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International politics in Astrid Lindgren's works

Before discussing international politics in Lindgren's works, it is necessary to take a quick look at some tendencies in their translatory reception with an update for this year, as many non-Scandinavian readers might not be aware how their interpretation of Lindgren may have been coloured by target text adaptations which are not to be found in Lindgren's Swedish source text.

As some of you remember, there are interesting differences in how Lindgren's works are translated (Surmatz 2005).¹ Most Scandinavian translations from 1946 and onwards show hardly any major changes. The only noticeable alteration is in the Norwegian translation (1946), where the refused fish liver oil is changed to liver pâté in order not to turn post-war Norwegian children against this important resource of vitamins (Surmatz 2005, 293f). The British translation (1954) is a lively and humorous one with relatively few changes. In the German translation (1949), anti-authoritarian aspects are subdued and some nonsensical moments have been omitted. The first and only German translation is probably one of the most often revised ones, with revisions ranging from censorship to restoration. The latest change dates from 2007, allowing the poisonous toadstool that Pippi magically bites into back in the text (Lindgren 2007). Pippi's striped stockings in many media adaptations are due to the 100 million potential readers for the German translation, who could not in 1949 accept a suspicious brown stocking that might be associated with the "Hitlerjugend" (Surmatz 2005, 154f). The American translation (1950) shows some alterations concerning possible dangers for children and lack some of the literary exuberance found in the British version. In this target culture, the language policy is more strict (Metcalf 1995, esp. 73f, Surmatz 2005, 325–348).

Of the number of texts that I have considered, the first two main French editions (1951, 1962) diverge farthest from the source. Most fantasy-related, magic elements have been reworked, Pippi is not

allowed to lift a horse, and she must not be stronger than any policeman in the world. A new French translation appeared in 1995, where policemen, teachers and parents are finally subjected to the subtle critique of anti-authoritarian Pippi (Surmatz 2005, 230ff, 385–426).

The 1950s saw quite substantial changes in the translations. Intertextual reference and adult addressees are eliminated from the texts, as well as some "dangerous" episodes which were considered harmful to children; especially harmful, of course, to those children supposedly unable to distinguish between the phantastic and the realistic. A translating agent is inscribed into the text; a translator's voice pops up and comments in an often authoritarian manner on what might be quite an anarchistic or dangerously nonsensical episode in the source text (Surmatz 2005a, 7ff). Quite a few changes and adaptations were made in some early translations in order to fit new cultural norms, such as in the German, American, French, Dutch (1952) and British translations. Most early translations have been revised, like the Norwegian, German, Dutch or French translations, and/or replaced by entirely new ones, like the Danish, Icelandic or again the Norwegian and French translations (Surmatz 2005, 385–426, 2005a, 8ff).

This is just to remind us that most international reception of the Pippi books is based upon translation. But we will look now at international and political phenomena in Lindgren's work, and then again at how they have been translated. We could call this phenomenon the translation of internationality. Two international political aspects in the the Pippi books will be discussed, namely the books' subtext against Nazism, militarism and totalitarianism on the one hand, and colonialism and post-colonialism on the other. In both cases, translation elements will be analysed in order to see what happens internationally to these elements of totalitarianism and colonialism.

During the past two years I have conducted a bi-national digital cooperation project for students on translation analysis and the Pippi books. Some Swedish participants said they would not recognize hints to Nazism and Hitler in the books because, in the words of one student, "there is basically no proper history teaching at Swedish schools anymore" (my translation). In each case, students were not immediately aware of the 1945 context in which Lindgren created a circus figure, the "Strong Adolf" [Starke Adolf], battled by Pippi.

The ethical aspects of writing on war and peace have received more attention in the reception of later Lindgren works, *The brothers Lionheart* (1973), a tale of enduring brotherly love, war, peace, guilt and ethics, but also *Ronia, the robber's daughter* (1981) or going back to *Mio, my son* (1954) (cf. Metcalf 1995). Since there is not a great deal of reference to

Nazism and the Pippi books in the research literature, I decided to take a closer look at *Ur-Pippi*, the original manuscript version of *Pippi Longstocking* from 1944, named by Ulla Lundqvist and kept at the Royal Library (Surmatz 2001, 91ff).² Many researchers and readers have noted the educational and the utopian aspects and the subversive power of a text like *Pippi Longstocking*. I would like, however, to consider it as the not only anti-authoritarian, but also decidedly anti-fascist book on its publication shortly after the end of World War II.

My second concern in this paper is how the discussion surrounding possibly racist implications of the choice of wording in "Negro king", no longer acceptable to many of today's readers, might blind us to some of the political implications of the book when it was published. Central to this article is the awareness that some text elements have become canonized and permanent, whereas others have become anachronistic or have been deemed 'unsuitable' or inappropriate in other cultures. These two sides of the international reception might be summarized as fascism and racism. The areas of politics considered are anti-authoritarianism in its broader sense, critique of hierarchy and abuse of power towards children, and the dogmas of empty conventions, but also anti-fascism in its more concrete sense, exoticism and possible racism.

A short glance at Lindgren's biography provides some background information. During the war, Lindgren worked together with quite a few fellow-intellectuals at the Secret Letter Control Service in Stockholm, so she will have known more about political details than the average Swede. Lindgren noted down a number of observations about the Nazi occupation of Denmark and Norway, about the food rationing and about political developments (Berf/Surmatz 2001, 61–66). She later wrote that the burning of blacklisted books in Berlin deeply shocked her, and some books she read herself or to her children at the time referred to the war, e.g. in May 1941 she received *Mrs. Miniver*, the translation of a novel about a London middle-class family under the threat of war by Jan Struther. Also, due to mobilization, Lindgren's husband had to serve in the coast guard for some time in April 1940 (Lindgren's diary in Strömstedt 1999, 222–240, Berf/Surmatz 2001, 62). Lindgren was certainly involved and deeply interested in the political developments of her time.

Circus scene and Nazism

As mentioned, the Bakhtinesque scene in the circus suggests some reference to totalitarianism. The most obvious sign of subversive

protest in the book is the name of the Strong Adolf, advertised as the strongest man in the world. The entire audience tries to convince Pippi that she should not dare to confront Adolf. She says she might as well, as she is the strongest girl in the world, which can be read as a double declaration of independence as a child and girl against a powerful man, but possibly also as an imagined declaration of the Swedish state against Nazism. This episode might even contain an implicit critique of the appeasement politics of Chamberlain and the many compromises made by Sweden in order not to become occupied like the other Nordic countries. Sweden continued to export the essential iron ore from Kiruna via Narvik to Germany, thereby feeding the German weapon industry and war efforts. Also, Sweden allowed German soldiers to use the Swedish railways and waters, which enabled Germany to defeat the Norwegians more quickly using Swedish infrastructure. Lindgren found this significant enough to be mentioned in her diary (8.6.1941, august 1943, Berf/Surmatz 2001, 61–66). Moreover, intellectual life in Stockholm at the time was much inspired by the Norwegian intellectual refugees who had escaped to their neutral brother-country Sweden.

The name of “Strong Adolf” itself is quite suggestive, even more so through the German accent assigned to the circus director and other circus staff. The story ends with Pippi nonchalantly refusing the money the circus director offers her after she has beaten Strong Adolf. She keeps to the gold coins given to her by her father. Pippi ridicules the Nazi speakers by repeating and mocking their accents. This makes very clear that Pippi at least will not accept the Nazi intruders in her small Swedish town, and she demonstrates courage by daring to fight them – as opposed to the Swedish neutrality politics. There are some more, slightly oblique references to totalitarianism and Nazism in the book, some of them introduced through intertextual reference (Surmatz 2001, 91ff, 2005, 81–109, 329–337).

Ur-Pippi with a political mockery on a chair

This anti-totalitarian subtext becomes even clearer when one looks at *Ur-Pippi*, the manuscript version dedicated to Lindgren’s daughter Karin from 1944. Both of the following two main episodes have vanished in the final, printed version. Ulla Lundqvist and others have been looking into how *Ur-Pippi* has been transformed into the final *Pippi Longstocking* text (Lundqvist 1979, 99–127). The conclusion is that quite a few coarse and provoking episodes have disappeared, the style has become more refined, and references to adult cultur-

al phenomena, like to ballads, popular music, and films have been omitted. Pippi in the printed version became more gentle and accessible, more the friendly “Machtmensch” using her powers only to do good. Thus, the transformation from *Ur-Pippi* could be compared to quite a few of the changes made in later translations of the Pippi books into other languages.

Most stunning is the *Ur-Pippi* scene where Pippi, in a mockery of the many political speeches of the time, climbs on a chair and offers a nonsensical parody of such a speech. She starts off by lifting one of her arms straight up into the air in a well-known manner: “[hon] slog ut med ena handen i en imponerande gest”, which I translate as “she struck one hand (upwards) in an impressive gesture” (Lindgren [1944], 89f).

Then Pippi rambles on about a murdered Swedish king, crocodiles and sheepish lambs who dare not do anything, the episode ending up in a strange cooking recipe.³ It seems as if Lindgren is using the form of the children’s book in order to express a deep dissent with the Nazi regime through mockery.

Ur-Pippi and Kvissling versus Quisling

Another significant episode is the one where Pippi skates around in the kitchen on her cleaning brushes and repeats the following mocking song eight times.

Jag haver en syssling
vid namn Olle Kvissling,
nu har han fått mässling,
oj oj oj!
Min syssling har mässling,
min myssling har sässling
Olle Kvyssling har myssling,
oj oj oj!
Min kvässling har syssling,
min mässling har sässling,
min myssling har kvyssling,
oj oj oj! (Lindgren [1944], 39f)

I have a cousin
who is called Olle Kvissling
now he has got measling
oj oj oj!

My cousling has measling,
my myssling has saessling
Olle Kvisssling has myssling
oj oj oj oj!
My kvaessling has coussling,
my measling has saessling,
my myssling has kvyssling
oj oj oj oj.
(Lindgren [1944], 39f, my translation)

Lindgren in her manuscript spells Kvisssling with a camouflage “Kv” instead of with a “Qu”, but the association to “Quisling” springs to mind. When Norway was occupied by Nazi troops in 1940, Quisling, the leader of the small local Nazi party, immediately offered his services to Hitler. As Quisling was rejected by most Norwegians, Terboven was installed as the “Reichskommissar” of occupied Norway. Still today, a quisling is synonymous with a traitor and collaborator in many languages. The term was reportedly used in *The Times* already in 1940.

As to the illness of measles in the song, there are a reasonable number of possible references. In Swedish the sentence “Quisling har mässling”, “Quisling has the measles” sounds quite funny and might have occurred as a joke. Another aspect is that there are the “German measles”, a form of rubella. “Olle” could refer to “Ola Nordmann”, the cliché name of the standard Norwegian man, something like John Smith. And “syssling”, a name for cousin, could certainly refer to the occupied “brother people” of Norway. So quite a few elements in this text point towards a subversive, anti-totalitarian subtext. In *Ur-Pippi* there are more of these references, some of which remain in the published book. Most of them would not be intelligible to the child readers of the time, though. This might be one of the reasons why Lindgren chose to remove quite a few of those references from the *Ur-Pippi* text.

But for the printed book she even adds new references of this kind, for instance the song Pippi sings when she saves the small boys from the fire; “there burns a fire” is also the title of a 1943 Swedish resistance film. Referring to this film in 1945 when *Pippi Longstocking* was published, after the end of World War II, would need less camouflaging than in the episodes mentioned above (Surmatz 2001, 104, 2005, 101–109). A return to *Ur-Pippi* explains some of the hints at fascism and the political content in the printed book *Pippi Longstocking*. Also the pictures from the Lindgren/Vang Nyman comic from the fifties

are historically explicit with a black moustache and other details (Lindgren [1957], 1969).

The Nazi accent in translations

In this quote from the source and the Norwegian translation, I would like to draw the attention of the non-Scandinavian reader to the richly used “sch” sound, so familiar from German:

Mine damer och mine herrer! Om ett ögonblick kommer ni, att få *schkåde* alle tiders störste onderverk, den *sch*tarkaste mannen i världen, *Sch*tarke Adolf, som ännu ingen har besägrat. (Lindgren 1945, 104, my italics)

Mine damer og mine herrer! Om et øyeblikk kommer dere til å *sch*kue alle tiders største onderverk, den *sch*terkeste mann i verden, *Sch*terke Adolf som ennå ingen har vunnet over. Vær så god, mine damer og herrer, her kommer *Sch*terke Adolf! (Lindgren 1988, 86, my italics)

Like the Swedish source, the Norwegian translation indicates an explicit German accent (Surmatz 2005, 329ff). The Norwegian illustrator of the first translation, Alice Midelfart, even makes a joking allusion to the 1000-year Reich. She shows Pippi carrying Strong Adolf, and Adolf in his turn lifting a weight of 100 kg, while on his shirt is emblazoned the print “1000 kilos”. The implication here would be that Nazism did not survive 1000 years either. The Icelandic and Finnish translations also offer the accent (Surmatz 2005, 329ff), whereas the American and British translations adopt different strategies to tackle target culture norms:

Ladies and gentlemen, in a moment you will be privileged [sic] to see the Greatest Marvel of all time, the Strongest Man in the World, the Mighty Adolf, whom no one has yet been able to conquer. Here he comes, ladies and gentlemen, [sic] Allow me to present to you THE MIGHTY ADOLF. (Lindgren 1950 98, small caps sic)

Ladies and *chant*lemen! In ze next moment you *vill zee vun* of ze *vunders uff* all time, ze *zdrongest* man in ze *vorld*, Mig-hty Adolf, who nobody has *effer* beaten yet. And here he is, ladies and *chant*lemen. Mighty Adolf! (Lindgren 1954, 71, my italics)



© Lindgren, Astrid. Pippi Langstrømpe. Ill. Alice Midelfart. Oslo: Damm, 1972 (Pippi Longstocking).

In the American translation, there is no accent, only an earlier mention of "broken Swedish" (Lindgren 1950, 92). It seems as if a foreign accent in the American edition would have been taboo, probably because children's literature in the US was supposed to contribute to the project of educating youngsters in the melting pot into correctly-speaking Americans. This might be one of the normative concessions in the target text. In addition, using a foreign accent might have seemed discriminatory towards immigrants (Surmatz 2005, 332–334).

The British translation employs a German accent. Films using such a German accent include Anglophone propaganda films on World War II or critical films like Ernst Lubitsch's *To be or not to be* (1942), Charlie Chaplin's *The great dictator* (1940) and the accent of the Austrian Jews in *Casablanca* by Michael Curtiz (1942/1943). Later examples are most roles by Gert Fröbe like in Ken Annakin's *Those*

magnificent men in their flying machines (1964) (Surmatz 2005, 109f, 334f).

Even the first French version, which otherwise leaves out many comical scenes, and of course the new translation from 1995 in which they are restored, show a clear German accent:

Mestames et mezieurs! Dans zune secontte, fous allez foir un tes plus grands miracles de dous les temps, l'homme le plus vort du monte, Arthur le Costaud, qui n'a *ch*amais zété battu. Applaudissez tres vort! Arthur le Costaud! (Lindgren 1995, 97, my italics)

While the first translation still has "le Grand Adolf", a revised edition changes to "Le Grand Hector". The political dimension and no accent disappears, (Lindgren 1951, 77f, Lindgren 1962, 78–81, also Blume 2001, 104f). The 1995 translation has the accent but chooses a different name: "Arthur le Costaud". This change has its consequences, as the name Adolf might trigger the whole interpretation of the German accent. But possibly French readers in our time would not make the immediate historical link regardless of the name. Some fifty years after the end of war in 1995, these allusions might have been considered undesirable in the context of the political cooperation between France and Germany within the European Union.

The historical context of the Adolf episode will become more and more oblique to many target culture readers, but it can now be reinterpreted within the general critique and mockery of authorities in the text: think of Pippi carrying away the two policemen, who want to abduct her from her house, or her persiflage of a militaristic drill at the coffee table in the Settergren household. It shows the original *Pippi* text from 1945 as the anti-totalitarian modernist manifesto that it was.

We can only conclude with the explicit sentence which first appears in the 1945 text (not in *Ur-Pippi*), where Pippi claims: "Aren't we living in a free country", (Lindgren 1945, 13, Surmatz 2001, 122).

(Post-) Colonialism

The second main political minefield in the Pippi books is the question of race and possible racism. When a new picturebook edition of *Pippi in the South Seas* came out in Sweden in 2004, this discussion blew up to a full media blizzard (Matthis 2004), where Lindgren's daughter

Karin Nyman had to reassure readers and journalists that what her mother wrote about "negroes" in 1945 was not part of a racist context at all, but was probably ahead of its time. She had to comment, too, that the picturebook edition did not, as many had assumed, have the "negro" word "whitewashed", but followed Lindgren's original text.

In the first book, Pippi lives alone and fantasizes about her father. He fell overboard from his ship, but Pippi, according to the narrator, maintains the belief that he was washed ashore on an island, where the inhabitants made him king. The original Swedish text knows no politically correct restraints but states he became a "Negro king", and Pippi dreams of becoming a "Negro princess". In a postcolonial perspective, this is of course just the stereotyped hierarchic phenomenon of how colonies were established in imperialist times, and Lindgren received a fair amount of criticism for that mostly from the US, but also in international children's literature discourse within Sweden and elsewhere, later by the French-speaking critic Epin. The seventies also saw criticism on the two later books about Pippi (Surmatz 2005, 230ff, 243-252). The British translation:

She [Pippi] was certain that he [her father] had come ashore on a desert island, one with lots and lots of cannibals, and that her father had become king of them all and went about /--/. (Lindgren 1954, 2)

Tommy and Annika [Pippi's new friends who come to the house for the first time] looked carefully about in case *that Cannibal King* should be in a corner. They'd never seen a Cannibal King in all their lives. But no father was to be seen, nor any mother /--/. (Lindgren 1954, 7, my italics)

In order to avoid racial discussion, the 'Negro king' has been transformed into a cannibal king, both in the American and the British translation. This element in a children's book creates some new and unexpected connotations, for instance when Pippi longs to play with the small cannibal children on her father's island or when Tommy and Annika's mother, without the slightest doubt, sends her children away together with Pippi to spend some time on Cannibal Island. In a later scene in the first book, Pippi presents herself at school:

My name is Pippilotta *Provisionia* [sic] Gaberdina Dandeliona Ephraimsdaughter Longstocking, daughter of Captain Ephraim Longstocking, formerly the terror of the seas, now Cannibal King. (Lindgren 1954, 34, my italics).

To be a cannibal king almost seems like any other profession, and offers an amusing contrast with one of Pippi's names. In Swedish she is called "Viktualia", meaning essential daily food groceries. So we get a whole new subtext and subplot, a chain of interconnected motifs in these translations (Surmatz 2005, 239ff).

This strategy of avoiding racial questions and replacing them with a topic from adventure literature is not only employed in the American and British translations but also in others derived from these, like the Welsh, Spanish, Katalan, Basque, Brazilian Portuguese, Seychellois Creole, Afrikaans, Arabic and other translations like the new French (1995), so there seem to be cannibals all over the place (Surmatz 2004, 16ff, 2005, 248ff). Just at a moment where, from an ethnographic point of view, this kind of depiction is questioned, it is employed as a translatory narrative prop to avoid even worse evils. Interestingly enough, some critics of Lindgren in the seventies criticized the use of the word "cannibal" in *Pippi Longstocking*, because it would discriminate against third world inhabitants anyhow, in an only slightly disguised form (Surmatz 2005, 243ff).

Conclusions

There is a clear political subtext against Nazism in the *Ur-Pippi* text, most of which remained in the final printed book. Most early translations keep the Adolf references in the translation and those were probably as clear to the target cultures as to the Swedes at the time. During the War, children's books were used as vehicles to convey anti-totalitarian messages or to mock the Nazis. This element is integrated with other antimilitaristic episodes in the Pippi books, like the caricature of authoritarian, militaristic behaviour Pippi demonstrates at the Settergren coffee table. Most revised editions respect this historical context although a few of them have decided to eliminate some of the hints, maybe in the spirit of a new European unity. The political message of the Pippi books, though, might be an integral part of the anti-authoritarian project which the books constitutes, perhaps as important as its modernist project in general.

As to colonialism, the historical context should be taken into consideration. The generally antiracist policies in Lindgren's text have been opposed by several researchers who thought the whole South Sea episode to be racist and unnecessary, but the exoticism of the South Sea island episodes might have been intended as a new opening after the isolation during World War II, and as an amusing balance for the stiff bourgeois background of the Settergren family. Of

course there are aspects to this which might be discussed differently in our time, when it is considered acceptable to employ a cannibal king as a humorous and exotic counter-image in some contexts.

Lindgren continues to surprise her readers, and we can only hope translations support them in this and new inspiring ones are to follow.⁴ Hopefully this article has introduced yet another aspect of Lindgren's many-faceted books about Pippi, while both respecting her work in its historical context and connecting it to our time.

1 Most examples have been discussed in a different context in Surmatz 2005, which therefore will be referred to regularly, see also Surmatz 2001, 2004, 2005a.

2 Lundqvist was the researcher who gave the manuscript its name; according to her, neither war nor crisis are a theme in *Pippi*, which she considers vital for the Swedish children unsettled by the war (Lundqvist 1979, 111, 128). In her comment on *Ur-Pippi* in the new Swedish edition she tentatively creates a path for such an interpretation (Lindgren, 2007a). Strömstedt quotes from Lindgren's diaries in her excellent biography, but would deny a strong connection between Pippi and Nazism (Strömstedt 1999, 230–240). In her study of ethic in Lindgren's work, Eva-Maria Metcalf regards Nazism as a background for the book, which thus assumes the function of a sign of hope for a better world (Metcalf 1995, 70). Vivi Edström formulates a reluctant position on this (Edström 1992, 87–103), whereas Lena Kåreland sees a parallel between playful, absurdist *Pippi* and Dadaist protest against Nazism and the destructive war (Kåreland 1999, 280f, similar Gaare/Sjaastad 2000, 175).

3 The name Adolf has also been used as a second name for Swedish kings, even Adolf Fredrik (1751–1771), but this reference is less likely, especially when linked to the German accent and the epithet of strongest man in the world. The nonsense speech about Erik XIV. (Lindgren [1944], 89f) may contain Lindgren's affection for Sweden (Surmatz 2001, 104). The contrast between the aggressive crocodiles (the Nazis) and the lambs (neutral Sweden) also fits this perspective. Lindgren has in her war diaries and in *The brothers Lionhart* repeatedly compared totalitarian rulers to monsters and amphibiae, cf also Strömstedt 1999, 230–240, esp. 235.

4 A Slovenian new translation will be initiated, integrating research from one of my students from the *Pippi* translation project, Daša Zidar. At the Stockholm Lindgren conference in 2007, Tiina Nunally announced she was working on a new English translation.

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