 2)

3 DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF DEATH

It is impossible to experience death and then return to tell about it, and this is what constructs death's unique nature. Death can always only be a representation. Thus, in order to describe death, it is necessary to involve and utilize images that do not genuinely belong to death, because without these we could make no sense of it. This very reason has played a significant role in creating the unique status death holds in culture today. It can, without doubt, be said that human culture revolves around death, and that death is what "grounds the many ways a culture stabilizes and represents itself". It is also true that death is defined by culture, as an actual definition of death to this day has proven impossible to attain. (Bronfen and Webster Goodwin 1993: 3–4)

Death can be studied and interpreted through multiple fields; be it art, literature, or science. The interest in the topic seems to be universal. Yet, it is hard to find an exact definition of what death actually is as culture, and the means used to define death, are fluid and in constant change. Culture differs from generation to generation, from people to people, and from person to person. At times death has been an almost forbidden, silenced topic. Nevertheless, death has also been called "the muse of philosophy", and has given rise to many discussions concerning, but not limited to, the possibility of an afterlife. (Bronfen and Webster Goodwin 1993: 3) Indeed, any cultural construct, from religion to poetry, may be constructed as a response to death, asserting its position as one of the more important sources of inspiration in the world.

Everyone experiences death in their own private and unique way, but no one can claim that their ideas have not, at least to a certain degree, been influenced by culture. (Perdigao & Pizzato 2010: 1). Furthermore, as suggested by Perdigao and Pizzato (2010: 2), the practice of deconstructing death through literature, movies or theatre is very common. While a living human being will never be able to fully grasp the true essence of death, as it is scientifically impossible, this does not entail a lack of attempts to try and comprehend the mysteries of death.

A trend that recently seems to have gained popularity in both culture and media is the

preservation, in form of memorials and beautification, as well as the marketing of death. Perdigao and Pizzato claim that this can be seen in high art as well, for example through the re-representations of memorialisation of death and funerals. In media, such as film, art, and literature, creators try to aesthetically eternalise the moment of death, so that it might be remembered in place of the decay that will follow. Furthermore, the actual rise in marketing of caskets, gravestones and flowers also indicates that the sense of perfection in death is sought out in not only popular culture, but in society as well. (Perdigao and Pizzato 2010: 2) The beautification of beasts, such as the vampires (sparkling beauties in the recent Twilight series as opposed to the hideous, bestial Nosferatu), serves as a good comparison in the field of popular culture.

The following sections explore death and culture from different angles. First to be looked upon is how death, life and fear are related to each other, followed by a section focusing on the human desire to hold power over death. The focus will then be shifted to mourning and rituals that are connected to death, such as burials, as well as the idea of an afterlife.

3.1 Death, Life and Fear

Françoise Dastur, in his work *Death: An Essay on Finitude* (1996), reflects over the different aspects and functions of death. He states that life itself, or at least several angles of it, naturally focus on death, and that sophisticated thinking around death has a rather lengthy history. Already in the times of Plato, philosophers enjoyed pondering upon death, trying to comprehend it. (Dastur 1996: 1–2)

One method of understanding death is examining how it relates to life. It has been said that death and god are two equal, conflicting powers, and the same is also true about death and life. One the one side we have life; the familiar and sensible, on the other side is the unintelligible death; the eternal unknown. (Dastur 1996: 19) It is through death that life is granted meaning, but as death represents the end of the life known to the human beings it is often associated with fear, spurring people to fight against and aim to

conquer it. Only the living can fear death and only through existing can death be witnessed. (Dastur 1996: 81)

The chain between life and death is linked so tightly together it is impossible to separate the two. This is reinforced by Jean-Paul Sartre, who argues that death and birth are close to interchangeable. Sartre claims that both birth and death are factualities that no man can avoid; all men must be born just as surely as they must die, and these are events lay far beyond what any man can influence. Both birth and death will come unbidden, both will transform man, and all men lay equal before these occurrences. (Sartre 1969: 545)

Dastur (1996: 26), quoting Kojève, states “that ‘man is not only mortal; he is death incarnate; he *is* his own death’ which implies that the being of man ‘manifests itself as a deferred suicide’”. From this can be concluded, as Dastur (1996: 25) also argues, that “the attainment of humanity as such is possible only through confrontation with death”. In other word, death is what defines man. Death is what links human beings to a mortal, limited life, and in order to be human men cannot thread outside the borders that death represent without becoming something else.

Death is inescapable, and similarly to Kojève, Royle (2003: 84–85) argues that this depends on the fact that death is a force that continuously lives within man. That death is, in fact, the very aim of life itself. Yet, even if death is inevitable, it is not solely a frightening thing but also a promise. To die guarantees an individual freedom. In death one no longer is, and therefore one cannot be in pain, feel alienated, discriminated or lonely, and thus, to die is to finally be freed from all labelling that has been constrictive, even restrictive, during life. (Royle 2003: 84–85) This is supported by Dastur (1996: 26), who also compares death to freedom.

Further, Dastur (1996: 6) draws attention to the assumption that humans are, to current knowledge, the only animals on earth who are intelligent enough to discuss and contemplate death, and thus also fear it. Perhaps then, as humans are incapable of accepting death as part of life in the same sense as animals, consciously facing death is the price humanity has to pay for their high intellect. (Dastur 1996: 6) Death does not

hold meaning in itself, but it is through one's own loss of life that it gains its interest value. Death forces an individual to face their own mortality, the fact that they will one day disappear. Thus, in order to facilitate the processing of death and its aftermath, it has been allowed to possess a significant role in human culture. (Dastur 1996: 18)

It is the inevitable unknown that sparks the fear, but also a desire. Terror of death is like terror of freedom, because death is the only true freedom and true freedom thus remains unknown to mankind until their deaths. Yet, freedom remains something human beings yearn for. This dual relationship applies to death as well. Death is feared because it is unknown, but it only through dying that can humans face death, and consequently cease to fear it. Still, humans wish to comprehend death. (Dastur 1996: 26) This leads to a need, a desire, to control death. Having power over something makes it less threatening, and being able to exert power over death, no matter how marginal the power, is naturally appealing to humans.

3.2 Death and Power

According to Elisabeth Bronfen and Sara Webster Goodwin, death is closely linked to power. While humans have no power over death, not to a great extent at least, they have the power to reflect over the phenomenon. Bronfen and Goodwin even claim that studying death and its representations might actually lead to a better knowledge of the power structure of society. (Bronfen and Goodwin 1993: 3, 4–5) An example of this is when ruling entities, such as the government, know that they have to sustain information from the public in order to manipulate their reactions to a violent situation. The public would like to know how many have died, who was responsible for the deaths and why these deaths have occurred. (Bronfen and Webster Goodwin 1993: 5) So, by maintaining information of the actual situation, the ruling entities are able to exert their power over the public.

Further, it is claimed that death is not only a concept involving abstract terms, but that it actually involves living bodies as well. The authors stress that it is not only the binary

relation between life and death that has been thoroughly researched and criticized, but that as of late the actual borders of life and death, its physical definition has been put under the microscope. This can be seen in the struggle to determine at what exact moment an embryo is considered to become a living human or when deciding whether a brain-dead person is dead or alive. This idea can be seen further established in society's need to give the dead a voice, such as through a testament. (Bronfen and Webster Goodwin 1993: 5–6) Bronfen and Webster Goodwin state the following about humans and their desire to exert power over death:

Death is the constructed Other. That which aligns with death in any given representation is Other, dangerous, enigmatic, magnetic: culturally, globally, sexually, racially, historically, economically. To study representations of death is to study not only how individuals but also groups have defined themselves against what they are not but wish to control [...] this idea of death as agon is in part a cultural construct, since death and life do not by nature stand in an exclusively binary relation. (Bronfen and Webster Goodwin 1993: 20)

In other words, it is the elusive nature of death that further intrigues, and gives rise to the desire to be able to control it. It is hard for the human mind to understand, and perhaps to accept, something that does not have clear borders. People will want to know where exactly to draw the line, because this empowers them and contributes to a safer environment. Perhaps this is why humankind has aimed to create certain constructed borders of life and death, such as the time limit in which it is considered, at least by certain people, ethical to have an abortion. The same can be said about organ donation, which is not permitted unless the deceased, or those closest to this person, has agreed upon it. Being allowed a certain amount of control over the body, even once deceased, grants humans a certain imagined control over death, too.

It could perhaps even be argued that euthanasia, which is not yet widely permitted, is an extension of the power to control death, as it builds upon the idea of granting the living individual with an actual choice of how and when to meet their death. Having this choice asserts a certain amount of power over death, whereas people can decide to revoke, and in a manner even conquer, the “natural” death in favour of a “created” death.

All this reflects the constant struggle of power and the almost antagonistic yet natural relationship between life and death, and the desire possessed by humans to be the rulers of this system, even though they gladly admit it is uncontrollable.

Royle, referring to Freud's original theory, introduces another aspect of death and power, namely the death drive. The death drive should not be misinterpreted as an individual's desire to perish, but more correctly, it could be explained as the manner in which a person would want to die. Each individual has a unique death drive and all want to die on their own terms, and thus the death drive differentiates human beings from one another, much like does their personalities. It should be noted, though, that this wish cannot always be fulfilled, as death, ultimately, lies beyond the control of mankind. But, the sole existence of a death drive is one more attempt by men to control death. (Royle 2003: 93)

A wish to have power over death can also be seen in the desire to die instead of another person. While a person may die for someone he or she cannot, according to Dastur, die in someone else's place. The reason is that dying for someone only means postponing the other's death, not annulling it forever. In other words, a human's lifespan may be extended through the acts of someone, yet, a human can never be granted immortality. Dastur further argues that there could be several culturally constructed reasons behind wanting to die for another, for example love, but he stresses the fact that sacrificing one's life in place of another's is fundamentally an act of selfishness. He states that "it is not in fact a question of the death *of* the other [individual] but, rather, of the irreparable loss this would be for *us* who prefer not to live after it". Strictly speaking dying for someone is a method of protecting the self from the other's mortality by including oneself in the other's death. (Dastur 1996: 48) Sacrificing oneself thus becomes another way to exert power over death, in this case serving as a means to shield the self from the emotional pain that may be caused by death.

Another aspect of dying, which is also explored by Dastur, is the idea of that a person must always die alone. He states that, no matter how many are present at the moment of someone's death, to accompany them in their last moment, death itself can only be

experienced by the dying alone. Even if the death of the other person can be perceived as painful, and while the death also affects the people close to the dying person with a sense of loss, the actual loss of life cannot be interpreted nor understood by the observers. (Dastur 1996: 47) This, according to Dastur (1996: 49) proves that death is an essential attribute to man, as one cannot die instead of another person.

3.3 Mourning and Rituals

Dastur (1996: 2), quoting Spinoza, says the following: "The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal", and it is this way of thinking that might have inspired people throughout the ages to attempt to eternalise the dead, striving to keep part of them with the living even after their actual physical bodies are gone.

Dastur claims that mourning can be seen as a means of internalising and eternalising the dead. Many cultures, ancient and current, hold the spirits of ancestors in high regard. In this sense, the very essence of the deceased continue to exist among the living even when the actual bodies are gone. Funerals, for example, are one way of eternalising death. Whatever the ritual, be it cremation, mummification, entombment or exposure of the dead, it is often thought of as important, and the person carrying out the formal service is often highly valued. On the other hand, those who actually handle the corpse when it is in its natural, unbeautified state have throughout human history been thought of as unclean and have consequently often been banned from society. This reinforces the notion that it is the immortalisation of the dead that holds value and not the actual body itself. (Dastur 1996: 8)

In case of the death of another person, one experiences the physical absence and nonresponsive behaviour of the individual passed, however, simultaneously one also incorporates and eternalises the deceased in spirit and memory through the process of mourning (Dastur 1996: 47). Dastur (1996: 47–48), studying Freud's philosophical ideas, phrases the essence of mourning as "keeping the departed alive by incorporating

him into our interiority and [...] putting him to death by agreeing to be his survivor”. Mourning thus enables people to physically let go of something forever, yet eternalise the very same thing spiritually (Dastur 1996: 47).

Although mourning and sorrow may be considered the most common reactions to death, loss can also be expressed through diverse reactions. Laughter, a response perhaps deemed unsuitable in the face of death, is not wholly uncommon. This is caused by emotions born when faced with an anxiety so tremendous that a human does not know how best to face it. In death, or in anticipation of it, the world and life lose their form, dissolving into something other, something uncontrollable. Laughter in the wake of death is thus not out of joy, but out of madness. As all else lose meaning so does the mind and morals, and this effectively gives way to mad, uncontrollable laughter. It is thus but a failure to express a more appropriate reaction to death. (Dastur 1996: 84)

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) Julia Kristeva also mentions the Célinian laughter; a laughter which is described as “a horrified and fascinated exclamation” (Kristeva 1982: 204). This further strengthens the argument that death, and other horrific prospects – in Céline’s case the apocalypse – can wring out unusual, inappropriate reactions from human beings. This kind of laughter, according to Kristeva (1982: 206), can be derived from the pleasures that lay hidden in the mind; “the unconscious, the repressed, [the] suppressed” joy that man can feel about, for example, death. It is important to bear in mind, though, that laughter such as this is not an expression of joy, and even though it carries within it a certain fascination, it is for the large part a fearful and tormented expression of emotion (Kristeva 1982: 206). All has gone, and the humans is left laughing because there is nothing left, no more support to be found.

In order not to lose everything when death strikes, the human race has created numerous rituals and ceremonies to eternalize the dead. Examples of this are the multiple representations of death, for example in form of gravestones. The aim of these is to bridge the gap between life and death. A sense of absent presence is created through passing rituals and funerals, and this sense of eternalising the dead through memories,

even though they are no longer present, offers consolation to the ones left behind. Monuments and memorial objects are important for the same reasons. Such objects offer a chance of remembrance, and according to Perdigo and Pizzato (2010: 3), memories are a way of masking death, making it more bearable. In a sense death is made the other, while the beautification of death, the memorials, are the real – even though they, if anything, are the forged existence.

Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny* (2013) also reflects over death and its relation to mankind. The uncanny represents something else, something that should not be, but still is. It can be something repressed, something that has turned unfamiliar, or an unnatural recurrence. The living dead, for example, could be referred to as something uncanny. (Royle 2003: 84) When discussing death, another subject that can be brought up as uncanny is the act of being buried alive. A living body that is receiving a treatment reserved only for the dead is unnatural and contradictive, and this is what gives the process, and mere thought of being buried alive, an uncanny notion. However, being buried alive is also prone to happen in real life, and can manifest itself as fear of being buried in rubble during an earthquake, and this lends the notion of being buried alive certain magical realism, where it is both unlikely and likely simultaneously. (Royle 2003: 162)

3.3.1 The Afterlife

While lacking distinct borders, death simultaneously forms a very firmly drawn border. Once it is passed, it is passed. In a natural world the dead do not return to life, a fact that makes the possible presence of ghosts and undead people extremely effective. (Rättyä 2009: 206) The fascination with vampires might very well stem from this thought, as recent years have seen multiple books revolving around these creatures: *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976–2014), the *Twilight* series (2005–2008), and the *True Blood* series (2008–2014) only to mention a few.

Still, in some specific cases the border between life and death might seem unstable.

According to Rättyä, this often happens if the victim experienced a sudden or violent death, or if they committed suicide. In these cases, she argues, the treatment of the deceased in the afterlife may vary depending on the cause of death. (Rättyä: 2009: 206) For example, whereas the belief of heaven and hell is strongly manifested in many religions, some also proclaim the existence of purgatory; a temporary stage where the soul is to be cleaned before entering paradise.

Another example would be the Norse mythology. Here it is believed that those who die in battle will go to Valhalla, while those who succumb to ailment or old age are bound to go to Hel. Valhalla, where battles are fought during the day and feasts held every night is considerably more joyful than Hel. Hel is a place which, although not described as horrible as the Hell one might be familiar with from Christian belief, is a rather a dull and grey place and offering little entertainment.

The underworld in ancient Greek mythology is also rather similar. The dead in this underworld are caught in a twilight state, stuck where they were in death. They lack capability to communicate with the other souls, yet they all the same retain a certain instinct and awareness. (Sarah Iles Johnston 1999: 8) This specific underworld also refuses entry for any souls whose physical remains have not been taken care of. Thus, if a body is not honoured in death, for example by receiving a funeral in the physical world, the soul may not go on living in the underworld. (Johnston 1999: 9)

Dastur, also ponders over religion and death and draws a connection between death and god. Both are powers that lay beyond the reach of human control. Where death stands for mortality, god, on the other hand, stands for immortality – the eternal afterlife. Dastur thus argues that the conception of an afterlife might be the human need to create balance, an equipoise to the mortality that has led to the creation of the immortal, thus constructing an afterlife. (Dastur 1996: 3–5) Rättyä (2009: 206), however, claims that the belief in other worlds, worlds after death, has dwindled in recent times. This in turn provides an additional reason to fear death. Fear of being unable to move on to another world as well as fear of such a world not existing renders death frightening because of the uncertainty of what is to come next, if anything at all. Major causes for conflict in

children's fiction are, in fact, the questions concerning what death really is and what lies beyond the borders of it. (Rättyä 2009: 210)

4 DEATH IN *THE SAGA OF DARREN SHAN*

“As soon as man comes to life, he is already old enough to die” (Heidegger 1962: 245)

Death is an ever-present element throughout the whole book series *The Saga of Darren Shan*. Each book features death in one way or another, but there are certain instances when death plays such a significant role that the changes it causes visibly affect the protagonist or the plot. Most of these deaths, with a few exceptions, occur either in the beginning or the end of the series. The deaths that are discussed here are the three different “deaths” that the protagonist, Darren, experiences, the death of Darren’s close friend Sam Grest, the death of Darren’s mentor Larten Crepsley, as well as the death of Kurda Smalth.

Darren goes through three different deaths. The first one is a faked death. Darren does not exactly die, but is put into a deathlike state which in turn leads his family to believe him dead. This is followed by an open-casket viewing and a funeral, and Darren is buried alive. The second death of Darren is his real death, after which his soul proceeds to the afterlife. The third death takes place after Darren’s revival, and it is performed by Darren himself. In other words, he commits suicide.

Grest and Mr. Crepsley both meet their end through rather violent, gruesome events. Sam Grest is thoroughly mauled and mangled by a rabid wolf man, and Mr. Crepsley falls down into a pit covered in deadly sharp spikes, which pierce him to death. Kurda Smalth dies twice. The first time he dies because of a death sentence. However, in the analysis I will focus on the rebirth and second, voluntary, death of Smalth.

The deaths that Darren goes through personally are valuable for the thesis. The series is written from a first person perspective, and through this the dying experience is conveyed directly to the readers. Thus readers may gain insight into how the deaths affect Darren himself, as opposed to only receiving the reactions of the ones left mourning. Having the protagonist die several times allows the reader to glimpse at the

guilt and suffering that death can cause not only in the survivors, but the dying party, in this case Darren Shan, as well.

It is not only the deaths of Darren that are significant, but the deaths of Grest and Creplsey also considerably impact the story. These deaths are, namely, the ones that seem to affect Darren the most. These two characters are extremely close to Darren, and although he has a number of other close companions, Gerst and Mr. Crepsley are the only ones to perish. As the reader is also able to experience the mourning that Darren has to go through, this provides another relevant source of material for the analysis. Lastly, the death of Kurda Smalth is also mentioned in the analysis. His case is somewhat special as he is an antagonist, but later turns out to be something more close to an antihero, and this makes it worthwhile to look at his end as well.

Death will be approached from five different angles. First, death will be looked at from the perspective of children's literature. In this section the aim is to establish what practices the author has used that are commonly applied when discussing death in children's fiction. Shan's work will be scrutinised in the light of the theories on children's literature, as well as those on fear and death in children's literature. The intent is to identify both the similarities and differences that the author of *The Saga of Darren Shan* has utilised to describe death when compared to the theories oftentimes applied of modern day children's fiction.

The second part of the analysis discusses death as a negative force. Deaths brought up in this section are generally sudden and unwished for. The focal point will be mourning, negative feelings, and other reactions that death causes in the protagonist and the people surrounding him. Because this section heavily reflects the need and desire felt by the protagonist to have control over death, the concept of death and power will also be brought up in this context

The third part, contrastively to the second, concentrates on death as a positive force. The deaths that are analysed in this section are usually planned or wished for, and these circumstances help soften the image of death, making it seem more positive. The bond

between life and death, the death drive, as well as the idea of dying instead of another person are brought up in this part. Self-inflicted death is also featured in this section, and therefore it will also touch upon the notion of death and power.

The fourth subchapter studies whether all the characters are treated similarly when faced with, and after, their deaths. Funerals, mourning, and beautification of death are all part of this category. The questions that are studied in this chapter are: Who is buried? Why? Why not? And what happens if a person is not buried? Furthermore, as there are two alternative afterlives in *The Saga of Darren Shan*, this section will also pay attention to their role in the life after death.

The fifth subchapter explores the idea of death as a transformer. The chapter focus on the finality, or rather lack thereof, of death. Metamorphoses, transformations and changes caused by death in *The Saga of Darren Shan*, be they actual bodily changes or merely spiritual ones, provide the research material for this section. The afterlife is further discussed, and rebirth also composes one point of interest. Additionally, one more aim is to establish whether there is a connection to be found between the nature of the character that dies and the transformation that follows.

4.1 Death in Shan's Books as Opposed to Death in Other Children's Fiction

As it has become clear that *The Saga of Darren Shan* can definitely be categorized as children's fiction, how then does it apply the ideas and practices, discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, commonly used when writing about death in children's fiction? The following subchapter will focus on the similarities to these theories, and the next subchapter will explore the differences to these theories. The perspective in which death is viewed, as well as themes such as fear and evil are examined closer in the following sections. Furthermore, the uses of metamorphosis or symbolism are also a point of interest.

4.1.1 Similarities to the Presentation of Death in Other Children's Fiction

Metamorphoses and beautification of death are approaches often favoured when writing about death in children's fiction (Rudd 2009: 17, Royle 2003: 227). While in *The Saga of Darren Shan* actual physical metamorphosis is seldom described, death in itself can be seen as a form of metamorphosis.

Death as a transformation is further analysed in chapter 4.5, but to give an example one could bring up the internalisation of Sam's soul: "Sam has already been killed. But if you finish him off before he dies of the bites of the wolf-man, you will save some of his memories and feelings. In you he can live on." (VA 230–231). Here a metamorphoses can be witnessed, as part of Sam's essence, rather than just disappearing upon death, is transformed into a part of Darren through the act of drinking his blood. Simultaneously, the style of writing used to describe this scenario lends it a softer nuance, beautifying it, even though what actually is taking place is Darren being forced to consume blood from a maimed and dying child.

An example of beautification of death can also be seen in the following example, describing Darren's final death – his suicide. The passage is very beautiful and calm, focusing more on the universe around Darren than his actual bodily death.

Explosions of space and time. Breaking through the barriers of the old reality. Coming apart, coming together, moving on. A breath on the lips of the universe. All things, all worlds, all lives. (SD 195–196)

The above quote represents a very abstract and removed way of describing death, and can be compared to the usage of the symbolism used to describe death in children's fiction (Royle 2003: 227). It finds beauty in death. Even though the reader is aware that death is what is happening to Darren, it is displayed in such a manner that the reader is protected from the negative emotions death might bring forth if a more direct approach had been applied.

When looking at Darren's fake death, where he is put into a death-like slumber in order to fool his family into thinking him dead, one can also find similarities to how death is described in children's fiction. The sentence "And that was how I came to enter a new, miserable phase of my life, namely – *death*." (CF 233) is used by Darren to describe his fake death, and brings to light another common practice used when writing about death in children's fiction. This sentence plays with the paradox of life and death, two totalities that cannot exist simultaneously, yet here they do, thus creating a paradox. Death, however, need not always be a permanent stage, as suggested by both Windling (2006: 2) and Lassén-Seger (2006: 10). In a similar manner to these stories Darren's fake death also bears resemblance to a deep, but passing, slumber.

Lassén-Seger (2006: 21) also mentions the use metamorphosis as a means of bridging the paradox of life and death, and stresses that these can be either voluntary or involuntary. Darren goes through a metamorphosis when his body is put into a death-like state. This change is neither voluntary nor involuntary but simply represents a necessity, which reflects how death works in the real world.

Through his fake death Darren is paralysed, losing the ability to speak. He does, however retain most of his senses. Thus, even though Darren has gone through a change which momentarily costs him the ability to speak, the reader can take part in his emotions. This happens partly through Darren himself, as the reader has access to his thoughts. But, as is the case with some children's stories, the inner voice can also be represented through an outer force (Lassén-Seger 2006: 83–85). The pain and suffering Darren's family feel over the loss of their beloved can thus also be interpreted as an externalisation of the physical emotion Darren is unable to show in his paralyzed state.

Another characteristic of children's literature, according to Nikolajeva, is the happy ending. However, as she herself points out, the question of what is counted as a happy ending is rather relevant. (Nikolajeva 1997: 34) *The Saga of Darren Shan* might not present the reader with a traditional happy ending, but it does adapt a similar ending to Lindgren's *The Brothers Lionheart* (1973) an ending that Nikolajeva categorizes as

happy. Furthermore, this type of open ending can also be considered a beautification of death.

Both books, Shan's and Lindgren's, end with the protagonists committing suicide, but in neither case any negative connotations are subscribed to the act. Rather than being presented negatively, the death at the end of the novels represent uniting rather than loss. In Lindgren's novel the characters die in order to be able to live together again, and in *The Saga of Darren Shan* death presents Darren with a salvation from his hard life and a chance to reunite with his friends who passed before him. "Mr. Crepsley waiting. Laughter in the great beyond." (SD 196) is Darren's description of what he sees at his dying moment, and most likely this is a clue to the reader that Darren can now see the Vampire Paradise, the afterlife. However, whether this is the case or not is ultimately left to the reader to conclude on their own. This type of open ending is usually categorised as a happy ending when dealing with children's fiction (Nikolajeva 1997: 34).

There are, as can be seen, certain traits that the deaths in *The Saga of Darren Shan* share with the majority of children's literature. It is especially the open ending that acts as a redeeming force for the book series, because through death Darren is, in the end, able to reunite with all whom he has lost to death throughout the 12 books. Metamorphoses and as well as beautification of death is also applied whenever the book addresses death, and generally they are used to soften the serious topic in order for it to better suit a younger audience, as is the case in most children's fiction.

Lastly, it cannot be denied that Shan's books also function on a pedagogical level, through which children are able to familiarise themselves with death in a safe environment (Lassén-Seger 2006: 14–15, 28; Hood 1999). Even though the descriptions are gory and more straightforward than in many other children's books, the fact still remains that the world in Shan's works is a literary fantasy world, and thus a safe playground.

4.1.2 Differences to the Presentation of Death in Other Children's Fiction

No loss of important characters, beautification, clear distinctions between good and evil, and a distinct lack of hopelessness, gore and powerlessness are all definers of how death as a theme is often treated in children's fiction. This section will explore if these definitions apply to *The Saga of Darren Shan*, too.

First and foremost both Lurie (1990: xiv) and Todd (2008) suggest that the protagonist or characters who are closely related to them are not usually the victims of death in children's fiction. This does not correspond with death in the *The Saga of Darren Shan*, though. A factor that gives death a great deal of shock value in the series is, in fact, that most people who succumb are important to the protagonist.

An example of this would be the death of Sam. This death defies the two ground rules of children's fiction; no one close to the protagonists, or the protagonists themselves, should die, and the killer should be an evil entity (Todd 2008). Sam is one of Darren's best friends, thus close to the protagonist, and he is ultimately killed by Darren, who is not an evil entity.

Even though it is Darren who technically kills Sam, by drinking his blood, it is also stated in the novel that he is not the true killer: "“You want *me* to kill Sam?” I screamed. ‘No,’ he sighed. ‘Sam has already been killed.’” (VA 230). The true killer referred to here is the wolf-man, but as it is stated later in the book that the wolf man is not evil but merely an animal succumbing to his animalistic senses (VA: 234), he cannot be referred to as an evil entity either.

Another option would be to lay the blame on Mr. Crepsley, as it is he who urges Darren to drink Sam's blood. But, as Mr. Crepsley's suggestion is based on good intent, namely preserving a piece of Sam's soul within Darren, as can be seen in the following example, neither he can be marked as an evil killer.

“He is dying and nothing can change that. But there is something we can do for his *spirit*. “Darren,” he said, “*you must drink Sam’s blood*.” I went on staring at him, but now it was a stare of disbelief, not hope. [...] “Do you remember our discussion about vampires being able to absorb part of a person’s spirit?” he asked. [...] “Yes,” I said softly. “What about it?” “Sam is dying,” Mr. Crepsley said. “A few more minutes and he’ll be gone. Forever. But you can keep part of him alive within you if you drink from him now and take his life before the wounds of the wolf-man can.” (VA 229–230)

Same above example not only justifies Mr. Crepsley’s actions when he suggest Darren should finish Sam off, but it also lifts any blame that could technically be laid upon Darren, him being the one who ultimately sucks the last drop of blood – in this case signifying life – out of Sam. In other words, it is very clear who the actual killers are, but none of them had any ill intent, rather the opposite, actually. From this can be concluded that *The Saga of Darren Shan* does not abide by the general assumption that killers in children’s fiction should be evil, but that it applies an alternative point of view to the matter.

This can be further explored through the second death that Darren causes, which is the death of a young vampaneze (an evil vampire) fighter. As soon as Darren realizes that he has caused the man lethal injuries, Darren himself becomes mortified. Darren immediately reverts to a state of hopelessness, which according to Hood (1997) is a symptom of death, and the fact that Darren experiences such a loss of power at having killed a man suggests that he is feeling remorse.

As Bronfen (1993: 3) points out, death is closely linked with power, or lack thereof, and this can be seen in Darren’s attempts to calm his own victim, as the vampaneze lies moaning in pain on the ground.

“‘It... hurts!’ he gasped, clutching at the deep, wide hole in his belly. [...] ‘It’s OK,’ I lied. ‘It’s only a flesh wound. You’ll be up on your–’ Before I could say anything more [...] he groaned softly, fell back, shuddered, then died.” (VP 100)

In this example Darren, during a brief moment, tries to calm the vampaneze fighter, and tries to hide the reality of the vampaneze's death by withholding information from the dying vampaneze. Bronfen (1993: 5) suggest that this reluctance to share the truth is the only way a living can execute even a small amount of power over death.

Death in children's fiction is not usually linked with hopelessness or powerlessness, and here again *The Saga of Darren Shan* defies the norm. Furthermore, the above example also proves that Darren is not an evil entity despite killing people because he feels remorse and fear.

Rättyä (2009: 206) suggests that if a victim is exposed to a violent and sudden death, the acceptance of the death is remarkably harder. Both these criteria met in the case with Darren and the vampaneze. This might not only apply to the victim, but to the assaulter as well, and serves to explain why Darren is shocked by this particular death, when he was not upset in the same manner when killing Sam. Whereas Darren had time to reflect over the fact that Sam was about to die, Darren had received no previous warning of that he was going to kill the vampaneze. The lack of time to reflect over the situation before killing the vampaneze might thus have brought on the utter sense of appal and self-loath Darren experienced when he realized he had made the kill. The violent death Rättyä (2009: 206) speaks of also lack the beautification filter. This is true for the above example as well. No attempt was made to soften the impression of this death, something that is rather unusual in children's fiction.

Further, this death marks an important turning point in Darren's personality, as he suddenly reaches an understanding of how horrible a creature he really has become, and how bloodthirsty the society around him is. Darren reflects upon the war scene in front of him, thinking that there is "something deeply unsettling about seeing the vampires extract so much ghoulish satisfaction from the massacre" (VP 103) Lassén-Segre (2006: 19) implies that it is customary for the protagonist of children's novels to come to realize the true nature of the society they live in, and their inability to influence it. However, in children's fiction the protagonist is generally not left to deal with this truth

on their own in the midst of a massacre, and this is one other factor pointing toward a different presentation of death in *The Saga of Darren Shan*.

As can be seen there is also a rather hazy line between good and evil in *The Saga of Darren Shan*. Storr (1976: 151–152) supports the presence of evil in children’s fiction, as she claims this can help children accept that some form of evil exists in all of us. But, she stresses that evil should be presented in such a manner that it is either de-humanised, exaggerated, presented through humour, or distanced from the current world (Storr 1976: 149–148). Although these methods are utilised, none of them are widely applicable in these novels. Rather, what becomes apparent is that evil can occur in anyone. This in turn might help child readers to comprehend that evil is part of them as well, but that carrying some evil within does not make one thoroughly evil. Even though Darren kills and commit evil, as when he steals Mr. Crepsely’s spider, he oftentimes does so out of necessity rather than desire, and this alone does not make him evil. Darren’s theft of the spider is one of the instances where he is driven by desire, but even then he left a note for the vampire in order for no innocents to be blamed for his deeds (CF 123–124). Yet, *The Saga of Darren Shan* clearly lacks the strictly black and white image usually ascribed to evil in children's fiction.

Further, Todd (2008) suggests that it is rare for close family or friends to turn on the protagonist in children's fiction, however this is exactly what happens in *The Saga of Darren Shan*. It can be seen in the case of Kurda, one of the vampire princes who is loyal to Darren, even assists him, that is up until the point where Kurda’s betrayal towards the vampire race is revealed. Yet another, and even more striking instance, is that the main villain of the whole series turns out to be Darren Shan’s best, childhood friend; Steve Leonard.

Another common denominator in children’s literature is its role as a preserver of hope (Todd 2008). While in *The Saga of Darren Shan* the deaths of important characters are often preceded by a strong sense of hope, and occasionally it might even seem as if a solution might be reached without actual causalities, this is actually a false truth. A good example of this is the death of Larten Crepsley:

AT THE last possible moment, when all seemed lost, someone on a rope swung from the ceiling streaked through the air, grabbed Mr Crepsley around the waist, and rose with him to safety on the platform, where they landed on their feet. [...] NO THAT'S not how it happened. I wish it was. With all my heart and soul [...] But it wasn't to be. [...] Mr Crepsley dropped. He was impaled on the spikes. He died. And it was *awful*. (KD 170, 174)

The predicated hope could be interpreted as a product of Darren's desperation when faced with the possibility of losing an important person. The false hope held by the protagonist strictly goes against the idea of children's literature as an upholder of the protagonist's, and readers', hope. The sense of hopelessness, or loss of power is, in fact, a strong theme in Shan's works.

Features that set *The Saga of Darren Shan* apart from other works in the field of death and children's literature can be summarized as hopelessness, an equal death that has mercy for no one, evil that can manifest itself in anyone, as well as the gory and direct descriptions of death.

4.2 Death as a Negative

Death in *The Saga of Darren Shan* is both of negative and positive nature. In this chapter the focus is on death as a negative force. The aim of this section is to establish whether there is a certain pattern that can be seen when analysing death as a negative. It compares the circumstances surrounding negatively perceived deaths and attempts to define the factors that contribute to a negative image of death, such as powerlessness, solitude, meaninglessness, hopelessness, guilt, and unexpectedness.

The following extract is from the first book in the series, *Cirque Du Freak* (2002), and describes the circumstances of Darren's fake death. The events taking place in the following scene are those of Darren's parents discovering their young son's body lying on the ground, immobile, cold and dead. The parents are unaware that Darren is actually

still alive, as he is only faking his death in order to leave his family and become the assistant of the vampire, Mr. Crepsley.

For a while my body went undetected, so I lay there, listening to the sounds of the night. In the end, a passing neighbor spotted me and investigated. I couldn't see his face but I heard his gasp when he turned me over and saw my lifeless body. He rushed straight around to the front and pounded at the door [...] "Darren!" Mom screamed, clutching me to her chest. "Let go, Angie," Dad shouted, prying me free and laying me down on the grass. "What's wrong with him, Dermot?" Mom wailed. "I don't know. He must have fallen." Dad stood and gazed up at my bedroom window. I could see his hands flexing into fists. "He's not moving" Mom said calmly, then grabbed me and shook me fiercely. "He's not moving!" she screamed. "He's not moving. He's –" [...] "Is he...dead?" our neighbor asked. Mom moaned loudly when he said it and buried her face in her hands. Dad shook his head softly. "No," he said, giving Mom's shoulder a light squeeze [...] Now go call for help, okay?" Mom nodded, then hurried away with our neighbor. Dad held his smile until she was out of sight, then bent over me, checked my eyes, and felt my wrist for a pulse. When he found no sign of life, he laid me back down, brushed a lock of hair out of my eyes, then did something I'd never expected to see. He started to cry. And that was how I came to enter a new, miserable phase of my life, namely – *death*. (CF 231–233)

To be noted is also that Darren has not altogether voluntarily agreed to leave his family in this manner, but only goes along with the plan in order to save a friend. While the act of dying in someone else's place may be positive, the fact that Mr. Crepsley basically forced Darren to die even as he possessed the means to save Darren's friend whether or not Darren went through with the fake death, renders the experience negative.

The previous scene describes the tumult and chaos induced when Darren's dead body is discovered. Further, it also portrays shock and denial, as the mother seems to be unable to accept the death of her son. The fact that Darren's death is so unexpected and seemingly meaningless may also aid in increasing her feelings of distress, as according to Rättyä (2009: 206), death in today's society does not just happen without a reason. The same unexpectedness of death can also be witnessed in fairy and folk tales, in which it was common the toy with the notion that death could strike at any time and kill

anyone (Windling 2006: 2). Unexpectedness could thus, perhaps, be one of the factors that aid in creating a negative image of death.

Further, Hood (1997) argues that death is not only a symbol for the loss of life, but that it also represents a loss of control. The scene cited above is, indeed, intensely overpowered by the loss of control, as it is presented through both Darren and his parents. Darren's parents express a loss of control in such a manner that they simply are unable to help their son, as death is unconquerable. They try shaking the body, screaming at it, and the father is seen flexing his hands into fist, trying to accomplish something but ultimately being unable to aid. These are involuntary responses. Darren, too, exerts a similar loss of control in connection with his actual inability of informing his parents that he is still alive.

The human desire to hold power over death is supported by Bronfen and Webster Goodwin (1993: 6, 20) who claim that the lack of this control is what ultimately result in despair. From here we can conclude that the loss of control – powerlessness – could also be a factor that paints death in a negative light.

The following scene to be analysed, takes place after Darren has been pronounced officially dead. Like in the previous scene, Darren is in his manufactured dead state, observing his parents and little sister as they express their farewells. The scene takes place before the official funeral ceremony and describes Darren as he lies immobilised in his coffin at home and simply waits for time to pass faster.

Early next morning, Dad came in and sat with me. He spoke for a long time, telling me all the things he'd planned for me, the college I would have gone to, the job he'd wanted for me. He cried a lot. Toward the end, Mom came in and sat with him. They cried on each other's shoulders and tried to comfort themselves [...] I hated being the cause of so much hurt [...] I heard Annie crying, begging me to stop fooling and sit up. It would have been much easier if they'd taken her away, but I guess they didn't want her to grow up feeling they'd robbed her of her chance to say good-bye to her brother. (CF 239–240)

This passage, in a similar manner to the previous one, looks at death from the viewpoint of the deceased, not limiting itself to those grieving. Therefore, in addition to the feelings of sorrow usually connected with death, the reader is also introduced to the guilt felt by the deceased. Hood (1997) suggests that guilt strengthens the feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness, and thus another factor that, apart from powerlessness, adds to death's negativity is guilt.

On the one side Darren's parents feel guilt in that they could not prevent the death, on the other side Darren himself also feels guilty:

Faking my death was the only way. If they thought I was dead, I'd be free. Nobody comes looking for a dead person. Now, as I heard the sadness, I cursed [...] myself. I shouldn't have done it. I shouldn't have put them through this (CF 236)

The guilt Darren feels is brought on by his feelings of selfishness. He has done something in order to facilitate his own life, but in the process he has put his family through insurmountable suffering. Both sides mourn, and they mourn alone, independently of each other. And, as Dastur (1996: 47) argues, death can only be experienced alone, and solitude could thus be one more factor reinforcing the negativity of death.

As a piece of children's literature the scene can also be seen to represent the relationship between an adult and a child. It is suggested by both Hunt (2005: 10) and Lassén-Seger (2006: 18) that children's fiction seeks to represent the bond created between adults and children. If this is the case, then the scenes where Darren's family spends time with their supposedly dead son, all of them depicting very uncommunicative states, could be seen as representing the severing of such a bond. Hereof can be deduced the following: breaking the most important, strongest bonds are a signifier for a negative death.

Similar patterns can be found in the scenes describing the gruesome death of Darren's close friend, Sam Grest. The fact that Sam is a close friend already fills one of the criteria so far established for a negative death, namely the severing of a close-knit bond.

Although Sam and Darren had not known each other for long, they had an extremely close relationship. This is, for example, expressed through Sam's desire to become Darren's blood brother, a desire that Darren reciprocates, although he cannot perform the ritual due to his vampire blood (VA 154).

The following scene depicts scenarios of bereavement, powerlessness and hopelessness. So, as Hood (1997) suggests, death does indeed invoke a multitude of complex feelings. This concept is even explored in the above scene, which also focuses on the irrationality often connected with death, and death's inevitability.

The wolf-man had torn Sam's stomach open and eaten a lot of his insides. Amazingly, Sam was still alive when I got to him. His eyelids were fluttering, and he was breathing lightly. "Sam, are you okay?" I whispered. It was a stupid question, but the only one my trembling lips could form. "Sam?" I brushed his forehead with my fingers, but he showed no signs of hearing or feeling me. He just lay there, with his eyes staring up at me. Mr. Crepsley knelt down beside me and checked Sam's body. "Can you save him?" I cried, He shook his head slowly. "You have to!" I shouted. "You can close the wounds. We can call a doctor. You can give him a potion. There must be some way to—" "Darren" he said softly, "there is nothing we can do. He is dying. Another couple of minutes and..." he sighed. "At least he is beyond feeling. There will be no pain." "No!" I screamed, and threw myself onto Sam. I was crying bitterly, sobbing so hard it hurt [...] In the deserted old railroad yard, the wolf-man lay unconscious behind me. Mr. Crepsley sat silently by my side. Underneath me, Sam Grest – who'd been my friend and saved my life – lay perfectly still and slipped further and further into the final sleep on an unfair and horrible death. (VA 226–227)

Darren's powerlessness in the above scene can be seen through his will to help Sam. The rational part of him knows that it is too late, but the urge to hold power over death still drives him to take action, acting as a multiplier for the sense of hopelessness in the situation. Death is powerful, indiscriminating and beyond the control of humans (Rättyä 2009: 205–206), and not even supernatural creatures, such as vampires, have the power to rule over it, as can be seen when Mr. Crepsley admits that some wounds are beyond even his healing capacity. So, there is definitely powerlessness to be found.

Another negative aspect in Sam's death is the unexpectedness. After Darren awakes

from his short knockout, he is first unaware that Sam is dead: “The dizziness from the punch meant it took me a while to realize it wasn’t a *something* he [the wolf-man] was eating... it was a *someone*. *SAM!!!*” (VA 222). The use of capital letters in the spelling of Sam’s name when Darren realises who the wolf-man is eating is a clear hint to the element of surprise. It can thus be assumed that the idea of Sam actually falling victim to the wolf-man had not crossed Darren’s, and presumably the reader’s, mind until he actually witnessed the scene.

Furthermore, guilt, as Darren was unable to stop the wolf-man also provides to the building of a negative image of death. Darren feels guilty about not being able to help Sam even when the ordeal is over: “Sam Grest – who’d been my friend and saved my life” (VA 227) is how Darren describes Sam once he is dying, and the quote refers to a debt that Darren will never have the opportunity to repay. Guilt is also present when Darren is urged by Mr. Crepsley into drinking Sam’s blood: “‘I can’t drink of him,’ I sobbed ‘he was my friend.’” (Shan 2001: 231) is how Darren expresses the matter. It is clearly guilt at taking further advantage of his friend’s dead body that is cause to this outburst. It is the act of robbing someone of a life they should have had, as Darren feels Sam is the one who deserved to live, and to then even further defile the body by consuming Sam’s very essence that lies behind this guilt.

One more death which can be considered to be negative is the death of Larten Crepsley, Darren’s mentor. In the description of his death one can find all the previously presented criteria for a negative death, as well as a new one. There is the severing of an important bond, powerlessness, guilt, solitude, as well as meaninglessness.

The chain reached its limit and snapped taunt. [...] On the platform, Steve wailed as the weight of Mr Crepsley caused the chain to tighten around the flesh of his right hand. He tried to shake it loose, but couldn’t. As he stood, leaning half over the rail, struggling with the chain, Mr Crepsley reached up, grabbed the sleeve of Steve’s shirt, and pulled him over further, caring nothing for his own life, intent only on taking Steve’s. As the pair fell – Steve screaming, Mr Crepsley laughing – Gannen Harst thrust a hand out and caught Steve’s flailing left hand.[...] “Let go!” Steve screamed, kicking out at Mr Crepsley, trying to knock him off. “You’ll kill us both!” “That’s what I meant to do!” Mr. Crepsley roared. He didn’t seem the least bit

bothered by the threat of death. Maybe it was the rush of adrenaline pumping through his veins, having killed the Lord of the Vampaneze – or perhaps he didn't care about his own life if it meant killing Steve. [...] Mr Crepsley looked to where Vancha and I were standing. As our eyes locked in grim understanding, Debbie rushed up beside us. "Darren!" she shouted. "We have to save him! We can't let him die! We—" "Shhh," I whispered, kissing her forehead, holding her close. "But—" she sobbed. "We can't do anything," I sighed.[...] Then his gaze settled on me. "Darren," he said. "Larten," I replied, smiling awkwardly. I felt like crying, but couldn't. There was an awful emptiness inside of me and my emotions wouldn't respond. [...] Then, as the echoes of his final cry reverberated around the walls of the cavern, Mr Crepsley let go of the chain. He hung in the air an impossible moment, almost as though he could fly ... then dropped like a stone towards the steel-tipped stakes beneath. (KD 165–169)

Once again Darren is faced with the loss of a close friend. Perhaps even the loss of one of the most important characters, as Mr. Crepsley throughout the series has been a constant support for the boy. Mr. Crepsley first acted as a mentor to Darren, before their relationship eventually formed into a friendship. But, even though the two characters reach equal level, and Darren matures into an adult, Mr. Crepsley can in all the novels be seen to act similarly to a father figure, to whom Darren turns for help even at older age. As suggested by Nikolajeva (1997: 54), children's fiction might have a set line-up of characters and in that case Mr. Crepsley would definitely be the adult companion whom she argues is inevitable for any book aimed to children. The reason to why Mr. Crepsley's death is so devastating for Darren is that he has lost a secure presence of an adult, and now he has no-one who can replace Mr. Crepsley. Also, the severing of this bond is extremely similar to when Darren had to bid his real parents farewell.

Further, Mr. Crepsley is given the chance to surrender, and his allies urge him to take this, but Mr. Crepsley declines (KD 166–167). This stages a type of powerlessness in the face of death. It is not derived of the actual death, but of the dying person's death drive. Mr. Crepsley is determined to kill Steve, and this prevents any outside influence from changing his mind. So, there is physical powerlessness to be found from this section, as help cannot be provided however which way Mr. Crepsley's allies chose to act. However, there is also psychological helplessness, as the allies try, but fail, to encourage Mr. Crepsley not to throw away his life. Furthermore Mr. Crepsley's avid

refusal of outside influence also fortifies the idea of him dying alone, and that only he, as Dastur (1996: 47) suggests, can see the reality of his own death.

Powerlessness surrounding Mr. Crepsley's death can also be detected in the following segment, and in this particular scene the fact is literally written out: "We have to save him! We can't let him die! We—" 'Shhh,' I whispered, kissing her forehead, holding her close. 'But—' she sobbed. 'We can't do anything,' I sighed" (KD 168). The previous is a conversation, between Darren and his friend Debbie, which takes place during the moments of Mr. Crepsley's death. Debbie is still in the stage of disbelief, not having lost hope but fumbling to reach solutions that are not there, as people are powerless when faced with death. Darren on the other hand seems to accept his powerlessness, bluntly stating there is nothing they can do. Admitting this powerlessness proves the strength of the impact this death has on Darren. As a norm one would fight to gain power over death, but the emotional blow has sent Darren straight into a state of hopelessness.

There is also solitude to be found in regards to this death. Apart from Mr. Crepsley dying alone, the events surrounding his death are also followed by a period of solitude, as Darren is unable to express his mourning and is left alone with his emotions. Help is given to him, but he refuses it as he is unable to process the previous event:

"As another week dragged by, I withdrew further and further inside myself. I no longer responded to people when they asked questions [...] I sat by myself [...] stony-faced and dry-eyed, thinking –as usual – about Mr Crepsley" (LS 27)

This reflects another side of a negative death, the feeling of being alone.

There is also a feeling of meaninglessness surrounding Mr. Crepsley's death. It is clearly stated that he does not mind dying as long as he can bring the Lord of the Vampaneze and Steve with him into death. This desire could be interpreted as his death drive, which Royle (2003: 93) claims that all persons possess. However, ultimately Mr. Crepsley is unable to realise this goal, and through this his death is rendered a worthless,

especially in the eyes of Darren. And, as it becomes obvious that Mr. Crepsley has not actually killed the Lord of the Vampaneze, but only a man masqueraded as him (Shan KD 185), the meaninglessness grows worse in the mind of Darren.

The deaths described in this section provide the reader with several denominators to a negative death in *The Saga of Darren Shan*. These are as follows: the severing of an important bond, powerlessness, unexpectedness, solitude, guilt, and meaninglessness. In other words, it is the utilisation of negative emotions that create an unfavourable image of death. It is that which lies beyond human control that aggravates and frustrates, because, as Bronfen and Webster Goodwin (1993: 6, 20) suggest, humans have need to control. Lack of ability to do so thus leads to negativity.

4.3 Death as a Positive Force

Similarly to when death is described in a negative light, *The Saga of Darren Shan* also portrays several aspects of death in a positive manner. In this chapter an analysis of the aspects that make death seem more agreeable is conducted. What is necessary for a death to be perceived as a positive occurrence? Are there redeeming factors to be found even in negative deaths? And, can death, despite being perceived as negative by some, still be a positive incident? These are questions the following section provides answers to.

The death of Sam Grest is the first death, except for his own, that Darren is forced to tackle, and what makes it harder is that Darren himself is the actual killer in this incident. However, as can be seen when reading the following example, there is a, perhaps somewhat hidden, positive reason behind this. This positivity can be seen when equalising the situation with euthanasia. In other words, one can view the the incident where Darren kills Sam as more of an act of mercy than of anything else.

“Darren,” he said, “it will not seem like the right time, but there is something you must do. For Sam’s sake. And your own.” “What are you

talking about?” I wiped some of the tears from my face and looked up at him. “Can we save him? Tell me if we can. I’ll do anything.” There is nothing we can do to save his *body*,” Mr. Crepsley told me. “He is dying and nothing can change that. But there is something we can do for his *spirit*. “Darren,” he said, “*you must drink Sam’s blood*.” I went on staring at him, but now it was a stare of disbelief, not hope. [...] “Do you remember our discussion about vampires being able to absorb part of a person’s spirit?” he asked. [...] “Yes,” I said softly. “What about it?” “Sam is dying,” Mr. Crepsley said. “A few more minutes and he’ll be gone. Forever. But you can keep part of him alive within you if you drink from him now and take his life before the wounds of the wolf-man can.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “You want *me* to kill Sam?” I screamed. “No,” he sighed. “Sam has already been killed. But if you finish him off before he dies of the bites of the wolf-man, you will save some of his memories and feelings. In you he can live on.” [...] “I will not force you to,” he said. “But think carefully about it. What happened tonight is a tragedy that will hunt you for a very long time, but if you drink from Sam and absorb part of his essence, dealing with his death will be easier. Losing a loved one is hard. This way, you need not lose all of him.” [...] I stared down at Sam. He looked so lifeless, liked he’d already lost everything that made him human, live, unique. I thought of his jokes and long words and hopes and dreams, and how awful it would be if all that just disappeared with his death. [...] His blood was hot and salty and ran down my throat like thick, creamy butter. Sam’s pulse slowed as I drank, then stopped. But I went on drinking, swallowing every last drop, absorbing. When I’d finally sucked him dry, I turned away and howled at the sky like the wolf-man had. For a long time that’s all I could do, howl and scream and cry like the wild animal of the night that I’d become. (VA 229–232)

Darren frees Sam from his earthly pains and grants him passage. This is very similar to the way in which children’s fiction from the 18th and 19th century viewed death as a salvation, as suggested by Nikolajeva (:1997 34). Darren’s role in this scene could also be compared to the role death plays in many fairy tales: a saviour from pain and sickness rather than a ruthless killer (Windling 2006: 1). When Darren kills Sam his actions do not represent an unnecessary evil but rather Darren acts as a merciful benefactor. Mercy, or salvation, could thus be considered one of the factors that render death in more positive light.

Furthermore, Darren’s killing of Sam is justified, as Darren, through drinking Sam’s blood will be able to absorb and eternally preserve a part of Sam’s soul within himself (VA 231). Because of this transformation in which blood is moulded into a part of the

soul, Lassén-Segre's (2006: 24) theories indicate that this killing might actually be a metamorphosis in disguise. The scene not only suggests that Darren now has killed a human, but it also completes the last step in his turning to an "animal of the night" (VA 232); thus the death of Sam brings a change upon Darren as well. Moreover, blood is as much a representation of life as it is of death, and it might thus be suggested that Sam is granted a new life through Darren's actions. Transformation is, in other words, another aspect that generates a more agreeable image of death.

Mr. Crepsley's death, on the other hand, involves a great deal of negativity. However, most of the negativity is dependent on the perspective from which the story is told – Darren's perspective. When, on the other hand, analysing the death from Mr. Crepsley's point of view, it does not come across as negative in the least.

According to Mr. Crepsley, his death is not in vain. He has killed the Lord of the Vampaneze, or so he believes, (KD 162, 185) and this justifies his death. His accomplishments, even though they led him to his death, triumph over the fear and uncertainty death often arouses in persons. The justification of Mr. Crepsley's death can also be found in his death drive, his conditions for a successful death (Royle 2003: 93). Mr. Crepsley might not wish to die if he had a choice, but he does not mind as long as he has been able to fulfil his death drive: dying only after killing the Lord of the Vampaneze (KD 166). From Mr. Crepsley's death two positive traits can thus be derived; reason and justification.

Furthermore, the death drive also provides another favourable aspect to death, an aspect lacking whenever analysing what renders death negative, namely power. The death drive grants Mr. Crepsley with a power to die in the way he wants, and in a sense he, thus, rules his own death. However, it is not only the death drive that eases the final blow, but also the fact that Mr. Crepsley, ultimately, chooses to sacrifice himself in order to let his allies, especially Darren, live on for a while longer (KD 167). As Dastur (1996: 48) suggests, no one can die in the place of another, yet, it is not impossible to die for another, and this is also a means of exerting power. Ergo, if the dying person believes they have a good reason to die for, perhaps to save another person, this will in

their mind grant them a certain power over death, significantly amplify the agreeability of death.

Even Mr. Crepsley's parting words to Darren, "'Do not let hatred rule your life. My death does not need to be avenged. Live as a free vampire, not a twisted, revenge-driven creature of despair'" (KD: 167) embody a certain positivity. Mr. Crepsley has always felt guilt at robbing Darren of his human-hood, especially because of Darren's young age (VA 36–37). Furthermore, when Darren has to get involved in the vampire war, as a central figure nonetheless, this guilt is multiplied, because if Mr. Crepsley had not blooded Darren in the first place that would not have happened. Through dying in Darren's stead, and simultaneously accomplishing the one act that is sure to end the war – killing the Vampaneze Lord – thus letting Darren live a supposedly peaceful life from there on, Mr. Crepsley can finally feel free of the guilt that has haunted him. To summarise this positivity the word redemption could be applied.

This idea is furthered through Mr. Crepsley's firm belief in afterlife, as can be seen in his parting words: "'Gods of the vampires!' he bellowed. 'Even in death, may I be triumphant!'" (KD 169). Mr. Crepsley does, in fact, desire to travel to vampire heaven, much similarly to the manner in which Nikolajeva (1997: 34) describes the positive influence Christianity and the promise of reuniting with God holds over death. Also Dastur's (1996: 3–5) theories support the idea of an immortal afterlife as a positive driving force, adding yet another item to the list of factors that render death more positive and less frightening.

Similar patterns can be seen in descriptions of Kurda Smalth's death. His death, too, involves a guaranteed afterlife and redemption brought on by self-sacrifice. It also becomes evident that Kurda, through the act of sacrificing himself, holds power over his own death, as he could just as well have chosen to kill another person instead of himself. (LS 210–211) Kurda's case is somewhat special because he is, for a time, a major antagonist in the book. However, the amount of righteousness his sacrifice displays corresponds in size to his previous ill-deeds, thus neutralising the situation. Whereas Mr. Crepsley sacrificed himself out of guilt, Kurda did so only because he felt it was the

right thing to do. This unselfish sacrifice lends Kurda's death humility, supporting Dastur's (1996: 25) claim that individuals may attain humanity through death. Re-attainment of humanity can, as follows, be considered yet another positive aspect of death.

The deaths of Sam, Kurda, and Mr. Crepsley are, although showing some signs of positivity, negative on the whole. *The Saga of Darren Shan* does, however, also feature deaths that in their entirety are more positive than negative. One such example would be Darren's second death, explored in the following extract from the last book, *Sons of Destiny* (2004), of Shan's book series.

What Steve found in those last moments were what I thought he had lost for ever – his humanity. He saw the error of his ways, the evil he'd committed, the mistakes he'd made. There was possible salvation in that recognition. [...] But I couldn't afford humanity. Steve's salvation was my undoing – and the world's. I needed him mad as hell, fire in his gut, filled with fury and hate. [...] "Steve" I said, forcing a wicked smile. "You were right. I *did* plot with Mr. Crepsley to take your place as his assistant. We made a mug of you, and I'm glad. You're a nobody. A nothing. This is what you deserve. If Mr. Crepsley was alive he'd be laughing at you now, just like the rest of us are. [...] Steve's eyes refilled with hatred. The human within him vanished and he was Steve Leopard, the vampire killer, again. In one fast, crazed movement he brought his left hand up and drove the knife deep into my stomach. Less than a second later he did it again, then again. [...] I giggled as Steve's blade slid and sliced through my guts for a fifth time [...] Then I grabbed Steve tight as he lunged at me with his knife again, and rolled [...] into the river. [...] I was barely conscious, hanging sluggishly, limbs being picked at and made to sway by the current of the river. Water rushed down my throat and flooded my lungs. [...] I saw faces in the water, or in my thoughts [...] I imagined Mr. Crepsley waving, and a sad expression crossed his face. Then everything faded. I stopped struggling. The world, the water, the faces faded from sight, then from memory. A roaring which was silence. A darkness which was life. A chill which burnt. A final flutter of my eyelids, barely a movement, impossibly tiring. And then in the lonely, watery darkness of the river, as all things must do when the Grim Reaper calls – I died. (SD 114–116)

The scene picks up where Darren has gotten the advantage over his mortal enemy, Steve, by giving him a deathly injury. Initially, the driving force of the battle had been Steve, although the situation changed as the two of them, Darren and Steve, found out that they,

in fact, were brothers. Through this realisation Steve is reverted into an apathetic state, wallowing in his own pity and remorse while Darren is left with the decision of how to proceed in order to prevent chaos. Darren, knowing that the world will be plunged into misery if either he or Steve survives their fight is desperate for Steve to regain his aggression. In the end, as nothing else helps, the protagonist forcibly riles up the antagonist by telling him lies, claiming that the reason for their original fallout was just as bad as Steve feared. Darren's plan works and Steve starts fighting back, inflicting deadly wounds on Darren, as well. Then, when both are wounded beyond the point of repair, Darren throws them both into a river where they drown.

This scene cited above is full of controversies, such as the comparison of darkness to light, of silence to roaring and of chill to a burn. All these are states that rarely occur simultaneously, and can thus be seen as a play upon the notion of life and death. What would indeed be more suitable than to compare complete opposites when making the crossing between the two, as described by Dastur (1996: 19), ultimate opposites – life and death? Lassén-Seger (2006: 25) describes metamorphosis as a means to cross the chasm between two realities, the self and the other, but also between life and death. Here the other is the death and the self is the life.

Dastur's (1996: 25) arguments about the relationship between life and death are also applicable on this scene. The self-sacrifice made is a wish for death. Death is said to give life its meaning, and this very fact renders death a natural, albeit frightening, part of life. Further, if self-sacrifice is chosen as the means of death, the meaning of life gain an even higher value, acting as a vindicator. Furthermore, a death caused by self-sacrifice is almost always an attempt to die in someone's stead, which could be viewed as a selfish act (Dastur 1996: 48). It can be considered selfish because the fear of death is weaker than the fear of the consequences if staying alive, for example one could chose to die instead of another person not only out of a wish to save this individual, but also because one would rather be dead than faced with the emotional aftermath of losing another person. In Darren's case he has seen what the future would hold if he would survive the fight with Steve, and he fears it, because in this future he will lose his remaining friends and companions. Therefore Darren chooses death, instead leaving his

companions to struggle with the loss of him. Yet, him choosing to die ultimately shines a positive light on his death.

Simultaneously, the wish for death can also be seen as a wish for freedom (Dastur 1996: 26). This, perhaps, becomes most apparent in Darren's final death, the suicide.

By dying now, my soul – like Kurda's – will fly immediately to Paradise. I suppose it's a bit like passing 'Go' on a Monopoly board and going straight to jail, except in this case 'Go' is the Lake of Souls and 'jail' is the afterlife. I feel exceptionally light, as though I weigh almost nothing. The sensation is increasing by the moment. My body's fading away, dissolving. [...] This is a gentle, painless dissolve [...] I smile and the corners of my lips continue stretching, off my face, becoming a limitless, endless smile. [...] And now it's over. I'm finished with this world. My final few atoms rise at a speed faster than light, leaving the roof, the theatre, the town, the world, far, far behind. I'm heading for a new universe, new adventures, a new way of being. [...] Explosions of space and time. Breaking through the barriers of the old reality. Coming apart, coming together, moving on. A breath on the lips of the universe. All things, all worlds, all lives. Everything at once and never. Mr Crepsley waiting. Laughter in the great beyond. I'm going...I'm...going...I'm...gone. (SD 194–196)

In this scene Darren ends his life for his own sake, as opposed to dying for someone else. Suicide is the ultimate selfish act, the only way to gain full control over death. Darren wanted to die, and he took death into his own hands. Doing something willingly, especially if it is to gain freedom, is hard to look at in a negative light. Therefore, as a last denominator for positive death, desire for freedom could be mentioned.

To summarise, most instances of positive death in *The Saga of Darren Shan* consist of many elements. Yet, one is always present. It is the power that the dying person's exert over their own deaths. If death is made a choice, rather than an unavoidable tragedy, this automatically softens the image of death that is relayed to the reader. Redemption, often accomplished by characters sacrificing themselves, is another trait that makes death seem more agreeable to the readers, because this gives a reason to death. Redemption justifies death. Through dying instead of another person there is also an actual positive outcome, namely to prolong someone else's life. This may also soften the image of

death. The same goes for mercy and transformation, as death, when combined with either of these, could be seen as a blessing, rather than a punishment.

4.4 Death and the Aftermath

Mourning, funerals, beautification of death, and the eternalising of someone's memory are all reactions that follow in the wake of death. Why are these important in *The Saga of Darren Shan*? What do they represent? And, how are they described? These are the questions discussed in this chapter.

A certain pattern can be observed in the nature of the few characters in the series who actually receive a funeral. Only Sam Grest, Arra Sails, Paris Skyle and Darren Shan receive an actual ceremonial end. A common denominator for these characters are their throughout good nature. The link between the goodness of people and funerals is further established in that Darren receives a funeral only as a child, when he was yet sin-free. When Darren finally dies through the act of sacrificing himself he does not receive a funeral, and Darren concludes that even though he might have saved the world he had still taken lives and caused unhappiness (SD 118).

What can also be deduced from the following scene, in which Darren's family mourn their son, is that it captions the importance of memories and remembering in the face of death. Memories are, as suggested by Perdigao and Pizzato (2010: 3), in a similar manner to funerals, a way to eternalise the dead. The dead may live on through the livings' memories.

Early next morning, Dad came in and sat with me. He spoke for a long time, telling me all the things he'd planned for me, the college I would have gone to, the job he'd wanted for me. He cried a lot. Toward the end, Mom came in and sat with him. They cried on each other's shoulders and tried to comfort themselves [...] I hated being the cause of so much hurt [...] I heard Annie crying, begging me to stop fooling and sit up. It would have been much easier if they'd taken her away, but I guess they didn't want her to grow up feeling they'd robbed her of her chance to say good-bye to her brother. (Shan 2002b: 239–240)

This scene begins with Darren's father confining his dreams and hopes to his dead son, before moving on to talk about things they had experienced together, their shared memories (CF 239). When the mother arrives and sits down together with her husband the two also come to the conclusion that "they would always have their memories" (CF 239); thus the importance of memories is highlighted again. The fact that the parents do not interfere with Darren's sister's attempts to interact with her dead brother also indicates that they feel it is important she remember Darren like this, and eternalise him in her memory.

Honourable vampires Arra Sails, who is Mr. Crepsley's love interest, and Paris Skyle, the oldest and most prestigious of the vampire princes, both, in contrast to Darren, undergo very ceremonial or ritualistic funerals. For vampires there is nothing more important than an honourable passing where death is faced head on, because without such a death their souls will be unable to reach paradise (SD 138). Rättyä (2009: 206) supports a similar phenomenon, as she concludes a soul might be trapped on earth if death is faced with fear. Also, meeting one's end with honour and acceptance could be interpreted as an externalisation and beautification of death, and as suggested by Perdigao and Pizzato (2010: 2), this is a depiction of the way death is immortalised in today's society.

Furthermore, Darren being unable to bury Mr. Crepsley causes him tremendous pain and discomfort, and it bereaves him from the chance of receiving closure. The fact that Mr. Crepsley is actually deserving of a proper burial, as he has been Darren's mentor and close friend for years, and always lived true to the vampire ways, renders Darren's guilt at being unable to give him a proper ceremonial farewell even worse. Darren even states that he is unable to grieve his mentor because of the lack of a funeral, and he is desperate to the degree that he is willing to risk his life in order to retrieve the body. (LS 12–13) The grief Darren experiences at this death could be explained by the lack of a funeral. As Perdigao and Pizzato (2010: 3) suggest, it is the process of burying someone that helps in masking the cruelty of death. A burial immortalizes the deceased.

The process of memorialisation can also be seen in the death, and funeral, of Darren's

friend Sam. ““What happened tonight is a tragedy that will hunt you for a very long time, but if you drink from Sam and absorb part of his essence, dealing with his death will be easier. Losing a loved one is hard. This way you need not lose all of him.”” (Shan 2001: 231). The previous statement is a reference, uttered by Mr. Crepsley, to a vampire’s ability to absorb a part of an individual’s soul and memories, if the vampire were to consume all of the victim’s blood, which is what Darren chooses to do. This is an actualisation of the process of remembrance which often, even in literature, only occurs through the rising of a monument or gravestone. (Perdigao and Pizzato 2010: 3–4) Darren, in this scene, does actually immortalise Sam not only in mind, but in soul as well.

It is also stated that the only reason to why Darren did go through with the blood drinking was because he did not want Sam’s memory to waist away, but that he wanted to forever eternalise the image he held of Sam previous to his death; the Sam of his youth (VA 231–232). Because Darren selects to forget the current, mangled body of Sam, instead focusing wholly on the constructed image he holds of the boy, this can be viewed as a beautification of death.

Moreover the matter of Sam’s actual funeral is important, too. After Sam’s death the Little People (small, cloaked and quiet supernatural beings of unknown origin who help the circus staff with menial tasks) mean to dispose of Sam’s body by devouring him, but Darren protests, stating: ““I won’t let them eat Sam. He deserves a proper burial.”” (VA 235) Here the importance of the preservation of the body becomes apparent. While Darren already has internalised part of Sam, if Sam were to be eaten there would be nothing left of him for his family to eternalise him by. Daren proceeds to dig Sam a shallow grave, which he strives to make easily detectable as possible in order for Sam to be discovered and given a proper funeral. ““I wanted his parents to be able to give him a ceremony”” (VA 239). This shows that Darren understands that a body, or a concrete reminder of the deceased, such as an item they held very dear, is often necessary for the remembrance of the deceased, and that this will also help the parents with their mourning.

Finally, there are characters in the books who are denied a funeral ceremony altogether, and this indicates that a certain level of goodness is crucial in order to be eternalised. Kurda Smalth, originally regarded as a good vampire but later shown to work undercover for the evil vampiric race, is denied a funeral on the basis of his betrayal against the vampire society. The same applies to his companion, Cyrys, who together with Kurda tried to initiate a war between the two races. The pair of them is killed in a scornful manner. Not only are they stripped of their right of a funeral ceremony, but in order for them to die without honour they are dismembered before their cremations. An honour-filled death is of great importance to the vampires in this universe, and it is believed the souls of those who have not faced such a death may never reach paradise. Thus, being dismembered before cremation, rather than facing the scorching fire while still alive, is regarded as cowardly, and as a sure-fire way to banish undeserving souls from the vampire paradise. (VP 139)

Beautification and remembrance can also often be expressed as through funerals, something that these to individuals are denied. Especially the maiming of the deceased's body shows a true desire to not preserve the memory of the deceased, as by hurting the exterior, damage will also be transferred to the internal image of the individuals. (Perdigao and Pizzato 2010: 3–5).

Furthermore Rättyä (2009: 206) suggest that a death faced with uncertainty might lead the soul to a twilight zone. In the case of vampires in Shan's books this uncertainty could be interpreted as a death deprived of honour, and the twilight zone as the Lake of Souls. The Lake of Souls is thus, unsurprisingly, where Kurda's soul is headed.

4.4.1 The Afterlife

As Suggested by Rättyä (2009: 2006), the existence of an afterlife is a question subjected to critique in recent times, but in the universe of *The Saga of Darren Shan*, two versions of an afterlife exist.

Death, according to Rättyä (2009: 210) is a very metamorphic space, and while trapped there the dead may either gain or lose power. Death can be either an empowering or disempowering element, or none of these two. In the universe of *The Saga of Darren Shan* the empowering aspect of death can be seen when a soul reaches paradise, and the disempowering aspect represents a soul trapped in the Lake of Souls.

The Lake of Souls is described as “a zone where spirits go when they can’t leave Earth’s pull. Some person’s souls don’t move on when they die. They remain trapped in the waters of this putrid lake, condemned to swirl silently in the depths for all eternity” (SD 118). The lake is very similar to purgatory, as it is a place where the soul is trapped and forced to repeat the nightmarish events of whatever life it had. Whether a soul becomes trapped in the lake partially depends on a higher judgement. It is, however, stated by Darren that “[he] is imprisoned by [his] own guilt” (SD 118), which suggests that thoughts and feelings of an individual also affect the place the individual will be forced to spend the eternity after death. In her studies of death Rättyä (2009: 206) has reached a similar conclusion, as she claims that the fear of being unable to move on might cause the dead to end up in a twilight zone. The Lake of Souls, then, could be considered the twilight-zone in the universe of *The Saga of Darren Shan*.

The Lake of Soul also carries close resemblance to the Ancient Greek underworld. The spirits in the Greek underworld seem to have some sort of awareness, yet they cannot really interact with one another as their consciousnesses are focused on the circumstances of their deaths (Iles Johnston 1999: 8). Whereas souls in the lake are not forced to endlessly repeat the moments of their death, they are constantly haunted by the thoughts and guilt that has etched into their mind throughout life.

Furthermore, there are often certain criteria to be filled in order to reach a certain afterlife. For example, in order for a soul to be granted access to the Greek underworld the body had to have received a proper funeral (Iles Johnston 1999: 9). In Norse mythology, on the other hand, the afterlife would vary depending on whether the dying perished in battle or by other causes. The afterlife in *The Saga of Darren Shan* is also

dependant on certain factors. This leads us to the following subchapter, 4.5 Death as a Transformation, where these will be explored.

4.5 Death as a Transformation

Death as a transformation is not altogether uncommon in *The Saga of Darren Shan*. Part of the reason for this is that the book series is a vampire story, a genre which has a long history of transformation through death. However, reasons for the numerous transformations death causes is also found in the possibility of rebirth, as well as the afterlife. Additionally to simply analysing whether a bond between death and transformations exists, this chapter will also look deeper into the nature of the transformations.

The first link between death and transformation can be found when looking at the blooding (the process of turning someone into a vampire) of Darren. In *The Saga of Darren Shan* neither vampirism nor vampanezism are preceded by an actual death. Yet, in Darren's case the fabricated death which he experiences can be seen as a symbol of the death that is often seen as a criterion for vampirism. This is rather an interesting point because both the death and Darren's transformation into a half-vampire are deviations from the norm.

After his transformation the first thing Darren says is "I don't feel any different" (CF 194), and there are no physical changes to his appearance either, except for "ten tiny scars running across" his fingers (CF 194). The whole transformation is, in other words, almost like a softer version of what is offered in other vampire stories. As can be seen from the following quote, "I felt a gushing sensation and realized my blood was moving from my body to his through my left hand, while his was entering mine through my right" (CF 193), blood is exchanged during the process, but no real transformation takes place.

Darren's death, too, is a mere reflection of a real death, and it is described as follows:

“I couldn’t move any of my limbs, my lungs weren’t working (well, they were, but very, very slowly), and my heart had stopped (again, not fully, but enough for its beat to be undetectable)” (CF 230). Again, the symptoms are similar to that of an actual death, but are not as final as they would be if the death was real. The idea of a modified transformation followed by a modified death strengthens the link between the two, entwining the two even closer together.

Another noteworthy thing about the transformation and the death are that neither of them is final. Darren’s death is very similar to the temporal death that Windling (2006:2) refers to, and the transformation into a vampire, too, is not a fully completed process. That the blooding is not an entire change can be seen through Mr. Crepsley’s words, “I will make you a half-vampire. That means you will be able to move about during the day. You will not need much blood to keep you satisfied. You will have certain powers but not all” (CF 190). So, the transformation grants Darren some abilities, just as his staged death only takes away certain abilities. Both transformations are, in other words, half and not complete, and this further strengthens the idea of death as transformation.

The second link that can be established between death and transformation is seen when Darren internalises Sam’s soul. Also in this case death is not final, but Sam is transformed into a part of Darren. As can be seen when studying Sam’s death, it is clearly stated that by consuming all of Sam’s blood, thus ending his life before the wounds inflicted by the wolf-man does, Darren is able to absorb a part of Sam. By doing this, as Mr. Crepsley insists, Darren “need not lose all of him” (VA 231) but can transform a part of Sam into himself.

This action fortifies the views often held by fairy tales in which death is not final but that love can keep the deceased alive (Windling 2006: 2). Here, while Sam is not persevered physically, part of him will always remain with Darren. One can also conclude that it is out of the goodness of his soul that Darren performs the killing of Sam. Darren is against it at first, as he has never drunken anyone’s blood, and does not want to, and it is only Mr. Crepsley’s comment: “[i]t is *because* he was your friend that

you must” (VA 231) that finally persuades him. He does it because Sam was important to him, thus reflecting the idea of love preserving the deceased despite of death (Windling 2006: 2).

Furthermore, the consuming of Sam’s blood leads to another transformation. It brings Darren closer to becoming an actual vampire. Through drinking Sam’s blood, Darren transforms more into a vampire than he did even at the bleeding. This following quote makes this matter particularly obvious.

“[w]hen I’d finally sucked him dry, I turned away and howled at the sky like the wolf-man had. For a long time that’s all I could do, howl and scream and cry like the wild animal of the night that I’d become” (VA 232)

An intriguing aspect of death in relation to transformation is, in this case, that the positive emotions such as love, bring a positive transformation. This is depicted through the preservation of Sam’s soul. Simultaneously, the murder that Darren commits, despite his good intentions behind it, gives rise to a negative transformation. This, again, serves to reinforce the role of death as a cause of transformation.

The connection between love or sacrifice and a positive transformation can also be seen in the case of Kurda Smalth. His soul, upon dying, was banished to the Lake of Souls. Considering that Kurda acted as one of the series antagonists this was only natural. However, when faced with redemption, the path Kurda chooses transforms his soul into one that is immediately granted access into the vampire heaven.

When Kurda is resurrected his soul is already shared with another entity, a little person named Harkat (another of Darren’s companions): “You and Harkat share a soul, but it is a soul which I have helped divide into two parts. If you let me destroy your new body, your part of your shared spirit will depart this realm” (LS 211). However, Kurda also has the choice to live again, in which case “Harkat’s body will fall apart” (LS 210) and he will die. As Kurda, in the end, favours the noble option and decides to sacrifice himself, his soul is transformed into one that will be able to go on living in paradise. It also becomes apparent that had Kurda chosen to live again, thus sacrificing Harkat,

there would have been no guarantee that his soul would have been granted the same transformation upon death. Goodness, as suggested by Windling (2006: 2), does again affect the relationship between death and transformation, acting as an eternaliser.

Lastly, death as a transformation can also be witnessed through the last stages of Darren's death, where a few transformations take place. The first of these transformations take place in connection with Darren's second, real, death. He dies and is transformed to one of the souls forever banished to the Lake of Souls. This transformation can partly be blamed on the choices Darren has made in life, and all of them have certainly not been good. The very reason that Darren became a vampire in the first place was the result of such a decision.

Darren had an obsession with Mr. Crepsley's spider, Madam Octa. He is, in fact, so fascinated with the spider, and the desire to own her as a pet grows so strong that he reaches the conclusion that his only option is to steal her. (VA 115–116) The established relationship between bad decisions and negative transformations is thus further reinforced. Another reason which could have urged Darren's spirit towards the Lake of Soul is the fact that Darren died in a river (SD 116). Vampire lore states that vampires cannot cross running water, such as rivers, and this could also be connected to the negative transformation.

After having spent an indefinable length of time in the Lake of Soul Darren is, against the odds, given a chance to be reborn. While a transformation through rebirth is not the same as one through death, it is still a transformation. Also, Windling (2002: 2) argues that being reborn after death is also a form of transformation. Moreover, Satre (1969: 545) asserts that birth and death – the definers of life's borders – are very similar, as these are the only two stages any human must go through in life. Perhaps then this allows the reader room to interpret one as the other, and thus a transformation through rebirth could be seen as a transformation through death.

Again, as this is a positive metamorphosis, it is initiated by positive emotions. It is a woman named Evanna (a helpful, yet mysterious character that is clearly linked to fate,

but how is never explained) that helped revive Darren, and as he asks why, she gives him the following explanation: “you tried to do good. It wasn’t fair that you should rot in the Lake of Souls, so I pleaded [...] [for] help” (SD 153). In other words, it is the pity and compassion that the woman feels for Darren that triggered his resurrection.

However, as Darren is reborn he takes on a different physical appearance than before. He is transformed into a little-person. In the universe of *The Saga of Darren Shan* people cannot be reborn as themselves, because their bodies have decayed, nor can they inhabit the body of another, as one body is equipped only to hold one soul. Therefore being reborn as one of the little-people, creatures created by destiny himself, is the only option. These creatures are not pretty, as can be seen from a description of their faces:

Full of scars and stitches all crumpled together, like some giant had squeezed it with his claws. He didn’t have ears or a nose, and there was some kind of mask over his mouth. His skin was gray and dead-looking, and his eyes were like two green bowls near the top of his face. He didn’t have hair, either. (VA 93)

The disfigured and hideous outside could very well serve as a reflection of the deeds that sent Darren to the Lake of Souls in the first place. Even though he has been resurrected through love, his previous actions cannot be erased and are thus displayed on the outside, as a physical transformation. Here, again, the relationship that death and transformation share with the notions of good and bad are echoed. Death causing changes in physical appearance is also supported by Dastur (1996: 25), as man, or in this case vampire, cannot, according to him, escape death’s hands without becoming something else. Darren is simultaneously something familiar, yet something unfamiliar, which resonates well with Royle’s (2003: 84) ideas of the uncanny. Darren is familiar in the sense that these creatures are humanoid, and the readers have acquainted themselves with these being throughout the series, yet Darren is also unfamiliar because he is no longer human. He is not a vampire, either. He is something that should not exist, something from beyond the grave.

Furthermore, as Darren now wears his sins on the outside his soul is now again pure. This explains why Darren, through his third death, is transformed to a free soul, as

opposed to one that has to return to the Lake of Souls. He already carries the mark of his past actions in his appearance, and via this he suffers the consequences these deeds have. As there are no more negative emotions to judge his soul by, he is consequently allowed a positive transformation and can thus reach paradise.

Through an analysis of death as a transformation in *The Saga of Darren Shan*, a certain pattern has become visible. First of all, it can be concluded that death and transformation do, indeed, go hand in hand throughout the book series. Secondly, it can also be suggested that positive and negative feelings, actions and notions deeply affect the nature of the transformation, rendering it either favourable or unfavourable depending on which of the two, the positive or negative, has played a more significant role during the death or resurrection.

5 CONCLUSION

Death in *The Saga of Darren Shan* is, on the whole, a rather neutral experience. Of course this differs from case to case, but the general feeling that death invokes is one of acceptance rather than fright. The series does, without doubt, point out the cruelties and horribleness that death is associated with, and gives a very vivid imagery of the actual dying process. On the other hand, the series also seems to aim to explain death and introduce valuable methods of coping with the aftermath of death. Herein lays the two factors that make *The Saga of Darren Shan* such a special piece of work.

The series works against the grain in that it does not shield the reader from, nor soften the impact of death. Simultaneously, though, *The Saga of Darren Shan* does display quite a pedagogical approach to death. The series familiarises the readers with death, and thus assists them in arriving at an interpretation of their own of the unfamiliar horror that represents death. And this, again, is a common practice in literature.

Death, as described in the book series, is a force that renders everyone equal, just as it has done in the fairy tales of older time. It does not matter who the characters are; anyone, important or no, can be confronted with death. The real world functions in the same way, and through reading this book series children may come to realise this. Yet, even if death can be a rather brutal force, the reader is not left without a means to process it, but the book series provides several strategies to process and mourn death. All may not be obvious to a young reader, but will, nonetheless, be recognised by the subconscious as sources to draw from when faced with possible hardship in the future.

The book series also seem to aspire towards not only shining a negative light on death, but also endeavours to enhance the positive sides of death. Although perhaps somewhat controversially for modern children's fiction, *The Saga of Darren Shan* points out that death may, to some, be a mercy. However, neither does the series shy away from the powerlessness that death can often give rise to. Both negative and positive sides of death are brought up to discussion, and although this might at times put the readers in a

distressed or uncomfortable situation, with the help of the protagonist and his strong inner voice, they can overcome these difficulties.

Furthermore, even though powerlessness is strongly linked to death in *The Saga of Darren Shan*, it is also hinted at that death need not be final. There is hope in the notion that something might follow after death. This hope functions as a weight that keeps the balance in check, monitoring it so that the book series does not turn too negative but can still provide an enjoyable reading experience. Its purpose is, after all, to entertain and not to frighten. Moreover, as the transformations following death are heavily influenced by the deceased's past decisions, another pedagogical notion rises to the surface: The book teaches children the simple lesson of choices and consequences, only here they are presented through different transformations following death.

On the whole, *The Saga of Darren Shan* gives a multidimensional image of death. At times death is bad, at times it is good. However, it is always equal. The book series offers both the negative and the positive view of death, refusing to overprotect children, yet simultaneously making sure that a balance is established. When the needs call, death may be beautified. However, more often than not this form of symbolism only takes place after a particularly gruesome, bloody, cruel death, when the balance needs to be restored. Entertaining yet educative is perhaps a good way to summarise death in *The Saga of Darren Shan*.

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Appendix 1. Darren's First Death

For a while my body went undetected, so I lay there, listening to the sounds of the night. In the end, a passing neighbor spotted me and investigated. I couldn't see his face but I heard his gasp when he turned me over and saw my lifeless body. He rushed straight around to the front and pounded at the door [...] "Darren!" Mom screamed, clutching me to her chest. "Let go, Angie," Dad shouted, prying me free and laying me down on the grass. "What's wrong with him, Dermot?" Mom wailed. "I don't know. He must have fallen." Dad stood and gazed up at my bedroom window. I could see his hands flexing into fists. "He's not moving" Mom said calmly, then grabbed me and shook me fiercely. "He's not moving!" she screamed. "He's not moving. He's –" [...] "Is he...dead?" our neighbor asked. Mom moaned loudly when he said it and buried her face in her hands. Dad shook his head softly. "No," he said, giving Mom's shoulder a light squeeze [...] Now go call for help, okay?" Mom nodded, then hurried away with our neighbor. Dad held his smile until she was out of sight, then bent over me, checked my eyes, and felt my wrist for a pulse. When he found no sign of life, he laid me back down, brushed a lock of hair out of my eyes, then did something I'd never expected to see. He started to cry. And that was how I came to enter a new, miserable phase of my life, namely – *death*. (Shan 2002b: 231–233)

Appendix 2. Darren's First Death – The Aftermath

Early next morning, Dad came in and sat with me. He spoke for a long time, telling me all the things he'd planned for me, the college I would have gone to, the job he'd wanted for me. He cried a lot. Toward the end, Mom came in and sat with him. They cried on each other's shoulders and tried to comfort themselves [...] I hated being the cause of so much hurt [...] I heard Annie crying, begging me to stop fooling and sit up. It would have been much easier if they'd taken her away, but I guess they didn't want her to grow up feeling they'd robbed her of her chance to say good-bye to her brother. (Shan 2002b: 239–240)

Appendix 3. Darren's Second Death

What Steve found in those last moments were what I thought he had lost for ever – his humanity. He saw the error of his ways, the evil he'd committed, the mistakes he'd made. There was possible salvation in that recognition. [...] But I couldn't afford humanity. Steve's salvation was my undoing – and the world's. I needed him mad as hell, fire in his gut, filled with fury and hate. [...] "Steve" I said, forcing a wicked smile. "You were right. I *did* plot with Mr. Crepsley to take your place as his assistant. We made a mug of you, and I'm glad. You're a nobody. A nothing. This is what you deserve. If Mr. Crepsley was alive he'd be laughing at you now, just like the rest of us are. [...] Steve's eyes refilled with hatred. The human within him vanished and he was Steve Leopard, the vampire killer, again. In one fast, crazed movement he brought his left hand up and drove the knife deep into my stomach. Less than a second later he did it again, then again. [...] I giggled as Steve's blade slid and sliced through my guts for a fifth time [...] Then I grabbed Steve tight as he lunged at me with his knife again, and rolled [...] into the river. [...] I was barely conscious, hanging sluggishly, limbs being picked at and made to sway by the current of the river. Water rushed down my throat and flooded my lungs. [...] I saw faces in the water, or in my thoughts [...] I imagined Mr. Crepsley waving, and a sad expression crossed his face. Then everything faded. I stopped struggling. The world, the water, the faces faded from sight, then from memory. A roaring which was silence. A darkness which was life. A chill which burnt. A final flutter of my eyelids, barely a movement, impossibly tiring. And then in the lonely, watery darkness of the river, as all things must do when the Grim Reaper calls – I died. (Shan 2004a: 114–116)

Appendix 4. Darren's Final Death

By dying now, my soul – like Kurda's – will fly immediately to Paradise. I suppose it's a bit like passing 'Go' on a Monopoly board and going straight to jail, except in this case 'Go' is the Lake of Souls and 'jail' is the afterlife. I feel exceptionally light, as though I weigh almost nothing. The sensation is increasing by the moment. My body's fading away, dissolving. [...] This is a gentle, painless dissolve [...] I smile and the corners of my lips continue stretching, off my face, becoming a limitless, endless smile. [...] And now it's over. I'm finished with this world. My final few atoms rise at a speed faster than light, leaving the roof, the theatre, the town, the world, far, far behind. I'm heading for a new universe, new adventures, a new way of being. [...] Explosions of space and time. Breaking through the barriers of the old reality. Coming apart, coming together, moving on. A breath on the lips of the universe. All things, all worlds, all lives. Everything at once and never. Mr Crepsley waiting. Laughter in the great beyond. I'm going...I'm...going...I'm...gone. (Shan 2004a :194–196)

Appendix 5. Sam's Death

Munch, munch, munch.

I sat up slowly, ignoring the hammering pain in my head. It took my eyes a few seconds to readjust to the darkness. When I could see again I realized, I was gazing at the back of the wolf-man. He was crouched on all four, head bent over something. *He* was the one making the munching sounds. The dizziness from the punch meant it took me a while to realize it wasn't a *something* he was eating... it was a *someone*.

SAM!!!

I scrambled to my feet, pain forgotten, and rushed forward, but one look at the bloody mess beneath the wolf-man and I knew it was too late. (Shan 2001: 222)

Appendix 6. Sam's Death – The Aftermath

The wolf-man had torn Sam's stomach open and eaten a lot of his insides. Amazingly, Sam was still alive when I got to him. His eyelids were fluttering, and he was breathing lightly. "Sam, are you okay?" I whispered. It was a stupid question, but the only one my trembling lips could form. "Sam?" I brushed his forehead with my fingers, but he showed no signs of hearing or feeling me. He just lay there, with his eyes staring up at me. Mr. Crepsley knelt down beside me and checked Sam's body. "Can you save him?" I cried, He shook his head slowly. "You have to!" I shouted. "You can close the wounds. We can call a doctor. You can give him a potion. There must be some way to—" "Darren" he said softly, "there is nothing we can do. He is dying. Another couple of minutes and..." he sighed. "At least he is beyond feeling. There will be no pain." "No!" I screamed, and threw myself onto Sam. I was crying bitterly, sobbing so hard it hurt [...] In the deserted old railroad yard, the wolf-man lay unconscious behind me. Mr. Crepsley sat silently by my side. Underneath me, Sam Grest – who'd been my friend and saved my life – lay perfectly still and slipped further and further into the final sleep on an unfair and horrible death. (Shan 2001: 226–227)

Appendix 7. The Eternalizing of Sam's Soul

“Darren,” he said, “it will not seem like the right time, but there is something you must do. For Sam’s sake. And your own.” “What are you talking about?” I wiped some of the tears from my face and looked up at him. “Can we save him? Tell me if we can. I’ll do anything.” There is nothing we can do to save his *body*,” Mr. Crepsley told me. “He is dying and nothing can change that. But there is something we can do for his *spirit*. “Darren,” he said, “*you must drink Sam’s blood.*” I went on staring at him, but now it was a stare of disbelief, not hope. [...] “Do you remember our discussion about vampires being able to absorb part of a person’s spirit?” he asked. [...] “Yes,” I said softly. “What about it?” “Sam is dying,” Mr. Crepsley said. “A few more minutes and he’ll be gone. Forever. But you can keep part of him alive within you if you drink from him now and take his life before the wounds of the wolf-man can.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “You want *me* to kill Sam?” I screamed. “No,” he sighed. “Sam has already been killed. But if you finish him off before he dies of the bites of the wolf-man, you will save some of his memories and feelings. In you he can live on.” [...] “I will not force you to,” he said. “But think carefully about it. What happened tonight is a tragedy that will hunt you for a very long time, but if you drink from Sam and absorb part of his essence, dealing with his death will be easier. Losing a loved one is hard. This way, you need not lose all of him.” [...] I stared down at Sam. He looked so lifeless, liked he’d already lost everything that made him human, live, unique. I thought of his jokes and long words and hopes and dreams, and how awful it would be if all that just disappeared with his death. [...] His blood was hot and salty and ran down my throat like thick, creamy butter. Sam’s pulse slowed as I drank, then stopped. But I went on drinking, swallowing every last drop, absorbing. When I’d finally sucked him dry, I turned away and howled at the sky like the wolf-man had. For a long time that’s all I could do, howl and scream and cry like the wild animal of the night that I’d become. (Shan 2001: 229–232)

Appendix 8. Mr. Crepsley's Death

The chain reached its limit and snapped taunt. [...] On the platform, Steve wailed as the weight of Mr Crepsley caused the chain to tighten around the flesh of his right hand. He tried to shake it loose, but couldn't. As he stood, leaning half over the rail, struggling with the chain, Mr Crepsley reached up, grabbed the sleeve of Steve's shirt, and pulled him over further, caring nothing for his own life, intent only on taking Steve's. As the pair fell – Steve screaming, Mr Crepsley laughing – Gannen Harst thrust a hand out and caught Steve's flailing left hand.[...] "Let go!" Steve screamed, kicking out at Mr Crepsley, trying to knock him off. "You'll kill us both!" "That's what I meant to do!" Mr. Crepsley roared. He didn't seem the least bit bothered by the threat of death. Mybe it was the rush of adrenaline pumping through his vains, having killed the Lord of the Vampaneze – or perhaps he didn't care about his own life if it meant killing Steve. [...] Mr Crepsley looked to where Vancha and I were standing. As our eyes locked in grim understanding, Debbie rushed up beside us. "Darren!" she shouted. "We have to save him! We can't let him die! We—" "Shhh," I whispered, kissing her forehead, holding her close. "But—"she sobbed. "We can't do anything," I sighed.[...] Then his gaze settled on me. "Darren," he said. "Larten," I replied, smiling awkwardly. I felt like crying, but couldn't. There was an awful emptiness inside of me and my emotions wouldn't respond. [...] Then, as the echoes of his final cry reverberated around the walls of the cavern, Mr Crepsley let go of the chain. He hung in the air an impossible moment, almost as though he could fly ... then dropped like a stone towards the steel-tipped stakes beneath. (Shan 2003b: 165–169)