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CANON AND PAIN

On Übermensch and moralities in
A Dream Play and *Pippi Longstocking*

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Humans need benchmarks; icons that they can compare themselves to, to feed their own identities and suppress misery and pain. They need to know that there are geniuses out there that will alter the world in one way or another, or as Harold Bloom puts it: “We *need* genius [...] Our desire for the transcendental and extraordinary seems part of our common heritage.”¹ Occasionally a human quits hoping for changes and stops just adoring those geniuses, and becomes one. Even so, his work will always mirror itself in the echoes of prior pioneers. In Western literature we call the works of the pioneers *canon*, i.e. texts that have had most influence on the culture and shaped literature as a whole.

Here we will look into two works of the Swedish literary canon: *A Dream Play* (s. *Ett drömspel*) by August Strindberg (1849-1912) and *Pippi Longstocking* (s. *Pippi Långstrump*) by Astrid Lindgren (1907-2002). The works are quite distinct, for one is an expressionistic play while the other is a children’s book. Even so, the philosophy of the texts will be compared and discussed, following the advice of John Guillory:

[B]y resisting the tendency of the canonical form to determine in advance the meanings of works, it may be possible to acquire not only the knowledge the school offers but a knowledge of this knowledge, a knowledge of how the practice of reading is regulated or constrained by the institution and its social functions.²

The two texts mentioned must have some mutual elements which give them their canonical status. By finding them there is a chance we will find mutual elements to all canons. The primary tool to find these elements will be the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), mainly because it is well known that Strindberg was much influenced by him and it is also a common tradition to analyze Pippi Longstocking with his theories; it is a useful philosophy for both texts. Furthermore, the concept of *Übermensch* is parallel to Harold Bloom’s idea of the genius.

Without doubt is Strindberg the most known Swedish canonical author internationally. His plays and stories have been translated to dozen languages, reached a wide readership and influenced many authors, and *A Dream Play* is “Strindberg’s perhaps most remarkable work, and he himself called it [...] ‘my most loved drama, the child of my greatest pain.’ In this drama about philosophies of life, he succeeds

¹ Bloom, Harold, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, New York: Warner Books, 2002, p. 7.

² Guillory, John, “Canon”, *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 248.

better than earlier in intergrating drama form with his view of life.”³ Apparently, Strindberg emphasizes a lot on “pain” as a treatment in his writings, as one could see in other of his works, such as *Inferno* (1897). Pain is an important matter to Nietzsche as well, and is in fact one of the fundamentals in his understanding of human life: “Nietzsche’s deepest teaching [...] is that authentic meaning is painful, and that the pain itself is the meaning. Between pain and its meaning comes a memory of pain that then becomes a memorable meaning.”⁴ We could explain the term “pain” as a constant struggle between happiness and sorrow; life is never satisfying.

The motif of pain is much visible in *A Dream Play*, as it reveals itself constantly while the characters deal with the meaning of life; “It’s a real misery to be a human being!”⁵ Nietzsche’s ideas about pain intertwine with his theories about the master-slave morality and the Übermensch, which will be discussed in details further on.

In general, *A Dream Play* is an expressionistic play which deals with human frailty, our flawed philosophy of life and the injustice between classes. Strindberg completed the play in 1902 and at that time it was considered very original, especially for the style and expressionistic factors; he was one of the first to use those methods in drama. The play’s originality is maybe the most important quality in making it so significant, or canonical: “Fierce originality is one crucial component of literary genius, but this originality itself is always canonical, in that it recognizes and comes to terms with precursors.”⁶

The play’s originality is largely inspired by Nietzsche’s writings. The technique Strindberg uses to distance the text from reality is to introduce a character which is completely blank against Earth, an unwritten personality. That person is the daughter of the Indian god Indra, and she has never been to Earth but is about to explore it and the human civilization. Her terrestrial name is Agnes. She has no memory of pain and doesn’t really understand it, until she feels it for herself, e.g. the pain of love and also the pain of labour when she sees the two coal bearers working while the snobs are celebrating. Let’s take a look at the misery of one of the coal bearers: “Nothing to eat? We who work the hardest get the least to eat! And the rich who don’t do anything get the most. Would it be taking too much liberty with the truth to say this is unjust?”

³Algulin, Ingemar, *A History of Swedish Literature*, Uddevalla: The Swedish Institute, 1989, p. 127.

⁴ Bloom, Harold, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2004, p. 210.

⁵ Strindberg, August, *The Father and A Dream Play*, Illinois: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1964, p. 83. Hereafter, this source will be referred to with the letter “S” and a pagenummer in parenthesis.

⁶ Bloom, Harold, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, New York: Warner Books, 2002, p. 11.

(S: 113). Their pain shapes their identity and gives their life a meaning, and that meaning is pain, as mentioned before – it is a circulation. They have the morality of a slave, and the rich snobs at the party have the morality of a master, illustrated by the words of one of them, when making an excuse to his wife when she asks him to play a game: “No, I have to walk awhile so I will be *able* to eat dinner” (S: 115).⁷ Those words make the coal bearers furious.

Nietzsche’s idea of the master-slave morality is based upon the concept that when the masters establish the meaning of the word “good” they presume its connection to the soul’s dignity and pride. They say: “I am good, you are not like me and therefore you are bad.”⁸ The master morality is then established by the idea that those who are noble are also proud of themselves, distinguishing from those who don’t possess these characteristics, and in fact despise them. Amongst the masters “the opposites “good” and “bad” have the same meaning as “noble” and “despicable””.⁹ The disdain is then directed at the fainthearted and all of those who let others walk over them, i.e. the slaves. The slave side-glances at the virtues of those who have the power because of how repressed, insecure and bonded he is, as we see in above-mentioned quote from the coal bearer. Moreover is he suspicious against everything that is “good” (noble). The slaves would say to the masters: “You repress me and therefore you are bad, I am your opposite and therefore I am good.”¹⁰ The basic difference between the two moralities is how they sense the word “good” and “bad”. In the slave morality, characteristics like pity, patience, humility and kindness get to flourish. Nietzsche calls these the useful characteristics and the slave morality the useful morality, because they are almost the only resort for the slaves to withstand the yoke of existence. These characteristics are repeatedly lionised to make the life easier for the slaves, which results in a delusion that they are “the foundation of society”, as one of the two coal bearers declares (S: 114). The masters use other resorts to withstand existence; they dominate the slaves, consequently exploiting the useful characteristics to the slaves’ expenses, i.e. through dominance. The interactive relationship between the slaves and the masters is then what keeps civilization on its wheels.

⁷ Italics are mine.

⁸ Strong, Tracy B., „Nietzsche’s Political Misappropriation“ *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 122.

⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Handan góðs og illis*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1994, p. 367.

¹⁰ Strong, Tracy B., „Nietzsche’s Political Misappropriation“ *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 122.

The superstructure of society belongs to the masters. In *A Dream Play* we get to know five aspects of superstructure: the deans of Theology, Philosophy, Medicine and Law, and the Chancellor who most likely stands for politics and appears to be the deans' supervisor. The center of the play is a door with a hole in it, shaped as a four leaf clover. In the end, all other main characters, the slaves (in Nietzsche's sense), gather in front of the door and want it to be opened, to see what is inside. The universal truth about life and its meaning is supposed to be behind it, and the deans debate about if it is supposed to be opened up or not. They also come up with various definitions of "truth", but none of that matters because once the door is opened and they go inside they find nothing (S: 128). It comes clear that not even superstructure of society can tell what truth and meaning is. There is no absolute truth about life, our roles are based upon luck (four leaf clover) and neither can masters nor slaves break free from it. By finding no truth there is no solution. The pain will always remain and give life its meaning, which is pain, ergo life is pain (see Bloom on Nietzsche above), i.e. as long as individuals are involved in the master-slave morality. The ultimate goal, according to Nietzsche, is to overcome the predominant values and norms of society, and become the *Übermensch*.

The relationship of dominance and suppression between the master and the slave must remain steady – whereas it is impossible to break it – until the *Übermensch* comes to being. So that can happen, the man must be aware of that God is dead, and accept it; there is no one who will save us, there is no higher truth. The concept of *Übermensch* embodies the chance to be able to build up one's own valuations, i.e. after stepping away from current values of society, which are modulated by the conjunction of coercion of the master-slave morality. "The *Übermensch* is predicated on *new a way of feelings [...] a new way of thinking [and] a new way of valuation.*"¹¹ Pippi Longstocking's persona possesses these "new ways".

Astrid Lindgren's story about Pippi is naturally not as profound as *A Dream Play*, but children books can often hide deeper meanings than one would think. *Pippi Longstocking* has a clear canonical status in the world of children literature:

[Lindgren] has come to occupy supreme, unique position in the world of children's books. Her works have literary qualities far beyond what hitherto common in the genre. She has thereby effectively contributed to raising the quality and status of the children's book.¹²

¹¹ Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, London: The Athlone Press, 1983, p. 163.

¹² Algulin, Ingemar, *A History of Swedish Literature*, Uddevalla: The Swedish Institute, 1989, p. 253.

Pippi is conversed with almost every norm of Western culture. By sailing the seas since an infant she has never been established in one place. Her personality and position in the normal village she moves into is very clear from the beginning; the first moment Tommy and Annika see her, Pippi walks backwards.¹³ Through the story we get to know this extraordinary girl, whose everyday actions become stranger by every page. She is self-reliant, fiercely independent, answers children's secret dreams of inordinate strength, occupies unbound freedom and power over adults; this has made her "the child of the century".¹⁴

In contrast with the normal children (slaves) and the adults (masters) is Pippi an *Übermensch*. Neither of the moralities are match for her new ways, as she declares: "I can do anything I please" (L: 70). She feels no pain or misery, she has overcome it, supporting this fact with her own words: "I never cry" (L: 109). Everytime when her mother's death and her father's disappearance come up, she talks about it with a smile on her face:

"Yes, but haven't you a mother and father here?"

"No, none at all," said Pippi cheerfully. (L: 9)

It is a *new a way of feelings*, which the slaves have a hard time to understand. The masters (adults) try to put her into a children's home because of her absent parents, but the *Übermensch* resists – they can't beat her. Although at one point Pippi brakes down, at the teaparty at Tommy's and Annika's home, for she doesn't know how to behave herself, it's not a long term misery, but a clash between the *Übermensch* and the master-slave morality, which disappears later on when she becomes the heroine by rescuing two little boys from a burning building. Then, finally, the town's people accept her, her abilities and uniqueness.

Pippi's *new way of valuation* is the strongest factor in her personality. Throughout the whole story we see her value things differently than other people of the village. A good example is when the siblings ask her to join them to the circus, and explain to her that she has to pay for looking. Pippi replies: "Does it cost money to *look*? And here I've been going around with my eyes open all day and every day! Goodness

¹³ Lindgren, Astrid, *Pippi Longstocking*, Oxford Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 6. Hereafter, this source will be referred to with the letter "L" and a pagenummer in parenthesis.

¹⁴ Algulin, Ingemar, *A History of Swedish Literature*, Uddevalla: The Swedish Institute, 1989, p. 254.

knows how much money I've used up already!" (L: 70). Why pay for something when real life is just as amazing? The masters' money has no valuation for her, e.g. when she gives away the hundred crowns she wins at the circus: "What should I do with that piece of paper?" (L: 80). Pippi doesn't need capitalistic fake money, she has real gold, the basis of valuation, superior to normal economy.

Her *new way of thinking* is best shown in her attitude towards education and how she acts in the classroom. She knows a great deal about the world already, e.g. when the policemen ask her about the capital of Portugal (L: 28). She knows the fact already out of experience. When in the classroom it becomes obvious she doesn't know mathematics, but grammar school mathematics are all about who owns much of this and that, and Pippi doesn't really need that kind of information, because of her *new way of valuation*. When the school teacher asks Tommy a question about apples and the summation of two masses of them, Pippi interrupts with another question: "If Lisa has a tummy ache and Axel has even *more* of a tummy ache, whose fault is it, and where had they pinched the apples?" (L: 39). She thinks beyond the summation, about something real and important. She thinks outside the box all the time.

In *A Dream Play*, there is also a memorable scene which takes place in a classroom and deals with similar problems about irrelevant numbers. The Schoolmaster's question "What is two times two" has no meaning in real life. The Officer is surprised why he himself is even there, and says: "I'm full grown, I've finished school ... I have my degree, haven't I? Why am I sitting here then? Don't I have my degree?" (S: 104-105). He has it, but that didn't keep him away from tormenting himself and chasing Victoria's unrequited love. He hasn't really learned anything, therefore he could such as stay in the classroom forever. Education does not save one from the pain and misery of life, education does not make one an Übermensch. Their dispute about the answer to the question leads to speculations about time as a phenomena, they circle around it and the conclusion is that they're wasting their time.

So truth does not lie in numbers, the most logic part of the human mind. The truth is supposed to be behind the door with the four leaf clover, the backstage of reality. As said before, there is nothing behind it. That way it is revealed to the characters that God is dead, there is no higher truth and all they have to do is to accept it, which they don't. The characters, especially the deans, get very disappointed.

Considering Nietzsche's theories, then *A Dream Play's* ensemble is a study and demonstration of the master-slave morality, which ends by opening up the chance for the characters to become Übermensch. Nobody seizes the opportunity and the work carries on to be "a long dramatic poem that in elegiac form expresses resignation to the sufferings of existence, conveyed in its best known and oft-repeated line: 'Man is to be pitied.'"¹⁵

On the contrary is *Pippi Longstocking* a portrayal of the Übermensch as a converse to the master-slave morality. Pippi has already reached the uppermost level. Agnes in *A Dream Play* could have done the same after being an observer of the master-slave morality, but by experience all the pain and misery of life directly she is torn between the two moralities and thus incapable to start "the new ways". So, she abandons them and walks into the burning castle. As Nietzsche said, the Übermensch can't come to being unless by sustaining the master-slave morality. Agnes had never associated with morality before. But the purpose of Agnes' presence in the play, her innocence and observations, is to force truth, meaning and pain out from other characters, which happens often because of her femininity. One of the vague aspects of Nietzsche's writings is when he talks about women. Protagonists of both texts in question are women, so we shall bear both Agnes and Pippi in mind for the next thought. *Beyond Good and Evil* by Nietzsche starts with these words:

Supposing that Truth is a woman—what then? Is there not ground for suspecting that all philosophers, in so far as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women—that the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to Truth, have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman?

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Nietzsche does not believe in truth but ironically sets an example if the woman was the truth, thus mocking all former thinkers. A comparable example from *A Dream Play* are "All the Right Thinkers", but that is what the Poet calls the deans. They are the ones who yell "Hurrah, the door's open!" when it is opened and reveals the nothingness (S: 128), plus they are the ones who criticize Agnes and her doings,

¹⁵Algulin, Ingemar, *A History of Swedish Literature*, Uddevalla: The Swedish Institute, 1989, p. 127.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Handan góðs og ills*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1994, p. 75. The English version of this particular quote was taken from *Project Gutenberg*: <www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.htm> [Viewed 7th of January 2009].

primarily because she is a woman. Pursuant to Nietzsche's ideas, philosophers and other thinkers that come under the deans' subjects are the biggest hypocrites.

When Nietzsche writes about women it's a part of his method of alienating the reader, getting the reader active in thinking of new values, pressing him one step closer to the "new ways". So, when he writes about women it's a part of eradicating current valuation which has been produced since human society was formed. If the man is to be able to reach the stage of *Übermensch*, he must first realise that God is dead, reject current valuation along with creating his own. At the same time the patriarchy will be eradicated and the relationship between male and female hit zero, based upon that the male is no longer the center of everything. Instead will both genders start the process together.

In the case of Pippi it seems that the life on her father's ship, along with the crew, was free from the boundaries of master-slave morality. They travelled around the world on their own terms, avoiding normal societies that contain typical Western master-slave morality. Pippi was raised in an environment without traditional gender roles, an environment which made her capable of becoming an *Übermensch*.

In *A Dream Play* the gender roles are still present but are disrupted once Agnes and the Lawyer get married, live together and have a child. Agnes yells lines like "I can't breathe!", "I'm choking!" and "I'm dying in here!" (S: 88-89). She is pent-in, isolated and unhappy. At the same time the Lawyer earns no money, "Look how hard it is! And the child, who was to be our bond and our blessing, is our downfall!" (S: 89). She can't be a housemother and can't take care of the baby, like a woman is supposed to do according to patriarchal gender roles. And he can't support his family, which is a great humiliation for the man of the house. The first real pain Agnes feels for herself is in marriage, in love; it opens up her eyes for human suffering and gives life on Earth more meaning. In continuance of the break-up the gender roles become unclear and she begins to travel wider, to other social structures, getting to know master-slave morality. Considering all prior discussion about Agnes and her chances of staying on Earth and becoming *Übermensch*, we ask ourselves why does she not do it? In this play, which is clearly under the influence of Nietzsche's theories, why does the protagonist leave and put aside her opportunities of becoming a superior being? Is there maybe another character which is an *Übermensch* already?

Strindberg often wrote himself into his works, either in an autobiographical way or by making a character which stood for the author of the play. In *A Dream Play* it's obviously the character named "Poet". While other strong male figures, e.g. the Lawyer and the Officer, are washed up by their own pain and misery, the Poet has accepted the suffering and seems to be in a much superior state of mind than the others. The conversations between the Poet and Agnes are most often explanations and conclusions of what has been happening in the play. There we can see the voice of the implicit author discussing with the protagonist. The Poet knows more than other characters, he can explain their actions and thoughts, much like how the implicit author addresses the readers of children books. We can not put the Poet under the same hat as other characters in *A Dream Play*, for they want the door to be opened. The Poet is neutral against the door, and he is the one who introduces Agnes to "the new ways", e.g. by saying: "Do you think that all who are tortured suffer – that all who are put to death feel pain? Suffering, we know, redeems, and death sets free" (S: 135). He is liberated from pain and suffering, he realizes what it is that gives life its meaning. If it weren't for death, what would be the value of life? He teaches Agnes the greatest lesson of all, and therefore she doesn't need to stay on Earth anymore.

Few lines after the Poet speaks those words it comes clear that he has the power over the whole play, as Agnes leaves the stage and the story by addressing the Poet with a poem. Here are three lines from it:

good-by, you child of man
you dreamer you and poet
who knows best how to live (S: 136)

The Poet is the supreme being in *A Dream Play*. According to the text then poets understand pain and suffering better than a normal person does (master, slave). Harold Bloom raises a determining question of the canonical, an aesthetical question which seems impossible to answer: "What makes one poem more memorable than another?"¹⁷ If we take into consideration what Nietzsche says about pain and meaning, that it identifies each other and implants memories of pain, then poetry about pain must be more memorable than other. Well, the Nietzschean answer to this question is:

¹⁷ Bloom, Harold, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2004, p. 219.

[T]he memorable poem, the poem that has more meaning, or starts more meaning going, is the poem that gives more pain [...] the strong poem repeats and commemorates a primordial pain [...] the strong poem constitutes pain, brings pain into being, and so creates meaning.¹⁸

A Dream Play is a very memorable text not only for its timeless wisdom about life, philosophy, religion etc., but also for the suffering and delirium of the characters. Readers identify themselves with pain and misery in whatever form it is. The “literary institution” also appreciates these peculiarities of literature. This fact can easily be proven by looking at a list of the Western Canon and the list of the Nobel Prize in Literature; it’s all highly serious literature with serious treatments. The intellectual novels/plays/poems, with rich philosophy and description of human struggle, are the texts which become a canon. Of course, not all such texts get that honour, but only those with “fierce originality”.

Based on that fact, it seems that quality literature deals mainly with characters that are trying to reach the state of *Übermensch*, i.e. characters who do not fit into normal society in one way or another. But quality literature also deals with characters who find it difficult to cope with the master-slave morality, i.e. slaves who don’t accept their role in life. So, what literary canons have in common is to tell these stories really well, putting an important input to human ethics and society.

There we have the mutual elements of *A Dream Play* and *Pippi Longstocking*: The matter of human pain and misery, and the longing to overcome it. The “knowledge of a knowledge” has been improved. But still, on the other hand, there is a matter which comes between the two texts in question: Pippi Longstocking and all other characters in her story are happy. It seems that literary happiness is mostly found in children’s books, and that genre is never on any lists along with high literature.

Astrid Lindgren was an incredible author and – as quoted before – she literally changed children literature in Western culture. But she wrote children books and her characters were happy. In *A Dream Play* are many characters acting childishly, e.g. the Officer. The examples given above, those which take place in the classroom, show that both stories are on similar quality scale. Still, Lindgren has to stand for the actuality of her work; it’s a children’s book. Even so, Pippi Longstocking will carry on from generation to generation, alive and well. This examination has led to new

¹⁸ Same source, p. 219.

questions about canons, especially international ones that are involved in above-mentioned lists of high literature. Does a canon always have to involve pain and misery? Can a canon never represent happiness? Those questions are worthy for another study, but in the meantime we shall come to a conclusion.

Humans need an ultimate girl like Pippi, an *Übermensch* to whirl up current valuations, even though we accept it only for awhile. We *need* a genius who lives by different rules to tell us that the reality could be different, that life is a dream play where everything can happen; there is no higher truth that we are constantly forced to follow. Nietzsche is one of those voices, for he himself saw “life as a literary text, human beings as literary characters, and knowledge as literary criticism.”¹⁹ Pippi introduced “the new ways” to Tommy and Annika, the Poet did it to Agnes, but in reality the authors and the poets are the ones who introduce it to us. They are the canonical geniuses who show us deeper meaning of life by pulling the pain up to the surface; they liberate us from pain by showing it to us; they do it through literature and sometimes they sacrifice a lot to do so.

¹⁹ Same source, p. 208.

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Companion to Nietzsche, edited by Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 119-147

Canon says its technology has two advantages over conventional mammogram devices: first, it (obviously) saves patients from exposure to radiation, and second the diagnosis is completely pain-free. The machine, which was developed along with a research team from Kyoto University, is based on laser and ultrasonic wave technology (which is why it can't actually be labeled as a mammogram device). Canon says that the first clinical studies are scheduled to begin at Kyoto University soon.

Prayer after the Canon. Lord Christ our God, Who hast healed my passions through Thy Passion, and hast cured my wounds through Thy wounds, grant me who have sinned greatly against Thee tears of compunction. Transform my body with the fragrance of Thy life-giving Body, and sweeten my soul with Thy Holy Blood from the bitterness with which the foe has fed me. My mind has been darkened through earthly passions, I cannot look up to Thee in pain. I cannot warm myself with tears of love for Thee.

The Canon EOS-RP Mirrorless Camera was just released, and we had the opportunity to test it at Canon's press event in New Orleans. In this review, we'll dive into who this camera is for, give you the pros and cons of the camera, show you some sample images, and provide you with our overall analysis. My Canon EOS-RP review focuses on the benefits and pain points actually seen and felt from the day that I spent shooting with this camera. With that said, read on! Who is the Canon EOS-RP For?