

We Love What We Know –

The Canonicity of Pippi Longstocking in Different Media in Flanders

“There can be no strong, canonical writing without the process of literary influence[.]”

(Bloom 8)

### 1. The Question of Canon

Astrid Lindgren is widely recognized as one of the most influential children's book authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and her works can therefore be said to be highly canonized. But when does a literary work become part of the literary canon? Considering the canonical works of any given literature, one can distinguish some common criteria which all of them live up to. There is, however, no clear consensus on what is seen as canonical. In this paper, we suggest the following definition: In order to be considered a canonical work, a literary work should firstly be of interest to today's audience. It should, in other words, still be read and, hence, passed on. Secondly, the literary work should be debated by literary critics. This entails the work having supporters as well as opponents. Furthermore, it should be discussed in works of literary history. Finally, the literary work should exert some influence on modern writers.<sup>i</sup>

Literary works on the verge of being admitted to the canon struggle to gain immortality and to live on, in the sense of being reread and remembered. As Harold Bloom argues, “[t]here can be no strong, canonical writing without the process of literary influence[.]” (Bloom 8) Hence, a feature characteristic of a canonical work is that it influences modern writers, a concept on which this paper will elaborate.

## **2. The Role of Intermediality in the Process of Canonization**

As the canonical literary work inspires other authors, it becomes in itself a source of literature. In an essay on the relationship of Charles Kingsley's The Water-Babies to the canon of children's literature, Deborah Stevenson has also pointed out this connection. Stevenson names four different instances of canonicity, namely academic relevance, critical reviews, media attention and filming, and stresses the importance of the last factor. (Stevenson 112) Thus, evidence of canonicity can be found in allusions and references to that literary work. In an ultimate stage of the development towards canonicity, "derivatives" of the work and references to it in daily life come into being. Such side effects, like a portrayal on a bank note, a statue, a literary prize or schools and institutions named after the author, indicate far-reaching canonization.

Literary works would not be able to survive if they did not succeed in finding new reader audiences time and again. Through translations, adaptations and derivatives, all examples of "remediations", the literary work is endlessly reused and reread, thus obtaining immortality and securing its own survival (Bloom 19-20). Such remediations inevitably entail intermediality as new media fall back on older ones. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define remediations as "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms". (Bolter and Grusin 273) In this process of refashioning, canonical novels are adapted to new media versions, such as movies, cartoons and video games, which can cause a revival of the original version.<sup>ii</sup> As Ronald Soetaert has pointed out, the significance of remediations – that is, making classics available to a large audience

through other media – is immense. (Soetaert 138) It seems that Soetaert is convinced that literature is a segment of culture that is reserved for the elite, and that the lower classes can only gain access to classical literary works through other media versions.

Remediations do, in any case, widen the scope of the literary work, as they make it possible for the work to be handed down from one generation to another, across social and geographical borders. Thus, remediations allow for the classical works to stand their ground within the literary canon.<sup>iii</sup> Intermediality and canonization are in other words strongly entwined.

### **3. Investigating Canonization in Three Regions: The Peculiar Case of Flanders**

This paper will discuss the role of intermediality in the canonization process of one of Astrid Lindgren's most famous novels, Pippi Longstocking. First we will look into how this book is canonized in three different regions: Sweden, the Netherlands and Flanders. We will focus on these three areas as the novel seems to have been received differently in each one of them. The next chapter will elaborate on how Lindgren and Pippi Longstocking have been canonized. Secondly, we will compare these results with how today's target audience perceives Pippi.

But before we do, we should explain the peculiar circumstances of the Flemish language situation and literary field. Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, happens to be a small but complicated region.

When it comes to language use, Belgium is situated at the intersection of the Germanic and Romance language families. The country can be divided into three different areas:

Dutch-speaking Flanders in the North (approximately 6 million inhabitants), the French-speaking Walloon provinces in the South (approximately 4 million inhabitants) and a small German-speaking community in the East (approximately 75,000 inhabitants). Belgium is officially trilingual. The Flemish, Walloon and German cultures are entirely different entities and therefore, the country could even be considered to be *tricultural*. Belgium makes up a meeting place of three separate cultural and literary systems. As a consequence, different texts constitute the literary canons in the respective literary fields. The influence these three different systems have over each other is non-reciprocal. The overwhelming cultural rivalries are those between Flanders and the Walloon provinces, and the German culture is barely visible in the rest of the country. The three cultures do not so much cross as brush past each other. Inhabitants of the three regions watch separate TV channels, read different newspapers and listen to disparate music. Apart from one common, so-called “federal”, government, each of the regions have their own local government. People living in Flanders cannot vote for Walloon politicians and vice versa. The literary systems, too, are completely unrelated to each other, and writers seldom succeed in breaking through the language boundaries.

Yet, neither one of these areas is completely independent either. The three Belgian regions each belong to a larger language region. Flanders shares the Dutch language with the Netherlands, whilst the Walloon provinces are connected to France and the German-speaking community is linked with Germany. The language situation in each of these three areas, with their cross-over point in Belgium, is a pluricentric one, in which the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands, the French of France and the German of Germany are the dominant varieties setting the norms for the standard language.<sup>iv</sup> The varieties of the

respective Belgian regions are largely subordinate to these foreign norm-defining centres in terms of language, literature and culture.

In the case of Flanders, this entails the Flemish literary field being strongly defined by its Dutch counterpart. Dutch authors and publishing houses rule even the Flemish literary system, and one might in fact even argue that the region is suffering from a literary inferiority complex toward the Netherlands.

#### **4. Canonizing Astrid Lindgren**

##### 4.1. Sweden

Swedish culture is permeated by Astrid Lindgren's works.<sup>v</sup> Almost all of Lindgren's works fulfil the conditions of canonization. They are still widely read and have been passed on for several generations. Many of Astrid Lindgren's works are nowadays available in other media forms and therefore accessible to a wide audience.

Her authorship has reached a highly canonical status, and has become part of Swedish cultural heritage, a fact that has previously been demonstrated. Ulla Berglindh, for instance, considers Astrid Lindgren to belong to a select group of unrivalled Swedish authors who have written unique Swedish texts, a set of texts which – according to her – constitute the essence of Swedish literature. (Berglindh) At the time of Lindgren's death, Lena Kåreland moreover observed that Astrid Lindgren's appreciation amongst both children and adults could probably be considered unique. According to Kåreland, Lindgren was the ultimate popular favourite. (Kåreland *Det var konstigt att vi inte lekte ihjäl oss*)

#### 4.2. The Netherlands

In this section, I will look into how Astrid Lindgren and her works are received in Dutch publications. Most contributors to books on literary history and journals on children's literature agree that Astrid Lindgren can be considered one of the most important and influential authors in modern children's literature. Lindgren is even thought to be the international queen of children's literature and her authorship is deemed indispensable. (Linders 321; van Delft 156; Verschuren 331; Wolters 14) One critic esteems Lindgren so highly that he considers her the only children's books author worthy of being discussed in his own literary history. According to him, her influence on world literature cannot be overrated. (Steinz 219)

Amongst Astrid Lindgren's books, the following seem to be the most popular: Pippi Longstocking, Emil, Ronia, the Robber's Daughter, The Children of Noisy Village, and The Brothers Lionheart.

When commenting on Lindgren's authorship, reviewers tend to refer to all of the literary prizes that she won during her lifetime, so as to point out her importance. (de Sterck et al. 227; Linders 318) In order to situate Astrid Lindgren in the broader context of Dutch-speaking children's literature, she is moreover often compared to other important Dutch authors such as Annie M.G. Schmidt, Paul Biegel and Joke van Leeuwen. The Dutch critics tend to nationalize Astrid Lindgren's authorship. There is, however, one exception: Roald Dahl is the only foreign writer whose name keeps appearing. (Van den Bossche 41-42; Wolters 16)

#### 4.3. Flanders

In the reception of Astrid Lindgren's authorship the cultural discrepancy between Flanders and the Netherlands may play a certain role. Whereas most literary historical overviews and academic journals are common for the whole language area, newspaper journalism is specific to the two regions. Scrutinizing coverage of Astrid Lindgren in the Flemish daily newspapers is therefore an appropriate means for getting an impression of Flemish opinions on the author and her works.

Astrid Lindgren did not become largely known in Flanders until the 1970s, but she has been considered a household name ever since. An analysis of the reception of Astrid Lindgren's work in Flemish daily newspapers indicates that Flemish literary critics regard her as an innovator whose greatest accomplishment was making children's books more exciting and their heroes less well-behaved. Some critics even call Lindgren the mother of all children's literature. (Plottier 15; van Nieuwenborgh 10) Overall, Astrid Lindgren is met with a large amount of praise and respect. The Flemish literary critics tend to put Lindgren on a pedestal. They idealize her and her authorship and critical comments are extremely rare.

The mentions of literary prizes provide a perfect example of this unconditional idolatry. In Flemish newspaper articles that appeared right after her decease, Astrid Lindgren was often compared to Hugo Claus, Flanders' own post-war great bard.<sup>vi</sup> Claus is considered to be a giant of Flemish literature, the ultimate writer of Dutch-language literature and the best poet in Flanders' history. He is praised for his versatility, and some critics are of the opinion that everything he wrote was superlative. According to Jef Geeraerts, a famous Flemish author of the same age as Claus, the latter was a "homo universalis": Not only did he excel in prose, poetry and drama, he also worked as a translator, painted and

directed movies. Award winning author Erwin Mortier appreciates the beauty of Claus' writings, and establishes that he dominated the cultural and intellectual life in Flanders during his lifetime. (Eetezonne 15; Guerden 5; *Hugo was homo universalis*; van Nieuwenborgh 10)

Just like Lindgren's, Claus' name was often mentioned when it came to Nobel Prize nominations. He even received the support of previous laureates José Saramago, Günther Grass and J.M. Coetzee. Yet – again just like Lindgren – he never won it. Given the unequalled status which Hugo Claus had acquired by the end of his career, the comparison shows that Flemish literary professionals attribute great value to Lindgren's authorship and that she is a largely canonized writer. One might even argue that she has acquired a place within the general literary canon. As Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer shows, the comparison of a children's book author to an important adult author indicates that the former is admitted into the latter's literary canon. She bases this statement on the case of German author Christian Felix Weiße, whose children's literary works were being compared to those of Christian Fürchtegott Gellert: "Da Gellert in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts zu den wichtigsten kanonischen Autoren der deutschen Literatur zählte, wird dem kinderliterarischen Oeuvre Weißen der höchste Rang innerhalb der Allgemeinliteratur zugesprochen." [Seeing that Geller in the first half of the nineteenth century belonged to the most famous canonical authors of German literature, the children's literary oeuvre of Weiße is attributed the highest rank within general literature.] (Kümmerling-Meibauer 94) The comparison with Hugo Claus can be said to have a similar effect on the status of Astrid Lindgren in Flanders.



Unlike the Dutch reviewers, Flemish critics hardly ever compare Astrid Lindgren to Flemish children's books authors. They do, however, name some important Dutch references, such as Paul Biegel, Joke van Leeuwen and Annie M.G. Schmidt. In other words, the Flemish critics do not relate Lindgren to a Flemish national canon, instead they refer to her high status in the entire language area.

The above-mentioned authors are also the ones with whom Lindgren had to compete in the election of the best ever children's book in 2008.<sup>vii</sup> Three of Lindgren's novels appeared on the long list (totalling 99 titles): Emil, Pippi Longstocking and Ronia, the Robber's Daughter. Other authors with three nominations were Annie M.G. Schmidt, Joke van Leeuwen and Roald Dahl, all considered eminences, as mentioned before. The only one of Astrid Lindgren's titles to eventually make it to the short list of ten books was Pippi Longstocking.<sup>viii</sup> Again, this indicates Pippi Longstocking's immense importance within Astrid Lindgren's oeuvre.

A distinct voice in the Flemish debate on Astrid Lindgren is Bart Moeyaert, a renowned author for both children and adults himself. He has received numerous national and international awards for his works, and several of his books have been translated.<sup>ix</sup>

Moeyaert is an ardent advocate of Astrid Lindgren's authorship and views on life. He claims that her books have deeply influenced him, as a human being and as a writer as well. According to Moeyaert, Astrid Lindgren defined his conception of the world and probably even his language and style. (gse *De wapens van Astrid waren humor en taal* 10; Moeyaert *Astrids erfenis* 90-91; Moeyaert *Harry Potter bestaat niet* 36; Plottier 15)

When it comes to the distribution of Astrid Lindgren's works, there has been some criticism against Dutch publishing house Ploegsma's marketing strategy. The Dutch

translations are hardly marketed in the Netherlands or in Flanders. As the Flemish readership is dependent on the reserved policy pursued by Ploegsma for getting access to Lindgren's works, it might not come as a surprise that the films have come to surpass the books. Several of the films are currently available on DVD and some of the TV series is still shown on television. In general, many readers are familiar with the filmed versions of Astrid Lindgren's books and a majority of them even became acquainted with the author's work through these film adaptations. Thus, it seems likely that the films have been an important trigger for the renewed attention paid to Astrid Lindgren's works and, as a consequence, for their continuous popularity. Because the fact remains that book sales are keeping steady,<sup>x</sup> and many of the people buying these books are adults who used to read the books or watch the TV series as a child and buy them out of nostalgia. (gse *De wapens van Astrid waren humor en taal* 10; de Sterck et al. 227; Lexicon 4)

The above-mentioned acclaim, idolatry and unremitting popularity are all indications of the strong appreciation which Astrid Lindgren enjoys in Flanders. Even though the effects of her works in daily life in Flanders are rather limited and not remotely as far-reaching as in Sweden, one can easily conclude that she has become canonized to a high degree.

Just how influential Astrid Lindgren has been in the Flemish literary field, shows in addition in the activities of Stichting Lezen Vlaanderen (The Flemish Booktrust), a government organization that promotes reading in Flanders. Stichting Lezen has been influenced by Astrid Lindgren in more ways than one. Firstly, the institute for children's books within the organization was named Villa Kakelbont, after Pippi Longstocking's

house.<sup>xi</sup> (Plottier 15; Van den Bossche 44) In 2007 Stichting Lezen furthermore established a so-called “Kinderconsul”. The organization appointed children’s books author and illustrator Gerda Dendooven as an ambassador for children’s culture in a truly Lindgrenian vein. During the installation, Majo de Saedeleer, director of Stichting Lezen, named Astrid Lindgren one of the foundation’s most important sources of inspiration and referred to Lindgren’s centennial as the perfect occasion for appointing a “Kinderconsul”. (de Saedeleer) This ambassador does not have any formal role as an ombudsman; her role was rather to initiate activities and debate concerning children’s literature. As soon as the enthusiasm of the jubilee year had faded away, the “Kinderconsul” unfortunately proved to be a concept that was not entirely viable.

## 5. Canonizing Pippi Longstocking

Back in the 1940s when Pippi Longstocking first came out in Sweden, a new kind of pedagogy (the so-called “fri uppfostring” or free upbringing), which emphasized the child’s perspective and development, came in vogue.<sup>xii</sup> However, these progressive pedagogical ideas were not widely spread and certainly not shared by all literary critics. Pippi represented these fresh ideas, with the result that her behaviour was considered odd and unacceptable.

Although Pippi Longstocking had severely stirred up the emotions of its adversaries, who met the book with scathing criticism,<sup>xiii</sup> it was also fiercely promoted by its supporters, who applauded Pippi’s revolutionary spirit and greatly appreciated the book’s fantasy and innovativeness. The huge amount of attention the book received because of all of this commotion, allowed for it to become indispensable relatively quickly. The trilogy on

Pippi Longstocking contributed immensely to Astrid Lindgren's popularity in Sweden and provides a classic example of a literary work which has become canonized to a high degree. Even if one takes into consideration different definitions of canonization, Pippi holds her ground.

In the Netherlands as well, Pippi Longstocking is by far the most important one of Lindgren's characters. The Pippi-trilogy is considered a real classic, a monument within children's literature. (Linders 319, 321; Parlevliet 14; Van den Bossche 39-40; Wolters 14) In addition, Pippi is considered a point of reference when it comes to Astrid Lindgren's writings. Not infrequently, Pippi Longstocking is the only one of Astrid Lindgren's books mentioned when Lindgren's works are discussed.

Against the background of the cultural and literary fragmentation in Belgium, the reception of Astrid Lindgren proves to be quite a peculiar case. Her works have been admitted to all three literary systems (viz. Flemish, Walloon and German-speaking), yet in entirely different ways. The reception of the books on Pippi Longstocking can serve as an example of this splintering.

The German-speaking audience was, just like the Swedish, inclined to reject Pippi Longstocking's antiauthoritarian tendencies.<sup>xiv</sup> Yet, despite the protest uttered by some, the work was admitted to the canon of children's literature in Sweden and Germany almost straightaway. Moreover, its canonicity was further enhanced by the filmed versions which came out in the late 1960s and early 1970s and later by the cartoon and the seemingly endless number of derivatives as well.

In France and the Walloon region, on the other hand, the book was never treated quite as negatively as in Sweden and Germany.<sup>xv</sup> As the French publishing house Hachette had severely censored Pippi Longstocking, the character which was introduced to the French-speaking readers was not remotely as shocking as the Swedish version. On the contrary, in an effort to please the adult establishment, one had normalized Pippi: She had been transformed from a strange, socially maladjusted child into a fine young lady. Pippi lifting a pony instead of a horse is a well known example of this purged French version. The book hardly caused any controversy and this might be one of the reasons why Pippi Longstocking has been largely ignored in France, at least until a new translation was published in 1995, a thoroughly revised version featuring a character which was more faithful to the original Pippi. Although this version shook the French audience considerably more than the former version had, one might conclude that Pippi Longstocking on the whole has not acquired quite the same canonical status in the French-speaking regions as in Sweden and Germany. Astrid Lindgren herself considered France a problem child. She was well aware of the lamentable quality of the French translation of the Pippi-books, and had for a long time been wanting to give Hachette a shaking-up. Overall, she regarded the case of Pippi in France as a missed opportunity. (Heldner 12; 14)

In Flanders, however, it seems that other prerequisites have determined the process of Pippi Longstocking's canonization. Here, too, Pippi Longstocking is the best known and most canonized of all of Lindgren's books. Many Flemish citizens and literary critics characterize Astrid Lindgren – in a rather patronizing way – as the “mother” of Pippi Longstocking, the figure which made her immortal.

The book was first published in Dutch in 1952 by a publishing house called Born. It gave rise to hardly any debate at all in Flanders. Upon its publication in the 1950s, Flemish critics did not reject Pippi Longstocking but praised it for being “de leven-geworden fantasie van de meeste kinders” [the imagination of most children come to life, svdb]. (de Bois 316) Although this critic acknowledges that Pippi’s behaviour is not quite what one would expect from a well-behaved child, he suggests that every child should read this book. The only reservation de Bois utters against Pippi is that she is not religious, an aspect which was very important in Catholic Flanders in the 1950s:

Pippi is zo knap en zo pittig, dat niet alle meisjes, maar ook alle jongens dat boek lezen moeten. Voor hen die graten zoeken waar ze niet zijn: Pippi is wel neutraal, maar wat zouden we met O.L. Heer doen in deze fantastische kinderwereldincarnatie. (de Bois 316)

[Pippi is so bright and so pithy, that not all girls, but also all boys should read this book. For those who are looking to split hairs: Pippi may be neutral, but what would we do with Our Lord in this fantastic incarnation of children’s world. (de Bois 316, svdb)]

de Bois’ final judgement is that the book be recommended for somewhat advanced readers (aged nine to twelve). Mind you, had Pippi been a faithful Catholic, the book certainly would have been *warmly* recommended.

So, instead of being criticized, Pippi Longstocking caught on immediately and became immensely popular. As mentioned earlier, the Pippi-books were chosen by children as one of the ten best children’s books ever written, and they are furthermore one of Flemish teachers’ all time favourites for reading out loud.<sup>xvi</sup> According to Bart Moeyaert, Pippi has moreover grown to become a truly legendary character of nearly mythical proportions: “Pippi is de fictie allang overstegen. Ze bestáát. Het verbaast je niet dat ze af en toe een paard optilt, want dat ligt nu eenmaal in haar aard.” [Pippi has long since transcended

fiction. She really exists. It does not surprise you that she lifts a horse every now and then, as this lies in her nature.] (Moeyaert *Harry Potter bestaat niet* 36, svdb) Moeyaert argues furthermore that Pippi Longstocking shares this persuasive quality with other famous children's book characters such as A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh and Sylvia Waugh's Mennyns.

In Flanders (and to a lesser degree in the Netherlands), Pippi Longstocking has acquired immense symbolic value. She is canonized to such a degree that whenever someone does not know Astrid Lindgren, mentioning the name of Pippi Longstocking immediately rings a bell. (Van den Bossche 39; 87-88)

All in all, it seems that the Flemish audience was more open to the character from the very start. The fact that the book was *not* received negatively in the beginning, may explain why it is still so widely loved.

## **6. Canonization at Work: Remediations of Pippi Longstocking in Flanders**

### **6.1. Pippi Longstocking in Different Media in Flanders**

The society which we live in today is a “media-rich environment” (Bolter and Grusin 4), in which old and new media coexist and complement each other. In this climate, popular characters from children's literature like Pippi Longstocking appear in several different forms in different media. It turns out that children in Flanders – parallel to those in Sweden –<sup>xvii</sup> are presented with different remediations of Pippi Longstocking. To be precise, five different visualisations had occurred by the time of investigation.

One such visualisation can be found in the Dutch translation of the novels.<sup>xviii</sup> The illustrations by Ingrid Vang Nyman from the Swedish original were interestingly enough

not used in the Dutch omnibus. Instead the drawings used were created by the Dutch artist Carl Hollander. Hollander's depiction of Pippi Longstocking differs quite significantly from the image provided by Ingrid Vang Nyman. The Dutch Pippi is portrayed as a kind of pre-hippie, an exuberant bohemian. The drawings are full of knick-knacks and therefore command the reader's attention.

Fig. 1. Carl Hollander's version of Pippi Longstocking in the Dutch translation. From Astrid Lindgren, Pippi Langkous (Amsterdam: Ploegsma, 2002) 227.

Secondly, the TV films directed by Olle Hellbom as well as the TV series based on the films, both featuring Inger Nilsson as Pippi, offer a different kind of portrayal. The TV series has played an immense role in making Pippi known to a large audience. For the past few years, the series has constantly been shown on Flemish TV (both on national and commercial channels),<sup>xix</sup> and moreover it is available for sale on DVD. In addition, it was already shown on Dutch national TV before that, and therefore known earlier even in Flanders. An important factor in the huge impact of the series in Flanders and the Netherlands was the fact that the Swedish original was postsynchronized with Dutch speech. The dubbed version allowed even very young children to enjoy Pippi's adventures.

Yet another image of Pippi is to be found in the cartoon series,<sup>xx</sup> also shown on national TV. By granting her permission for this series, Astrid Lindgren wanted to allow for a whole new generation of children to become acquainted with Pippi Longstocking. (De Kloet)



In addition, Pippi was brought to the Flemish children by means of several musicals.<sup>xxi</sup>

The image which the children were presented with was taken from the 2005 musical Pippi Langkous, which was very well received. (gse *Superieure Pippi Langkous* 27)

Finally, one further version of Pippi features in a computer game.<sup>xxii</sup>

## 6.2. Flemish School Children and Pippi Longstocking: A Survey

### 6.2.1. Method

As shown above, Pippi Longstocking is canonized to a great extent in Flanders, but which of the different versions is the most canonized? As new remediations keep appearing, and television and internet have long since outgrown the book as medium, the leading position of the book as a touchstone is no longer self-evident. In the case of Pippi Longstocking, too, the emergence of new media versions may have influenced the canonical value of the work. One can in other words no longer assume that the book version is still the pre-eminent depiction of Pippi. In fact, one of the other versions may well have taken over the book's role as the most canonized version. Just as the literary canon is not static but instead evolving over time (Høyrup 69; Nodelman 3), children's opinions on which visualisation represents Pippi Longstocking the best, too, may change. In order to carry out a small scale explorative study on the distribution of Pippi Longstocking in Flanders, and to formulate an impression of the canonization of this character, a questionnaire was drawn up. This study was intended to complement the analysis of the overall reception of Astrid Lindgren's works. An enquiry form, displaying each of the five Pippi Longstocking figures, was presented to a group of 48 primary school children (aged 8 to 12).<sup>xxiii</sup> Their school is situated in a rural village and the

children can be said to belong to the middle class. They constitute a homogenous group and are not accustomed to being exposed to different cultures. The pupils answered the questions individually (in writing) first, after which their opinions were discussed in class.

### 6.2.2. The Distribution and Popularity of the Different Remediations of Pippi

#### Longstocking

Firstly, the children were asked which of the five versions of Pippi available in Flanders they were familiar with. Most well known is apparently the film version, which 98% of the pupils had already encountered. 81% recognized the cartoon Pippi, 48% knew the musical character, 37% indicated that they recognized the book version, and 23% of them were familiar with the PC game.

Next the children were given the opportunity to rank the pictures, so as to elucidate which of these different characters they regard as the 'real' Pippi Longstocking. The results show that the TV version of Pippi is not only the most well known but also by far the most popular: 58% of the respondents ranked this figure first, against 19% first places for the cartoon, 10% for the musical, 8% for the book, and 6% for the pc game. The children evidently consider the image of Inger Nilsson in the TV film as their prototype for Pippi Longstocking and this particular version can therefore be said to have achieved the highest level of canonicity.

There seems to be a correlation between the TV character's overwhelming popularity and the children's familiarity with it (that is, how well known it is). The more children are acquainted with a certain version, the more they like it. Unknown figures, however, are

discarded as uninteresting. As only one of the respondents did *not* know the TV version, one can conclude that television clearly is the medium through which children first get acquainted with Pippi Longstocking and that the role of intermediality in the canonisation of this character cannot be underestimated.

The fact that television dominates and that books do not come first anymore does not count for Pippi Longstocking alone, but appears to be a general phenomenon in our highly mediatised society. In this respect, Emer O'Sullivan has argued that other media have taken over a book's function of introducing classical characters to their audiences. (O'Sullivan 19-20)

In the case of Pippi Longstocking, the emergence of new media forms seems to have influenced the canonisation of the work in several ways: On the one hand, as the television character apparently has grown more important than the figure from the book, intermediality seems to have influenced the internal hierarchy amongst the different Pippi versions. On the other hand, the remediations make the book available to a larger audience, thus facilitating the distribution and passing on of the work. In allowing for the work to reach an entirely new group of receivers, the different new media versions can be said to act as catalysts in the process of canonisation.

The widespread distribution and immense popularity of Pippi Longstocking as a television figure in Flanders thus enhance the literary character's highly canonized status. In the whole of the Dutch-speaking language area, the introduction of the film and television series in the early 1970s can be said to have had quite a deep impact on the reception of Pippi Longstocking. Reviews from that period establish that the series stirred up attention for the books, and that it may even have caused the publishing house

Ploegsma to publish a new volume collecting the three books on Pippi.<sup>xxiv</sup> Some critics explicitly state that the films have added greatly to the success of the books: “Sinds de NOS elke zondagavond de avonturen van Pippi Langkous uitzendt, is de roem van dit sterkste meisje van de wereld aardig vergroot.” [Ever since NOS [the Dutch national television channel, which was also watched by many Flemish people at that time, svdb] started broadcasting the adventures of Pippi every Sunday night, the fame of this strongest girl in the world has increased significantly.](Krans) Moreover, they believe that the television series allows for Pippi Longstocking to widen her scope,<sup>xxv</sup> and that the TV series actually was the real breakthrough for Pippi Longstocking in Flanders and the Netherlands: “Pippi Langkous werd al in 1952 bij ons uitgebracht, maar het duurde meer dan tien jaar voor het eigenzinnige dametje echt populair werd. Pas dankzij de gelijknamige televisie-serie werd Pippi ook hier een begrip.” [Pippi Longstocking was first published in 1952 already, but it took more than ten years for the self-willed lady to become really popular. Only because of the TV series of the same name did Pippi become a household name.] (*Tijdloosheid*) Consequently, one can conclude that the television series bolstered Astrid Lindgren’s – and in particular Pippi Longstocking’s – popularity in the Dutch-speaking language area. We do not know, however, how the emergence of the films and the television series influenced children’s actual reading.

In connection with the canonisation of the different versions of Pippi, remarks by children in this study’s focus group such as “dull: doesn’t resemble the real one” (cartoon) and “don’t know her: stupid” (book) clearly confirm the assumption that children start with a mental picture of their ‘ideal’ Pippi Longstocking when confronted with other

visualisations of that same character.<sup>xxvi</sup> Here we can clearly see canonisation at work.

The mental picture is used as a benchmark. In this case, it functions as a standard to judge all other depictions of Pippi Longstocking. It is deemed to be the only valid touchstone and the character resembling it the most is thus by far the most canonized. It appears that the respondents are not very fond of unknown figures and that they value the character they know best (i.e. the TV character) the highest. Comments such as “I watch it on television, it is super fun!” (TV film) and “I have this on DVD, it is great” (cartoon) again corroborate the assumption of the earlier mentioned correlation between popularity and familiarity. In this case, unfamiliar definitely does seem to equal unloved.

### 6.2.3. An Additional Remediation of Pippi Longstocking: The Picture Book

Finally, the Flemish pupils were confronted with the original Swedish portrayal of Pippi Longstocking by Ingrid Vang Nyman. This image features on the cover of Ken jij Pippi Langkous? [Do You Know Pippi Longstocking?],<sup>xxvii</sup> the Dutch translation of Känner du Pippi Långstrump?, the picture book on Pippi Longstocking of the same name. This picture book is, however, not as well known as the novels, and the image is far from as widely spread as the drawings by Carl Hollander discussed earlier. Scarcely 40% of the respondents declared that they had already encountered this image, which confirms that it is not very well known. Could the children’s reactions to this character perhaps provide even more proof of the assumption that unfamiliar equals unloved?

Indeed, also in this case, the credo “unfamiliar equals unloved” seems to apply. Remarks such as “she seems to me more stupid than the others” and “she is not as much fun as the other one” back up this assumption. Moreover, the statement “doesn't look like her”

clearly indicates that the child who wrote this has a prototypical image of Pippi Longstocking in his or her mind, which – as shown above – serves as a standard against which all other images are measured and to which all other images are compared.



Fig. 2. Ingrid Vang Nyman's depiction of Pippi Longstocking. Cover illustration of Astrid Lindgren, Känner du Pippi Långstrump? (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 2009).

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, the concept of the literary canon was debated by means of a case study of Astrid Lingren's authorship, in which the importance of intermediality in the process of canonization was highlighted. It was argued that the availability of a certain literary work in different media forms enhances its canonicity, as it makes the work available to a large audience, thus allowing for it to be passed on and remembered.

Pippi Longstocking turned out to be an ideal exemplification of this thesis. Its canonicity was investigated in two different ways. First, the perception of this book in Sweden, the Netherlands and Flanders was scrutinized. The level of canonicity was examined starting from the different instances of intermediality. It turned out to be slightly different in each

of the three regions, and, as a matter of fact, the Flemish stance towards the book proved to be the most progressive. Secondly, the process of canonization was shown at work in the reception of Pippi Longstocking by its present-day audience. A small survey was carried out among a group of 48 Flemish school children in order to find out which version of Pippi is the most canonized, as well as what role intermediality plays in the canonization of Pippi Longstocking.

One can conclude that the prototypical Pippi Longstocking for this group of children is the TV character. Television is the medium through which the majority of the children get to know Pippi. The cartoon character is almost equally well known, and the popularity of these two figures corroborates the importance of TV and DVD in the distribution and hence also canonization of Pippi Longstocking. The fact that some children refer to the television version as “the real one” shows that they think of this version as a standard against which they weigh all other remediations. There is a clear correlation between familiarity and popularity, and overall, the children react therefore fairly negatively to versions which they have not encountered before (for instance Ingrid Vang Nyman’s drawings as featured in the picture book). In other words, we love what we know.

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<sup>i</sup> This definition of a canonical work was formulated during personal communication with prof. dr. Ronald Soetaert (13 May 2008). See also Soetaert *Wat heet klassiek?* 138. In Ronald Soetaert's view, an ideal canonical work can be defined as follows: "een werk dat beschikbaar is en gelezen wordt binnen een cultuurgemeenschap; een werk dat binnen een cultuurgeschiedenis een belangrijke rol speelt, en door

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specialisten als zodanig (h)erkend wordt. De schrijvers verwijzen direct of indirect naar de canonwerken van hun cultuur. Academici en/of critici bestuderen het werk, en maken het ook beschikbaar voor het publiek.” [A work which is available and which is being read within a certain cultural community; a work which plays an important role within a certain cultural history, and which is recognized and acknowledged as such by experts. Authors refer directly or indirectly to the canonical works of their culture. Academics and/or critics study the work, and also make it available for the general public.”] (Soetaert *Wat heet klassiek* 138, svdb)

<sup>ii</sup> See Tucker 184 and Svensson 3: “[M]edieringen kan gjuta nytt liv i den ursprungliga versionen” [Remediation can enliven the original version]. Svensson also points out the dangers which remediation entail: “Men samtidigt som dessa nya kanaler ökat spridningen av barnbokens välsignelser, har de också fört med sig uppenbara risker för överexploatering, förvanskning och rentav utsuddning av ursprunget” [But at the same time as these new channels have increased the distribution of the blessings of children’s books, they also entail obvious risks for overexploitation, distortion and even effacing of the origin”].

<sup>iii</sup> See for instance Bekkering and Parlevliet 29.

<sup>iv</sup> See for instance Bijvoet 177-178. In a pluricentric language situation, one single language has the status of national language in several countries. Typically, one can distinguish one dominant country, which determines the linguistic norms in all of the other subordinate nations.

<sup>v</sup> See for instance Schottenius. Schottenius is convinced that Astrid Lindgren has moulded Swedish culture: “Om någonting kan kallas kultur så är det den Astrid Lindgren har givit oss. ... Vad som än händer, i stort sett, så har det alltid en Astrid Lindgren-referens.” [If anything can be called culture, it is that which Astrid Lindgren gave us. ... Whatever happens, in general, it always has an Astrid Lindgren-reference.] (Schottenius 18-19, svdb)

<sup>vi</sup> Hugo Claus (1929-2008) is one of Flanders’ most famous authors ever. He published novels, poems and plays. Several of his stories and plays were filmed and he won many literary prizes. The Sorrow of Belgium is considered to be his magnum opus. For more information, see <<http://www.clauscentrum.be/>> (8 March 2010).

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<sup>vii</sup> “Het mooiste kinderboek aller tijden” was organized by Stichting Lezen Vlaanderen, as part of “Jeugdboekenweek 2008”(Children’s Book Week 2008). See: <<http://www.hetmooiestekinderboek.be/>> (24 February 2009).

<sup>viii</sup> The top three consisted of Gernonimo Stilton’s Fantasia, Pluk van de Petteflet by Annie M.G. Schmidt and finally Roald Dahl’s Matilda.

<sup>ix</sup> See <<http://www.bartmoeyaert.com/?width=1280&height=770>> (8 March 2010) for more information on Bart Moeyaert’s life and works.

<sup>x</sup> To this day, Pippi Longstocking features on the bestselling list of WPG, Ploegsma’s parent company. It remains among the top 50 of children’s books. See <<http://www.wpgboeken.be/lijsten.asp>> (15 December 2009).

<sup>xi</sup> Nowadays, Villa Kakelbont has been entirely integrated into Stichting Lezen, and the name remains visible only in a monthly news letter and a weblog.

<sup>xii</sup> See also von Zweigbergk 403-405; Lundqvist 15-37; Nix 21; Blume 88-91; Metcalf *Pippi’s American Ancestors* 138.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Lundqvist 239-251 for a report of the so-called “Pippifejd”, the polemic Swedish critics of Pippi Longstocking engaged in in 1946.

<sup>xiv</sup> See Surmatz for an account of the reception of Pippi Longstocking in the German-speaking area.

<sup>xv</sup> See Kvint for a publishing history of Pippi Longstocking in France and Blume for an account of its French reception.

<sup>xvi</sup> See “Pluk is niet te kloppen”. Klasse / Voor leraren 1 February 2003: 38. In this article, the results of an investigation carried out by Canon (Culture Cell at the Department of Education) are summed up. Annie M.G. Schmidt’s Pluk van de Petteflet and Jip and Janneke prove to be the most popular reading material. Pippi Longstocking is the fourth most popular.

<sup>xvii</sup> See for instance Kåreland, *Modig och stark* 136. Kåreland claims that the majority of Swedish children got to know Pippi via another medium than the book: “Pippi är något av en portalfigur i svensk barnlitteratur ... . Alla svenska barn utan undantag vet vem hon är, även om de för det mesta kommit i kontakt med henne inte via böckerna utan via olika medieringar” [Pippi is something of a ‘portal figure’ in

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Swedish children's literature ... . All Swedish children without exception know who she is, even if they for the greater part have encountered her not through the books but through different remediations.] [svdb]

<sup>xviii</sup> Lindgren, Astrid. Pippi Langkous. Amsterdam: Ploegsma, 2009. The three books on Pippi

Longstocking are published in one single volume in Dutch. A new edition of this compilation came out in the summer of 2009.

<sup>xix</sup> Belgium's national channel is divided into a Dutch- and a French-speaking branch, called VRT and RTBF respectively. The Dutch-speaking channels include amongst others a children's channel called Ketnet. Both the TV- and cartoon series on Pippi Longstocking have been broadcast on this channel. Apart from the national channels, Flanders also has a broad range of commercial channels. Nowadays, the series is also broadcast daily on K-Zoom, the children's channel of the leading commercial channel, vtm. At present, neither the TV- nor the cartoon series are broadcast on French-speaking TV.

<sup>xx</sup> This cartoon series is based on the 1997 animated film directed by Michael Schaack and Clive A. Smith.

<sup>xxi</sup> This musical was produced by Theater Familie BV. The same company has even produced Pippi zet de boel op stelten [Pippi raises hell], a new musical project on Pippi Longstocking, which was performed all over Flanders from September 2009 until February 2010. Already in 1998, Pippi appeared in a musical version. An image of the 2005 musical was used for this survey as this was the most recent one at the time of the survey, which was carried out in 2008. The new version had not yet been staged at that point.

<sup>xxii</sup> Pippi Langkous, PC-game on CD-rom.

<sup>xxiii</sup> This case study was carried out on 25 June 2008.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See for instance Krans: "De komst van de tv-serie was voor Ploegsma aanleiding om alle Pippi-verhalen te bundelen in één dik boek[.]" [The emergence of the tv series was a reason for Ploegsma to collect all Pippi stories in one thick book.]

<sup>xxv</sup> See *Pippi Langkous-omnibus*: "In beeld gebracht zijn de avonturen voor een veel groter publiek interessant." [Visualized, the adventures become interesting to a much larger audience.]

<sup>xxvi</sup> In a similar way, Harold Bloom puts Shakespeare at the centre of the canon and uses him as a touchstone. See Bloom 50: "Shakespeare is the canon. He sets the standard and the limits of literature."

<sup>xxvii</sup> Lindgren, Astrid. Ken jij Pippi Langkous? [Do You Know Pippi Longstocking?]. Amsterdam: Rubinstein, 2007.