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## Lisbeth Salander Lost In Translation - An Exploration of the English Version of The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo

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Lisbeth Salander Lost In Translation  
- An Exploration of the English Version of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
English  
American Literature

by

Kajsa Paludan

B.A. Comparative Literature, Lund University, Sweden, 2012

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my Chair Dr. Dan Doll, the most accomplished professor I've had to this day and who will serve as inspiration for the future. Of all of my heart to my parents, Anneli and Mogens Paludan who have supported me through my studies in the United States, and who have been so kind to give me the precious gift of studying abroad. To my *Mormor* who is not only a wonderful friend, but also my light when things are rough. To Ulrik and Gustaf for always making me laugh. To my lovely friends who were there for me when I was busy writing this thesis.

And, to Splinten - wherever you are - there is a little red bird singing outside your tree top cabin.

## **Abstract**

This thesis sets out to explore the cultural differences between Sweden and the United States by examining the substantial changes made to *Men Who Hate Women*, including the change in the book's title in English to *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. My thesis focuses in particular on changes in the depiction of the female protagonist: Lisbeth Salander. Unfortunately we do not have access to translator Steven T. Murray's original translation, though we know that the English publisher and rights holder Christopher MacLehose chose to enhance Larsson's work in order to make the novel more interesting for English-speaking readers, which resulted in Murray translating under the pseudonym Reg Keeland as he did not agree to the translation made by MacLehose and Knopf. Furthermore, this thesis touches on the ethics of translation, and will likewise argue the importance of facilitating a dialog concerning misogyny and rape culture.

*Keywords:* Men Who Hate Women, The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo, Sweden, Stieg Larsson, Reg Keeland, translation

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## Introduction

Lisbeth Salander is a feminist phenomenon; she has started punk fashion trends, upset readers and reviewers with her aggressive behavior against sexism and misogyny, and has helped put Scandinavia once and for all on the map of American crime fiction. Salander is the female protagonist of Stieg Larsson's book *Men Who Hate Women*<sup>1</sup>, but it wasn't until she became *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* in 2008 that she became a million dollar industry. *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* is the first book in Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy*, three books that have collectively sold more than 17 million copies in the United States alone. The English-language rights were acquired by British publishing house MacLehose Press, owned by Christopher MacLehose, an imprint of Quercus, and later by Alfred A. Knopf in the United States. However, something was different about the American version. Through a series of remarkable changes to the text the English translation undermines Larsson's critique of prevailing gender relations by changing the character of Lisbeth Salander. This thesis examines how two versions of the text, the Swedish original and the English translation, reflect cultural differences in attitudes about gender, society and politics.

What first led me to this study was a reflection upon the unusual differences between the titles of the Swedish and American versions, and from there it all unfolded. By reading the books side-by-side even more differences were uncovered, changes that must be understood in a cultural context, as the final English translation was shaped by American culture, not Swedish. The infantilization and pacification of Salander's character are the most striking differences in the English translation. They not only undermine Larsson's original narrative, which allows the female protagonist Salander to break loose from female stereotypes, but also prevent a glimpse into Swedish feminist culture. In particular, Larsson's literary cross-reference to Swedish author Astrid Lindgren's feminist character Pippi Longstocking is a cultural reference lost in the American version and to the American audience.

Depiction of women in society is an ancient conversation, but nonetheless important to continue, especially when the interpretation of the role of women is part of a cultural exchange. Hence the relevance of debating the significance of these differences in translation and editorial choices. In this case, the English speaking audience could have been given the opportunity of challenging the current normative portrayal of women and gender, but the English version was so thoroughly changed that it prevented this possibility. I consider this to be an appropriate subject to examine, given the ethical questions related to the translation of depictions of gender constructions and roles into one's own language and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, this thesis will refer to the original title, *Men Who Hate Women*, when summarizing and interpreting the text, and will make it clear when using text examples from the American version, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. The English translations of the Swedish text are translated by the author of this thesis.

## 1.0 Background

*Men Who Hate Women* takes place in Stockholm where the investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist resides. Blomkvist is a finance reporter whose critical article about the financier Hans-Erik Wennerström lands him in prison for three months. After his release, Blomkvist is asked to take a job for the Vanger family, which wants to hire him to solve the mysterious disappearance of Henrik Vanger's niece, who went missing in 1966. The Vanger family represents the patriarchal dynasties in Sweden, and since Blomkvist is the investigative journalist he becomes the reader's eyes and ears, allowing us access into a concealed world of wealth and family secrets, another way of unveiling the hidden life of Sweden's misogynist culture.

The crimes brought to public knowledge in the novel are all related to finance and the Swedish establishment, whereas crimes committed against women and girls are never revealed in the open. Larsson's point here seems to be that by searching for external wrongdoings we don't have to face the real reason for our problems: ourselves.

The male protagonist and journalist Blomkvist agrees to the job since he needs a "time-out" from the aggressive media coverage of his arrest. He is hired by the private investigation agency Milton, for which the young woman, and virtuous hacker, Lisbeth Salander works. Salander is our heroine who wishes for, and achieves, revenge on the men who have molested her and other women. She is a lone ranger, she's hedonistic, and she sleeps with numerous men and women. However, whereas Blomkvist is seen by the narrator as liberated and free-spirited when sleeping with one woman after the other, Salander's behavior is attributed to a terrible childhood that drives her to use men only for sex. Her distrust of the Swedish state, known as *The People's Home*, is very anti-Swedish, since she doesn't care about social structures or community. Salander's life is a chaotic yet interconnected puzzle of events combined with her genius skills as a hacker and problem solver. Her father was a rapist and misogynist, and Lisbeth's own birth was the result of a brutal rape, which later led to her mother's institutionalization and Lisbeth's troubled childhood. Even though Salander is twenty-four years old when we meet her for the first time, she has been appointed a "guardian", Bjurman, who constantly threatens to commit her to a mental hospital if she reveals his own sadistic behaviors and rape. Bjurman, an agent of state authority, was assigned to Salander after her kindly first guardian had to leave his job. She was a difficult child, according to the authorities, but in reality Salander was assaulted throughout her childhood, both by her violent father and by her stepbrother. In the end, she burned down her father's house in an act of revenge. And since she was such a difficult child, and then an adult who never found her place in society, the authorities decided that an attorney should keep her under observation.

These events and situations follow Salander throughout the story, and Larsson explains her behavior in retrospective passages, leaving the reader with an understanding of the connection between the past and present. It becomes clear to the reader that ongoing betrayal by authorities and family has led Salander to want to avenge the sexual assault and violence that she and other



women have endured. The lawyer and “guardian” Bjurman is a personification of “the man who hates women.” He represents primitive and visible evil, rather than the covert and institutionalized evil that the rich and powerful Vanger family represents. Bjurman can be interpreted as the bridge between individual violence and institutional violence, and then becomes the personification of state corruption and the abuse of power. Of all the men in the story, Blomkvist is the least misogynist, even though he unknowingly enacts sexist behavior. For example, he uses women for his own pleasure, albeit without any malevolent intentions, and then leaves them when he falls in love with another. If we imagine a misogyny pyramid in the book, we see Blomkvist at the top, taking up a very little space, Bjurman, who represents the everyday violence, in the middle, and the rich Vangers as an invisible, yet strong foundation.

## 2.0. The English Version

The English translation, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (GDT), differs radically from the original Swedish version, *Men Who Hate Women* (MHW). Indeed, the English version was changed to such a degree that the American translator, Steven T. Murray, chose to publish under the pseudonym Reg Keeland in order to distance himself from the English version completely. The translation had to be completed quickly to meet British and American market demands, also American movie director David Fincher was in need of a translated manuscript (Keeland, Reg):

I translated it into fluent American English, and the British publisher has edited and rewritten it so severely that I had to take my name off it.

[...] Suffice it to say that TGWTDT (*The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*) sounds like a different book to me. (Keeland, Reg, January 22, 2009, at 1:34 PM)

The British publishing house MacLehose ordered an American translation from Keeland. They had asked him to translate the Swedish original rather quickly in order for the American movie director David Finch to use an American translation as foundation for a film-manuscript, but also, since there was a growing demand for an English version of *Men Who Hate Women*. MacLehose eventually turned Keeland's American version into British English, and the British version was then converted back into American English for Knopf, and published by Vintage, Knopf's crime-department. This was the only official English publication of *Men Who Hate Women* in the United States. In an online interview with *The Guardian* in 2012, English rights holder and publisher Christopher MacLehose expressed his view of the translation process:

MacLehose accepted the book on the condition that he could re-edit the translation. "I do think that almost every translation of a certain literary density has to be treated like an original text. If you had the author, you would make suggestions. We didn't have the author but that shouldn't stop you making the sentences more interesting for the reader." (Wroe, *The Guardian*, Web.)

On the one hand you have Christopher MacLehose interested in prettifying and safeguarding a work to fit the English book markets, and on the other hand you have the translator who wishes to secure the poetry and the intentions of the author's original narrative:

The British publisher acquired the world English rights to the trilogy, and I guess he thought the books needed titles that would have greater commercial appeal. So he changed the titles of books 1 and 3 and created what some people are calling the "Girl" trilogy. (Matzenbacher, Joanne, "Translating The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo", SouthWest Sage, 2010).

As readers of translations, we are limited in what we know of a text to what the translator gives us, and the translator's and the editor's roles are probably the least understood in the creation of a book. Of course, we readers admire the authors and create fan networks and book clubs to study their books, but rarely do we think about the translator who was charged with trying to understand the author's emotions and reasons for writing the way (s)he did. Based on our own experience and social framework and the translator's version of the original text, we construct an opinion and internalize the text we have read, but in order to understand the author's

intentions we will have to go back to the original untranslated source, and in this case that would be Larsson's authorized edition of *Men Who Hate Women*. Translations, no matter how faithfully they try to remain to the original, will of course always be different from the original because the cultures are different and because there is always, inevitably, an interpretation of the poetry of words in the translation. Nonetheless, it is my opinion that the English translation of the *Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* does readers a disservice by denying them access to Larsson's critique of current gender relations.

Stieg Larsson witnessed a rape committed by some of his friends when he was 15 years old. He did nothing to prevent it or to help the girl, and his negligence haunted him for years afterward and led to his engagement with women's rights. Larsson was a strong advocate for women's rights and often spoke out against the misogynist culture that thrives beneath the surface of feminist and politically correct Swedish society. Unfortunately, his critique of misogynist culture is lost in the English translation, which misinterprets the moral center of the original text. A few days after handing in the Swedish manuscript to his publisher Nordstedts in 2005, Larsson died of a stroke. That the disregarded American translator and the deceased author had no voice in the final English translation and editing of the book underlines the importance of exploring the matter: was the more conventional portrayal of violence against women in the English version intended to sell books, or was it an unconscious manifestation of American cultural norms that made the English rights holders edit the book as they did?

It is not hard to argue that Larsson would never have agreed to Knopf's version, nor that big corporations have no ear for post-mortem whispers. The English version turned Salander into a girlish and passive character, and even though some might argue that these changes in translation were due to aesthetic preferences, I believe that the English version suppresses Larsson's voice and political standpoints in a manner that is analogous to the way male characters, authorities and corporations suppress Salander and other women in *Men Who Hate Women*.

## 2.1 Translation Strategies

The translator's duty must be to use his own language to free the hidden truths of another language, and in this way release the intentions of the author. There are different strategies the translator will use to do so. Two strategies are widely accepted: either to translate a text word-for-word, or to make a translation in which the meaning is more important to convey than the right phrasing. When using the latter method the translator risks shading the translation with cultural norms from his or her own culture, resulting in an adaptation of the narrative rather than a translation that is true to the cultural references of the author's home country. Translation, of course, is not a science. It's a product that requires a mix of skills and disciplines: linguistics, cultural anthropology, philology, psychology, and theories of communications, among others: "Definitions of proper translating are almost as numerous and varied as the persons who have undertaken to discuss the subject. This diversity is in a sense quite understandable; for there are vast differences in the materials translated, in the purpose of the publication, and in the needs of the prospective audience" (Eugene Nida, "The Translation Studies Reader", 145, 2012).

Nida also touches on the difficulties in translation and the lack of knowledge of how the brain transfers concepts from one language to another, and he emphasizes that the translator is a reader like anyone else, thus the need for extra strong sensitivity towards anthropological and cultural differences since the slightest changes in syntax and phrasing might result in a failure to capture meaning:

Where the linguistic and cultural differences between the source and the receptor codes are least, one should expect to encounter the least number of serious problems, but as a matter of fact if languages are too closely related one is likely to be badly deceived by the superficial similarities, with the result that translations done under these circumstances are often quite poor. (Nida, 145)

Given the lack of a peer-review process for translations, the risk of creating new meanings and misinterpretations is higher, as seen in this case, where Larsson, for obvious reasons, and the American translator Murray were not presented with the edits of Murray's translation before its publication - hence Murray's decision to use the pseudonym Reg Keeland. Keeland writes on his blog, "I think the Brits thought it sounded too much like a self-help book, so dreamed up the catchy 'Girl' series, where Stieg had used the term only in the title of the second book. And hadn't we decided that female persons at age 24 are called women, oh, around the 70s I think it was..." (R. Keeland, web<sup>1</sup>)

American and Swedish cultures seem quite similar on paper, their languages both derive from West Germanic languages, but if we take a look at their official positions on feminist issues, we notice major differences. For example, the former Prime Minister of Sweden, Göran Persson, tried as late as 2005 to forbid the sexualization of girls in public spaces, and it is not uncommon for Swedish parents to raise their children in gender-neutral environments using the neutral pronoun 'Hen' instead of her or him, or for kindergartens to implement the same practice (Nyheter, Dagens, "[Könsneutrala kataloger upprör](#)", 2012, web). They do it to avoid sexualization of their children, and to allow them to choose their own sexual identity instead of

letting society do it for them. The first gender-neutral toy catalog was published in Sweden in 2012 and faced major criticism, especially in mainstream US media: “So politically correct that I feel sick”, said a commentator on Detroit’s WDIV-TV (SvD.Se).

## 2.2 Men Who Hate Women vs. The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo

A woman, in misogynist cultures, who has the power to make men hate her upsets social norms, whereas a girl with a dragon tattoo is a sexualized and disempowered child who is no threat to any man. Instead, she is merely an exotic, sexy rebel, but also reduced to a cliché and therefore quite harmless. To call the book *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* deprives not only Salander, but also the readers, of her actual intentions and motives. I would argue that the change in the title was made to appeal to the American and British markets by portraying a weaker and sexualized version of female characters, and especially of the heroine Lisbeth Salander, is supported by Keeland: “[...] the Brits thought it sounded too much like a self-help book” (R. Keeland)

The American title also shifts the focus from the social to the individual, and from interdependence to detachment. The Swedish title points to a societal problem: *men* and *women* are pluralized and the book can be seen to concern *all* men and all women. The American title, on the other hand, is protagonist driven: *girl* and *tattoo* are singular, and the purpose of tattoos is to make someone unique. This contrast between plurality and individuality reflects the two countries’ national identities. Sweden is built on social democratic values, and the official name for the state is “*Folkhemmet*” (The People’s Home) in which citizens exist interdependently with each other. In contrast to Sweden’s community focused identity, American society celebrates the self-made man and narratives of freedom and independence in which individuals fight against authority.

The English title is not the only example of Salander being diminished on account of her gender in *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. The first time Michael Blomkvist looks down at Salander’s naked body, after sleeping with her, he notices her ink:

He looked down at the dragon on her shoulder blade. He counted her tattoos. As well as a wasp on her neck, she had a loop around one ankle, another loop around the biceps of her left arm, a Chinese symbol on her hip, and a rose on one calf. (Keeland, *GDT*, 459)

However, the Swedish version reads:

He looked down at the dragon that stretched across her back, from her right shoulder blade down to her buttocks. He counted her tattoos. In addition to the dragon on her back and the wasp on her neck, she had a loop around one ankle, another loop around the biceps of her left arm, a Chinese symbol on her hip, and a rose on one calf. Except for the dragon, the tattoos were small and discreet.” (Larsson, *MHW*, Ch. 23, ebook)

Anyone who is capable of enduring the pain and exhaustion of having a dragon tattooed across her entire back is strong, vital, and much more threatening than someone who only dares to get a small tattoo on her shoulder blade. The interpretive choice here is not only a matter of aesthetics, but also a question of empowerment and action. While a girl might have a tiny dragon on her shoulder, it takes a powerful woman to have a dragon from top to bottom. Was it too vulgar for an American audience for Salander to have a big tattoo covering her back?

Once we accept that Salander is a woman, we also have to accept that she has a voice and a will of her own. However, if we are frightened by criticism by a female who raises her voice against misogyny or addresses unfairness we may turn her into a girl, since children are thought to have a distorted understanding of reality and therefore cannot possibly tell the truth. However, if the society accused of sexism and misogyny allows the woman condemning it to speak, then that society has to look at its own perpetuation of the system that fosters rapists. It is easier to blame crimes like rape on “the girl” since there would then be no need for change. Following this logic, if we accept the title *Men Who Hate Women* we also acknowledge that this is a societal issue, as the title refers to society, but if we agree to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, we are dealing with an individual, and the way society, in this case the British publishing house MacLehose brutalizes her by doing what Larsson speaks against, namely, objectifying and belittling her. Americans deal with the individual, and Swedes deal with the community, which also underlines the differences between a social democratic and a liberal society.

At the beginning of chapter 12 in both books, the narrator describes Lisbeth’s stream of consciousness regarding her rape by Bjurman. Where the original version reads: “Even if the lawyer Bjurman had gotten himself out of the situation by claiming that she wanted to do it or she seduced me or she wanted to suck my dick”, the American version reads: “Even if the lawyer had claimed that she wanted to do it or she seduced me or any other excuse that rapists routinely used”. The American translation does two remarkable things here: it takes away the direct responsibility of Bjurman by objectifying him as “the lawyer” since he becomes anonymous, and the translation also cleans up Lisbeth’s stream of thoughts by leaving out “she wanted to suck my dick,” as if the audience is incapable of reading dirty language if it is not in a sexy context.

Cultural and political differences are important because they describe the cultural horizon against which we create and understand ourselves. Sweden is, like most other Western countries, more globalized and privatized than ever, even though it is based on a social democratic structure with government-owned bodies and institutions. Nonetheless, Sweden is no match for foreign cultures as it has only 9 million inhabitants as compared with, for example, 313 million in the US. The United States’ export of culture is far more dominant than the export of Swedish culture to the U.S: “They (USA) don’t translate enough, and don’t participate in the big dialogue of literature.” This was a statement by Horace Engdahl, permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, the organization which awards the Nobel Prize in Literature, about the uni-directional export of cultural expression from the US to the rest of the world (Geherin, David, *The Dragon Tattoo and its Long Tail*, p.3). Engdahl is referring to the interconnection between society and the arts, and opens up the debate on the ethics of translation. “American readers’ historical resistance to books in translation is widely known. Foreign publishers refer to it as “the 3 percent problem,” alluding to the fact that only about that percentage of the books published in English are translated from another language.” (p. 4).

Larsson’s socialist political values stand in sharp contrast to everything corporate and capitalist, so it is not surprising that he chose to portray the rich Vanger family and the lawyer Bjurman as representatives of a rapist and misogynist society, or that ordinary people like

Salander and Blomkvist are the agents of change. Larsson's use of business narratives has turned entrepreneurship and finance into vehicles of storytelling:

This interest in corporate structures reflects obliquely on the novel's commercial success but also masks and suppresses the significance of the ethically most jarring egregious crimes of the story: the cover up and depreciation of violence against, and murder of, women. These gendered crimes are generally overlooked by reviewers and readers' discussions despite the fact that the novel's original title in Swedish (*Män som hatar kvinnor [Men Who Hate Women]* ) makes clear that gender relations are central to the plot. (Alm and Stenport 159)

Larsson's socialist logic asserts that it is the capitalist system and its characters that silence women like Salander and Harriet Vanger. In the context of American capitalist society, Larsson's narrative appears anti-American, even though Salander and Blomkvist are independent agents, albeit both working for a better community. This is a circumstance worth keeping in mind when evaluating Murray's opinion that the English rights holder chose to edit and censor MHW in order to meet market demands and gain profit. The publisher knew the book would never sell in the United States on Swedish feminist and socialist terms, and neither would a book with the title "Men Who Hate Women".

Horace Engdahl, airing his frustration about the paucity of translations available in the US, represents the arts and not the businesses selling literature. To Engdahl, the lack of engagement with foreign literature results in bad translations. How is one supposed to do something well if one is not accustomed to the considerations that must be made when mediating from one culture to another? The last decade's debate about cultural sustainability being the glue in society has opened the doors for social enterprises serving as change agents for the better. However, these social enterprises are not solving cultural or artistic problems in society, but trying to meet other needs, like poverty reduction or green energy. Nonetheless, the mindset of social enterprise could easily be adopted: how can publishers both support art and culture and meet their shareholder's interests? In this case, where *Men Who Hate Women* is prettified and Salander is censored to meet mainstream cultural and market demands, the question of whether Knopf, now owned by Penguin Random House, has a social responsibility, might be relevant. This is also a question about the ethics of translation, Baker and Maier cites Bromberg and Jesinowski and write, "As would be expected, when professionals discuss the ethical implications of such developments they do not often address the pedagogical implications of societal changes, but in this area too they have begun to point out the need for translator training to include a "profound understanding of professional ethics"(Bromberg and Jesionowski)" (Baker and Maier, 2). They argue that translators and publishers must become aware of the consequences of incorrect translations as a matter of public interest (2) and that in an era of internet connectedness and information availability, these translations will eventually be detected and questioned. Baker and Maier also argue,

...ethical decision making is a feature of all situations, not only those in which one finds oneself faced with controversial issues on highly conflictual



assignments [...] The decisions made during the course of translating and interpreting can potentially have considerable impact on the survival of individuals and even whole communities; at the very least they can impact the quality of life of those who rely on the translator or interpreter to mediate for them. (4)

A translation in which Salander was not silenced could have inspired men and women to think and talk differently, and perhaps more articulately, about rape. Instead, her stream of consciousness was enhanced by leaving out the unflattering thoughts she imagined him to have. Facilitating a more ethically correct translation is potentially a responsibility Knopf could undertake in case they do decide to revise the book before publishing a new edition.

## 2.3 Small But Significant Changes

After having established an understanding of the cultural differences between the US and Sweden on a political and societal level, the following section will examine Nida's point that the result of a translation between similar languages often is poor. A close reading of the passages below will show how minor changes in grammar and phrasing can result in a very different meanings. The first scene where Salander's figure and personality are described by her boss Armansky at the private investigation company Milton (GDT, 40-41) is another controversial passage that touches on one of the most important differences between the Swedish and the English versions: objectification versus subjectification. The original reads:

Armansky had a hard time accepting that his star researcher was a pale, anorexic young woman. (Larsson, *MHW*, 64)

GDT reads:

Armansky's star researcher was a pale, anorexic young woman. (Keeland, *GDT*, 40-41)

The Keeland version lacks the all-important point that Armansky has a problem accepting Salander's looks. In the English version, she is simply described by the narrator. Larsson's point that men's expectations of women's appearance is a characteristic of misogynist society and a problem we should be aware of. Her looks are not the focus of Larsson's text; instead Armansky's inability as a man to accept her looks is highlighted. It is mere entertainment rather than social critique, and misses out on the deeper motives suggested by the book's original title. In the English translation, the narrator's objectification ironically becomes part of the same societal problem that Larsson tries to exemplify by describing Armansky's judgmental attitude. Larsson's original intention, to let the omniscient narrator demonstrate how misogynist culture is ingrained in men's prejudices of how a woman is supposed to look, has thereby vanished from the text.

Further down on the page Armansky remarks further on her figure. The original reads like this:

small hands, narrow wrists, and breasts scarcely noticeable under her shirt. She was twenty-four, but looked fourteen. [...] Under her make-up - sometimes she even wore repulsive black lipstick - and the tattoos and the pierced nose and her eyebrows she was... hmm... attractive. In a totally unthinkable way. (64)

The English translation thus:

small hands, narrow wrists, and childlike breasts. She was twenty-four, but she sometimes looked fourteen. [...] Sometimes she wore black lipstick, and in spite of the tattoos and the pierced nose and eyebrows she was...well.. attractive. It was inexplicable. (41)

This passage of the American translation presents a narrative that infantilizes and pacifies Salander. I'm not sure whether the irony of using mistranslation to pacify a character who's already fighting misogyny is a stroke of genius or merely represents a lack of the cultural and anthropological knowledge necessary to translate societal concepts from one language to

another. If we keep in mind that in the American version Salander is a “girl” with “childlike breasts” but in the Swedish version she is a “woman” with “unnoticeable breasts,” the circumstances under which Bjurman rapes her change from misogynist hate to pedophilia. Of course, Bjurman is indisputably a pedophile as his rapes of Salander have been taking place since she was a girl. However, there is more power behind a grown up woman’s revenge than there is behind a child’s.

## 2.4 Salander as Lolita Figure in *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*

Lisa Wade, professor of sociology at Occidental College, writes in her online article “Power, Mickey Mouse, and the Infantilization of Women” (SociologicalImages.com) about the gender aspects of America’s Disneyfied culture:

The sexualization of girls and the infantilization of adult women are two sides of the same coin. They both tell us that we should find youth, inexperience, and naivete sexy in women, but not in men. This reinforces a power and status difference between men and women, where vulnerability, weakness, and dependency and their opposites are gendered traits: desirable in one sex but not the other. (Wade, *Sociological Images*, web)

Wade refers to researcher Allison Guy, who interprets the American infantilization of women as the “result of a cultural imperative for women to embody both the cute and the sexual.” (Wade, web.) If the cultural norm for the American woman is to be infantilized, are the changes in the translation and editing a purely unreflective response by the editors of the English text? Or are they a crafty decision by editors who knew that portraying Salander on Swedish terms never would have sold any books in America? Profit motive might explain why the translation theory used wasn’t the one by which the translator tries to reproduce the language or authorial motives underlying the original text. That the English editors chose to portray Salander as childlike instead of a woman corresponds neatly with Wade and Guy’s point about the sexualization of girls in America to make them “cute” and “sexual”. However, it is a mistranslation and takes away Larsson’s original intention: to show Salander’s revenge on pedophilic and misogynistic men. But if infantilization is made “cute” then there is no one to take revenge on. One cannot portray revenge or victory over pedophilia if one does not acknowledge its existence, which is seen clearly in the differences between the following passages:

Salander had explained her actions because the man had groped her, and since her looks were so that you could mistake her for being twelve years instead of eighteen she regarded the man to have pedophile tendencies. (Larsson, *MHW*, 280-281)

“Salander claimed that the man had groped her, and her testimony was supported by witnesses.” (*GDT*, 175).

The American version’s transformation of Salander into a sexy Lolita figure makes it impossible to introduce pedophilia to explain why Salander punched the man for groping her. If pedophilia is introduced into the narrative, male readers might not want to admit to her sexiness, nor would they want to relate to the male character if he has groped her because she looked like a child, nor would the male reader want to ask himself if he might have pedophilic tendencies just because he once groped a woman. The translation raises more questions than it answers. Is the English editor protecting the male reader and sustaining the narrative of the innocent and safe girl? It’s embarrassing to admit to a lust for young women, especially if they look *too* young and the interested man might be crossing a line. A line he doesn’t want to be reminded of. Nonetheless, Salander also goes out with much older men, which for some reason is not censored in the

English version.

Scholars and researchers who have studied Salander's character have mostly focused on Larsson's creation of her second and third-wave feminist roles, and although the Murray controversy is mentioned, none of the articles or books interpreting the story or looking at them in a social context deal with the translation. Salander is undoubtedly an interesting character from a feminist perspective. She has a second-wave feminist alter ego in Irene Nesser, a blond wig wearing, independent and boob-jobbed woman, whom Salander dresses up as when she wants society to work for her (Lorber 55). Salander uses her punk and introvert character when she wants to obtain different goals, but both Nesser and Salander want to get back at men, and often in a very violent way. Judith Lorber remarks that Larsson's extreme success is due to "this "equal-opportunity" violence, a sort of "guilty secret" (Lorber, *MHWWKA*, 53) that women also buy into as we follow Lisbeth's revenge on rapist and pedophile men with great satisfaction. We enjoy her violent revenge on Bjurman, her "guardian," as she tattoos a warning message onto his breast that he's a rapist and a pedophile.

Another study conducted by Lucas Gottzén at Lindköping University, Sweden, showed that American men were more likely to leave the housework to their wives, and be more present at sport training sessions. The American wife would more often need to prod their husbands to share in the chores in the home, whereas in Sweden men thought it was natural to engage in these daily activities. In so doing, the American families, willingly or unwittingly, end up strengthening classical gender-roles contrary to Swedish families. However, Gottzén also mentions that American culture has different internal truths than the Swedish, which explains the continued traditional male and female roles. In the US, it is still a very new thing to have two full-time working parents, and access to affordable or free child care is not an option in most parts of the States. This is supported by a survey conducted by CBS News of 990 adults nationwide in the United States; it showed that "Four out of 10 Americans think that being a good mother tops them all" (CBS News, "The Perfect Woman", July 29 2013). This narrative is also supported by the number of wedding magazines published in Sweden and the US: There are at least 22 wedding magazines published in the US, and this number includes only the most popular ones. Sweden, on the other hand, has only 2 magazines nationwide (top wedding sites). It doesn't take more than a stroll down any residential street in New York City to see these images further sustained by little girls in princess costumes following their mothers with their own little baby-doll stroller, something that would make any Swedish woman blow her political correctness whistle. On the other hand, it would most likely be a shock to most American women to see Swedish girls dressed up like androgynous characters such as Pippi Longstocking, Ronja the Robber's Daughter, or even cross-dressing as Lindgren's other popular character "Emil", a rascally boy equally at home with boys and girls, all as their parents call them 'hen'.

The American consulting company Catalyst conducted research on female leaders (Catalyst report, 30 and found that those who "take charge" are rated more harshly than their male colleagues, and that the prejudice was that women "take care" whereas men "take charge". Keeping the political and cultural differences between the US and Sweden in mind, we can see

Nida's point that minor linguistic differences will manifest themselves either as straightforward mistakes, or as a cultural difference in which the American woman is no longer playing an active part, but has been made passive compared to the male protagonist. Take, for example, these translation differences between the original and the translation:

Lisbeth Salander looked at Michael (Blomkvist).

(Lisbeth) "We have a mystery to solve. How are we going to do this?"

(Blomkvist) "We sum up the facts we have. We try to find more."

(Lisbeth) "The fact is that someone close to us is after you."

(Blomkvist) "The question is why? Is it because we're trying to solve the mystery about Harriet [...]" (Larsson, *MHW*, eBook, Ch. 23)

And here is the English translation:

A couple of hours later over breakfast Blomkvist said,

(Blomkvist) "How are we going to solve this puzzle?"

(Lisbeth) "We sum up the facts we have. We try to find more."

(Blomkvist) "For me, the only question is: why? Is it because we're trying to solve the mystery about Harriet [...]" (Keeland, *GDT*, 459)

The image that the American translation portrays is one of Blomkvist as a man of action who "takes charge". He becomes the active voice. Salander, on the other hand, is left to be the "good girl," answering questions asked, whereas in the original version she plays the active inquisitive part. Salander is even the one who holds the answer to who is after Blomkvist: "someone close to them". Patricia Y. Martin argues that when the authorities look the other way and fail to "challenge sex trafficking, domestic violence, and rape, it is complicit in supporting violence against women" (Martin, *MHWWKA*, 39). In this case, the authority is Knopf who censors Larsson's intention and motives by re-editing the text to match a stereotypical cultural construction: the man as active and the woman as passive. These little changes in translation, while apparently small and inconsequential, become, in the end, just as violent as the characters in the novel who rape Salander, and as the men who turn their blind eye toward such physical violence toward women. These changes keep women fixed within the paradigm of traditional sexual politics.

### 3.0 Lisbeth and Pippi – Literary Relations

“He's the strongest man in the world.’

‘Man, yes,’ said Pippi, ‘but I am the strongest *girl* in the world, remember that.’”

— Astrid Lindgren, *Pippi Longstocking*

While the North Americans have nurtured the image of strong women in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, Astrid Lindgren, whom Larsson pays homage to in the creation of Salander, took things a step further in 1945 when she created Pippi Longstocking, who became a national symbol of female liberation and equality.

Pippi Longstocking is an androgynous orphan girl, who is also the world’s richest, strongest and kindest person, although quite egoistical and a social outsider. Lisbeth is in every way a modern and adult version of Pippi. Most Swedish libraries and parents wanted Pippi to be banned at the time, as the young liberated girl who lived alone and slept with her feet on a pillow did everything that was contrary to accepted social norms of piety and timidity. Any Swedish reader would recognize Larsson’s reference to Pippi, the world’s strongest, richest, and bad-guy-fighting girl. Salander was celebrated as her grown up punk-ego, to great amusement. In 2003 Larsson stated, “My point of departure was what Pippi Longstocking would be like as an adult. Would she be called a sociopath because she looks upon society in a different way and has no social competence?” (Winkler 2010)” (Loe, Meika, “Pippi and Lisbeth”, *MHWWKA*, 171). The name plate on Salander’s new apartment even reads “V. Kulla” which is also the name of Pippi’s house, Villa Villekulla. I would argue that the English version has failed, with its infantilization of Salander, to grasp one of Sweden’s most powerful feminist symbols. Thus the translation also failed to understand Larsson’s real intentions and cultural references.

Pippi is an inventor, an action-girl, and “in charge” just like Salander, which is why turning Salander into a passive listener instead of the active investigator in *GDT* illustrates clearly this lack of cultural understanding. Or perhaps it indicates understanding that this girl might be too difficult to relate to for the American mainstream, making the motive for the shoddy translation purely to gain profit from the book, in the same manner that they changed the title to prevent the text from sounding too much like social critique. Loe writes,

It seems that Pippi’s popularity in the United States has waned since the androgynous 1980s [...] However, while superhuman traits may sell books [...] I think it is the human traits – the quiet confidence and internal strength or *ensamhet* (loneliness), combined with the spirit of play and a desire for fairness – that makes these characters (Pippi and Lisbeth) attractive to me. (172)

Through translation of foreign literature we gain access to other cultures and their mindsets, and we are given the possibility to reflect on our own culture and ourselves by identifying with characters and situations from strange places. But when we are limited in our access to new worlds, the potential effect on our culture and ourselves also becomes limited.

These are some of the ethical questions that translators must be capable of asking themselves when interpreting a foreign text and culture. But where Meika Loe's daughter found a gap in her American literature of Dora the Explorer and Curious George (Loe, 175) and replaced it with a Swedish icon and "lots of imagination", Pippi, it might be harder for women like Loe, or myself, to fill the gap with Salander. As Loe writes, "I have to wonder what social changes might emerge if most American girls went through a Pippi phase rather than a princess phase" (Loe, *MHWWKA*, 175) Or a Lisbeth phase, I would add, but a true Lisbeth phase where the character had not been infantilized, prettified or pacified.



## 4.0 Reader Responses

Through this reading of the two versions of *Men Who Hate Women*, I've focused on the differences and cultural framework in the US and how these have affected the translation and editing. It remains to discover how readers have responded to the different books in order to understand how the Swedish and English versions reflect cultural differences in attitudes about gender, society and politics, and if it is apparent from the readers' responses that Larsson's critique of gender relations has been compromised.

When reading responses and reviews of the book in US and Swedish newspapers and on blogs, I found two main differences: men who reviewed the book in both countries (Tim Parks from *The New York Review of Books*, Alex Brenson from *The New York Times*, Anders Hultman on his own blog, Per Planhammar in *Göteborgs Posten*) identified with Stieg Larsson and Mikael Blomkvist, but focused very little on Lisbeth Salander and misogyny. Women, on the other hand, both American and Swedish, focused mostly on Salander and the social problem of men who hate women. Nonetheless, even the reviews prove Larsson's point; the ruling discourse in mainstream media is voiced by men who don't pay attention to the struggle of women, or at least the struggles that Salander has to go through. This might be as simple as one sex's inability to internalize the battles of the other sex, since female bloggers focus mainly on Salander. Jessie Daniel writes in the chapter "Feminist Bloggers Kick Larsson's Ass": "I can understand why many feminist bloggers are effusive when it comes to Salander. She speaks to a deep desire among feminists – a longing," (Daniel, *MHWWKA*, 182). Daniel echoes Loe's point that we find freedom in a character like Pippi and Salander, they make it possible for us to leave society's norms and create new ones. Daniel quotes the blogger PunditMom:

I think that giving readers around the world a look at this type of violence without sugar-coating is a way that we can move forward with reducing violent acts against women. What do you think? Are graphic descriptions of violence against women just gratuitous way to sell books or is it time to stare it in the face and not turn away?

PunditMom definitely recognizes the potential for creating awareness about sexual violence, as Baker and Maier also discuss in their article on the ethics of interpretation and translation. But she also "recognizes the inherent contradiction in this text given that graphic depictions of sexual violence increase sales and thus contribute to a culture of violence against women." (Daniel, *MHWWKA*, 185) One might think that Daniel and PunditMom's reactions are spot on and clarifying, even without knowing the original uncensored text. However, I'd like to know what they would have thought if they had been able read the original Swedish text to see that the female character in the American version had been suppressed in a way that prevents the reader from understanding the story on Swedish terms.

One of the male reviewers who focused on Larsson and Blomkvist was Tim Parks from *The New York Review of Books*. He writes in his article "The Moralist,"

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo has now sold 50 million copies worldwide [...] What is the attraction? One character holds our attention throughout the trilogy

and dominates discussion of the work: Lisbeth Salander. From the first pages, it's evident that the journalist Mikael Blomkvist is an authorial alter ego.

Why does Parks find Salander attractive but only give her a couple of sentences in his review before turning to his focus on Larsson's "authorial alter ego"? Perhaps because Tim Parks has never experienced domestic violence himself, or beaten up a woman, and therefore the fascination of being in charge captures him, and he identifies with Mikael Blomkvist.

The American version of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* was edited quickly as the book's success grew in Scandinavia. Knopf and Random House Penguin saw a good business in Larson's *Millennium Trilogy* and wanted to capitalize on the story, which is after all the business model of any publishing house and the reason why they invest in literature. The Swedish publishing house Nordstets had agreed together with Larsson, before he died, on the Swedish edition, and Nordstets would not have agreed to the manuscript if there weren't basis for profit.

## 5.0 Reflection and Conclusion

*“Reading a poem in translation, is like kissing a woman through a veil”*

- Bialek

This thesis set out to explore the cultural differences between Sweden and the US through an attempt to explain why substantial changes were made to *Men Who Hate Women*, and why the book was renamed *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. My thesis contrasts these edits to highlight the interpretational consequences they have had on the female protagonist: Lisbeth Salander.

The translation was controversial from the very beginning, after Steven T. Murray refused to accept the English publisher Christopher MacLehose’s and the American publisher Knopf’s choices. MacLehose chose to prettify Larsson’s work in order to “making the sentences more interesting for the reader”.

The original Salander is not visible through the filter of infantilization in the Knopf version of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. The American/English version disempowers Salander, by portraying her, despite being 24 years old, as a passive, childlike “girl” rather than as someone taking charge. Furthermore, the English version sexualizes Salander to the point where she becomes an aggressive Lolita figure instead of an oppressed adult. Altogether, the readers are deprived of Larsson’s original Salander who is not only a grown up woman, but is also a re-imagining of Astrid Lindgren’s feminist and asexual title character: Pippi Longstocking. The mere fact that Larsson portrayed Salander as a grown up Pippi makes the choices to infantilize and pacify her all the more telling of cultural ignorance to the literary reference and its importance. The motifs and the strength behind Salander’s revenge over misogynist men are notably different when the actor is a childish figure rather than a grown up woman.

For the sake of commercial success, MacLehose and Knopf edited the original *Men Who Hate Women* without respect for the deceased author Stieg Larsson. Feminism was on sale and so was rape, and the English editors chose to play it safe and avoided any aspect of those topics in the writing. The English translation could have led to more dialog about misogyny and rape. “But Salander is rough and aggressive in the English version, too”, I hear you argue. Indeed, but with a glow of sexiness and Lolita about her, she is not allowed to release her full potential as an empowered and enfranchised grown woman on a path of vengeance. This same argument was also made by many female readers, like PunditMom, despite not having had access to the Swedish version. They merely reacted to the American version’s sexualization and the publishers’ capitalization on rape. It is this sexualization and detention of Salander’s full potential that is the American version’s biggest crime.

The scale of the Girl-debate is extensive and multilayered, and in order to cover the problem with limited translations and their consequences, there is need for more studies on ethics within translation, and how to facilitate dialog about misogyny and rape in other ways than the ruling discourse or mainstream is ready to address it.

In spite of the limitations of this thesis and the subject, I've examined the differences in how Lisbeth Salander is portrayed in the American version and the Swedish version. Very little has been previously said on these differences, as scholars formerly have focused more on Salander's English version appearance than on her Swedish version.

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## VITA

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