Pippi and Her Pals

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Abstract: This article explores the fascination of Swedish audiences with the forty-plus films based on Astrid Lindgren's children's books, *Pippi Longstocking* foremost among them. Following Lindgren's death in 2002, will these films continue to play a unifying function in an increasingly multicultural Sweden?

The most powerful girl in the world, Pippi Longstocking, was born in book form in 1945. The imaginary offspring of Astrid Lindgren, Pippi became an instant hit with Swedish girls and boys, beloved for her prodigious strength, fierce independence, kind heart, and unpredictable actions. In what was becoming a highly routinized—if stable—welfare state, many adults too welcomed the irrepressible fun and resolute nonconformity she embodied. In the more than fifty years since her first appearance, Pippi, her monkey, her horse, and her little neighbors, Tommy and Annika, have traveled widely, sailing out from their village near the sea to become friends of children and adults the world over. Today Lindgren's literary works (more than one hundred books, anthologies, and picture books) have been translated into almost sixty languages.

Pippi and her pals first visited me when I was a child in the 1950s. Each Christmas, my maternal grandmother (*mormor*) would send me a new Astrid Lindgren book. There are three about Pippi; the rest showcase other little heroines and heroes. For years, an elementary school teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Dalarna, Sweden, my *mormor* employed Pippi et al. as mischievous missionaries, sending them to the U.S. to teach me Swedish, if not good manners. Having met me, my *mormor* knew that they would appeal to me because they flout the codes of decorum and reserve that children in Swedish families are commonly taught.

The Pippi I grew up with overturned such conventions, in one 1970s made-for-television episode hanging upside down outside a train window to shock the elderly female passenger inside. Of course, contemporary Sweden has changed much from the days of Pippi and my youth: cell-phone chatter now fills the
trains; eight of ten Swedes live in or around Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö; and one in eight Swedes traces her or his ethnic roots to somewhere other than Sweden.  

What intrigues me is that Pippi and other Lindgren characters continue to bridge generational, ethnic, and gender differences, serving as tiny cultural attachés and diminutive ambassadors, through books, as dolls, on videos, via clothes, sheets, [End Page 3] umbrellas, backpacks, and more.  

The books are unquestionably primary, but the forty-plus film versions are also key. Though other characters reappear, "Pippis," with seven films, lead the pack.

More than 90 percent of contemporary Swedish children have seen the Lindgren films, and several of the 1970s and 1980s movies and some of the 1950s and 1960s films still appear on matinee programs. In addition, live-action remakes continue to be made. Most are broadcast on television (some are recut; some were originally made for TV); most are available on video in the smallest of villages.  

Box-office receipts are often impressive: Tage Danielsson's 1984 Ronja Rövardottern (Ronia, the Robber's Daughter), for example, outgrossed every other film shown in Sweden that year.  

Mediating National Pastimes for Swedish Audiences.

Over the years, many of Sweden's most prestigious directors have worked with Lindgren on Pippi films.  

Anointed her chief cinematic translator, Olle Hellbom has made seventeen Lindgren movies. They have been more widely seen than the work of Ingmar Bergman, who reportedly wanted to film Ronia.  

Lasse Hallström's remakes of the two Bullerby ("Noisy Village") movies won both critical and popular acclaim.  

Renowned actors, including Allan Edwall, Lena Nyman, Per Oscarsson, Jarl Kulle, Hans Alfredsson, and Tage Danielsson, appear in supporting parts; hundreds, even thousands, of children vie for the lead roles. Newspapers and magazines from all over Sweden eagerly follow their selection, printing story after story about how Hanna Zetterberg was chosen from among a thousand girls to play Ronia, how Dan Hafström (Birk) was found by accident after five hundred boys had tried out in vain [End Page 4] for the role, how Joana Liljedahl was selected from more than a thousand girls to play Madicken; and how eight thousand girls sought the chance to be
Pippi.

Dead at the age of ninety-four, on January 28, 2002, Astrid Lindgren had already achieved the status of a national monument and cultural treasure. In the days after her death, hundreds of children and adults covered the entrance to her Stockholm apartment building with flowers. For the last quarter of a century, she has been mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature. She mastered several art forms (radio, children's literature, autobiography, theater, screenwriting); she explored several genres (detective fiction, fantasy, romance, sagas, and more). Designated "Swede of the Year" at the age of ninety, she responded with characteristic modesty and good humor: "We've chosen an old person who is deaf and dumb and half blind. . . . People around the world will think all Swedes are like this!"

Bottom line, Margareta Rönnberg is not overstating the case when she writes: "Astrid Lindgren . . . plays a unifying function, for that which unites the Swedish people is not least a love for her and her characters." But of what does this unifying function consist? How has it changed over the years? How do the films and television programs modify the national "pastimes" represented in the books, written in another era?

The Lindgren films, like the books, have been and are important because they revolve around three time periods that are foundational for "modern" (i.e., post-World War II) Swedish society: (1) the small-town and urban welfare state (folkhemmet) of the 1940s to 1970s; (2) the rural, peasant era of the 1880s to the 1920s; and (3) a mythical Viking era. I treat each of these time frames in turn, prefacing my remarks about the films with short historical commentaries. I then note where the films and television programs inscribe attitudes and concerns specific to their times of production and original reception. Since Pippi is Lindgren's most famous character, I accord her most attention.

The first section, "Professing Nuttiness in 1940s and 1970s Sweden," compares the 1949 film directed by Per Gunvall with the three 1970s Hellbom films. I examine how all, though differently, position Pippi as a lovably eccentric girl who is never really "foreign." By comparison, the 1974 fantasy figure, Karlsson on the Roof (Mats Wikström), is more intractable but still friendly and fun.
The second section, "Troubling Paradise in Rural Turn-of-the-Century Sweden," centers on two late 1970s films directed by Göran Graffman. Both portray the adventurous, upper-class Madicken as a budding "pre-" Social Democrat who, unlike Pippi or Karlsson, is generally well behaved. More briefly, I discuss the three 1970s Hellbom films about the impish Emil in Lönneberga (Jan Ohlsson) and the two 1960s Hellbom and two 1980s Hallström films about the Bullerby girls and boys. Variousy nostalgic for the times of grandma and grandpa (or great, or even great-great-grandma and grandpa) and for the security of the 1960s and 1970s welfare state, these films are basically realist.

The third section, "Romancing Stones in Medieval Fields and Forests," concentrates on how Danielsson's Ronia, the Robber's Daughter (1984) showcases freedom and tolerance while "animat[ing] nature into a symbol for Swedishness, [End Page 5] above class boundaries." I survey two films that feature boys engaged in struggles of good versus evil as well: Olle Hellbom's 1977 Bröderna Lejonhjärta (The Lionheart Brothers) and Vladimir Grammatikov's 1987 Mio, min Mio (Mio, My Son). All three films are steeped in fairy tales and myths.

In conclusion, I review how childhood and adulthood have been reconceived in the Lindgren films and Swedish society, anchoring my observations around the 1955 Rasmus original and the 1981 color remake. I explore the consistently favorable responses of children to all the films and particularly to those featuring Pippi and Emil. Finally, I speculate on what the Lindgren film representations of national pastimes may offer audiences growing up in this century's Sweden, weaving my reflections around reactions to the 1997 animated Pippi film and a final live-action girl, Emil's little sister, Ida (Lena Wisborg).

**Professing Nuttiness in 1940s and 1970s Sweden.**

By the 1970s, thanks to the efforts of the Social Democrats together with other political parties, business leaders, unions, and cooperative movements, the economic and cultural gaps that had distinguished the Swedish working class from the bourgeoisie during the 1940s had narrowed. In the 1940s, most households had been relatively spartan; consumer goods were not really widespread until the 1970s. Changing gender roles helped increase purchasing
power: in 1950 only 15 percent of women in Sweden worked outside the home; by 1980, 64 percent did. Racial and ethnic composition altered only in the late 1970s.

To promote a "radical democratic and egalitarian society," in 1975 the Social Democratic state announced that three key tenets would govern future social research and institutional implementation: equality (jämlikhet), freedom of choice (valfrihet), and partnership (samverkan). Designed to recognize individuality while fostering social responsibility, these principles were meant to integrate immigrants and ethnic minorities into mainstream Swedish society and to promote equality between women and men.

Based on Lindgren's three books about Pippi, written in 1945, 1946, and 1948 respectively, the four Swedish live-action Pippi films shape the main character according to the times in which they were made. Rarely shown today—in part because Lindgren protested Per Gunvall's addition of certain scenes, in part because Gunvall so assiduously repeats the racism of the original books—Gunvall's 1949 film stars twenty-six-year-old Viveca Serlachius as Pippi and features Bengt-Åke Bengtsson as her father. The fat, jolly king of a "Negro island," Captain Longstocking is almost, but not quite, as strong as his daughter. In a town where everyone knows everyone else, the residents are particularly intrigued by the king's black servant. In one scene, the servant, wearing a chef's hat, plays an African drum while Pippi's dad, clad in a grass skirt and shell necklace, dances. A policeman tries unsuccessfully to scrape the servant's "color" off with a knife, then comments, "They have GOOD shoe polish in Africa, you can't scrape shoe polish like that off!"

Pippi is not as crass, although she too is fascinated by foreign cultures, often making up stories to explain her own outlandish habits (she walks backwards, sleeps with her feet on the pillow, etc.) as customs learned while traveling in Egypt, India, or Brazil. As in the books, she constantly flouts bourgeois decorum. At a coffee party hosted by Tommy and Annika's mother (Emy Hagman), Pippi talks back to the priggish middle-class female guests who cluck about the need to punish ill-mannered children with spankings or confinement. Undaunted, Pippi helps herself to cake and cookies, drinks her coffee from her saucer, then triggers a slapstick chase. In another sequence, when she goes to school for a visit, Pippi calls the teacher by the informal "du"
at a time when it was customary to distinguish differences in class, rank, and age by levels of address. Pippi then lies down on top of the teacher's desk, one leg flung into the air, casually displaying her garters, mismatched hose, and oversized shoes for all to see.

Overall, though, Serlachius's Pippi adopts middle-class mores more frequently than the Pippi of either the books or subsequent films. In one of several sequences, she buys a grand piano only so she can display it in her living room. In another, four female clients break into song as they surrealistcally appear and disappear in a music store via jump cuts, superimpositions, and dissolves. Usually adventurous, Pippi leaves the premises, saying she does not want to vanish.

Pippi's own house is without film magic: camera movements and angles are minimal, and the editing is traditional. Only outside does Gunvall occasionally use extreme camera angles and pans to convey her rambunctiousness. Per 1940s custom, gender roles are clearly divided: Tommy and Annika's mother, a housewife, is helped by a female servant; Annika (Berit Essler) is a shy, well-behaved little girl. The least likable character, the stodgy music-store owner (Stig Järrel), is a figment of Gunvall's, not Lindgren's, imagination.

Hellbom's 1970s films are more faithful to the books, but then Lindgren wrote all the screenplays. All feature a younger Pippi (Inger Nilsson) who is surrounded with characters who, for the most part, are comic "types." Gone is the racism of the original film. Even the 1970 Pippi Långstrump på de sju haven (released in the U.S. as Pippi Longstocking in the South Seas) avoids the book's references to the "sweet little black children" who stupidly think whites are better. Curiously, however, although the children have left home far behind, flying over oceans and a volcano on a bed held up by balloons, and then by a bicycle transformed into a plane, only light-skinned "Swedes" ever appear in Hellbom's film. The children encounter crocodiles, lions, and snakes but no people of other races; instead, Swedish pirates threaten them with knives, guns, and cannons. Reviewers worried at the time that the excitement of this Pippi film, easily the most action packed of the Hellbom Pippis, might be a tad too much for tots.

Hellbom's two other 1970s Pippi films are tamer. Less exotic, they more easily
avoid mention of racial "others" as well. The 1971 På rymmen med Pippi Långstrump (Pippi on the Run) and the 1973 Här kommer Pippi Långstrump (released in the U.S. as Pippi Longstocking and Pippi Goes on Board) position Pippi as abnormal, even other-worldly. At the end of Pippi on the Run, she even flies off on a broom. In all the Hellbom Pippis, she is somewhat gender-bending. In Pippi Longstocking, her father (Beppe Wolgers) lifts five sailors on a door; Pippi lifts five sailors, the door, her horse and her monkey, Tommy (Pär Sundberg), and Annika (Maria Persson). And at one moment in Pippi in the South Seas, she speaks in a [End Page 7] (dubbed) male voice; she wears oversized male shoes. Tommy and Annika also incarnate more liberal 1970s gender roles. They help Pippi tar a boat and wash the floor, and all three clamber on roofs and hide in Pippi's hollow tree. The relationship between Pippi and Annika has changed noticeably as well. Annika says much more, and Pippi speaks to her directly.

Strong primary colors, omnipresent close-ups, and extreme high angles (used when the children do something outlandish indoors, like hanging from a chandelier) encourage affinity with their world. The voice-over narration by the child actors, frequent use of songs, familiar small-town settings (the films were shot primarily on Gotland, in Visby, and in Röros), recurring gestures, and episodic plots make the stories comprehensible to young children. Threats are carefully prepared and contained; whatever happens, Pippi is in control. The adult male characters, in contrast, are infantilized. In Pippi in the South Seas, for example, Pippi's father cries when he is imprisoned and deprived of food by the enemy pirates; bravely, his daughter rescues him. In the other two films, duos of childish robbers and cops are similarly dependent on Pippi's generosity and forbearance. Only Tommy and Annika's mother [End Page 8] (Öllegård Wellton) seems like a "normal" 1970s adult: understanding, caring, and none too strict. Class differences are not particularly marked.

By comparison, Karlsson on the Roof is less brave or generous than Pippi, and more destructive. The 1958, 1962, and 1968 books describe him as an amiable little man "in his best years"; Hellbom constructs him as part older boy (actor Mats Wikström is a chunky adolescent), part grown-up (an adult male actor speaks Karlsson's lines). Invisible to everyone but the seven-year-old Lillebror (Lars Söderdahl), Karlsson lives in a messy cottage with a turf roof and outdoor toilet on top of Lillebror's apartment building, from which he flies in and out of Lillebror's room and over Stockholm, thanks to a retractable propeller on his
back.

As boy/man/machine, Karlsson is clearly different from everyone else. He is also greedy and unpredictable: he gobbles up meatballs; he devours Lillebror's birthday cake; he blows up Lillebror's steam engine. But Lillebror is glad to take the blame, for he is lonely if loved—per 1970s social changes, both his father and mother work outside the home, and his older brother and sister are busy with high school. Since Lillebror's world is basically such a safe and settled one, however, Karlsson's messes are easily put aright, and eventually everyone in the family comes to know and protect him.

Both Pippi and Karlsson were and are popular because they are fun-loving and feisty; that their rebelliousness is always, ultimately, checked is reassuring. Indeed, though literary and film critics of all decades have labeled Pippi an outsider, occasionally even an anarchist, the 1970s film Pippi might better be characterized as a bohemian, a younger version of the Swedish hippies, who also wore mismatched and patched clothing and lived in equally dusty and disorderly older villas. Like them, Pippi poses no real social threat. She is well liked by most of the characters, and she values her place in small-town life. Roughly the same can be said about Karlsson; especially on film, he looks and acts like an eccentric old man.

As Margareta Strömstedt observes, as welfare-state children, Lillebror, Pippi, Tommy, and Annika all "live out their aggression within a frame of security." Like most Swedish children's films made in the 1970s, moreover, Hellbom's cinematic renditions of "modern" life dodge disagreement and curb criticism; more exceptional amid a decade of boy-centered detective films, Gunvall's 1949 Pippi film foregrounded racial distinction, if in racist ways.

In partial contrast, the predominantly realist films set between the 1880s and 1920s—the bulk of the Lindgren oeuvre—more frequently inscribe class and gender differences. Yet they, too, rarely show poverty. Instead, the movies made in the late 1970s and 1980s—those about Madicken and the Bullerby children, for example—respond to other concerns, proffering nostalgic fantasies to audiences whose welfare-state bubbles were beginning to burst.

Troubling Paradise in Rural Turn-of-the-Century Sweden.
At the turn of the century, the overwhelming majority of Swedes were landless peasants. The working class was quite small; the upper class amounted to 5 percent of the population. Rural households were generally large, with the more well to do encompassing not only other generations but also servants. Everyone, including children, worked; [End Page 9] the two sexes often functioned as separate units. Occasionally, people traveled by horse to the local market or visited nearby relatives on key holidays. Only gradually, at the beginning of the twentieth century and as a result of economic and population pressures, did Swedes begin to move to the cities; many continued onwards to the U.S. Finally, as the cities grew, so did the working class and the bourgeoisie.

The titles of many Lindgren works set during the period—Emil in Lönneberga, The Children of Bullerby, Madicken of Junibacken—recall the importance of place. Both the films and books concentrate on rural life as seen through children's eyes; often they explore children's relationships with servants. Göran Graffman's two films about Madicken, Du är inte klok, Madicken (You're Out of Your Mind, Madicken, 1979) and Madicken på Junibacken (Madicken of Junibacken, 1980), are somewhat atypical in that they revolve around a girl, a composite of Lindgren herself and her best friend. Exceptionally, too, Madicken is middle class, and, like the more modern Pippi, she lives in a town. All the other turn-of-the-century films either feature boys (three by Hellbom about Emil; two, one by Hellbom, about Rasmus) or showcase a mixed group (four, two by Hellbom and two remakes by Hallström about the Bullerby children).

Shot in 1979 (the second originally as six television episodes), as Swedish children's film began to address issues such as sibling rivalry, class conflict, and changing gender roles, Graffman's Madicken films engage with "daily life" somewhat more than do Hellbom's movies. Critics preferred Graffman's work to Hellbom's, praising the former as sober and realistic; the trend toward "authentic," if nostalgic, adaptations continued into the 1980s.

Nevertheless, in Graffman's films as in Hellbom's, rose-colored retrospection generally rules, though a very mid- to late-1970s insistence on collaboration (samförstånd) among the classes undergirds Madicken's interactions with adults.
and other children. Gender roles are marked, as befits the times portrayed and
not the late 1970s: Madicken's mother (Monica Nordqvist) stays home to care
for her attractive children; there's a kindly maid named Alva (Lis Nilheim);
Madicken's father (Björn Granath) owns a newspaper. A "gentleman socialist," he is fond of testing class boundaries. In *You're Out of Your Mind, Madicken*, for example, he encourages Alva to attend a ball given by the mayor's wife. Shunned by the upper-class guests, Alva is miserable until the handsome chimney sweep (Ted Åström) appears to whisk her onto the dance floor. The family loves the town baker and drunken dreamer, Mr. Nilsson (Allan Edwall), too. Typical of Graffman's hands-off style, only the "small, sure, pen strokes" of Edwall's acting create the character as charming but shiftless. \(^24\)

Class differences are, however, quite visible in both films. \(^25\) One episode revolves around Madicken's love for her new sandals, consumer goods her barefoot best friend, Mia (Kerstin Hansson), certainly cannot afford; Mia is too poor even to have a sandwich to eat at lunch. After an initial rivalry, Madicken sticks up for Mia at school. Her relationship with Mr. Nilsson's hard-working son, Abbe (Sebastien Håkansson), is more a little girl's admiration for an attractive older boy who takes her seriously. In one of two subjective sequences in the film, Madicken yields her chance to ride in an airplane to Abbe, and we experience his joy via the camera's loops and [End Page 10] spins. In a second, we share Madicken's own fear and joy when she walks across the school roof.

As in Hellbom's Pippi films, the overarching narratives of both Madicken movies center on a late-1970s framing of the welfare state as familial and familiar. \(^26\) Security and excitement go hand in hand. As the first film opens, Madicken and her little sister (Liv Alsterlund) awake in their airy upstairs bedroom on a bright summer's day; as the movie ends, they climb onto the roof into the snow, elated because a new baby sister is about to arrive, just in time for Christmas. Two of the more "threatening" episodes shot for television (Madicken nearly drowns; Lisabet hitches a sled ride and ends up far from home) were even cut for the theatrical release of the second film.

In contrast, the second of the three Emil films directed by Hellbom at least raises the possibility that Emil's best friend, the servant Alfred (Björn Gustafson), will die if not seen by a doctor. Ever resourceful, though, little Emil drives Albert on a sled through a snowstorm to the town doctor in time.
All three films touch on poverty (in the first, Emil invites the poorhouse inhabitants to feast on his family's Christmas food when his parents leave), but all put Emil's pranks front and center. Significantly, the relationship between Emil and Albert is virtually equal. In the first film, Emil tells Alfred how to conduct his love life; in all three, rhyming responses of "You and I, Alfred," "You and I, Emil," signal the strength of their cross-class bonds. [End Page 11]

Like Lillebror and Madicken, Emil gets into trouble safe in the knowledge that his (extended) family will always support him. Narrated by Lindgren herself and set on a farm, the Emil films place nostalgia for nature everywhere. Spectacular twilight skies form pacific winter backdrops for the house, barn, and out-buildings; bright skies illuminate late-summer crawfish trapping. Critics were appreciative of the bonderomantik that underpins the films; by the third (Emil och Griseknoen [Emil and the Piglet]), however, most had had enough: they praised the piglet above all else. 27

Hellbom's two earlier (1960 and 1961) films about the Bullerby children are, admittedly, less concerned with period realism. The three farming families they chronicle do not even wear turn-of-the-century clothes. Never shown today because they are so poorly preserved, both were shot without synchronous sound. Episodic and repetitive, both are wound around the drama of daily events, often captured in close-up, like the loss of a tooth. The children—three boys and three girls—are frequently grouped, and opposed, by gender. In one episode, narrator Lisa (Lena Wixell) and another girl care for a baby; in another, they go to the village for groceries. Yet the Bullerby girls are not passive. They jump in the hay just like the boys, and they protest that Lasse (Tomas Johansson) should always decide what adventure comes next, just because he is oldest, and a boy.

Hallström's mid-1980s remakes are, like Graffman's Madicken films, both more realistic and more lyrical. Sets and costumes are historically accurate; at the same time, Jens Fischer's cinematography captures, often in lingering long shot, the exquisite light that bathes the countryside in sunny summers. 28 Again girls and boys are grouped by gender; again nature surrounds and prompts their activities. Travel is local (the children travel by sleigh to have dinner at an aunt's house at Christmas, by wagon to see the pastor at Lent) or imaginary. As
Lisa says when she returns home for a mug of hot chocolate after spending a night in the barn pretending to be a tramp, "You don't have to run away so far you can't come back." Reviewers savored the look and feel of both films, though Chaplin critic Margareta Norlin commented that they lacked the drama and comic flair of Hellbom's originals. Nevertheless, she, too, admitted that she and her eight year old were fascinated by "the lost paradise" they portray.

Despite realist foundations, the world the Graffman and Hellbom films in particular tender is thus utopian. Only the three films set at greatest historical remove—Olle Hellbom's Bröderna Lejonhjärta (The Lionheart Brothers, 1977), Tage Danielsson's Ronja Rövardottern (Ronia, the Robber's Daughter, 1984), and Vladimir Grammatikov's Mio, min Mio (Mio, My Son, 1987)—really engage with such issues as loss, loneliness, or death. Not surprisingly, all three feature older children (nine and thirteen; eleven; and nine, respectively). The enormous popularity of the first two testifies to how important a specifically, if mythically, Swedish Middle Ages are to modern Sweden's self-image. Both feature young, attractive Swedes who fight for independence, at home and in "the world," in ultra-romanticized backdrops that showcase ur-Swedish fields and forests. Shot in English with British, Russian, and Swedish actors, then dubbed into Swedish, filmed on location in Scotland, Russia, and Stockholm, Mio, My Son did, and does, less well. [End Page 12]

Romancing Stones in Medieval Fir Forests and Fields.

The promotion of Sweden as "world conscience" post-World War II is anchored in images of the country "not only as a neutral welfare state—above the intrigues of power politics and lumpen self interest—but also as a modern society [where] . . . good sense [and] rationality . . . reign." Moral superiority now replaces territorial imperialism. Until relatively recently, Sweden ruled Finland and Norway, earlier Swedes sailed and marched into Asia, the British isles, continental Europe, and the "New World."

Yet the contemporary emphasis on democracy has roots in democratic traditions dating back to the Middle Ages: quite unusually among European countries, Sweden never had a single group of nobles who held sway for a long period of time. Until the mid-1970s, moreover, it was relatively easy to believe in a common purpose and shared communication. Most immigrants—Finns, Baltic peoples, Central European Jews, Germans, and Wallons—came "from cultural spheres relatively
close to the Swedes." The state religion since the sixteenth century, 
Lutheranism has served as a homogenizing force, as well, though pagan 
superstitions lingered until well into the nineteenth century, displacing fear of 
foreigners onto dark-skinned trolls lurking in forest recesses, behind boulders, 
and inside caves. Such fairy-tale nightmares were simultaneously 
complemented, of course, by beautiful Swedish versions of pan-European 
national romantic visions, witness John Bauer's illustrations for the 1920s 
children's magazine, *Bland Tomtar och Troll (Among Elves and Trollops).*

Similar weaves of fantasy and history pervade the Lindgren films set in the late 
Middle Ages. Two (*The Lionheart Brothers* and *Ronia*) were scripted by 
Lindgren; all are drawn from her books—from 1973, 1984, and 1954, 
respectively. Though modeled on Norse sagas and Viking tales, as usual they 
include contemporary references. Alone among all the Lindgren-based films, 
Hellbom's *The Lionheart Brothers* briefly depicts the miserable living 
conditions of the 1920s working class. An opening story introduces two boys 
and their seamstress mother. The younger boy, Skorpan (Lars Söderdahl), is 
dying of tuberculosis; to comfort him, his older brother, Jonatan (Staffan 
Götestam), tells stories about a beautiful land named Nangijala where everyone 
goes after life on earth. Ironically, Jonatan dies first, rescuing Skorpan from a 
fire; Skorpan follows shortly after, and dissolves and superimpositions signal 
his journey to Nangijala. To his joy, he finds Jonatan waiting, and, for a time, 
the two live happily in a village of thatched-roof cottages surrounded by 
jasmine bushes and cherry trees. But evil—in the shape of a dragon named Katla 
and the tyrant Tengil (George Årlin)—threatens. To help neighboring freedom 
fighters rescue their leader, Orvar (Per Oscarsson), from Tengil's clutches, the 
boys ride through moss-covered landscapes across barren plains reminiscent of 
Bauer's illustrations. Operating with a bigger budget than usual, Hellbom is 
more attentive to visual composition, using period costumes, fanciful sets, and 
camera tricks to translate Lindgren's mythically medieval world. The final 
message, that violence cannot be successfully fought with violence, is more 
ambiguous than that of most sagas. And though the ending is upbeat, it is not 
simply happy: the brothers defeat Tengil and a giant serpent demolishes Katla, 
but her flames paralyze Jonatan. To save him, Skorpan must overcome his fear 
and in turn jump, [End Page 13] his older brother on his back, to yet another 
land. Critics praised the film, often seeking contemporary parallels, reading 
Jonatan as Che and Tengil as Hitler, Stalin, Pinochet, Nixon, and Sadam

http://www.longwood.edu/staff/miskecjn/357pippi.htm
In contrast, virtually all Swedish reviewers found Vladimir Grammatikov's *Mio, My Son* boring. For them, this was "canned Astrid Lindgren," an incoherent jumble of landscapes and cast members, badly dubbed to boot. Add that, like the book, Grammatikov's film has a traditionally happy ending without, as the book does, exploring psychological motivations or dilemmas: despot Kati (Christopher Lee) is soundly defeated by little Prince Mio (Nicholas Pickard) and his friend Jum Jum (Christian Bale), then both boys are reunited with their loving families. Both book and film begin sadly, with orphan Bo Vilhelm Olsson (Pickard) living with an uncaring (Swedish) foster family in 1980s Stockholm. One night he runs away. Special effects show how a beautiful lady in a convenience store offers him a golden apple from which the enormous head of a long-bearded spirit materializes. Bosse climbs onto the beard and—in superimpositions galore—flies off to a mythical land and to his father (Timothy Bottom), the king. Painstakingly, Grammatikov chronicles Mio's adventures, using a plethora of effects: in 1987, with a budget of fifty million crowns, this international coproduction was the most expensive Lindgren film yet made, rivaling the 1997 animated *Pippi* in its universalizing (read: Anglicizing) ambition.

Danielsson's film is, in contrast, resolutely Swedish. All facets of the filming were widely covered in the Swedish press, from the patterning of music on contemporaneous Corsican folk songs, to the fabrication of authentic period costumes with the help of the Historical Museum, to the construction of sets (a few interiors were filmed in Oslo) and the scouting for locations (in Dalsland and Skåne).

The story revolves around the adventures of a courageous young girl, Ronia (Hanna Zetterberg). As Ronia, Zetterberg is the only Lindgren heroine who ages. Opening sequences show her birth and early childhood, but when the main narrative begins, Ronia is eleven. Her favorite saying is "Bring on a little danger!" Perversely and fearlessly, she obeys the dictum of her father, Mattis (Börje Ahlstedt), to "watch out," going to exactly those places he warns her about so that she will have something to "watch out" for. She roams farther afield than all other Lindgren girls save Pippi, and her daring affords Danielsson and crew the chance to display vast forests, towering waterfalls,
rushing rivers, bubbling brooks, murky swamps, spring wildflowers, and winter snows.

Ronia meets Birk (Dan Hafström), son of warring robber baron Borka (Per Oscarsson), jumping back and forth over the chasm dividing the mountaintop on which Mattis and Borka's robber gangs live. Initially afraid, Ronia risks her own life to save Birk when he falls. Their friendship is cemented when he in turn rescues her from being pulled underground by strange siren-like creatures. Later, Ronia and Birk encounter other supernatural beings, including roly-poly trolls, harpies, gray dwarves, and real animals, too. 36

In this case, the gender roles are more characteristic of the 1970s and 1980s than the Middle Ages. Between Ronia and Birk, equality is all; and the two mothers seem more poised and in control than the many boisterous, boyish men. A key [End Page 14] (and for Swedish film almost obligatory) sequence depicts Mattis's childish glee as he gambols naked in the snow with his ready robber cohorts as part of their spring sauna. 37 At times, Ronia seems more mature than her father, yet Lindgren and Danielsson take pains to paint his love for her and his worries about Birk as her boyfriend. The two children are allowed to live alone together one summer; Ronia takes on her mother's roles, nursing, nurturing, and cooking for her "man." Courageously if sadly, she confronts the death of her best friend, wise old Skalle Per (Bald Peter) (Allan Edwall). By the end of the film, both children are so self-sufficient that they even tell their parents they do not want to become robber leaders when they grow up because they do not believe in stealing. What matters to their "modern" parents, of course, is that they are safe and sound and return home periodically. As Birk's mother (Med Reventberg) says, "Kids do what they want these days."

Her statement is indicative. What has in fact changed most in the Lindgren-based films made since the 1940s are the depictions of intergenerational relationships. In conclusion, I focus on how generational representations have shifted in the Lindgren films, then signal some of the ways children have reacted to them. Finally, I suggest why and how they might continue to "play a unifying function" for future generations growing up, and growing old, in Sweden.

Astrid Lindgren's original portrayals of Pippi and her pals stemmed from her convictions that children have a right to self-respect and autonomy yet should be [End Page 15] able to feel they belong to a community. In the context of 1940s debates about childrearing, these were progressive positions, indicative of the welfare state's concern for all Swedes, including children. Today Lindgren's work is more frequently regarded as "safe," middle of the road, even conservative. 38 Most Swedes feel that her books and films are part of a cultural heritage to which all should have easy access. A storm of controversy surrounded The Lionheart Brothers, for example, because theatrical screenings were restricted to children age eleven and older. So many argued that younger children gained access to more troubling and violent works via television and video that a new censorship age of seven was established.

How much times have changed with respect to representations of children and adults is readily manifest in the variations between originals and remakes, prime among them the two films made more than twenty-five years apart about a little orphan named Rasmus. The black-and-white original dates from 1955; the color remake, from 1981. The story takes place in the 1920s and features a young boy who runs away from an orphanage to look for "his" family in the company of a tramp named Paradise Oscar. 39 Both films use village markets, kingly visits, and country weddings as nostalgic period markers, but each depicts the relationship between the young boy and his older male companion differently. The titles alone reveal the extent of the shifts. The first, directed by Rolf Husberg, is called Luftaren och Rasmus (The Tramp and Rasmus); the second, made by Hellbom, is called Rasmus på luffen (Rasmus on the Road). The original takes the two characters to be of equal importance; the second emphasizes the child.

As the original opens, the orphanage where Rasmus (Eskil Dalenius) lives is depicted as a grim place: shadows of bars fall on Rasmus's face as he sleeps. 40 As soon as he runs away, however, things get better, for he meets a kindly and competent tramp. As played by Åke Grönberg, Paradise Oscar is always an adult and from the beginning a father figure. When Rasmus and Oscar take refuge in a run-down cottage abandoned by peasants who have immigrated to America,
Rasmus alone pretends that "here is where the table goes, here is the bed." Oscar merely looks on and nods. Because he takes such good care of Rasmus from the start, when he returns home to his wife at the end of the summer their adoption of Rasmus legitimates a prior relationship.

The second film portrays the tramp (Allan Edwall) and the child (Erik Lindgren) as equals. Like the 1970s Captain Longstocking or 1984 Mattis, Edwall's Oscar often behaves as if he were himself a little boy, acting shame-faced and shy when he returns to his wife, consistently shirking work and responsibility. As critics remarked, it is not at all clear that Oscar wants to be a father, let alone Rasmus's father. Backdrops of summer wildflowers, wooden fences, and waving grasses make life look beautiful; even the orphanage now looks more like a day-care center.

Whereas 1950s critics praised the first film for its "unsentimental portraits" and "realism," 1980s reviewers lauded Hellbom and Edwall for bringing out the "warmth" of Lindgren's story. The differing reactions exemplify shifts in representations and receptions discussed throughout this essay. To recapitulate: from the 1970s onward, few comments were made regarding class distinctions, logically enough, since the films generally avoided such issues. Often, however, charges are leveled that the 1970s and 1980s films were too idyllic. The presence of active girl characters has consistently been recognized and applauded, but many object that the more recent films are too slow, the narratives too episodic, and the acting sometimes wooden. The 1940s and 1950s films, in contrast, were rarely described as dull, in part because most of the first Lindgren works adapted for the screen were detective stories, in part because the adult characters were less silly. At no time have critics commented on the racist portraits in the original 1949 Pippi Longstocking or mentioned the dearth of characters of other racial or ethnic origins.

Children's reactions have, in contrast, consistently been positive, varying primarily by age and to a lesser degree by gender. The 1950s detective films unleashed an epidemic of play, replete with a secret language. In the 1980s, Margareta Rönnberg found many day care-age children pretending to be Pippi and Emil, basing their imitations on the 1970s Hellbom films; my young relatives still do so today. Costumes are, after all, easily in reach—for Pippi,
unmatched stockings, big shoes, red yarn braids; for Emil, a wooden stick for a gun, a cap, and black clogs. Key to the films' cum television episodes' popularity, of course, are their clearly delimited, familiar settings, easily interpreted daily dramas, catchy songs, and tag lines delivered by little heroines and heroes who speak Swedish. In my own mid-1990s interviews with ten older (nine to thirteen) children, everyone told me she or he liked Ronia best because she is "active, funny, and lively"; the adventure-filled Lionheart Brothers was their next favorite. The girls thought Madicken sweet and they loved Pippi, but the nine- and ten-year-old boys could not imagine pretending to be Pippi "because she dresses too bizarrely," and insisted they would never want to be Madicken because she is too "girlish." The two oldest boys, both thirteen, however, remembered hopping and climbing "like Pippi" when they were little. One volunteered that he liked the times when Ronia's father cried "because that's realistic": his parents were on the verge of divorce.

Yet what will the future hold for these (largely blond) Lindgren heroines and heroes? Today's Sweden is, after all, increasingly multicultural; a significant minority of young Swedes are now either second-generation immigrants or were born abroad. In backlash, racist movements are on the rise, leading some to argue that "though the policy of the last half-century has been to advocate tolerance and understanding for people from all ethnic backgrounds," such efforts have been ineffectual. Similarly, though much has changed for women in Sweden since the 1940s, much remains problematic. Women now constitute almost half the labor force and more than half the total population. The now-adult Hanna Zetterberg (Ronia) among them, they make up more than 40 percent of the members of Parliament. Yet women continue to earn less than men do, and few hold visible or influential government posts. Unemployment is, in fact, on a par with what it was in 1930, thanks to what has become a new underclass of women, young people, and foreigners.

If films about Pippi and her pals are to continue to be made and enjoyed, therefore, it will be thanks to a combination of factors. The single most important element will surely remain Lindgren's partisanship of children and her adoption of children's points of view. To a population now clustered in just 3 percent of the [End Page 17] country, nostalgia for wide open spaces and unspoiled nature will undoubtedly also play a role, as will the progressive visions of gendered equality and the more reactionary repressions of class and
ethnic differences these films proffer. Amorphously "pro-Swedish" sentiments are likely to become more important; witness the overwhelmingly negative reaction of critics, if not children, to the 1997 animated Pippi. Reviewers raged against the modernization of Pippi's clothes, her "Pepsodent" smile, the lack of "authentic" settings, and the inclusion of English text on signs, labeling this version—the most expensive Swedish Film production to date—a "scandal" and voicing vehement protests against the "Disney" look and "Euro-pudding" attitudes it conveys.

Thus, though I, too, think that the live-action films are becoming increasingly nostalgic, I predict that Swedes will continue to appreciate Lindgren's sense of humor and her willingness to play with gender, generation, and nation. For me, a final, girl-centered moment in the otherwise boy-dominated *Emil in Lönneberga*, summarizes what is at stake: One warm midsummer afternoon, as Emil's parents' guests arrive for Sunday dinner, Emil kindly hoists his sister, Little Ida, to the top of the family flag pole. Emil sees this as a way to help Little Ida vicariously travel: from way up there surely she can see farther than she's ever been, why all of Småland! The myopic Mrs. Pettrell sees not a little girl in a red dress and white apron, however, but a national scandal. "Oh, my God!" she cries. "They've raised the Danish flag!" [End Page 18]

Wise old Swede that she was, Astrid Lindgren was not above using little girls to play with symbols of national identity—providing, of course, they remained identifiably Scandinavian.

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**Filmography**

Compiled from Margareta Rönnberg's *En lek för ögat (A Game for the Eye)*; Kjell Andersson et al., *Inte bara Emil;Svensk filmografi 1950-1959, 1960-