

# Storyteller, Stenographer, and Self-Published Superstar

## How Astrid Lindgren's Multiple Roles in Book Production Created the Lindgren Myth

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Astrid Lindgren holds a unique position within world literature, yet her enigmatic creative process has for many years been hidden in her impenetrable stenographed drafts and manuscripts. Because Lindgren through her employment at publishing house Rabén & Sjögren acted as her own editor and publisher, these drafts contain the entire creative and editorial – and to date inaccessible – process behind her literary works. With the purpose of unmasking Lindgren's creative process as visible in her shorthand drafts and typed up manuscripts, this article applies the perspective of sociological editing (shaped particularly by McGann (1983) and McKenzie (1986) and more recently developed and applied for text genetic purposes by for example van Hulle (2008; 2014) and Gabler (2018)) to early results from The Astrid Lindgren Code. Focal points are 1) the secretarial skill of shorthand as the engine in Lindgren's creative process, and its function in the interplay between the different production roles assumed by Lindgren 2) how the inaccessibility of her manuscripts, as well as the fact that Lindgren as author, editor, and publisher was her own 'collaborator' has contributed to reproducing an image of Lindgren as a solitary literary genius, or with Norwegian writer Alf Prøysen's words, "a solar system of her own".



# STORYTELLER, STENOGRAPHER, AND SELF-PUBLISHED SUPERSTAR: How Astrid Lindgren’s Multiple Roles in Book Production Created the Lindgren Myth

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ABSTRACT

Astrid Lindgren holds a unique position within world literature, yet her enigmatic creative process has for many years been hidden in her impenetrable stenographed drafts and manuscripts. Because Lindgren through her employment at publishing house Rabén & Sjögren acted as her own editor and publisher, these drafts contain the entire creative and editorial – and to date inaccessible – process behind her literary works. With the purpose of unmasking Lindgren’s creative process as visible in her shorthand drafts and typed up manuscripts, this article applies the perspective of sociological editing (shaped particularly by McGann (1983) and McKenzie (1986) and more recently developed and applied for text genetic purposes by for example van Hulle (2008; 2014) and Gabler (2018)) to early results from The Astrid Lindgren Code. Focal points are 1) the secretarial skill of shorthand as the engine in Lindgren’s creative process, and its function in the interplay between the different production roles assumed by Lindgren 2) how the inaccessibility of her manuscripts, as well as the fact that Lindgren as author, editor, and publisher was her own ‘collaborator’ has contributed to reproducing an image of Lindgren as a solitary literary genius, or with Norwegian writer Alf Prøysen’s words, “a solar system of her own”.

Astrid Lindgren occupe une place unique dans la littérature mondiale, et son processus de création énigmatique est dissimulé depuis de nombreuses années derrière ses impénétrables ébauches et manuscrits sténographiés. Puisque Lindgren, en tant qu'employée de la maison d'édition Rabén & Sjögren, était pour ainsi dire sa propre réviseuse et éditrice, ces ébauches contiennent, dans son entièreté, la genèse créative et éditoriale de son œuvre, genèse jusqu'ici inaccessible. Avec pour objectif de révéler le processus de création de Lindgren, qui ne se donne à voir que par les abréviations et symboles présents dans ses ébauches et manuscrits dactylographiés, le présent article applique aux résultats obtenus jusqu'à présent dans le cadre du projet « Code Astrid Lindgren » la perspective de l'édition sociologique, telle que développée par McGann (1983) et McKenzie (1986), et plus récemment utilisée en génétique du texte par van Hulle (2008; 2014) et Gabler (2018), entre autres. D'une part, la compétence en sténographie que possédait Lindgren en tant que secrétaire apparaît comme le moteur de son processus de création et l'interface entre les différentes fonctions de production assumées par l'écrivaine. D'autre part, Lindgren apparaît comme sa propre « collaboratrice », puisqu'à la fois autrice, réviseuse et éditrice, ce qui, conjugué à l'inaccessibilité des manuscrits, a contribué à forger son image de génie littéraire solitaire, elle que l'écrivain norvégien Alf Prøysen qualifiait de « système solaire en soi ».

### Keywords

Astrid Lindgren, stenography, shorthand, publishing studies, genetic criticism, children's literature

### Mots-clés

Astrid Lindgren, sténographie, études d'édition, critique génétique, littérature jeunesse

## The Star Author

The work of one of Sweden's most prominent authors, Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002), has been published, adapted, translated, read, and studied globally from the beginning of her career to the present day. Since her breakthrough in 1945 with the now-classic *Pippi Longstocking*, Lindgren's work has been an essential part of contemporary Scandinavian literary fiction and played a formative role in children's literature in particular. During the latter half of the twentieth century, Lindgren gained an almost unmatched intellectual influence in Sweden's public and political spheres, and she has remained a dominant cultural presence since her death in 2002.

Even within the broader Nordic literary scene Astrid Lindgren holds a unique position. Not only is she one of the most translated Swedish authors of the twentieth century (exceeded only by August Strindberg), but her literary as well as ideological views have come to represent seminal reference points in the international field of children’s literature.<sup>1</sup> Despite this fame and attention, however, Lindgren’s method of writing her books in shorthand, as well as the subsequent production process, where she played a central role as editor and publisher of her own titles, have remained unexplored until recently. This neglect of an essential dimension of the author and her work has left a grey area within Lindgren scholarship that has fuelled the continued mythologizing of her creative process. Such mythologizing has arguably fed the idea in both scholarly and popular readings of Lindgren as an autonomous author and solitary genius, or romantic wise old woman storyteller—an understanding of the author that I refer to here as the “Lindgren myth.”

In this article, I argue that the Lindgren myth is related both to the author’s creative process of writing and editing her work in shorthand and her dual position as star author and one of Sweden’s most influential publishers. In order to trace the foundations and assess the veracity of the Lindgren myth, I apply perspectives from publishing studies, literary sociology, genetic criticism, and authorship and celebrity studies to the various professional roles and personae that Lindgren assumed. In addition, I present some broader conclusions from empirical digital humanities research into her original shorthand drafts and manuscripts, which have long been presumed indecipherable. These papers are held in the Astrid Lindgren Archives, and have in part been transliterated as part of the Astrid Lindgren Code project (2020–2023).<sup>2</sup> Focal points in this essay are Lindgren’s self-presentation through strategic narrative,<sup>3</sup> the author’s influence over the production process behind her books and its consequences for her reception by the general public, the relationship between Lindgren’s poetics and her composition in shorthand, and the character of the intellectual and creative space that she created for herself through that use of shorthand.

## **The Storyteller**

As is the case for many other writers of children’s literature, Lindgren’s most recurrent public epithet in Sweden is “storyteller.” In Swedish this

epithet is often gendered feminine as “sagotant,” which translates literally to “storytelling old woman,” and is therefore associated not only with someone narrating a story, but also with the archetypal wise old woman of the fairy-tale genre. Although Lindgren’s versatility as an author undeniably came across in her public persona, it is in this role of storyteller/*sagotant* that the author has most often been represented publicly, right up to the present day.

In his work *Star Authors* (2000), Joe Moran points to a mid-twentieth-century tendency to transform authors into “media figures,” which co-existed with an academic interest in the “death of the author.”<sup>4</sup> These “media figures” were “dead” in the sense that they lacked specific agency and were to be understood as products supplying the demand of the literary marketplace. According to this model, media figures can be understood as corresponding to predefined roles or personae provided by the literary context, which the authors themselves must negotiate. One approach to these predefined roles or personae is to view them within the framework of master narratives responding to sociocultural preconceptions and norms.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, actors in the literary marketplace have cast Lindgren in the role of the “storyteller”. The recurrent discursive framing of Lindgren as storyteller/*sagotant* represents a trope historically associated with authors of children’s literature which arguably serves to emphasize the naïve, intuitive, and maternal aspects of Lindgren’s public persona, instead of her intellectual, psychological, or political savviness. And yet this projection is also deeply rooted in Lindgren’s own self-conscious performance. The construction of the Lindgren persona of the wise old woman is in this sense collective: the author provides the marketplace with a strategic marketing narrative, and the reception of this narrative creates a feedback loop which is itself often capitalized upon by publishers for marketing purposes. This collective process gives rise to an intricate system in which narratives, stories, and tropes circulate and are recycled and reproduced with differing aims in varying forums, all contributing to the discourse surrounding authors and their work.<sup>6</sup>

In line with the public persona of the storyteller/*sagotant*, Astrid Lindgren’s fiction is widely recognized for its references to an oral tradition of folk tales, ballads, songs, and psalms. The scholarly reception of Lindgren, meanwhile, tends to emphasize the strong intertextual presence of Swedish

lyrical romanticism.<sup>7</sup> Both elements, but the latter in particular, illuminate the storyteller's relationship with the trope in literary studies of the childlike genius of Swedish romanticism. Comparative literature scholar Krzysztof Bak has pointed out that the reception of Lindgren, consistent with the author's own statements, highlights the archetypical, naïve origins of her works, where she is presented as using her fiction to return to a lost childhood paradise—a world of play and imagination, steeped in the historical oral tradition of rural Sweden.<sup>8</sup> Not only is Lindgren's imaginative play in childhood frequently described as the source from which she draws inspiration, but in addition Lindgren tends to portray writing *itself* as a symbolic play, imaginative game, or, in her own words, “make-up” (“påhitt”), further emphasizing the link between creativity and the return to childhood.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in criticism on Lindgren and in Lindgren's own statements, the act of writing is often depicted as a kind of descent into the childlike condition where stories effortlessly come to the author, a state in which she “just fantasizes” or “just writes.”<sup>10</sup>

In Lindgren's fiction, both the leitmotif of imaginative play and the importance of telling and hearing stories are constantly thematized, and integral to the form of the work. Such metafictional approach can serve as a means for authors to comment on their own personae within their literary works. Through interaction, they have the opportunity to problematize, change, undermine, build, boost, or tear down their personae or brands.<sup>11</sup> This is highly applicable to Lindgren, and very visible in the paratexts<sup>12</sup> surrounding her work such as interviews and performances for television and radio, or in photographs and portraits, where she was often cast either in the role of storyteller or as one of her own literary characters. There are thus multiple examples of how Lindgren strategically engaged with her own “media figure,” from frequently reading from her own books in the nationally broadcasted television show *Sagostund med Astrid Lindgren* (“Storytime with Astrid Lindgren”), to appearing as the aged Queen of Doves from *The Brothers Lionheart* in a much circulated photograph,<sup>13</sup> to stepping into the role of the fairy-tale witch Pomperipossa in a much-publicized political debate about the Swedish tax system.<sup>14</sup>

A particular anecdote—in line with the ‘star author’ themes of this article—might highlight Lindgren's tremendous media capital. In 1996, the Russian Academy of Sciences named the asteroid 1978RH after Lindgren, which

resulted in a national headline, by this point typical for Lindgren, in which she was quoted saying that she should from now on be known by the name of “Asteroid Lindgren.”<sup>15</sup> It is, however, in her more directly revealing non-fiction in the form of lectures, pamphlets, essays, and autobiographical work that Lindgren has attempted both to theorize her own position as writer, and to develop a specific poetics relating to the storyteller. In short, this poetics emanates from an *ur*-scene or origin story in the author’s oeuvre in which Lindgren describes her childhood experience of hearing an older girl reading or telling “the story of the giant Bambam and the fairy Viribunda.”<sup>16</sup> On several occasions, Lindgren has portrayed this experience as one which for the listening child lighted an almost miraculous spark of creative imagination, and which subsequently became the starting point of her own career as a writer.<sup>17</sup> In a previous article in Swedish, I have argued that Lindgren’s poetics comes together when the author herself steps into the role of narrator –storyteller– of her own literary fiction, reading directly to a new listener through the audiobook, lighting the same spark in another child.<sup>18</sup>

As discussed above, many of the different but interlinked components that have circulated through the reception of Lindgren can be traced back to the author herself. These include the image of the author as storyteller/*sagotant*, a poetics based in the oral act of reading and listening, and the naïve origins of Lindgren’s fiction, resulting in self-proclaimed intuitive writing, which is associated with the literary practice of the childlike geniuses of Swedish romanticism. In this sense, the strategic narratives communicated by Lindgren through her literary work and public persona have contributed to the formation of the Lindgren myth. The reason that the myth has had such an impact, however, is the combination of the powerful master narratives and archetypes to which the myth alludes and the willingness among Lindgren’s readers, critics, and other supporters to reproduce these narratives. As has been noted by Swedish literature scholar Andreas Hedberg, contemporary non-fiction about Lindgren still struggles with an idealistic and occasionally even compliant approach to Lindgren’s self-presentation through strategic narratives. This approach can be at least partly explained by her strong public persona and ongoing influence on the Swedish literary community.<sup>19</sup>

## The Self-Publisher

Oral tradition and nineteenth-century poetry can easily be traced as influences on Lindgren's work, as the author herself has frequently explained. But Lindgren also had access to the very heart of the production of mid-twentieth-century children's literature in Sweden, as an editor and publisher at Rabén & Sjögren. Lindgren started working part-time at Rabén & Sjögren in 1946, the year after *Pippi Longstocking* was published, and continued to work as an editor and publisher for the next 24 years. As head of the children's literature editorial staff, Lindgren established the publishing house as a hub for contemporary children's literature, not least by strategically using her own career as an engine to promote other writers and books for young people.<sup>20</sup> Whereas Lindgren's editorial influence on her contemporary colleagues is well known, many assume there to be a striking lack of reciprocity; Lindgren's relationships with the authors published by Rabén & Sjögren are frequently depicted as a one-directional, where Lindgren instructed and improved other writers, but did not absorb any influence in return.<sup>21</sup> Former professionals at the publishing house have typically characterized her editing of writer colleagues as "an intellectual game" akin to a completing highly advanced puzzle, where Lindgren "was an expert in picking up dissonance."<sup>22</sup> The fact that Lindgren continued her work with other writers' manuscripts until 1970 might have seemed surprising to her co-workers given the scale of her commercial success as an author in the decades before,<sup>23</sup> but even if Lindgren's well-known work ethic is removed from the equation, the acts of authoring, editing, and publishing should be viewed as part of Lindgren's wider intellectual engagement. In this regard, her many years in publishing supported Lindgren's own development and position as an author, rather than competing with her writing practice. Even if seldom mentioned, it is not a far-fetched conclusion that Lindgren's publishing work enabled her both to navigate the field, develop her marketing skills, and to sharpen her own tools as a writer. Communication with prominent writers at Rabén & Sjögren, such as Swedish modernist children's poet Lennart Hellsing, for example, suggests that Lindgren's work at the publishing house offered a unique space for intellectual debate and deeper conversation about children's literature. And yet, Lindgren herself has repeatedly expressed a notable unwillingness to provide any public information about contemporary influences on her own work—to the extent that these exist.



Though she shares this tendency with many other writers, part of the explanation might be the precariousness of Lindgren's double position as both writer and editor at the company which would have required careful balancing in relation to Rabén & Sjögren's other writers.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps most important for Lindgren, however, her position within Rabén & Sjögren guaranteed her full control of her own publication process. Such a position is comparable to that of other twentieth-century authors who ran their own publishing houses, most famously perhaps Virginia Woolf.<sup>25</sup> In this respect Lindgren can be placed in an existing category of author-publishers, and yet her combined position as both star author and hugely influential editor and publisher of the work of others is nevertheless rather unique within twentieth-century book history.

This aspect of Lindgren's possible motivations for continuing her work at Rabén & Sjögren has not been widely recognized by book historians, possibly because Lindgren's powerful role as a top-level editor and influential publisher was left practically untouched in Lindgren research until the last decade. Although recent important work by Helene Ehriander and Kjell Bohlund highlights Lindgren's work as editor and publisher of other writers, her process of editing and promoting her own books still remains to be studied. Where it is acknowledged, the fact that Lindgren "did all of it herself" has often been seen as further proof of Lindgren's infamous capacity for work, and as inseparable from her enigmatic writing process in general.<sup>26</sup> This is hardly surprising, since Lindgren herself is known to often have acted in a way that blurred the boundaries between the different roles she assumed.<sup>27</sup> Another explanation for the lack of attention paid to Lindgren's work on the production and promotion of her own texts can be found in the fact that she was writing and publishing children's books and not adult fiction. The professional context of children's literature has received limited attention from book historians, which may in turn explain a lack of applied theoretical models for breaking down the production processes and communications circuits for children's and young adult literature.<sup>28</sup>

Though it is well established that Lindgren's method of writing and editing in shorthand excluded both contemporaries and future readers from accessing her unpublished manuscripts, it still seems astounding that

Lindgren's colleagues supposedly saw her books for the first time only when they arrived in boxes from the printer, as employees at Rabén & Sjögren have claimed.<sup>29</sup> When asserting that Lindgren single-handedly produced her own titles, it is important to be clear about exactly which aspects of book production are included and which might be overlooked. It should also be stressed that Lindgren was a prolific author for several decades, and that her production process will have varied across this period.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, from an early stage in her career, Lindgren herself assumed several essential roles and functions within what would normally be a collaborative process, and these patterns remained stable throughout her time at Rabén & Sjögren. She authored and edited her own work, and sent her typescripts directly to the printer, with instructions for typesetting. Lindgren also handpicked the illustrators of her own books, produced her own marketing material, and was for several years her own foreign rights agent, managing overseas contracts.<sup>31</sup>

The concept of the “social text” in the tradition of Jerome McGann and D.F. McKenzie is a fruitful starting point for analysis of any literary fiction as it moves through the professional production process at a publishing house. As both McGann and McKenzie conclude, texts are shaped by many influences besides their original author.<sup>32</sup> The “social text” can thus be explored by a discursive analysis of the multiple agents taking part in transforming a handwritten manuscript into a printed book. Such agents are in Lindgren's case undoubtedly harder to discern than usual, since she herself played so many roles at once, but they do exist and are useful to explore. A prime example is the influential children's librarian Elsa Olenius's role in the “making” of Astrid Lindgren as an author. Olenius (who later also suggested Lindgren for the position as editor at Rabén & Sjögren) brought the first, by another publisher previously refused, manuscript to *Pippi Longstocking* to publication. Through an intricate process, Olenius first proposed revisions for the manuscript and later awarded the revised manuscript first place in Rabén & Sjögren's writing competition for children's literature in 1945.<sup>33</sup>

The material facets of book publishing, not least the commercial ones, naturally also affected the production process of Lindgren's books, perhaps even more than for many other authors, as her catalogue formed the financial backbone of Rabén & Sjögren. Being editor and publisher,

Lindgren was not only aware of these factors, but actively planned her work around them.<sup>34</sup> One example is Lindgren's rewriting of her own chapter books as picture books; another is her version of the famous Swedish poem *Tomten* by Victor Rydberg, aimed at the export market and published in 1960 under Lindgren's name, with illustrations by Harald Wiberg.<sup>35</sup> Further examination of the production process and bibliographic codes of the books Lindgren published would probably shed even more light on the material and sociological context out of which they were produced.<sup>36</sup> The same could be said for continued analysis of Lindgren's collaborations with those in the publishing industry whose tasks she did not perform herself—illustrators, typesetters, printers—as well as her professional relationships, in particular with some of her closer colleagues, such as the editor Marianne Ericsson and Rabén & Sjögren's foreign rights agent (later Lindgren's personal secretary) Kerstin Kvint, both of whom had started out as secretaries at the company, recruited by Lindgren herself.<sup>37</sup> Previous research on the collaboration between Lindgren and photographer Anna Riwkin Brick, with whom Lindgren made a series of photography-based picture books, contributing storyline and copy text, also offers useful insights into the “social” aspects of her texts.<sup>38</sup> However, there is no denying that Lindgren's self-editing/publishing/marketing approach is that of an author with unusual personal influence over the stages of production through which a literary work is generally shaped and altered by many different hands. A valid question in this context might therefore be to what extent “self-published” books by Lindgren should be defined as social texts at all. Might Lindgren's unusual practice even serve as a counterpoint to arguments that cast doubt on the autonomy of the archetypal genius author? I would argue that the rare case of Astrid Lindgren illuminates how significant autonomy over book production in the twentieth-century literary industry required an exceptional position whereby the author was not only a solitary worker but also occupied the related professional roles herself.

Lindgren's position is in this sense extreme and perhaps even unmatched, lending weight to her reputation as an autonomous and independent author, and to an idea of authorship in which the individual writer is the source of value and meaning, the producer and controller of their own self-image.<sup>39</sup> Although this notion of an independent literary and professional genius might be perceived as outdated, a relic of the nineteenth century, it notably reflects some of the practices and attitudes of today's self-publishing

authors. A significant difference, however, is that Lindgren was not truly working for herself, but working as an employee of a major institution. She had the benefit of operating in a highly regarded professional space, which she was also a driving force in developing.

## The Secretary

While both Lindgren's public persona and professional work in publishing have been addressed by scholars and biographers, the actual process by which she composed her stories remains largely obscure. To learn more about this process, close archival analysis—hitherto unperformed—of Lindgren's original drafts is key. These manuscripts are interesting for what they may reveal about the developments of Lindgren's literary works, but also because they provide clues to how the specificity of shorthand as both secretarial practice and medium might have influenced Lindgren's writing.

Lindgren had learned the Melin system of shorthand as part of her professional secretarial training at the Bar-Lock Institute in Stockholm in 1926–27. She wrote her manuscripts in shorthand quite simply because shorthand literacy was integral to the secretarial work that she had done for almost 15 years before beginning at Rabén & Sjögren in 1945. Those early professional years have been touched upon by Lindgren's biographers,<sup>40</sup> and they are also described in further detail in Lindgren's own first published literary fiction. For example, both Lindgren's teenage ambition to become a journalist<sup>41</sup> and an anecdote from an audition for a typewriting job are reflected in her debut novel *Britt-Mari lättar sitt hjärta*. In the *Kati* trilogy (1949–52), Lindgren writes autobiographically tinged descriptions of secretarial life, including depictions of shorthand notetaking and the workplace atmosphere. These books are the closest thing to self-portraits that exist in Lindgren's oeuvre; she portrays the experience of being a young woman with professional ambitions, or a “vierge moderne,” as Andersen, paraphrasing Finnish-Swedish modernist poet Edith Södergran, describes the young Lindgren. This modern, professional woman not only inhabits the office, but also the spheres of literature and art, entertainment, and city life.<sup>42</sup> *Britt-Mari* and *Kati* are ambitious, well-read, and creative: even by the standards of the children's *Kunstlerroman* to which they belong from the perspective of genre.<sup>43</sup>

Although it would be too much to unpack all of the possible literary connotations of “the secretary,” a few important qualities associated with secretarial work relevant to the Lindgren myth and to the author’s poetics should be mentioned here. Particularly notable is Lindgren’s oft-acknowledged efficiency, which can be traced to secretarial skills such as a strong work ethic, pragmatism, and the cognitive ability to process large amounts of information and juggle several ongoing projects at the same time.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the trope of the secretary as an invisible problem solver and silent but powerful operator behind the curtain is one way of understanding Lindgren’s mode of operating professionally. Most importantly however, the qualities of shorthand writing are recurrently present in Lindgren’s own depictions of the writing process, as she has described it both in interviews and in private conversations.

It was partly through such interviews that Lindgren became known for her split workday. In the mornings she was an author, creating and writing in shorthand from her bed: “And quickly it goes, so that I’m nearly ashamed when I hear of others working and trudging with their books. I have this funny feeling that the book is already written when I start writing, I’m only there to be of service for printing it out.”<sup>45</sup> In the afternoons she became an office worker, typing up the already edited notes at the pace of an experienced clerk.<sup>46</sup>

Quotations like the one in the previous paragraph contradict the aforementioned notion of text and self being one, and instead locate the origin of composition as beyond the self and pre-existing in a different space. This is an attitude which, as Finn Fordham notes, is “romantic in its own way,” but also similar to the Surrealist or Yeatsian pursuit of automatic writing.<sup>47</sup> Additional parallels can be drawn to a poetics repeatedly expressed by Margaret Atwood in her concept of the author’s “descent” into otherworldly realms where she retrieves her raw literary material.<sup>48</sup> I find that the many statements made by Lindgren on her own writing process can largely be sorted into two categories, corresponding to German scholarly editor Siegfried Scheibe’s notions of “*papierarbeiter*” and “*kopfarbeiter*”: the “paperworker” typically revises her text in many stages, while what the “headworker” writes down remains unaltered from what appears in their head.<sup>49</sup> They might also be viewed through the lens of the more common division between “the genius” and “the carpenter.” The genius or

“headworker” idealizes the moment of creation, depicts inspiration as a gift from above, and portrays the practice of writing—or, in Lindgren’s case, shorthand—as a means of catching or receiving it. The carpenter or “paperworker” revises extensively, and writing in shorthand provides the possibility of capturing thoughts in flight. Lindgren described the process thus:

I write the whole book in enormous frenzy in shorthand, which means that I can write as fast as I think. I can rewrite five sentences ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen times, throw away the pages and write again. I continue until the book is ready, worked-through and finished in the notepad. After that, I type it up and make no more alterations.<sup>50</sup>

Though apparently contradictory, the two categories tell us something about how Lindgren alternated between writerly and editorial roles in her practice. The storyteller and the secretary come together in a joint act of writing, which includes both speaking and listening. Lindgren has recalled, “I didn’t have clue when I started writing. It was as if someone dictated the plot to me.”<sup>51</sup> This quotation points toward an imagined division of the creative self into one who tells the story and another who jots it down—a division that invokes both a process where literature is mediated from a mystical realm outside the self, and a hierarchic work arrangement between a secretary and her superior. A comparison might be made with other writers who collaborated with a stenographer writing in shorthand—often a wife. Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Anna Dostoyevskaya, for example, are known to have developed a shorthand-based model of creative activity together, where he dictated, she took notes and wrote them out, he corrected, and she finally wrote out the final versions in full handwritten prose. Stenography allowed them to move quickly in the initial writing process, and to follow the author’s train of thought more precisely, as Irina Andrianova has argued.<sup>52</sup> Lindgren, though she in her statements on the act of writing most often identifies as merely the secretary, in fact represents both parts of this dyad. Lindgren was both the author (or genius) who gives dictation and the stenographer (or carpenter) who processes and refines the text until it has found its audial form. This form is achieved by repeatedly rewriting and reading the text aloud, with every alteration searching for its true

resonance.<sup>53</sup> “It had to have exactly the ring to it I wanted,” as Lindgren is quoted as saying in a German interview.<sup>54</sup>

## The Secrets of Shorthand

In the digital age, it is perhaps to be expected that analogue techniques of the twentieth century such as stenography are viewed as old-fashioned and somewhat mysterious processes that might conceivably be beyond the reach of most people. We can still ask, however, why Lindgren’s stenography in particular has been so heavily mythologized, and for what reason her manuscripts were declared to be undecipherable for decades, even after they were made available to the public. Although shorthand during the latter half of the twentieth century came to be replaced by what many believed were more efficient methods, such as tape recording, knowledge of the Melin system was, and to some extent still is, widespread among secretaries, journalists, and clerical staff in Sweden. And shorthand as a writing method is not unprecedented in world literature; Charles Dickens, Fernando Pessoa, and Erich Kästner are just a few notable examples of authors who are known to have used shorthand as part of their writing process.

The nature of stenography obviously has some part to play. A benefit of shorthand –where the stenographer generally develops a personal style and an individual bank of abbreviations and innovations– has always been that it allows the notetaker some privacy from the uninitiated. A significant exception to Lindgren’s adherence to shorthand are her *War Diaries 1939–45* (published in 2015), based on notebooks written in longhand and unique within her archival record. These longhand notes suggest that Lindgren was happy to use longhand when communicating directly with future readers. The occasional shorthand notes that do appear in these notebooks can consequently be taken to contain private information that the author wanted to keep to herself.

There are, however, additional factors that explain why Lindgren’s manuscripts have been characterized as inaccessible. The first is found in the larger framework of Lindgren’s self-presentation, where the author’s own depictions of shorthand play an important part. The most notable example of this is in the metafictional picture book *Assar Bubbla* (1986) (the full title, with subtitle, is *Assar Bubbla, or how there very nearly never was a book*

about *Pippi Longstocking*), which to some extent can be compared to the famous scene in Dickens's *David Copperfield* where the protagonist teaches himself shorthand. The plot of *Assar Bubbla* concerns a stolen shorthand notepad containing drafts of the first book about Pippi Longstocking. Master thief Assar Bubbla tries, but fails, to learn shorthand, and when he wants to decipher the notepad he has stolen, he famously misreads the phrase "Pippi Longstocking was the strongest girl in the world" as "Boiled pork tastes best with lingonberry jam."<sup>55</sup> Assar Bubbla's inability to read Lindgren's shorthand seems to some extent to have been a kind of prophecy for any literary scholar who in Vivi Edström's words is "snoopy" enough to look into Lindgren's manuscripts.<sup>56</sup> Even if Edström's characterization is intentionally lighthearted, it offers a clue as to how information originally provided as part of an author's literary work or strategic narratives can produce a trickle-down effect in their critical reception. This effect, as I have suggested, also appears in semi-academic and academic contexts, where elements of strategic storytelling about Lindgren are recycled in scholarly accounts without further critical reflection on the original purposes of such narratives.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Lindgren's celebrity and exposure in the media, as well as her forthcoming approach to providing the press with material, have arguably generated a particular concern for the integrity of her private life among some of those who knew and worked with her closely, including several of her biographers and critical interpreters. Her shorthand notepads thus took on a position as a last bastion of privacy, and even those who might have had access to them have been hesitant to explore them and share their content publicly.

Another major reason for the perceived inaccessibility of the shorthand manuscripts is the nature of the notepads themselves. Most of the approximately 670 preserved notepads are kept in the Astrid Lindgren Archives at Sweden's National Library.<sup>58</sup> The notepads contain Lindgren's unsorted production from the 1940s to the 1990s, including private notes and letters, which are restricted from public access for reasons of personal integrity by her estate. The unpredictable mix of (possibly sensitive) content in each individual notepad, as well as their delicacy as paper artefacts, has meant that they have had to be protected from widespread use. Interestingly, even the "map" to Lindgren's original manuscripts—that is, the public inventory of the notepads' content compiled by former parliamentary secretary Britt Almström—is relatively unknown and has so



far generated no real interest among Lindgren scholars. This is somewhat surprising, as this inventory provides plenty of information about Lindgren's work, and the fact that such an inventory was made and has been available to the public since 2011 also clearly contradicts a popular assumption that Lindgren's shorthand notepads are off limits. Lindgren's *perceived* inaccessibility has on a more practical level then been reinforced by a combination of moral hesitation relating to Lindgren's privacy, archival restrictions, the difficulty of dealing with time-consuming material, and the fact that other items, in particular Lindgren's vast correspondence, in the relatively and unexplored archive have attracted more interest from researchers.

### **The Stenographed Manuscripts**

Despite the apparent inaccessibility, ongoing research has shown that Lindgren's stenography is possible to read and transliterate for someone with knowledge of Melin shorthand. Doing so successfully, though, depends on the interpreter's experience and their access to a version of the text in longhand or print.<sup>59</sup> This means that Lindgren's shorthand today represents a different challenge than the one implied by Hugo Bowles's suggestive description of Charles Dickens's cryptic shorthand notes, which "sit like voiceless ravens in libraries around the world waiting to reveal their hidden contents."<sup>60</sup> Although most of Lindgren's notepads still remain to be transliterated, early results provide a general idea of how Lindgren applied Melin stenography for her own purposes. In terms of how shorthand influenced the writing process, previous research on Dickens can light the way forward. Although Dickens and Lindgren made use of different stenographic systems and the shorthand material preserved by Dickens is sparse compared to Lindgren (consisting of only ten known documents), the two writers seem to have used stenography in the same spirit.<sup>61</sup> As recognized by Bowles, there is in "the stenographic mind" a strong link between shorthand, vocalization, and—I would add—performance.<sup>62</sup> This is particularly true for users of the Melin system of shorthand, which, based partially on the German Gabelsberger system, works according to the frequency of particular sounds in the Swedish language, and uses phonetic symbols to represent vowels, consonants, and consonant combinations, as well as a wide range of abbreviations and suffixes. Stenographers using Melin will deconstruct what they hear, reconstruct it as a sequence of

phonetic symbols and short forms, and finally translate their shorthand notes into typed up longhand. Reflecting on Dickens's possible process, Bowles suggests,

Whether Dickens's vocalization took place internally or externally, his mind would become an echo chamber in which he listened to the sounds of words he was pronouncing himself, entirely self-made and entirely self-directed. It was a dialogue with himself, a continuous, repetitive orchestration of possible words rehearsed through the sound of his own voice.

Bowles also notes that although vocalization normally happens once a text has already been created, "Dickens's voice was actually creating the longhand text."<sup>63</sup>

This stenographic practice, as Bowles imagines it, emphasizing the importance of shorthand as an oral instrument, is also reflected in the rewritten sentences in Lindgren's notebooks, the passages where the author was clearly working to create particular rhythms in her prose.<sup>64</sup> As noted earlier, Lindgren herself has spoken of listening to the text to find its true resonance. The key elements that Bowles identifies in Dickens's stenographic practice—vocal mimicry, naturally produced sounds, and phonetic spelling—were also important in Lindgren's writing process and for the effect she wanted to create: she is well-known for drawing on oral elements and tradition, for example in her use of children's vocabulary and spelling, dialect, jokes, and folk songs.<sup>65</sup> The oral aspects of Lindgren's writing are also in line with the interartistic aesthetics which was a characteristic of Swedish 1940s modernism.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, we might describe at least one dimension of Lindgren's work, perfectly in line with her poetics described above, as "born audio." This may help to explain Lindgren's historically leading position in the audio book market and the transmediality of her work in general.<sup>67</sup> A closer look at the shorthand notepads that have been transliterated so far in the Astrid Lindgren Code project however also suggests that Lindgren's use of the Melin system contains for shorthand untypical intrusions of longhand. For example, Lindgren practices Melin's colloquial spelling selectively rather than as a general technique for speeding up the writing – a stylistic distinction she had need for, and which a consistent colloquial spelling might have obscured in

the subsequent phase of typing up. For similar reasons, possibly also related to rhythm of prose, Lindgren often “spells out” the phonemes of her shorthand rather than abbreviating them or relying on short forms. Notably, the notepads also so far display few individual stenographic short forms or innovations, not even for Lindgren’s most recurrent ‘personal’ vocabulary such as character names.<sup>68</sup>

The notepads also indicate that Lindgren employed multiple strategies of revision. Sometimes they point to editing as an integral part of the writing process, where she rewrote as she went along, but occasionally it is clearly a separate stage, where Lindgren has returned to the text, often using a different coloured pen, to make deletions, alterations, and additions. The notepads explored so far display crossed out, edited, revised, and unfinished versions of well-known chapters as well as the traces of torn out pages which content remains unknown. In *The Work of Revision* (2013), Hannah Sullivan argues for a particular connection between the print culture of modernism and the value attributed to the practice of revision. The revision culture of the modernist writers is contrasted by Sullivan with “[t]he romantic creed of antirevisionism, premised on a belief in inspiration, spontaneity, and organic form.”<sup>69</sup> Does the large preserved corpus of revised shorthand manuscripts then reveal the modernist Lindgren, rather than the automaton storyteller/*sagotant*?<sup>70</sup> In fact, as Paula Henrikson has acknowledged, revisionism as an aesthetic philosophy among modernists has a clear pathway back to romanticism.<sup>71</sup> Correspondingly (and, one might add, similar to how many authors would probably describe their work), the transliterated notepads seem to confirm both “head work” and “paper work,” both the even and chronological flow of a childlike (romantic) genius “just writing,” and a (modernist) carpenter’s linguistic refinement and remodeling of specific scenes and central events through revision. One way of seeing how the two modes, romantic and modernist, operate together in Lindgren’s process, however, is to look at the importance of play in her work. The intuitive composition, the elements of verbal storytelling, the intellectual games of revision, and the private language are all part of Lindgren’s aesthetic attitude, romantic and modern alike.<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion: A Star with Her Own Solar System

In her groundbreaking study of the representation of female writers in introductory works of Swedish literary history from the twentieth century, Anna Williams found that women writers are often depicted as working outside of tradition. Those who write in literary genres that have traditionally been the domain of women authors, such as children's literature and popular fiction, are given proportionally little attention, whereas those who write outside of tradition are portrayed in more depth and often acknowledged for their peculiarity, cast as singular "stars without constellations."<sup>73</sup>

Williams's striking metaphor can be read in contrast to the Norwegian author, singer-songwriter, and radio and TV personality Alf Prøysen's observation that Lindgren constituted her own "solar system."<sup>74</sup> Similar imagery appears in Lennart Hellsing's poem *Astrid*, where he compares Lindgren to a sun of children's literature, beaming across the borders of the Earth:

Astrid Astrid  
Everywhere  
everywhere in *der Welt!*  
Across all earthly borders  
you shimmer like a fairy tale sun to which  
the rest of us nicely bow!

Silvery fish  
you have hauled  
from the murky depths of fantasy  
Stories that roll from the lips  
But the greatest tale of all of them  
is the story of yourself.<sup>75</sup>

With its allusions to Lindgren as a "story", her commercial "silvery" successes (not least in Germany), and her humble influence to which others "nicely bow", Hellsing's ambiguous poem can be read as a slightly scornful irony over the Lindgren myth. The references to Lindgren as a "sun" and "solar system", however, imply a different level of power and international significance. Though Lindgren wrote and worked in form of literature that

Swedish literary historians have paid less attention to, her major literary import was –as demonstrated by Hellsing and Prøysen– still recognized not only by the public but also by the contemporary literary community during her lifetime. The discourse around Lindgren managed to refer to Swedish literary tradition, national and international renown, and the avant-garde without any apparent contradiction. It is clear, however, that her great achievements as a publishing professional, although widely acknowledged by contemporary writers and colleagues, have been overshadowed by her even greater achievements as an author.<sup>76</sup> This is not surprising, as the trope of the star publisher is generally subjugated to the trope of the star author in the cases where these appear in the same marketing stories.<sup>77</sup> Still, this dynamic between Lindgren’s two professional selves has naturally had an impact both on her general reception and on the portrayal of her work in literary studies, and has thereby propagated the Lindgren myth.

In this article, I have demonstrated that the two facets of Lindgren’s professional life were intertwined, and I have explored what this broader perspective contributes to our understanding of the author and of her reception. This discussion nuances but does not dispel the Lindgren myth. Several elements of Lindgren’s public persona serve to emphasize the naïve, intuitive, timeless, autonomous self as the source of art, and in this respect support the common notion of Lindgren as both storyteller and romantic, childlike genius. And whereas a closer examination of the material and sociological aspects of the book production process might normally counterbalance such a view, the perception of Lindgren’s autonomy as an artist is in fact supported by the author’s editorial work on her own books at Rabén & Sjögren. This is also true of Lindgren’s influential position within children’s literature, from which she edited and promoted her colleagues and was viewed as a central figure by other authors. The supposed inaccessibility of her own original manuscripts is merely the icing on the cake of this reading of Lindgren’s practice as solitary and mysterious, where time has only added to the mystery of her method as stenography has become increasingly obsolete. All of these factors combined have created an almost impenetrable barrier which Lindgren’s critics and readers have struggled to reach beyond.

The construction of the Lindgren myth can thus be understood as a prime example of how predefined master narratives might guide the discourse

around authors and literary fiction, favouring the relatable, familiar and “good story” over an often more complex reality. That said, it is equally possible to argue that the recurrent tropes that have guided Lindgren’s general reception actually find strong support in in the author’s work and working method. She consciously embodied the character of the storyteller/*sagotant* both publicly and in her writing, was to a high degree an autonomous writer, and demonstrably wrote and edited her work in an idiosyncratic language that she had developed herself: a practice that for her seems to have offered a private creative space, but that also signifies the deep connection between writing, orality, vocalization, and performance. Although this connection is in many ways in line with the poetics of the intuitive storyteller/*sagotant* figure, it also corresponds with the form-conscious, modernist auteur, revising her manuscripts to perfection. In support of this dual impression, the shorthand notepads that have been transliterated so far go some way to reinforcing the author’s own descriptions of her creative process as chronological and intuitive, but also marked by continuous revision as she searched for the true resonance or proper sound of the language. However, the evidence in Lindgren’s original manuscripts of both “head worker” and “paper worker” also suggest that such identities might in themselves be popular tropes that get attached to particular authors and their work. As other scholars have stressed, the paper worker and the head worker live together on a spectrum.<sup>78</sup> Here, they might also be understood as concepts that help illuminate the different aspects of Lindgren’s multifaceted creative and professional selves.

Focusing on Lindgren’s roles as editor, publisher, and secretary also indisputably provides some grounded nuance to the more stylized preconceptions of the author as discussed above. With her various professional identities came technical skillsets and experiences which can contextualize not only Lindgren’s use of shorthand but also her efficiency, high productivity, and management skills. Her own paratextual statements, along with the autobiographically coloured stenographers, typists, and secretaries who appear as characters in Lindgren’s early literary work, indicate that her identity as a stenographer was an important part of the author’s self-image. It should be stressed, however, that while Lindgren’s shorthand was a practical tool based in her professional training, it was also an artistic choice with various aesthetic implications. I argue that the author’s work in shorthand should be considered as a modernist,

intermedial technique closely connected with her own understanding of her literary self, and which conditioned, provoked, and permeated her creativity. By reflecting so much of the author, from secretarial and editorial skill to the oral dimensions of her poetics, Lindgren's original manuscripts in shorthand can also indeed, in Tzvetan Todorov's words, be said to tell the story of their own creation through the fabric of their events.<sup>79</sup> In this respect, understanding Lindgren's shorthand practice is essential to understanding Lindgren as an artist.<sup>80</sup>

As I have suggested, romantic Lindgren returning to childhood play and modernist Lindgren playing with literature are not opposites. And equally important for a deeper understanding of the author are the other roles that she played. Here, I have discussed Lindgren's position as a highly independent female author-publisher in terms of its rareness, whilst also demonstrating how the multiple professional roles she assumed are precisely what allowed her to develop "her own solar system" in children's literature. Through these different roles Lindgren seems able to have obtained an unusually favourable situation for a woman writer of her period. Her own books granted her financial independence, and through her professional experience and position at Rabén & Sjögren she acquired a high level of both influence and professional autonomy. Her secretarial shorthand skills, meanwhile, were fundamental to her poetics, even as they provided her with a key to a private intellectual and creative space. In this regard, Lindgren's stenography constitutes her unique version of a "room of one's own."

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Andreas Hedberg, *Svenske litteraturs spridning i världen* (Stockholm: Svenska förläggareföreningen, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> The main purpose of the ongoing research project, The Astrid Lindgren Code (2020–2023), is the decoding of Lindgren’s original shorthand manuscripts through the application of digital methods such as handwritten text recognition (HTR) and crowdsourcing. HTR approaches to the material are discussed in Raphaela Heil, Malin Nauwerck, and Anders Hast, “Shorthand Secrets: Deciphering Astrid Lindgren’s Stenographed Drafts with HTR Methods,” (*Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> Italian Research Conference on Digital Libraries (IRCDL)*), Padoa 2021 and Raphaela Heil, Ekta Vats, and Anders Hast, “Paired Image to Image Translation for Strikethrough Removals from Handwritten Words.” In: *Document Analysis Systems. (DAS) 2022. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol. 13237. Springer, Cham, 2022. As for crowdsourcing, volunteers have so far transliterated approximately 60 of Lindgren’s 670 preserved notepads. The method is further explained in Karolina Andersdotter and Malin Nauwerck, “Secretaries at Work: Accessing Astrid Lindgren’s Stenographed Manuscripts through Expert Crowdsourcing,” (*Proceedings of Digital Humanities in the Nordic and Baltic Countries (DHNB)*), Uppsala, 2022 (forthcoming August 2022). The notepads that have been transliterated so far mainly contain drafts to *The Brothers Lionheart* (1973), though they also hold other works by Lindgren, such as songs, speeches, letters, and private notes. A more comprehensive literary and genetic analysis of the transliterated manuscripts will start in summer 2022. An example of a hands-on shorthand analysis of Lindgren’s drafts to the short story “Spelar min lind, sjunger min näktergal?” [“My Nightingale is Singing”] is however available in Swedish: Malin Nauwerck, “Sagoberättaren, sekreteraren och den spelande linden,” in *Från Strindberg till Storytel: korskopplingar mellan ljud och litteratur*, eds. Julia Pennlert and Lars Ilshammar (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2021), 197–219.

<sup>3</sup> By “strategic narrative,” I am referring to a type of marketing storytelling common within the literary world, as discussed by Claire Squires in *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), and which generally appears in the paratexts surrounding a literary work, but which also can constitute a dimension of the literary work itself, often on a metafictional level. A theory on strategic narratives based in literary sociology is further explored in Malin Nauwerck, *A World of Myths: World literature and Storytelling in Canongate’s Myths series*, (PhD diss. Uppsala university, 2018), 46–67.

<sup>4</sup> Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London: Pluto, 2000), 36–37.

<sup>5</sup> More precisely, “a form of socio-cultural framework for interpretation and a nomenclature for the cognitive structures which dictate how we perceive objects and events. Master narratives have a particular ideological gravitas within culture, meaning they also form the basis of new stories. Within the specific cultural context of the book business there exist a number of normative master narratives, which can be loosely described as expectations that influence the act of strategic storytelling. Such pre-defined norms are for example found in the widespread expectation that there should exist a conflict between economic and cultural capital, or the concept of the solitary genius author” (Nauwerck, *A World of Myths*, 48).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.



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<sup>7</sup> Most notably in Vivi Edström's extensive scholarly contribution to the field of Astrid Lindgren research. See especially Vivi Edström, *Vildtoring och lägereld* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1992); *Astrid Lindgren och sagans makt* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1997) and in English, *Astrid Lindgren A Critical Study*, trans. Eivor Cormack, (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Krzysztof Bak, "Genreekvibrilisten Astrid Lindgren," *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis* 6 (2011): 8. See especially the examples from the general and scholarly Lindgren reception listed in his footnote 2. In the article, Bak subsequently goes on to problematize this view by illuminating Lindgren's strategic, polyphonic, and subversive relationship to genre.

<sup>9</sup> Astrid Lindgren, *Mina påbitt* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1971). For a deeper analysis, see Edström *Kvällsdoppet i Kattbult: essäer om Astrid Lindgren diktaren* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 2004), 88–96.

<sup>10</sup> These quotations are, like many of Lindgren's, frequently repeated, but see for example Bak's references to his own interviews with Lindgren, in Bak, "Genreekvibrilisten Astrid Lindgren" and the famous quote by Lindgren in an interview from 1970: "Och så skriver jag som jag själv skulle vilja ha boken om jag själv vore barn. Jag skriver för barnet i mig själv." ["And so I'll write the way I would have wanted the book if I were a child. I write for the child within myself."] (Elisabeth Frankl, "Strängt personligt med Elisabeth Frankl", *Expressen* (Stockholm), December 6, 1970). This translation and all other translations from the Swedish in this essay are my own.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1ff.

<sup>12</sup> I here refer to Gerard Genette's understanding of paratext as it has been developed and applied by literary sociologists when studying the marketing of literature; see for example Nauwerck, *A World of Myths*, and Karl Berglund, *Mordförpackningar: omslag, titlar och kringmaterial till svenska pocketdeckare 1998–2011*. (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> The canonical and much reproduced photograph *Astrid och duvan* ["Astrid and the Dove"] was originally shot by Jacob Forsell in connection with a theatre adaptation of *The Brothers Lionheart* in Stockholm, in 1987.

<sup>14</sup> The debate started with Lindgren's satirical fairy tale allegory "Pomperipossa i Monismanien" ["Pomperipossa in Monismania"], first published in evening tabloid *Expressen* on March 3, 1976. It is available in English translation by Sarah Death in the *Swedish Book Review* 1 (2002): 22–26.

<sup>15</sup> Lena Törnqvist, *En utmärkt författare: Astrid Lindgrens belöningar och utmärkelser*, (Stockholm: skrifter utgivna av Astrid Lindgren-sällskapet, 2019), 78.

<sup>16</sup> In Swedish "Sagan om jätten Bam-Bam och féen Viribunda." The full title is "Prins Florestan eller sagan om jätten Bam-Bam och féen Viribunda." The story was written by the Swedish writer Anna-Maria Roos and published as part of children's story book series *Barnbiblioteket Saga* in 1908.

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<sup>17</sup> Nauwerck, “Sagoberättaren, sekreteraren och den spelande linden,” in Lars Ilshammar and Julia Pennlert eds., *Från Strindberg till Storytel: Korskopplingar mellan ljud och litteratur*, (Göteborg: Daidalos) 2021; see also Vivi Edström, *Astrid Lindgren och sagans makt*, (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren), 1997, 47ff.

<sup>18</sup> Nauwerck, “Sagoberättaren”, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Andreas Hedberg, “Samlingsrecension Astrid och jag: 50 års arbetsliv 1952–2002 och En utmärkt författare: Astrid Lindgrens belöningar och utmärkelser,” *Barnboken* 43 (2020).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Kjell Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren: åren som förläggare och chef* (Lidingö: Astrid Lindgren text), 2018 and Åsa Warnqvist and Jonas Ellerström, *Tri raske skutt*, (Stockholm: Skrifter utgivna av Astrid Lindgren-sällskapet), 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Helene Ehriander, “Exotisk vardag: Anna Riwkin-Bricks och Astrid Lindgrens fotografiska bilderböcker,” in Helene Ehriander and Birger Hedén eds., *Bild och text i Astrid Lindgrens värld* (Lund University: Absalon), 1997; “Astrid Lindgren och Rabén & Sjögren,” in Gunnar Harding ed., *Samfundet de Nio, Litterär kalender*, (Stockholm: Norstedts), 2006; “Tack snälla, rara Astrid: förlagsredaktör Astrid Lindgrens korrespondens med författaren Gunborg Wildh.” In *Speglingar av Småland*, Inger Littberger Caisou-Rousseau, Maria Nilson, and Carina Sjöholm eds, 285–302. (Hestra: Isaberg förlag), “Förlagsredaktör med näsa för böcker”, *Tvärnsnitt* 4 (2009); “Astrid Lindgren, förlagsredaktör på Rabén & Sjögren.” *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 2 (2010); “Värden och värderingar hos förlagsredaktör Astrid Lindgren och Rabén och Sjögren förlag,” in Sara Kärrholm and Paul Tenngart eds, *Barnlitteraturens värden och värderingar* (Lund: Studentlitteratur), 2012; “Skriv fritt och av hjärtans lust: Maktförhållanden och barnboksideal i Astrid Lindgrens verksamhet som förlagsredaktör,” *Avain – Kirjallisuudentutkimuksen aikakauslehti* 3 (2014).

<sup>22</sup> Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 109.

<sup>23</sup> This includes Hans Rabén, founder of the publishing house and Lindgren’s only superior at Rabén & Sjögren. Bohlund says that Lindgren kept her reason for staying on so long private, but claims that there are no indications that Lindgren saw her work at the publishing house as a sacrifice. (Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 216–217).

<sup>24</sup> As Bohlund notes, Lindgren was in her work as publisher constantly aware of her own position in regard to other writers, carefully trying to avoid any suspicion that she was promoting her own books at the expense of others. (Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 161).

<sup>25</sup> Two other notable examples of world famous author-publishers are Margaret Atwood and Mark Twain, who published their own works in the beginning and at the end of their respective careers. There are many parallels between Atwood and Lindgren as public figures, and Lindgren has often referred to Twain as source of inspiration—particularly his captivating first sentences. *Edström, Vildtoring och lägereld*, 46, 91, 259.

<sup>26</sup> This view was present in several interviews with Lindgren’s colleagues and friends performed by this author on behalf of the Astrid Lindgren society in 2013.

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<sup>27</sup> Most notably Lindgren consistently made use of her own influence as a writer in order to promote the authors she published, which is more extensively discussed in Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*. Another example of how roles often overlap is how Lindgren's approach to children's literature, expressed in several canonical essays and speeches, overlaps with the guiding principles of her editing, as seen in her editorial communications. For further discussion on Lindgren's credo and values as editor see Ehriander, *Värden och värderingar*.

<sup>28</sup> Researchers of literary sociology such as Stefan Mählqvist and Sonja Svensson have historically contributed to this area in Sweden, and today there are several prolific research projects focusing on the mechanisms of the field of children's literature in Sweden. See for example Sara van Meerbergen, *Nederländska barnböcker blir Svenska: en multimodal översättningsanalys* (PhD. diss., Stockholm University), 2010; Åsa Warnqvist, "Don't be too upset with your unchivalrous publisher," translator-publisher interactions in the Swedish translations of L.M. Montgomery's Anne and Emily books." *Barnboken* 42 (2019); Laura Leden, *Adaption av flickskap: normbekeräftande och normbrytande i flickböcker översatta från engelska till svenska och finska 1945–1965*. (PhD. Diss. Helsingfors: University of Helsinki), 2021, as well as ongoing projects at the Swedish Institute for Children's Books such as "Den svenska barn- och ungdomslitteraturens historia" and "The Saga Archive: Mapping and Visualizing a Swedish Children's Book Series (1899–1970)."

<sup>29</sup> Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 73.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Lindgren's close friends and colleagues have famously testified that Lindgren rarely let anyone see her books before they were published; but equally there are stories of how Lindgren tested her work in progress by reading from it to the children of family members and friends.

<sup>31</sup> For colourful depictions of the office life at Rabén & Sjögren, see Kerstin Kvint, *Astrid och jag: 50 års arbetsliv 1952–2002*, (Lidingö: Astrid Lindgren Text), 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Jerome McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1983, *The Textual Condition* 1991, "From Text to Work: Digital Tools and the Emergence of the Social Text", *Text* 16 (2006), and D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Elsa Olenius freelanced as editor for Rabén & Sjögren but was also a jury member for the company's then annual writing competition for children's literature. In 1994 the jury awarded *Britt-Mari lättar sitt hjärta* second place in the competition, leading to the publication of Lindgren's debut novel. The acquaintance between Astrid Lindgren and Elsa Olenius was made during the editorial process of Lindgren's debut novel *Britt-Mari lättar sitt hjärta/Confidences of Britt-Mari* (1944). As editor Olenius suggested revisions for *Britt-Mari* which for example include the addition of an introductory chapter where Britt-Mari addresses the reader directly. For further discussion of Olenius' promotion of Lindgren see the chapter titled "Nepotism eller networking" ("Nepotism or Networking") in Jens Andersen, *Denna dagen, ett liv: En biografi över Astrid Lindgren*, trans. Urban Andersson (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2014), 203–13. The refused *Pippi Longstocking* manuscript by Astrid Lindgren have later been published as *Ur-Pippi: Originalmanus* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 2007).

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<sup>34</sup> As Bohlund notes, Rabén & Sjögren was completely dependent on Lindgren's production, especially during her first years at the publishing house. In 1949, Lindgren's books constituted 40 percent of the company's turnover (Bohlund *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 69). In due course, new careers were built at the publishing house, which thus came to expand its list of commercially successful writers from both Sweden and abroad. In 1954, for example, Rabén & Sjögren became the Swedish publisher of bestselling British author Enid Blyton (Bohlund *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 71). The dependence on Lindgren decreased as the company grew, and in 1960 Lindgren represented 15% of the total turnover (Bohlund *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 87).

<sup>35</sup> In relation to this publication, Lindgren has herself expressed what Bohlund interprets as ethical doubts in a letter to her friend Louise Hartung. This did not stop her, however, from applying the same commercial strategy to another book about "tomten" based on Karl-Erik Forslund's *Räven och tomten*. Lindgren also rewrote Forslund's book and published it with new illustrations by Wiberg. See the discussion in Bohlund *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 79–80.

<sup>36</sup> Prolific examples of such analyses can be found for example in Annette Almgren-White "Bilder av Alma i Katthult: Emils skrivande mamma i intermedial belysning," in Helene Ehriander and Martin Hellström eds, *Nya läningar av Astrid Lindgrens författarskap* (Stockholm: Liber), 2015 and Lena Törnqvist, *Ingrid Vang Nyman. En biografi*, (Lidingö: Astrid Lindgren Text), 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Lindgren's colleague Marianne Eriksson was also one of her close friends and took over her role at Rabén & Sjögren after Lindgren quit in 1970. The working and private relationship between Lindgren and her foreign rights agent and later personal secretary Kvint is described in Kvint, *Astrid och jag*.

<sup>38</sup> Ehriander, "Exotisk vardag"; "Astrid Lindgren, förlagsredaktör på Rabén & Sjögren".

<sup>39</sup> See the discussion on authorial autonomy in Finn Fordham, *I do, I undo, I redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves in Hopkins, Yeats, Conrad, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2010, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Andersen, *Denna dagen, ett liv*, 42ff, 94ff, 100ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–46.

<sup>42</sup> The topic of modern city life in the *Kati* trilogy is further discussed in Lydia Wistisen, "Uppbrott och inordning," 2015. The biographical implications of Britt-Mari and the small Swedish town are explored in Hanna Liljeqvist, "Brev från den lilla lilla staden: skildringen av småstaden i Britt-Mari lättar sitt hjärta," *Humanetten* 45 (2020).

<sup>43</sup> Birgitta Theander, *Till arbetet! Yrkesdrömmar och arbetsliv i flickboken 1920–65*. (Helsingborg: Makadam, 2017). See especially chapter 8, where Theander gives an overview of the girls' literature published in Sweden in which the protagonists nourish writing ambitions.

<sup>44</sup> As Hugo Bowles notes about Dickens: "Learning shorthand had helped him to process language efficiently, reducing his cognitive load and freeing up his mind to organize his

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ideas.” Hugo Bowles, *Dickens and the Stenographic Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2019, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Interview from 1956 in *Vi* newspaper, quoted by Andersen *Denna dagen, ett liv*, 224.

<sup>46</sup> “Själva renskrivningen var några timmars verk, det gick med den vana kontoristens hastighet och alla sista korrigeringar var redan gjorda i stenogrammanus.” This is how Lindgren’s daughter Karin Nyman has described the procedure (Andersen *Denna dagen, ett liv*, 180f). The practice is with few exceptions confirmed by the typewritten manuscripts deposited at the Astrid Lindgren Archives, which have been labelled as practically identical to the printed first editions with few alterations, and therefore “uninteresting” (Lena Törnqvist, *Man tar vanliga ord och säger ovanliga saker: Astrid Lindgrens språk*, (Lidingö: Salikon), 2015, 185f).

<sup>47</sup> Fordham, *I do, I undo, I redo*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2002; Nauwerck, *A World of Myths*, 227–81.

<sup>49</sup> Siegfried Scheibe, “Variantendarstellung”.

<sup>50</sup> “Jag skriver hela boken med den mest enorma frenesi på stenografi, vilket betyder att jag kan skriva lika fort som jag tänker. Jag kan skriva om fem meningar tio, elva, tolv, tretton gånger, kasta bort bladen och skriva igen. Jag håller på tills boken är färdig, genomarbetad och klar i stenogramblocket. Sedan sätter jag mig vid maskinen och skriver rent och då gör jag inga ändringar.” Lindgren, quoted in Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 173.

<sup>51</sup> “Jag visste inte ett dugg när jag började skriva. Det var som om någon dikterade plotten för mig.” Lindgren, quoted by Rita Törnqvist Verschuur, *Den Astrid jag minns*, (Stockholm: Skrifter utgivna av Astrid Lindgren-sällskapet), 2011, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Irina Andrianova, “The Assistant and Co-Author of Fyodor Dostoevsky”, 2016, 439.

<sup>53</sup> Törnqvist 2015, 33.

<sup>54</sup> “Ess muss so klingen, genau so wie ich es haben muss.” Lindgren, quoted in Edström, *Kvällsdoppet i Kattbult*, 202.

<sup>55</sup> Astrid Lindgren, *Assar Bubbla, eller det var nära ögat att det aldrig blev någon bok om Pippi Långstrump* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren), 1987.

<sup>56</sup> Edström, *Kvällsdoppet i Kattbult*, 13. In the next sentence Edström concludes that Lindgren’s stenographic code needs to be deciphered in order for Lindgren research to move forward.

<sup>57</sup> See Nauwerck, *A World of Myths*, 61ff.

<sup>58</sup> Astrid Lindgren’s archive at the National Library Manuscript Division in Stockholm is the largest ever bequeathed by a single Swedish individual. In 2005, it was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

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<sup>59</sup> Heil, Nauwerck, and Hast, “Shorthand Secrets”; Andersdotter and Nauwerck, “Secretaries at Work”.

<sup>60</sup> Bowles, *Dickens and the Stenographic Mind*, 91.

<sup>61</sup> These documents are explored within digital humanities research project “The Dickens Code” (2021–2022). Like the Astrid Lindgren Code, the project makes use of citizen science and crowdsourcing and is further described here: <https://le.ac.uk/dickens-code/about>.

<sup>62</sup> Bowles, *Dickens and the Stenographic Mind*, 91.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> For a more developed discussion, see Nauwerck, “Sagoberättaren”.

<sup>65</sup> Bowles, *Dickens and the Stenographic Mind*, 148f. The oral dimensions of Lindgren’s work have been much explored by Lindgren scholars. In addition to the work of Vivi Edström, the theme has been explicitly addressed by, for example, Ulf Boëthius, “Konsten att göra sig rolig: skazen i Astrid Lindgrens Emil i Lönneberga,” *Tidskrift för litteraturvetenskap* 3 (1990) and Karl Lindqvist, “Om konsten att ta kontakt: Muntligheten i Astrid Lindgrens författarskap,” in Per Gustavsson and Vivi Edström (eds.), *Astrid Lindgren och folkdikten*, (Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag), 1996.

<sup>66</sup> Lena Kåreland, *Modernismen i barnkammaren: barnlitteraturens 40-tal*, (Stockholm, Rabén & Sjögren), 1999, 321.

<sup>67</sup> Lindgren’s historical position in the Swedish audiobook market is further discussed in Ann Steiner, “Rödluan och Kalle Stropp på stenkaka, lp, kassett, cd och mp3. Barns ljudböcker då och nu,” in Julia Pennlert and Lars Ilshammar eds. *Från Strindberg till Storytel*, (Göteborg: Daidalos), 2021.

<sup>68</sup> For a stenographer of Melin, “Pippi Longstocking” would for example typically be abbreviated to Pip, P.L or P. Lindgren, however, consistently writes out the full name, although she applies the established abbreviation for “lång”/“long”.

<sup>69</sup> Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2013, 31.

<sup>70</sup> The modernist dimensions of Lindgren’s writing have been discussed by Swedish children’s literature scholar Lena Kåreland, *Modernismen i barnkammaren*; “Astrid Lindgren och modernism: exemplet Pippi Långstrump,” *Årboka: litteratur för barn og unge* (2008). This dimension of the author is also implicitly present in scholarly works on Pippi Longstocking, which focus on the experimental and innovative dimensions of Lindgren’s use of language. These accounts range from Christina Heldner “I gränslandet mellan lingvistik och litteraturvetenskap: en analys av några språkliga drag i böckerna om Pippi Långstrump,” in Maria Nikolajeva ed., *Modern litteraturteori och metod i barnlitteraturforskningen*, (Stockholm University: Centrum för barnkulturforskning), 1992 to Lena Lind Palicki, “Ordvitsar och samtalsuppror – en språkvetenskaplig essä om en barnboks märkvärdiga normbrott,” In Maina Arvas ed., *Pippiperspektiv*, Lidingö: Astrid Lindgren text, 2020. Although Lindgren’s modernism thus constitutes a dimension of the writer that has been

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well recognized by scholars, it is often overshadowed by popular images such as the storyteller/*sagotant* in general Lindgren reception.

<sup>71</sup> Paula Henrikson, “Verk som process,” in Paula Henriksson and Jon Viklund eds., *Kladd, utkast, avskrift: studier av litterära tillkomstprocesser*, (Uppsala University: Avdelningen för litteratursociologi), 2015, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Edström, *Kvällsdoppet i Katthult*, 90f.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Williams, *Stjärnor utan stjärnbilder*, (Stockholm: Gidlunds), 1997.

<sup>74</sup> Prøysen’s letter to Lindgren is quoted in Bohlund *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 82. In the Norwegian original, it reads: “Det skulle vært morsomt å skrive en avhandling om dette merkelige solsystem som kaller seg Astrid Lindgren en gang – hvordan i all ver dens rike får du till det?”

<sup>75</sup> Lennart Hellsing, “Astrid,” in Susanna Hellsing, Birgitta Westin, Suzanne Öhman-Sundén eds., *Allrakäraste Astrid: En vänbok till Astrid Lindgren* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren), 2002: 9. In Swedish original: *Astrid Astrid/ Allestädes/ allestädes in der Welt!/ Över alla jordens gränser/ som en barnbokssol du glänser./ Här står vi och bockar snällt!/ Blanka fiskar/ har du fiskat/ upp ur Sagans dunkla älv./ Sagor som på läppen falla./ Dock den största av dem alla/ är väl sagan om dig själv.*

<sup>76</sup> See Kai Söderhielm, quoted in Bohlund, *Den okända Astrid Lindgren*, 112.

<sup>77</sup> See further discussion in Nauwerck, *A World of Myths*, 235.

<sup>78</sup> Henrikson, *Verk som process*, 2015, 9.

<sup>79</sup> The quotation concerning Tzvetan Todorov is discussed in relation to the field of genetic criticism in Fordham, *I do, I undo, I redo*, 29.

<sup>80</sup> Recent genetic analysis and digital editing of manuscripts which display various modern and cognitive strategies used by authors indicate the complexity but also potential of such approaches to Lindgren’s original manuscripts. In addition to Fordham, *I do, I undo, I redo* and Sullivan 2013, see for example Dirk van Hulle, *A Genetic Study of Late Manuscripts by Joyce, Proust, and Mann*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 2004; *Manuscript Genetics: Joyce’s Know-How, Beckett’s No-How*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 2008; *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond*, (London: Bloomsbury), 2014, as well as recent digital editions of Anne Frank’s diary ([annefrankmanuscripten.org](http://annefrankmanuscripten.org)) and of Zacharias Topelius’s collected works ([topelius.sls.fi](http://topelius.sls.fi)).

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Interviews with Marianne Eriksson, Kerstin Kvint, and Lennart Svahn, performed by the author in 2013 on behalf of the Astrid Lindgren Society. Interview transcripts available from the Astrid Lindgren Society. <https://www.astridindgrensallskapet.se/>.

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