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Staging a "Children's Classic", Teaching Racism: *Pippi Longstocking* (2005/2019)

Abstract:

In 2019, the Finnish National Ballet company brought on stage the 2005 Royal Swedish Ballet production *Pippi Longstocking*, based on Astrid Lindgren's works for children. This article uses the ballet production as an example of how intertextual contexts complicate choices made in representation, and how canonicity is used to shelter derivative works from criticism. The specific focus is on the compound effect of the choices made by the ballet's creators to include aspects of Lindgren's novels that have been criticised for racism by taking recourse to ballet's own traditions of racist representation. The ballet adaptation draws attention to systemic whiteness in Nordic countries still struggling to acknowledge their histories of colonialism and racism. Simultaneously, the Finnish company's decision to change the choreography in August 2022 reveals how even an art form as intimately linked with European colonialism as ballet needs to change with the times.

A Note on Production History

In December 2019, after I had been interviewed about the use of blackface in ballet for YLE, the National Broadcasting Company of Finland, my colleague Eeva Anttila asked me why I had not addressed the *Pippi Longstocking* ballet currently performed by the Finnish National Ballet company (Kansallisbaletti). I had to confess I had not wanted to see the work, given that the ballet's narrative seemed to evoke racist aspects of the books by Astrid Lindgren. Stuck in isolation in the coronavirus epidemic, however, I sought out performances to watch online. As this production was made available at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet Stage24 service in 2020 and again in 2021 (i.e. *Pippi Longstocking* 2019), I felt it had become imperative to counter its increasing visibility in some fashion.

Even so, I found myself procrastinating in part because of the lockdowns that affected the revenue of all performing arts institutions in 2020–2021. Yes, ballet still receives vast majority of all dance funding in the Nordic countries, and the National Ballet is currently the only large professional dance company in Finland that has dancers on permanent contracts including early retirement pension plans. Even so, this is very little in comparison to how much support is given to dramatic theatre or opera. Does a singular repertory choice merit this much attention, especially given the work is an adaptation from 2005?

As I see it, the import of this revival lies in the *lack* of interest in dance scholarship towards repertory revivals and re-performance of what are considered 'average' works. As Frances Babbage (2018, 9–44) has shown, few theatrical adaptations are seen as in any way 'vanguard' productions, and yet, many of them are immensely popular precisely because they are adaptations of known works from other media. Adaptations also involve many design choices referencing a given medium's established practices of representation: a ballet is primarily a ballet, regardless of whether it is an entirely novel work or an adaptation of a work from another medium, and it references previous ways of creating ballets.

This is not to say ballet does not change. When I first submitted my thoughts to this journal, the *Pippi* production was announced for the autumn season of 2022. During the peer review process, however, a former dancer with the Finnish National Ballet company initiated a

public debate about the work's stereotypes, which led to some changes in the staging and choreography, and I wanted to include these in the discussion below.[1] What action the company will take as regards the legacies of colonialism in its repertory remains to be seen, but the *Pippi* ballet is no longer available in the online service nor staged during the spring 2023 season.

Introducing Pippi through Colonialism

Astrid Lindgren is one of the best-known Nordic authors of children's books, and Pippi Longstocking, the world's strongest little girl, has often been represented as a model feminist heroine. In the 75 years since her first public appearance, Pippi has travelled from the pages of the original three books to stage and screen, toys and merchandising. Through this intermedial migration, she has acquired international fame in seventy languages in over a hundred countries. It is therefore reasonable that the Royal Swedish Ballet (Kungliga Baletten) would also choose to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the first Pippi book in 2005 with an eponymous ballet. In 2019, this *Pippi Longstocking* production was revived by the Finnish National Ballet company as part of their effort to cater to younger audiences. The choreography was by Pär Isberg, with choreographic contribution by Karl Dyall on what were called "street dance" parts in the programme notes (*Peppi Pitkätossu – Pippi Långstrump* 2019). The music was composed by Georg Riedel and Stefan Nilsson, the sets designed by Bo-Ruben Hedwall and costumes by Ann-Mari Anttila. Although no full recording of either work is currently available online, some of the problematic aspects of this production are evident in the short promotional video by the Royal Swedish Ballet on YouTube (see Isberg 2016).

The ballet picks episodes from the three Pippi novels, *Pippi Långstrump* (*Pippi Longstocking*, 1945), *Pippi Långstrump går ombord* (*Pippi Goes on Board,* 1946) and *Pippi Långstrump i Söderhavet* (*Pippi in the South Seas*, 1948). The novels reflect their time of writing in the 1940s, when Sweden's neutrality during the Second World War was turning into the prosperity of the *folkhemmet* ('the people's home') welfare state. Lindgren may have been vehemently anti-fascist and anti-authoritarian (Surmatz 2007, 24–32), but she certainly did not oppose the racist and colonialist discourse of her day. The 1945 novel, *Pippi Longstocking*, begins with a description of Pippi as she tells it to herself: a story of how her mother is an angel and her father was blown off his ship at sea and lost. Pippi is convinced that he is not, in fact, dead like her mother, but has swum to an island where natives have made him king – and here Lindgren's original wording, retracted in recent editions, repeats the n-word several times.

Pippi's story of her family is, from the beginning, linked to colonialist tropes of white superiority. However, this colonialist narrative is not *corroborated* in the first book – rather,

[1] On 8 June 2022, former dancer with the company, Suvi Honkanen (2022), wrote to the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper opinions page on the ballet's racist stereotypes. On 18 August, Eleonora Riihinen (2022) from the same paper contacted Liisamaija Hautsalo and me for interviews on the colonialist legacies of opera and ballet. Soon thereafter, Riihinen learned that the company claimed to be reworking the *Pippi* choreography, that the brownface leotards would be dropped and the segment rechoreographed due to some dancers protesting these elements. Although Honkanen's intervention was the likely cause the company finally listened to the dancers' concerns, in the newspaper piece, I complimented them for doing so but noted the changes were still only the first step in the right direction.

it is merely one of the many, many tall tales Pippi tells. That Pippi's father, Captain Ephraim Longstocking, has, in fact, become the king of a South Sea island is only confirmed at the end of the second book, when he returns to ask her to go with him. At first, Pippi agrees, throwing a farewell party and embarking her father's ship, but seeing how sad this makes her friends, she decides to stay in Sweden. In the third novel, however, Pippi's father sends her a letter, and she invites Tommy and Annika to go with her to her father's kingdom. It is this book that has been criticised most in anti-racist discourses and for a good reason.

Lindgren's depictions of both how Ephraim Longstocking became king and what his subjects are like are decidedly racist – even if, in the Swedish original, these natives are not the 'cannibals' of the English translation. Unlike defenders of Lindgren's language (e.g. Surmatz 2007, 32 onwards) present, the issue is not merely anachronistic language in the use of the n-word: it is the reproduction of a particular power relation of white superiority and the fiction of Sweden as a 'benevolent' country that did not benefit from colonialism. Until the 1990s, however, Sweden's active participation in colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade was swept under the proverbial rug.

Lindgren's (likely unconscious) reliance on pseudoscientific racism is visible not only in the royalty bestowed on these white characters by their white author, but in how the colonised are framed in the introduction of Pippi's character. Upon first meeting the 'good' Swedish children Tommy (who always combs his hair and never bites his nails) and Annika (who is well-behaved, her dress never dirty), Pippi immediately starts spinning stories of all the people she claims she has seen – Egyptians who walk backwards to people in Farthest India who walk on their hands – to explain her odd behaviour. Notably, these tales are so exceedingly strange that anyone, regardless of their age or background, will understand them as lies. Yet, when Pippi is forced to admit to lying, she blames this on spending too much time in the Belgian Congo, where people always lie. From the outset, Lindgren thus has her main character represent both the colonial Other as unreasonable and untrustworthy, and the coloniser's fear of 'going native', becoming too alike the Other – themes familiar from Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), also set in the Congo.

Introducing Pippi in Ballet

Ballet and colonialism were both products of European modernity, and even early court ballets celebrated European colonisation (as with *Le Grand Ballet des étrangers*, 1598) to the extent that it is possible to claim alliance with European colonisers the only constant in the history of the art form. As a dance scholar, I had thus expected a scene in which Ephraim Longstocking and the South Seas would be referenced simply because of the way in which the exotic functions in ballet's 'classical' repertory – works like *La Bayadère* (1877), a work also in the repertory of the Finnish National Ballet and marketed as a package deal with *Pippi Longstocking* in 2019. (See Archive.org 2023 for the advertisement) Yet, I had not expected colonialism to frame the *Pippi* ballet from the outset, almost as if the South Seas was the reason why the creators of the ballet had chosen the Lindgren books for adaptation in the first place.

As noted, Lindgren's introductory scene references colonialism. However, when this scene is reproduced in Isberg's choreography, all of Lindgren's subtlety about Pippi as an unreliable narrator is lost. The Sweden (Villakulla) on stage is deliberately quaint, set in the past instead of Lindgren's presumed present day. From the outset, the ballet also establishes white

heteronormativity in an opening scene where dancers in 1950s attire portray nuclear families: groups of four split into fathers going to work, girls and boys leaving for school, and mothers as housewives gossiping in a circle. With her red braids and mismatched clothing, Pippi arrives unconventionally from the orchestra pit, climbing down from the conductor's podium, stepping between the musicians playing her theme to climb up onto the stage as the housewives mime their deep concern. In this manner, Pippi is introduced as the disruptive element as well as the focus of the story, but her arrival does not connect the auditorium to the stage. Pippi could be made to represent the values of the present in the outdated normativity on stage, but alas, this is not to be. Pippi's first dance ends with her entering Villekulla with her monkey Mr Nilsson and her spotted horse, but what follows draws from extant stereotypical representations in ballet as a genre, reinforcing rather than disrupting the colonialist history of the art form.

After Tommy and Annika enter stage left and dance a duet, Pippi reappears, doing a handstand (at 10:35 in the performance recording). She expresses frustration when the children do not believe her (11:30). Her particular 'thinking' gesture – twisting her braids – is introduced (11:48) before Pippi starts an "Egyptian" dance, moving in profile with arms stiffly raised to imitate paintings in ancient tombs. Mr Nilsson, Pippi's monkey, is at the back of the stage centre, sitting on the porch of Villekulla and playing a horn. A group of white-turbaned men in white shalwars enters with sinuous steps (11:55). They form a line behind Pippi, their arms and legs out, forming a stereotypical 'Hindu Deity' figure. Next, they twirl out into two lines and break out butts first towards the centre in an exaggerated, non-balletic fashion. They continue (13:30) with 'Egyptian' poses: the six male dancers in grey suit jackets and fez hats walk in parallel lines in profile behind Pippi, who teaches Tommy and Annika square forms with their arms and hands whilst the six men of the corps pair off to do angular arabesques à la *La Fille du pharaon* (1862) and *Cléopâtre* (1907/1909) whilst Mr Nilsson again imitates them at the background. The ballet's choreography does not, in any way, contest the accuracy of these Orientalist representations, their confusion of timelines and art forms from India (Hindu deities), ancient Egypt (hieroglyphic figures), and the Ottoman empire (the fez). The male corps performing the Orient does not break out of character or even hint in any way that the representation is not meant as serious illustration of Otherness, a repetition and reinforcement of century-old ballet tropes that have nothing to do with *dances* from the cultures they try to evoke, but rather vaguely recognisable visual signs.

In contrast to written text, ballet is a performing art where each work has always needed to change over time to retain its appeal. New casts, new choreographies, new special effects, or outright reworking of the events have been standard practice in ballet.[2] Uncritically referencing earlier ballet representations in the manner that *Pippi Longstocking* does leaves no space for the spectator to construe these representations as lies, or even as an exaggeration of ballet's old genre conventions as the dancers do not perform the exotic otherness as caricatures of ballet's stereotypes. On the contrary, by reproducing how ballet has choreographed the Other for centuries lends credence to Pippi's tall tales. In a sense, the ballet needs to turn what in the book are obvious lies into apparently neutral descriptions of Pippi's exotic travels in order to justify how ballet as an art form constantly reproduces these lies as truths about non-European Others in works like *La Bayadère*. To do otherwise would be to contest the rest of the repertory.

[2] Perhaps the best-known example of outright revision of a ballet's plotline are the Soviet versions of *Swan Lake*, which change the tragic ending of the nineteenth-century versions into a happy ending seen as suitable for a fairy tale. Sporton 2013, 91, 91n5. *Swan Lake* has seen many adaptations since, notably Matthew Bourne's 1995 queer version that figured in the film *Billy Elliott* (2000) and the musical adapted from the film. See Babbage 2018, esp. 18 for adaptation as the 'afterlife' of a literary work.

To add insult to injury, the antics of Mr Nilsson emphasise the animality of the cultural Other. The monkey is drawn to these gestures of the Other; these are dances a monkey can do. Once the children enter Villekulla, all this is reinforced: Pippi points to a portrait of her father, then throws objects from a sea chest to her companions. Tommy gets a sword and Annika a lei, and Mr Nilsson puts on a grass skirt (16:45) equating the monkey with the native. Throughout, the music is reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, where the theme for the Moor, the stereotypical blackface character, harks back to the theme for the dancing bear. (Järvinen 2020, 81–83) Such echoes only amplify later in the ballet when the children travel to Pippi's father's kingdom in the South Seas.

Critiques of ballet's Eurocentric bias have been a staple of dance scholarship at least since Joann Kealiinohomoku's 1970 article "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance" (reprinted in e.g. Kealiinohomoku 1970/2001). However, vocal criticism of ballet's racist stereotypes and the concrete effects these stereotypes have had on dancers' careers largely postdates the Isberg choreography, and I could find no examples from the Swedish press that discussed the work's racism in 2005.[3] Similarly, in 2019, only the review in the principal Swedish language paper in Finland, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, briefly noted that the various stereotypes of the ballet "feel quite passé" (Djupsjöbacka 2019, my translation), amidst an overwhelmingly positive response from all critics. (E.g. Tossavainen 2019; Koivisto 2019; Gustafsson 2019)

The resounding absence of debate in the Swedish response to Isberg's choreography may explain something of the Finnish National Ballet's decision to revive the work in 2019. In 2004, a year *before* the Isberg ballet was first staged, Swedish papers reported on how the publisher of Lindgren's Pippi books decided to omit the n-word from future editions. (Gindt & Potvin 2020, 18) In another instance, in 2014, the public broadcasting company SVT (Sveriges television), aired a public debate in the wake of their children's programming department cutting the n-word from the re-run of the 1969 Pippi Longstocking television series.[4] In both instances, claims of 'censorship' and 'tampering with the original' were disproportionate and indicative how eliminating one word from the books or seconds of dialogue of the first episode of a television series represented a broader issue with *admitting* that these beloved stories were fundamentally racist. That this debate did not happen with the ballet adaptation shows how transferring a story from one medium to another (transmediality) employs safeguards from *both* mediums – the canonicity of the Pippi character and Lindgren as a 'child of her times' now excuse an art form largely unable to come to terms with its own traditions of representation.[5]

In the twenty-first century, Ephraim Longstocking has become a central figure in Swedish discourses of racism as well as an intertextual reference point in contemporary art seeking to draw attention to Sweden as a coloniser. (Gindt & Potvin 2020, 17–19, 25) That the largest professional, multicultural, state-funded company in Finland chooses to revive a choreography celebrating such a figure in 2019 with no outcry indicates how normative racism still is in the Norden, and how ballet companies continue to uphold the assumption of a white spectator through their use of stereotypical tropes. The ballet manages to be *more*

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[3] After reading reviews in Swedish dailies (e.g. Ångström 2005; Pauli 2005) and the trade paper *Danstidningen* (Sörenson 2005, also published in the daily *Expressen* 13 May 2005), I asked Swedish colleagues working as dance journalists or scholars at the time if they could find any further discussion on the work's racism – to no avail. Since 2010, however, anti-racism has become topical in both ballet reviews (e.g. Angyal 2010; Robb 2014; Culp 2017) and ballet scholarship (e.g. Gottschild 2012; Bourne 2018; Akinleye 2020; Chan 2020).

[4] Trippiic 2015. The comments to the YouTube video reflect the racist attitudes by some of the speakers in the debate.

[5] Cf. Loponen 2019 on transmedial 'inherited racism' in genre fiction.

racist than the 1940s book, its fictional island reflecting both a real history of Swedish colonialism in the Caribbean and that of the very first ballets in Sweden.

Choreographing the South Seas

Unlike the 1969 television series that only focused on the adventures of Pippi and her friends in Sweden, the ballet's second half addresses the third Pippi book. Whereas both the 1970 feature film *Pippi Långstrump på de sju haven* (also given the English title *Pippi in the South Seas*) directed by Staffan Götestam and the 1980 musical based on the film rewrote Ephraim Longstocking as a pirate king, the ballet keeps close to Lindgren's 1948 version. The book begins with introductory chapters where Pippi ousts a man seeking to buy Villekulla and 'helps' Tommy's and Annika's Aunt Laura. After a letter from her father, Pippi invites her friends to travel with her to the South Seas, their voyage marked with adventure and several references to Vikings. Upon arrival, the 'wild' natives literally enthrone the white children and kowtow to them because they think white skin is better than black. Here, Lindgren may have sought to show the Swedish belief in the superiority of white skin as silly, but her overall narrative conforms to colonialist views – much like the people of the Belgian Congo who always lie. Only one of the local children, Momo, has any agency as an individual speaking broken Swedish; another, Moana, is mentioned by name. As Pippi instigates fun and adventure, there is much emphasis on the island as a self-sufficient little paradise where life is easy, but this is contrasted by the sharks in the surrounding waters. After the adults leave on a hunt, Lindgren's narrative effectively transposes the evils of colonialism onto Jim and Buck, two white robbers who arrive on a steamboat with an all-Black crew. The two robbers with English names land on the island to steal the pearls that the children use in their games. Pippi, of course, becomes the white saviour of the island's riches who stops these thieves and sends them away just as the adults return.

Lindgren may have founded Pippi's father on an actual Swedish seaman: Carl Emil Petterson shipwrecked in 1904 near Tabar Island in Papua New Guinea, and by 1907, had married Singdo-Misse, the daughter of a local chief. In 1922, after his wife's death, Petterson returned to his native land to find a new, white wife in the English-Swedish Jessie Louisa Simpson, and became something of a celebrity in the 1930s. (Nyqvist 2018, 265–267) However, as Anette Nyqvist (2018, 269–270) notes, whether Lindgren ever read about Petterson is somewhat irrelevant, as Lindgren's narrative devices "are no exception from the exoticising and romanticising, stereotypical and outright racist descriptions and depictions of the people of, and the life on, the islands in the western Pacific" common in travel literature at the time.

The scenography and choreography of the ballet adaptation do more than just exacerbate Lindgren's colonialist stereotypes. Upon arrival, Pippi, Tommy and Annika encounter 'Polynesian' men in leaf skirts and leotards with 'tattoos' painted on their skin waving vaguely African shields and spears; and women in red grass skirts that recall the one Mr Nilsson donned in the beginning of the ballet. The grass skirt became an epitome of Polynesian dance in the nineteenth century, to the extent that it began to be seen as emblematic of even Polynesian cultures where cloth and other kinds of local materials were used for dances, as in Hawai'i. (See e.g. Hix 2017) Here, however, it rather disturbingly echoes the animal-Other connection.

In 2005 and 2019, all the dancers performing these 'natives' wore light brown face paint to match their leotards – something that twenty-first century revivals of originally brownface

ballets (such as the aforementioned *Bayadère*) very rarely use. (Järvinen 2020, 79) In 2022, these obviously racist aspects were removed, but most of the equally problematic choreography was retained. Repeatedly, the dancers' steps involve motifs from Afrodiasporic dances, such as pumping both arms with wrists in 90° angle, fingers splayed, in a gesture familiar from the Charleston (e.g. 1:08:20). However, the choreography lacks any polyrhythmic articulation whatsoever. Instead, it signifies Blackness with 'jazz hands', a convention popularised by Bob Fosse, where performers raise their hands palms outward and fingers splayed, often vigorously waving either hands, fingers, or both. However, jazz hands emerged from the racist practice of blackface minstrelsy, as seen in the first 'talkie' film *The Jazz Singer* (1927) where the Lithuanian Jewish actor Al Jolson includes it in his truly offensive blackface act. (Grundhauser 2016) The balletic reiteration thus continues the whitewashing of jazz dance, where white practices of minstrelsy have become normative, making its dancers complicit in a history they probably do not know that well. The use of jazz hands culminates at the end of the first group dance of the islanders, when, now in sync again, the dancers turn towards backstage left to greet the king by raising their arms, fingers spread and waving, and then prostrating on the ground (at 1:09:10).

Alas, this is not all. After Pippi greets her father, he leads the men into a balletic imitation of a haka (1:09:50 onwards), treating an indigenous Polynesian dance as mere material separated from its narrative and practical function, particular technique, and appropriate contexts of performance.[6] The king's pirouettes and tours-en-air are followed by the male dancers of the corps in pairs doing grand jétés, entrechats, and similar balletic jumps. The contradiction in movement practices is already jarring when, in the vein of Fokinesque Orientalism, the women begin a swaying dance in the round around the men. This is followed by a group dance that again includes some jazz dance elements during Pippi's pas de deux with her father. As the 'natives' pair off, their steps look like ballet dancers being exceedingly sloppy with their beats and articulations – they lack precisely the precision of jazz dance choreography as utilised in American musicals of the 1940s and 1950s. In another incongruous flip, the scene ends with everyone doing a clapping dance reminiscent of certain Nordic folk dances, the white Europeans in one group, the "natives" in two others, followed by dancers forming four orderly queues as Pippi and her father finish their duet.

Dressed in a sailor costume, Mr Nilsson, with the coconut reminiscent of the Blackamoor of *Petrouchka*, meets with native monkeys (1:13:40). One of the monkeys skateboards on a leaf, another steals Mr Nilsson's suitcase, and then Mr Nilsson is adopted by the tribe. The burglars seen in the first act trying to steal Pippi's gold are now goofy tourist figures, whose presence on the island is not explained any further. (1:17:10) One of them wears the only 'fat belly' costume in the choreography. They take photographs of themselves and the monkeys, then discover a pearl and start to scheme how to get the biggest pearl away from the entering islanders and the three white kids who play games with the pearls. In contrast to the book, however, Pippi simply kicks out the potential robbers and gets the pearl they coveted. Whereas Lindgren makes it clear the treasure belongs to the Koratuttutt islanders, the ballet quite concretely rewards Pippi's white saviour routine, fumbling any potential for criticising colonialism. One might read the ballet scene as exemplifying how only the Europeans are interested in getting treasures – were it not for the fact that the islanders have no agency whatsoever in the scene (or the ballet overall) and the pearls end up in Annika's hands.

[6] Haka has been popularised by the New Zealand national rugby team, the All Blacks, who perform the Ka Mate haka as a challenge to the opposing team. The association of hakas with rugby began with the popularity of the sport amongst the Māori, but its appropriation by the non-indigenous Pakeha and even foreign sports teams has been marked with controversy. See Jackson & Hokowithu 2002. In the 2022 remounting of *Pippi*, the gestures most associated with haka (notably the showing of tongues and slapping of fists) were removed.

Paradoxically, even the unnamed 'native' children in Lindgren's *Pippi in the South Seas* have more agency than any of the 'natives' in the ballet version. The makers of the ballet certainly have had more exposure to Pacific Islander cultures than Lindgren had in the 1940s. They could have turned Momo and Moana into soloist roles, alleviating the homogeneity of the Other. But the adaptation fails to include even the slightly redeeming qualities of Lindgren's colonialist narrative – for example, there is no implication in the ballet that the visit to the South Seas *changes* the Swedish children in any way. On the contrary, when next the 'natives' dance in the ballet, men imitate rowing canoes and women wave their arms and try to move their hips in imitation of Hawai'ian hula. The king and now-princess Pippi are carried in on wicker thrones, and their subsequent duet allows these leading performers to show off their ballet skills.

After Pippi wins their arm-wrestling match, two figures enter from backstage right in spotted costumes. (1:27:45) These figures comprise of two dancers, one on the shoulders of another, but they are reminiscent of the Moko jumbie or stiltwalker characters in Afrodiasporic carnivals. A final confirmation of the natives-as-animals association emerges from their dance: the dark figure is a dancer holding up another in a black monkey mask with long, wavy arms; the yellow figure a white dancer in a black, vaguely African mask, with a tall, cylindrical headdress and a grass skirt. Mr Nilsson in a green suit leads the monkeys in a coconut band whilst two male and one female soloist dance a pas de trois as birds of paradise. In other words, animal roles are given more prominence than any of the 'native' humans. After a final chorus dance, the white children and Mr Nilsson, now with a banana-peel parasol, return home, like the tourists they are. The denouement (1:38:30) shows them arriving back home where snow is falling, greeted by the townspeople.

Of Islands Fictional and Real

Even before its independence from Russia in 1917, Finland, the former Östmark (Eastland) of Sweden, struggled to attest the whiteness and Europeanness of its population. Founded in 1922, the Finnish National Ballet company was one chapter in construing a Europeanist image for Finland, and the company's history and repertory reflects this strong connection to ballet in both Sweden and Russia. (Laakkonen et al. 2021) Watching the adaptation of Lindgren's books in this historical context, one cannot but think of how the fictional island on the South Seas mirrors another, real one, in the Caribbean.

In 1784, Sweden's long-term colonialist interests in the Americas finally bore fruit when king Louis XIV of France agreed to concede to Sweden's Gustav III the small island of Saint-Barthélemy on the Leeward Islands in exchange for trading privileges in Gothenburg (the so-called Franska Tomten). Named after the brother of Christopher Columbus in 1493, Saint-Barthélemy had been Spanish territory until mid-seventeenth century. Like the French, the Swedes used the island for slave trade. Increasing public pressure led to the abolishment of slavery in Swedish colonies in 1847, but as elsewhere in the Americas, abolition meant severe economic downturn in Saint-Barthélemy and many of the island's Black community left to pursue better lives elsewhere. After the colony also lost its free port status, the administrative expenses led to Sweden beginning negotiations of returning the island to France. In 1878, the profits from the sale of Saint-Barthélemy and the nearby Guadeloupe

were placed in a trust from which the current king of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustav, withdrew the last funds in 1983.[7]

Today, Saint-Barthélemy remains one of the French overseas territories, a free port and luxury holiday destination, but as of 2012, it is no longer part of the European Union. The island still capitalises upon the tropes of 'tropical paradise' where rich white people can find solace from their labours – a trope in which the local populations are content in their subservience and dependency due to economic gain, and where white citizens still employ narratives of racial segregation.[8] As with Ephraim Longstocking, artists critical of Sweden's colonialist past have used Saint-Barthélemy to address Sweden's participation in trans-Atlantic slave trade – a trade that also brought to Sweden Gustav Badin, likely the first Black person to list 'ballet master' as one of his professions.[9]

Adolf Ludvig Gustav Fredrik Albert Badin (1747/1750–1822), called Couchi or Couschi by his enslavers, was brought to Sweden from Danish colony of Saint Croix in 1757 and gifted to queen Louise Ulrika, who freed the boy and had him raised with the royal children.[10] Because Louise Ulrika explicitly forbade any punishment of her favourite, he was called Badin, short for 'badinage', or 'trickster'. Like a court jester, he gave members of the court insulting nicknames, and addressed everyone with the informal 'du' instead of their proper titles. Although never formally adopted or fostered by the royal family, Badin was taught several languages as well as religion, arithmetic, manners and etiquette – everything that went into the making of a gentleman – and his Christian names reflected those of his godparents in the royal family. As was proper for gentlemen of the time, he also took to theatre and ballet and performed during the 1769–1771 seasons at Bollhuset, the first theatre in Stockholm. Queen Louise Ulrika had evicted the Swedish troupe from the theatre, installing a French company led by the actress Jeanne Du Londel, and Badin starred in works like *Arlequin sauvage* (1770) that reproduced the noble savage trope. (Heed 2007, 185) Yet, despite being the first Black person in Sweden – and possibly in Europe – to ever officially list 'ballet master' as his profession, Badin is barely mentioned in histories of the art form.

In part, this was because Badin did not choreograph for the stage but for fraternal organisations in which he was a member: Timmermansorden, Svea Orden, and Par Bricole. Like Gustav III, he was also a Freemason – in fact, the Freemasons paid for his burial in 1822 – but he preferred landowner ('bonde') to his other titles.[11] Badin was a well-liked and sociable man, but also discriminated against, and his diaries recall one particularly vicious racist attack from a servant. (Badin 1802, [48–49]) Rumours persisted of his involvement with princess Sophia Albertina, including claims of an illegitimate child – dangerous slander at a time when neither Gustav III nor any of his siblings had a legitimate male heir. As Allan Pred (2004) has discussed, the ways in which Badin has featured in histories of the Gustavian era or as a character in fiction exemplify the imaginary whiteness of Sweden: he is the

[7] Aaltonen & Sivonen 2019, 216 on Guadalupefonden, established in the Treaty of Paris 1814 by Great Britain and France to compensate Sweden for the loss of another Caribbean colony to France. On Nordic colonialisms, see e.g. Palmberg 2009/2020.
[8] Aaltonen & Sivonen 2019, erit. 146–147 are not nearly critical enough of the racism of their informants, but the book is also not academic but rather a collection of materials for a documentary film project.
[9] Eric Magassa's site-specific work *Walking with Shadows* at Franska Tomten during the 2019 Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art evoked both Saint-Barthélemy and Badin and was one of the inspirations for this text. The Biennial also included several other works and events around the theme of Swedish colonialism in preparation for the fourth centennial of the city that coincided with the 2021 Biennial.
[10] Pred 2004 is by far the best book on Badin and the ways in which he has figured in the Swedish discourses of racialisation and otherness both during his lifetime and for centuries since.
[11] It is said that when Gustav III wanted to name him assessor to the high court of justice, Badin originally refused – and when people addressed him by this title, he joked about it.

exception that proves the rule, a darkness in the heart of the royal court. In ballet, Badin exemplifies the selective nature of ballet's histories: who get included as important trailblazers signify who are the presumed patrons of the art form. The slave port of Saint-Barthélemy is the reality that Lindgren's happy Koratuttutt island actively forgets, just as the presence of a formerly enslaved Black ballet master at the very beginning of the art form in Sweden disturbs the nostalgic whiteness of the *Pippi* ballet.

Pippi Goes to (Ballet) School

Pippi Longstocking is marketed as suitable for ages 5 and up, and its selective adaptation of Lindgren's stories speaks to what these children are supposed to learn. A key scene is when, between the colonialism-affirming beginning and the arrival of Pippi's father's ship, Pippi goes to school in town. Pippi 'unruly' corporeality gets associated with the 'street dancing' mentioned in the programme notes while the rest of the appropriately white children in class do ballet (00:47:00–00:48:10). Although it might seem like this only emphasises Pippi's radical difference from her peers, the scene effectively establishes the whiteness and correctness of ballet.

Pippi's 'street dance' in this scene is an exaggerated tap routine. Tap is dance with a complex history of white appropriation of technique divorced from a particular cultural history of slavery and Black self-expression. (E.g. Robinson 2015) Here, it exemplifies a broader issue with so-called 'character dances' – dances that ballet uses to provide 'local colour' to its allegedly neutral 'classical' dances. (Shay 2021; Järvinen 2020, 88) Ballet's systemic whiteness means that it gets to position itself as the sole *universal* dance form. Thus, Pippi's teacher can correct her by demonstrating the fifth position and straightening Pippi's ankle extension *as if* tap was derivative of ballet. The dancer in Pippi's role is a ballet dancer and her tap is a caricature at best, but her performance points to another expectation: because ballet is allegedly universal, all ballet dancers are assumed to have the necessary corporeal techniques for all other dances. A ballet dancer, in other words, is expected to learn any dance in the matter of days whereas a dancer trained in any other dance technique would require years of systematic training to be accepted as doing ballet.[12]

Pippi Longstocking is marketed for ages 5 and up, and it is by no means the sole 'children's classic' with racist characters. *The Nutcracker's* Christian Christmas narrative with its stereotypical Chinese and Arabic dances is practically a repertory staple. (Fisher 2003) Another often cited example is the aforementioned *Petrouchka*, set in a fairground but revolving around the conflict between two puppets – the eponymous white hero and the stupid and violent Blackamoor. (Järvinen 2020) Like other popular racist representations, these kinds of ballets reproduce systemic racism by indoctrinating children under the guise of 'family entertainment'. As Gloria Wekker (2016, 150–152) has analysed, appeals to racist representations as 'harmless fun' deliberately confound white children's presumed 'innocence' in Euro-American culture with the infantilisation of the Other in a stragetic stripping of any agency. If anything, teaching children racism should make the issue *more* serious rather than less so.

[12] In both 2005 and 2019, "street dance" parts were credited to Karl Dyall, but the Finnish National Ballet also hired Akim Bakhtaoui (aka. Alpha Extreme from the group Will Funk for Food) as a guest repetiteur.

Paradoxically, setting the *Pippi* ballet explicitly in the prosperous post-war years of Sweden in the 1950s suits its specific flavour of racism. As elsewhere in Europe, there was no discontinuity between eugenics in the Nordic countries before and after the Second World War – rather, the peak years of eugenics and pseudoscientific racism came *after*, not before, the atrocities of National Socialist Germany became public knowledge. (E.g. Dikötter 1998; Weingart 1999) Positive eugenics underlay the welfare states' promotion of support systems for young families, for example, and emphasis based on physical culture in education. 'Race science' and eugenics justified medical and social interventions on those deemed 'unsuitable' for the national body, and their legacy still affects both medical and social discourses and those of transhumanism and posthumanism.[13] The town of *Pippi* with its physical education ballet school could thus be read as nostalgia for the whiteness of the *folkhemmet*.

Although there is archival evidence of free Black people in Sweden since the eighteenth century, the politics of the *folkhemmet* further enforced representations of the country as homogenously white.[14] Swedish scientists had actively participated in the creation of racial hierarchies from Carl von Linné's eighteenth-century taxonomies to the 'race science' of Anders Retzius in the nineteenth and Herman Lundborg in the twentieth centuries. Even the term 'Nordic' originated as a classification for racial superiority within whiteness as pseudoscientific racism was primarily concerned with hierarchies *within* whiteness rather than the distinction of white from not-white. Even today, it is through the plurality of white races – the gradation of whiteness in the hierarchy where only some white people are white enough – that whiteness itself becomes normative and unmarked.[15]

As late as 1969, Swedish anthropologist Bertil Lundman could publish his racist classification system as science, his work translated into English in 1977. By this time, however, 'ethnicity' had replaced the word 'race' in Nordic discourses about cultural differences and multiculturalism. Paradoxically, when only racists used the word 'race' of human beings,[16] this eroded the possibilities of racialised people to draw attention to systemic whiteness and prevent racism in Nordic societies. Consequentially, racialised citizens have re-appropriated the word 'race' in the twenty-first century to emphasise their shared experiences as distinct from the kind of racism encountered by people who are or can pass for white. (Rastas 2019)

However, since the 1990s, the political culture of tolerance and long history of nationalism defined through whiteness in the Nordic countries have also allowed the ethnonationalist far right's hate speech to go at best unchallenged by more moderate political actors and the media. Simultaneously, increasing media visibility of diverse citizens in less stereotypical roles combined with postcolonialist critiques of Nordic participation in the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and cultural genocide have challenged previously hegemonic assumptions about the history and inhabitants of the Nordic countries. (E.g. Mulinari et al. 2009/2020;

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[13] E.g. Mulinari et al. 2009/2020; Tydén 2010; Wessel 2015; Bashford 2010.

[14] See Rodreguez King-Dorset 2008 on methodological issues with researching Black communities in Europe; Pred 2004 on Gustav Badin and how he has been represented in Swedish culture; also Östlund 2017. Inconsistencies in translation, transliteration, and spelling of names, as well as the multiple meanings of words like 'svart' (black) exacerbate scarcity of archival records in the Norden.

[15] On plurality of white races, Dyer 1997, esp. 11–13; Painter 2010, esp. 220–227 on racism as a particular concern *within* whiteness; Stillwell 2012. However, Richard McMahon (2016, 170) points out that although "a rich palette of strategies offered considerable imaginative freedom to demonstrate one's own group's racial superiority", these identity claims were limited by "cosmopolitan scientific ideologies of universalism, the presence within each nation of transnational race categories like Celts, Teutons and Nordics and the dependence of scientific legitimacy on international scholarly consensus".

[16] Unlike in English, in both Swedish and Finnish, the word for 'race' is the same as that used of animal breeds (Swedish 'ras' or Finnish 'rotu'). This complicates local discourses of racism.

Tamminen 2015) The politics of the *Pippi* ballet thus seem like a throwback to a bygone era. Why, then, draw analytical attention to it?

Adaptation as Indication of Awareness

In the wake of criticism from those in or close to the company, removing the brownface makeup and leotards from the 2022 remounting was the most obvious step for the Finnish National Ballet to take. Yet, it was largely a cosmetic change. As I have outlined, racism permeates the *Pippi* ballet on the level of choreographic and gestural appropriation to a degree that I doubt it can ever be reworked into anything but an edifice to ballet's whiteness. However, the artistic director of the Opera company, Lilli Paasikivi (2023) recently announced that the company is committed to changing its practices of representation and has put together an advisory body to that end. Perhaps this will mean that this particular *Pippi Longstocking* will never appear on stage again, but that is secondary to how the work functions in the broader discourse of adaptation practice.

In modernist art, adaptation has long been set against an (imagined) original work, as a copy or even as simplification. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn (2013) amongst others have pointed out, adaptation is a quality of storytelling practice, indicative of the appeal of transmediality. Consequentially, adaptation calls for media-specific treatment and analysis, but also for understanding referentiality to the already known. In ballet, adaptations of literature were a veritable fashion in the nineteenth century – for example, Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) became *Esmeralda* in 1838 in Turin; in 1844 in London; and in 1886 in St. Petersburg, where it also changed names (to *Dotch Gudule* in the Gorsky version of 1902). This history gets referenced when, in 1965 in Paris, Roland Petit reimagined the ballet with Hugo's original title, or when Pär Isberg created his version of the work, *Ringaren i Notre Dame*, in 2009. (Bührle 2019; Jensen 2009) Like Hugo's hunchback, Pippi Longstocking is known to audiences who have never read the novel – a character known as and through various adaptations. The *Pippi* ballet is thus but one participant in a larger, transmedial fan culture around the character, and as the Swedish debates around the use of the n-word show, this fan culture has rapidly changed even between the 2005 adaptation and the ballet's 2019 revival.

Although Hutcheon and O'Flynn (2013) distinguish telling stories from forms showing stories or allowing audience participation, they do so to emphasise different ways of layering time, representing point of view, or ambiguity. These have allowed me to think of how, in the *Pippi Longstocking* ballet, what is chosen and how reveals something of how ballet as an art form assumes systemic whiteness. For one, the spectators of *Pippi* are supposed to be white people, or at least people for whom the appropriations of Afrodiasporic and Polynesian dances are not immediately repulsive. Which roles are given to dancers of colour also reproduces assumptions about what the 'Sweden' or the 'South Seas' of the Pippi books looked like – and when, exactly. Through its casting, the ballet relies on white nostalgia for precisely the post-war era of prosperity and peace represented in the staging, a *folkhemmet* imagined as white. In 2022, this nostalgia for a presumed-white Norden is focal in the anti-immigration debates, it shows in the ease with which white Ukrainian refugees of 2022 were accepted in countries expressly hostile to refugees from Syria or Afghanistan only months prior.

Pippi Longstocking's manner of adapting Lindgren's text foregrounds ballet's colonialist past and its colonialist forgetting that enable systemic whiteness in the art form. But how ballet stages its normativity should also draw attention to how other practices use corporeal means in reinforcing cultural normativity, especially in practices marketed for children. Children learn from representations, staged or mediated, regardless of whether these productions have considered what kinds of ideas about gender, behaviour, beautiful features or body types they perpetuate. Dance is hardly the only field where scholarship is overdetermined by novelty and innovation, or ballet the sole art form with a canon of predominantly white authors. As long as the vanguard is articulated primarily through references to hegemonic white histories, white philosophers, and new works created in nearly exclusively white institutions, progressive minoritarian performance practices remain the exception that confirms the centrality of this white discourse. (Järvinen 2020, 86–88) Thus, addressing transmediality and referentiality in revivals and repetitions may help transform these fields for new generations of artists and audiences alike.

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