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“Somebody’d get a fat lip if they ever called me Pippi Longstocking”:

Gender, Sex and Red Hair in Stieg Larsson’s *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

Elise Riedlinger  
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Centre for Languages and Literature  
Lund University  
Supervisor: Birgitta Berglund

## Abstract

In *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Stieg Larsson depicts a fiery, independent and highly sexual protagonist in the character of Lisbeth Salander. While many readers fail to notice the subtle reference to Lisbeth's natural red hair, this quality, along with Larsson's admittance that his inspiration originated from Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*, situates Lisbeth in a long tradition of redheaded women who have been stereotyped as highly intelligent, strong, adventurous and passionate. This thesis explores the cultural and literary background of such stereotypes, tracing the image of the redheaded woman back to biblical interpretations and Renaissance paintings. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the ways in which both Lisbeth and Pippi subvert their gender expectations is also discussed, and Lisbeth's vibrant sexuality is seen as a continuation of her independence and fearlessness. Finally, this paper takes on charges of Larsson's misogyny, in an overall attempt to establish Lisbeth Salander as a strong, feminist character and a continuation of the subversive role so commonly assigned to redheaded women.

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## Introduction

When Stieg Larsson's novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was published in 2005 it quickly became an international phenomenon, with critics and readers alike lauding the originality of the sassy, independent female protagonist, Lisbeth Salander. A twenty-four-year-old computer hacker with a photographic memory, Lisbeth often defies societal constraints and breaks down gender stereotypes as she demonstrates strength, sexual confidence and mathematic genius while driving a motorcycle, kick-boxing and seeking revenge on her rapist. Her appearance is similarly created in order to make her stand out as strikingly unique, so that she dresses in a gothic fashion with many tattoos and piercings, even dying her hair raven black despite being specifically described as "a natural redhead" (Larsson 34). What many readers do not recognize, however, is that Lisbeth comes from a long history of redheads in literature, culture and media who are known for their deviant ways and feminist traits.

Marion Roach, in her book *The Roots of Desire: The Myth, Meaning and Sexual Power of Red Hair*, writes "that redheads are untrustworthy, fiery, unstable, hot-tempered, highly sexed rare creatures is what passes for common knowledge today" (14). Her work traces the origin of these stereotypes back to biblical interpretations in which the colour red was seen as indicating the influence of the devil. She notes that over the course of history, stereotypes of redheads split evenly along the gender divide, establishing redheaded women as not merely devilish and sinful, but also promiscuous, seductive and desirable (Roach 35). A review of contemporary and historical works also reveals that this trope is well established as a cultural entity. Victoria Sherrow, in the *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History*, highlights the connection between red hair and independent women, suggesting that since the 1960s the passionate personality associated with redheads has been embraced by feminists (152). Lisbeth's adventurous sexuality can be seen as a protest against contemporary double standards of promiscuity, and the freedom she exhibits from gender roles extends to her sexual liberation.

While Lisbeth's characterization is influenced by general stereotypes of redheaded women, Larsson's specific inspiration can be traced to another fiery redhead from Swedish literature, Pippi Longstocking of Astrid Lindgren's cherished children's books. *The Telegraph* recently printed a translation of Larsson's only interview prior to his sudden death in 2004, which originally was published by Svensk Bokhandel. According to Lasse Winkler, Larsson said:

I considered Pippi Longstocking ... What would she be like today? What would she be like as an adult? What would you call a person like that, a sociopath? Hyperactive? Wrong. She simply sees society in a different light. I'll make her 25 years old and an outcast. She has no friends and is deficient in social skills. That was my original thought. (par. 11)

*Pippi Långstrump* was first published in Swedish in 1945 and became an international success with translations into over 70 languages and numerous film and television adaptations. Astrid Lindgren, in her turn, was strongly influenced by the image of another redheaded heroine, namely L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, written in 1909 (Åhmansson 11). Like the eponymous character Anne, Pippi is presented as a vibrant and precocious child, easily recognized by her two bright red braids, mismatched attire and immense strength.

While *Pippi Longstocking* is considered children's literature and consequently avoids the sexual connotations or violence associated with Lisbeth's story, it is similar in its subtle commentary on gender norms. Tiina Meri, in an article posted on Sweden's official website agrees that Pippi "breaks with conventional ideas about how girls should behave — and also, perhaps, makes fun of adults' gender roles in the process" (par. 5). In fact, the biggest similarity between Pippi and Lisbeth is the way in which they both defy expectations of typical young women, rebelling in school, showing both physical and emotional strength, ignoring figures of male authority, and expressing their love for exploration (Lisbeth as a computer hacker and Pippi as a "turnupstuffer").

According to feminist scholars, viewing gender as something that is enacted or performed rather than a biological essentialism situates it as "a potential site of struggle over perceived restrictions in roles" (Mills 138) and it is evident that both characters can be seen as protesting against society's gendered restrictions. Judith Butler, in her ground-breaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* even goes so far as to argue that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender ... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). She claims that it is language and discourse that create our notions of "gender" and that even "sex" is a cultural norm rather than a scientific differentiation (Butler 7). Her work will prove highly relevant in establishing the role language and literature play in breaking down these cultural norms and demonstrating the significance of Lisbeth and Pippi's gender bending.

Overall, this essay aims to demonstrate that Lisbeth Salander originates from a long literary lineage of redheaded women who have been stereotyped as highly intelligent, strong, adventurous and passionate, and who break down gender roles and expectations in the process. Her sexuality will similarly be considered from this point of view and explored as a further representation of her independence and defiance. Since it provides the most detailed account of Lisbeth's background and personality, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* will be the primary focus of study; however the other two novels in Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy*, *The Girl who Played with Fire* (2008) and *The Girl who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* (2010) will be taken into account. Lisbeth will also be directly compared to her literary predecessor Pippi Longstocking to prove that their common rebellious traits can be read as a feminist protest against gender norms. Finally, this paper will take on charges of Larsson's misogyny, in an overall attempt to establish that Lisbeth Salander is a strong, feminist character and a continuation of the subversive role so commonly assigned to redheaded women.

## Historical Stereotypes of Redheads: Fallen Women and Fiery Lovers

The image of redheaded women as fiery and sexually voracious has long been embraced across literature, culture and media despite its origin remaining unknown to many. The online source *Urban Dictionary*, a web-based dictionary of slang in which users vote for the most popular definition, provides insight into the contemporary stereotype of a *Redhead* as:

An exotic woman with a fiery temper. One of the most beautiful creatures on Earth, too bad there are so little of them. Rumored to have a three times as powerful sex drive as normal women. (*Urban Dictionary*)

Some examples from films include the 1932 release *Red-Headed Woman*, in which Jean Harlow plays an immoral woman who seduces various men in order to progress in society and even attempts to murder her husband. A 1999 box-office hit, *American Pie* introduces the character of Michele Flaherty, a redheaded band geek who not only uses her instruments for unconventional purposes but charms the film's main character, Jim, and promptly abandons him the following morning. Comparatively, the 2005 film *Wedding Crashers* features a vivacious redhead who pretends to be a virgin in order to seduce her love interest and then proceeds to shock him with her adventurousness. Her lover expresses his surprise but says, "I know when that redhead starts getting kooky that something about me feels alive inside!" (*Wedding Crashers*).

The trope of the redheaded seductress seems to have established itself firmly in the sequential arts as well. Whisper D'Aire, a recent copper-haired addition to DC Comics, uses her charms and voice to acquire mind control over her opponents. Another famous comic book redhead, Poison Ivy, originates from the *Batman* series of the 1960s and is known for her poisonous kiss and her mind-controlling pheromones. Even the more child-friendly *Archie Comics* saw the introduction of a redheaded siren in Cheryl Blossom, who was actually removed for a period in the 1980s after being deemed too racy. The popularity of redheads in comic books can be attributed to artistic influences, since it enables colourists to use vivid hues. Similarly, some historians claim that the reason why red hair became more popular in the twentieth century in both Europe and the United States was that red shades showed up well in colour films and television (Sherrow 152).

The typecast redheaded siren is common in modern-day romance novels and appears throughout the literary canon. In one of Martin Amis' first novels, *Dead Babies* (1975), this theme manifests itself in the character of Roxeanne, who has been described as a "full-formed,

red-haired, American nymphomaniac” (Leutbug 69). Anne Margaret Daniel is currently completing a book entitled *Redheads* and also notes the connection, saying she was drawn to study historical notions about red hair while reading William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848) in which the titian-haired heroine, Becky Sharp, “appears fiery-tempered and lascivious” (Jasiewicz, par. 7). This stereotype was evidently established as early as 1726, when in *Gulliver’s Travels* Jonathan Swift satirizes it in his description of the Yahoos, of whom “the red-haired of both sexes are more libidinous and mischievous than the rest, whom yet they much exceed in strength and activity” (164). Yet the belief in the vivid sexuality of redheads can be traced back long before the eighteenth century.

Marion Roach writes that contemporary fiction writers often “build on the strong, existing themes of redheads’ power of desirability to bring us fully dimensional red-haired women” (Roach 160). So where did these existing themes come from? According to Roach, they originate as early as the time the Bible was being written, in which the colour red was seen to represent the devil’s influence or possession (38). Victoria Sherrow, in the *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History* agrees that negative attitudes towards redheads can be traced to the belief that Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus in the New Testament, was thought to have this hair colour (152). Because of this, she claims that redheads have since become targets of superstition, prejudice and persecution. Sherrow draws attention to the links between redheads and witches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, claiming about those accused of witchcraft that “many had red hair and were also young and good looking” (*Encyclopedia* 152). Roach agrees that red became a suspected marker of the devil during times of witch hunts, something that had long been a German folk belief and extended into the literature of the twentieth century (60). It is therefore somewhat ironic that in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Lisbeth notes that her birthday is on Walpurgis night, the Swedish spring festival which historically includes lighting bonfires in order to keep demons and witches away. Lisbeth herself comments dryly, “Very fitting, don’t you think? That’s when I gad around with a broom between my legs” (Larsson 504). Even *Anne of Green Gables’* title redhead is referred to good-naturedly as a “freckled witch”, highlighting the assumption that one’s fiendish personality often matches their appearance (Montgomery 19).

This link between the devil, sin and red hair has also historically been applied to Mary Magdalene, often mistaken as a prostitute in Biblical interpretations and commonly portrayed

with long flowing red hair in contrast to other women who modestly cover their heads. Margaret Starbird goes further to note the connection between Mary Magdalene and Disney's version of *The Little Mermaid*, stating that Ariel is "a powerful metaphor for the plight of the 'Sacred Feminine'", as she too fights to free herself from an oppressive patriarchy (in this case her father's rule rather than the church's). She cites Ariel's long flowing red hair and her prized possession in her treasure cave – the painting "Magdalen with the Smoking Flame" by George de la Tour – as evidence that the little mermaid is an interpretation of Mary Magdalene (Starbird 121). The church's alleged conspiracy against Mary Magdalene, along with her vibrant red hair, is a theme that Dan Brown picked up on and made popular with his 2003 best-seller *The Da Vinci Code*. Another biblical figure, Eve, is depicted on the walls of St. Paul's Cathedral in London with blond hair while looking at the forbidden fruit in "The Temptation"; then in the "The Expulsion" the fallen Eve is shown as cowering under her long red hair (Roach 165). This transformation is repeated in the Sistine Chapel, in which Michelangelo's "Temptation" shows a brown-haired Eve being tempted by a red-headed serpent with a bright red apple, while the adjacent fresco shows a now redheaded Eve thrown out of the garden in shame (Johansen, par. 23).

While Eve, Mary Magdalene and Judas provide strong evidence for the relationship between red hair and a devilish countenance, perhaps the most influential redhead can be traced back to Lilith, whose earliest written mention is from around 2400 BCE in the Sumerian King list and who then appears in the epic *Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree*, dating to around 2000 BCE (Roach 22). The mythology surrounding Lilith was then incorporated into the Bible in Genesis references in which Lilith was created as Adam's first wife. She is said to have refused to lie beneath Adam, asking him "Why should I lie beneath you," as quoted in Roach's book, "when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust" (23). After refusing to be overpowered, Lilith fled to the Red Sea where she began a promiscuous life. Since then, her myth has been reinforced through portrayals as a succubus, a female demon who seduces men through sexual intercourse, or often as a woman's face on a red-haired serpent in countless renderings of the temptation scene (Roach 24).

As has been noted in the previous examples of modern-day redheaded stereotypes, redheaded women have often been portrayed as not merely devilish and sinful, but highly sexual. Roach credits this to Lilith, writing, "though evil through her powers of seduction, it was those

powers that also gave her a highly sexualized identity, even at the height of her ancient ability to provoke fear” (35). As history progressed, redheaded women were increasingly associated not only with fear but with desire as well and as Roach notes, both are states of heightened arousal (28). Furthermore, while the red-haired woman developed as a symbol of sexuality, the red-haired man did not fare as well, with reactions splitting evenly along the lines of gender and remaining negative towards redheaded males. Even today, female actors with red hair tend to be significantly more popular with an audience than their male redheaded counterparts (Sherrow 152). A recent psychological study by Heckert and Best called “Ugly Duckling to Swan: Labeling Theory and the Stigmatization of Red Hair” concurred that modern day stereotypes include the disparity between red-haired “wild women” and “wimpy men” (365).

With the improving status of redheaded women, Sherrow also points out that red hair “often was associated with a passionate personality type and that women’s sexuality has become more open and acceptable since the 1960’s” (152). In fact, it seems as though the redheaded woman’s role has shifted drastically since the rise of feminism, and although it is evident that redheads have long been portrayed as independent and sexually vivacious, these stereotypes have only recently been taken on in a more positive light. Due to her refusal to lay beneath Adam, Lilith has been embraced by contemporary feminists as a symbol of independence, as is evident in events such as *Lilith Fair*, the popular North American concert tour made up of solely female artists and bands (Roach 25). The shift is also highlighted when comparing the murderous harlot of the 1932 film *Red-Headed Woman* to Bruce Springsteen’s 1992 song “Red Headed Women” which celebrates rather than fears the redhead, claiming, “Well I don't care how many girls you've dated, man/ But you ain't lived till you've had your tires rotated/By a red headed woman” (*In Concert/MTV Unplugged*). The 1990s further saw the creation of the popular British girl band *The Spice Girls* who were celebrated for their emphasis on “girl power” and female autonomy. The group included one redhead nicknamed “Ginger Spice”, who significantly was the only one simultaneously known as “Sexy Spice”, epitomizing the acquiescence of bold sexuality with popular views on feminism (Lemish 18).

Yet the extent of the glorification of redheaded women’s uninhibited sexuality is perhaps best exemplified by the media frenzy that occurred when the UK’s *Daily Mail* published an article citing a recent study on the topic. According to the Hamburg Sex Research Professor Dr. Habermehl, who looked at the sex lives of dozens of German women, “[t]he sex lives of women

with red hair were clearly more active than those with other hair colours, with more partners and having sex more often than the average. The research shows that the fiery redhead certainly lives up to her reputation” (*Daily Mail*, par. 3). While the tabloid-like article, or even the research itself, may leave readers doubting its reliability, its tone expresses envy rather than fear of the redhead libido, and the numerous news sources which picked up the story indicate how ingrained this idea has become in the minds of the public.

Furthermore, while redheaded women may be typecast as highly sexualized and specifically *feminine* seductresses, they conversely subvert – or at least, re-define – other aspects of stereotypical femininity. This deviance appears when they are contrasted with historical gender roles; rather than passivity, redheads are commonly recognized for their aggression and hot tempers; instead of feminine weakness they are noted for their strength; and instead of dealing with a stereotype like the “dumb blonde” they are often portrayed as highly intelligent – even to the point of creating the redheaded “band geek” or “naughty librarian” tropes that have become popular in recent Hollywood films (or, in Lisbeth’s case, the “sexy computer hacker”). Like Mary Magdalene and *The Little Mermaid’s* Ariel, they often refuse to submit to patriarchal authority, fighting against these restrictions and asserting their own independence.

This battle against limiting gender roles is further epitomized in the warrior-like redheaded figures that appear in both history and literature. For example, Tamora Pierce’s fantasy series fittingly entitled *The Song of the Lioness* (1983) follows its redheaded heroine Alanna as she disguises herself as a boy in order to become a knight. Pierce’s protagonist not only binds her breasts and takes on masculine mannerisms in order to fight for her kingdom but, like many redheads, she complicates her role by simultaneously incorporating an unbridled sexuality and desirability to those who discover her true identity. This type of sexual vivacity – along with the qualities of strength, passion, aggression and intelligence often associated with redheads – undoubtedly invites comparison to Lisbeth Salander.

Significantly, a redheaded warrior woman is featured in the *Millennium Trilogy*, in this case the Celtic queen Boudicca, who led the Iceni against the Romans in the C.E. 60s. As Roach notes, she was a ruthless and powerful leader and is depicted as having fiery, long flowing red hair (29-30). In *The Girl who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest*, Stieg Larsson mentions Boudicca on the very first page, commenting on the many female warriors that are often overlooked. He writes that “historians have often struggled to deal with women who do not respect gender distinctions,

and nowhere is that distinction more sharply drawn than in the question of armed combat. (Even today, it can cause controversy having a woman on a typical Swedish moose hunt)” (3). Larsson’s point firmly establishes his trilogy’s aim in fighting for the rights of women and situating Lisbeth as a prototype for challenging gender expectations, and the redheaded feminist figures discussed above are important in demonstrating the cultural and literary background from which she was created.

## Lisbeth's Literary Ancestry

Although the sexual empowerment bestowed upon many red-haired female characters is appropriately omitted from the descriptions of pre-pubescent literary redheads, other aspects of the stereotype remain strong in children's literature, such as independence, stubbornness and a fiery disposition. Perhaps one of the most famous literary redheads with a hot temper, L.M. Montgomery's Canadian heroine Anne Shirley played a significant role in influencing the characterization of Pippi Longstocking, and therefore Lisbeth Salander, in turn. *Anne of Green Gables* follows the stubborn and proud young orphan Anne, who is taken in by the elderly Cuthbert siblings, Marilla and Matthew, and creates quite the stir in their quiet rural lives. Since its original publication in 1908, it has sold over fifty million copies world-wide and been translated into twenty different languages. Gabriella Åhmansson, in her article, "Mayflowers grow in Sweden too": L.M. Montgomery, Astrid Lindgren and the Swedish Literary Consciousness", states that it has been well-documented that Lindgren appreciated *Anne of Green Gables*. Åhmansson even interviewed Lindgren herself on the subject and quotes her as saying:

And then, of course, *Anne of Green Gables*, my most unforgettable, for ever you will ride in the buggy with Matthew Cuthbert beneath the blossoming apple trees of Avonlea. How I lived with that girl! One whole summer we played Anne, me and my sisters, around the big pile of sawdust up by the mill. I was Diana Barry and the dung puddle behind the barn was the Lake of Shining Waters. (Åhmansson 14-5)

In fact, in 1909 Sweden was the first country to receive a translation of *Anne of Green Gables*. A Lund University professor named Bengt Lidforss was visiting New York and came across Mark Twain's review of the book, in which he called Anne "the dearest and most lovable child in fiction since the immortal Alice". Lidforss loved the book and sent it to his sister, who worked for the publishing house Gleerups in Lund and finished the translation in record time (Åhmansson 14).

The connections between Montgomery's Anne and Lindgren's Pippi are undeniable, beginning with the description of their tattered dress and two bright red braids. As Åhmansson highlights, Lindgren uses some of the characteristics that specifically set both girls apart from their peers and emphasize that they do not submit to normal standards (20). She writes "the red hair symbolizes visibility when girls are supposed to be invisible; the mouth speaks of a voice capable in speaking in a loud voice when well-bred girls are supposed to be silent; the unorthodox dress contradicts the perfect image of a clean and neat little girl" (Åhmansson 20).

These qualities set Anne and Pippi apart, not simply because they act or look different than other children, but because they are different than other *girls*, and indicate a subtle feminist undertone to both Lindgren and Montgomery's writing.

When asked what effect *Anne of Green Gables* had on her, Lindgren answered "jubilation"; Åhmansson proposes that this word "suggests an elation which comes from the marvelous escape that a fictional character can provide for an imaginative child – in this case an escape from traditional gender roles and the restricted sphere in which a girl would find herself, especially 70 years ago in a small agrarian community" (18). The traditional gender roles broken down by Anne – and Pippi and Lisbeth, in turn – link them to the long history of literary and cultural redheaded female figures who have been recognized for their independence and defiance. Karen Coats also mentions Anne when she discusses feminism in her book *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*, writing that she has a "queerness in her deferral of marriage; it takes five books for her to finally submit to the heteronormative quietude of life with Gilbert" (111). Rather than put up with Gilbert's mild sexual harassment as he pulls her hair and whispers "carrots" into her ear, Anne smacks him over the head with her slate and refuses to forgive him (Montgomery 112). Notably, Gilbert chooses to tease Anne over a very sensitive subject – her "decidedly red hair" (15); however, like Pippi and Lisbeth will later mimic, Anne stands up to her bullies and refuses to be oppressed in any area of her life.

While Anne's connection to Pippi Longstocking (and to stereotypes of redheads) now appears to be quite obvious, many readers have expressed complete surprise over the revelation that Larsson subsequently used Pippi Longstocking as his inspiration for Lisbeth. In reality, the *Millennium Trilogy* is rife with references to the renowned redheaded character and Lindgren's writing in general. The first allusion appears in a discussion of Mikael Blomkvist, who is part owner and a writer for *Millennium Magazine*, often exposing scandals in business and industry. Due to his investigative journalism, Blomkvist is mockingly nicknamed "Kalle Blomkvist" after the Swedish boy detective in another series by Lindgren, *Mästerdetektiven Blomkvist* (1946). Blomkvist admits to respecting Astrid Lindgren "whose books he loved – [but] he detested the nickname" (11). Lisbeth commonly refers to Blomkvist as such, despite telling Dragan Armansky:

‘[Blomkvist] hates the nickname, which is understandable. Somebody’d get a fat lip if they ever called me Pippi Longstocking on a newspaper placard.’ She cast a dark look at Armansky, who swallowed hard. On more than one occasion he had thought of Salander as precisely Pippi Longstocking. (45)

As Lisbeth’s boss at Milton Security, Armansky’s belief in the similarities between his defiant employee and Pippi Longstocking can likely be attributed to her refusal to follow the rules of his office environment, working on her own schedule and using unconventional methods to research background information on clients.

Lisbeth’s often Goth-like appearance, conversely, does not initially garner references to Pippi; however, both are described as having red hair and wearing quite unconventional clothing. Lisbeth does not always dress in black, and is actually once depicted wearing “horizontally striped, green-and-red knee socks” (42). These stockings, and her mismatched attire in general, evoke images of Pippi’s typical wardrobe:

Her dress was curious indeed. Pippi had made it herself. It was supposed to have been blue, but as there hadn’t been quite enough blue cloth, Pippi had decided to add little red patches here and there. On her long thin legs she wore long stockings, one brown and the other black. And she had a pair of black shoes which were just twice as long as her feet. (5)

Pippi’s eccentricity in dress and behaviour is clearly replicated in Lisbeth, setting them apart as unique young women unafraid of expressing their individuality.

*In the Girl who Played with Fire*, Pippi Longstocking is also referenced directly in relation to Lisbeth. Holger Palmgren, Lisbeth’s former guardian and one of the few people with whom she has a close relationship, tells Blomkvist that Lisbeth may be hard up but she’s a survivor, to which Blomkvist thinks, “*She stole almost three billion kronor. She’s not going to starve. She has a bag full of gold, just like Pippi Longstocking*” (635). The manner in which Lisbeth acquired this “gold” ties her to Pippi as well, who proclaims in the very last sentence of the book, “I’m going to be a pirate when I grow up ... Are you?” and who gained her gold pieces from her sea captain father (Lindgren 115). Fittingly, Lisbeth’s money comes from a form of piracy as well, as her fortune is stolen from Hans-Erik Wennerstrom through a stealth operation of disguises, money transfers and online schemes.

Although Lisbeth has previously threatened to physically harm anyone who compares her to Pippi Longstocking, she evidently embraces the role, albeit privately, by the second novel. After buying a new 21-room apartment worth millions of kronor, she is said to take the elevator

to the very top floor and “[unlock] the door with the nameplate V. KULLA”, a clear allusion to Pippi’s home in Villa Villekulla (*Fire* 85). Blomkvist also promotes the image of Lisbeth as a grown-up version of Pippi when in *The Girl who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest* he sneaks a Palm Tungsten T3 hand-held computer into her hospital room and makes the password *Pippi*. Frustrated, Lisbeth types in “74774, which corresponded to the word *P-I-P-P-I – Pippi Fucking Longstocking*. The computer started up” (*Hornet’s Nest*). Despite her anger, Lisbeth seems to have a grudging acceptance of her nickname, even guessing the password without any clues from Blomkvist.

While Lisbeth is rather reluctant to be compared in any way to her happy, bubbly redheaded forerunner, Pat Ryan from the *New York Times* simplifies their similarities down to three subheadings: their singular beginnings, odd looks and awesome skills. Although actually failing to notice Lisbeth’s red hair, he writes that both young women live life on their own schedules, and that each are “[t]hrough courageous and loyal, probably not a role model” (Ryan, par. 4). Furthermore, despite emphasizing the autonomous lifestyles of each heroine, Ryan does not situate either Lisbeth or Pippi in gendered terms; he sees them as breaking from society as a whole rather than breaking from their roles as women. In fact, it seems as though an article specifically on the gendered bending of both female characters has yet to be written and the following section aims to do precisely that.

## Gender Bending

The term *gender role* was first coined by the psychologist and sexologist John Money in a 1972 book entitled *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: The differentiation and dimorphism of gender identity from conception to maturity*. In contrast to *sex role*, which Money viewed as the biological classification of male and female, *gender role* denoted differences in behaviour often defined by societal conventions (Udry 561). While feminist theory originally embraced this term, Judith Butler went on to argue that that even the materiality of “sex” is only constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms, emphasizing the cultural production of *both* terms and their artificiality in general (*Bodies That Matter* 1). Dino Felluga writes that Butler questions the belief that certain gendered behaviors are natural; what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity is only “an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality” (“On Gender and Sex”, par. 1). In Butler’s terms, this performativity is not a choice, but rather “that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (2). Lisbeth and Pippi are therefore not choosing to perform their gender, but are already classified as gendered (female) through society and language. Additionally, Butler highlights the impact of grammar in the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being, writing that gender is imposed from the time of the sonogram which “shifts an infant from an ‘it’ to a ‘she’ or ‘he,’ and in that naming, the girl is ‘girded,’ brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender” (7).

Despite Butler’s insistence that we do not *choose* to perform our gender, her work is highly productive in highlighting the mendaciousness of the construct of gender in the first place. Felluga argues that Butler underscores gender's constructed nature:

in order to fight for the rights of oppressed identities, those identities that do not conform to the artificial—though strictly enforced—rules that govern normative heterosexuality. If those rules are not natural or essential, Butler argues, then they do not have any claim to justice or necessity. Since those rules are historical and rely on their continual citation or enactment by subjects, then they can also be challenged and changed through alternative performative acts. (“On Performativity”, par. 4)

Because Butler sees gender as entirely a social construction, it can therefore be disputed and redefined as society changes. Sara Mills agrees, and writes that gender has begun to be theorized in more productive ways in recent years, with a shift to focusing on more nuanced statements

about certain groups of women or men who challenge the parameters of social norms (138). She emphasizes that Butler's model "draws attention to the instability and fragility of gender difference and suggests that, although the individual is not entirely in control of the production of her/his gender identity, there is the possibility of some measure of agency, resistance, and hence change" (Mills 141).

In her essay on "Language", Mills also discusses gendered stereotypes, writing that they can be usefully thought of as "hypothesized scripts or scenarios (sets of features, role and possible narrative sequences) which take some extreme aspect of an out-group's perceived behaviour and generalize that feature to the group as a whole", setting an unconscious notion of what is appropriate (147). For the middle-class, western, white female this has historically included a sense of passivity, obedience, emotiveness, dependence and family-orientation. If we can see Pippi and Lisbeth as challenging these stereotypes, they can be seen as protesting against society's gendered restrictions as a whole. Furthermore, since this contestation appears in literature and therefore is established and solidified through language, their protest returns to what Butler sees as the very site of gender construction and performativity – discourse.

With the rise of feminist theory and writing in the 1960s and 1970s, it is unsurprising that the topic of gender has been well explored when it comes to Pippi Longstocking; albeit not yet in comparison to the similar gender role portrayed by Lisbeth Salander, nor in relation to their specific roles as redheads. Laura Hoffeld, in an article entitled "Pippi Longstocking: The Comedy of the Natural Girl," states that *Pippi Longstocking* is surprising not only because it portrays an independent, self-sufficient child, but furthermore because that child is *female* (48). She writes that:

[t]here is nothing demure about Pippi. Thus, the comedy stems from two sources: the undercutting of our own attitudes about little girls in stories and in life, and the undercutting of the conventional expectations held by those characters who represent society in the book. In effect, we are laughing at ourselves as well as at the satire of social conventions. (Hoffeld 48)

The emphasis on Pippi's role as a *girl* breaking from social conventions is repeated by Tiina Meri, who writes that "[i]t is hardly strange that Pippi eventually became something of a role model in the women's movement. One result has been that in recent decades some adults have wanted to make girls as strong, brave, uninhibited, amusing, rebellious and defiant of authority as Pippi — at least those striving to bring up children in a spirit of gender equality" (par. 9).

Interestingly, a study by Ramona S. Frasher called “Boys, Girls and Pippi Longstocking” also found the fact that Pippi broke with typical gender stereotypes of girls lead to a greater interest by young boy readers. As Frasher notes, “[t]raditionally, female characters have possessed such stereotyped and generally unappealing characteristics as helplessness, narcissism, passivity and fearfulness” and male readers tend to shun these stories (860). The study, which included reading *Pippi Longstocking* to a group of 31 male and female third-grade children, revealed that despite alternative choices in normatively sexed characters (Tommy and Annika), “both boys and girls expressed delight in Pippi’s adventures and liked her best of all” and two boys in the group even reported that Pippi was the character with whom they were “most like” (862). Frasher writes that “[i]f anything, Pippi is characterized by “masculine” qualities in excessive amounts. She is super-strong, super-brave, super-clever, and super-independent” (861). Fittingly, these aspects of Pippi are not only reminiscent of redheaded stereotypes, but also some of Lisbeth’s most eminent characteristics as well, and will be explored individually below.

While the strength of historical redheaded warriors such as the Celtic queen Boudicca is often tied to leadership and resolve, Pippi’s power is very much physical as well. Her uncanny strength is noted by the sailors who work with her father and refer to her as “a remarkable child” because of this (Lindgren 3). She first displays this quality in direct response to a comment towards her red hair, when a group of young boys tease her with the name “carrot top” (18). Rather than get frightened or cry, she stands bravely in the middle of the ring of her assailants and smiles. Bengt, one of the young bullies, expresses his surprise at her reaction and when nothing else works, decides to push her instead. In response, Pippi merely tells him, “I don’t think you have particularly good manners with ladies” (18); she then picks up each of the boys, throws them over the fence, and declares them all cowards.

Similarly, when Pippi goes to the circus for the first time she hears about the strongest man in the world and decides that she will take him on, which she successfully does. Karen Coats argues that Pippi does not view her status as a girl as limiting, rather she announces she will beat Adolf precisely because she is the strongest *girl* (115). Pippi’s boastful and confident attitude is also indicative of her refusal to submit to gender norms of passivity and modesty, not only in regards to her strength but when she talks about her world adventures as well. As Hoffeld writes, “[i]t is startling that Pippi brags and tells tall tales the way male figures in folklore are wont to do, and funnier that her bragging - ‘Don't you worry about me. I'll always come out on top’ —proves

true” (49). Furthermore, at least in the first book, Pippi’s strength is only shown against specifically male opposition. When two older men try to steal her gold coins while Pippi is asleep in Villa Villekulla, she wakes up and refuses to hide. Instead, she “poked them with her forefinger so that they sat down hard each in a corner. Before they were able to get up, Pippi had got out a rope, and as quick as thought she bound fast the arms and legs of both the thieves” (79). As Pippi forces the thieves to dance the polka and play the comb in retribution, Lindgren turns the situation into a humorous one, unlike the sexual threats that make up Lisbeth’s world.

Pippi also takes on the role of protecting other children in the town, including Tommy who expresses his fear of ghosts. The typical gender role of men guarding the women is reversed as Tommy “comforted himself with the thought that the ghosts would never dare to try anything with Pippi” (11). Ulla Lundqvist, in “The Child of the Century: The Phenomenon of Pippi Longstocking and its Premises,” agrees that “[b]y means of her freedom, her strength and independence, Pippi is also the sure protector of the children around her ... In her company nobody has anything to fear” (100). It is interesting, however, that it is always male characters who are rescued by Pippi’s bravery. This is further evident in the chapter entitled “Pippi Becomes a Heroine,” when Pippi is praised for bravely saving two young boys from burning in a high rise fire.

In contrast, Lisbeth has been described by critics such as Sarah Seltzer as an “anti-heroine”; yet like Pippi, she is said to be rarely afraid of anyone or anything (1). Although small in stature, Lisbeth’s power comes from inner strength – an attitude of refusing to stand down from any confrontation. In *The Girl who Played with Fire*, Lisbeth reminisces about fighting back against her primary school bully, David Gustavsson, after he attacks her. In David’s point of view, “it had been amusing up to a point, but the stupid girl did not seem to understand what was good for her and refused to back down. She didn’t even cry or beg for mercy” (448). Like Pippi, who merely smiles in the face of her bully’s verbal harassment, Lisbeth never plays the role of a victim or expresses fear. Instead, after David beats up Lisbeth, she responds simply when “[t]wo days later she came back carrying a bat” (448). The description of this event ends abruptly here in the narrative, only further emphasizing Lisbeth’s no-nonsense attitude towards her aggressors.

Lisbeth’s fearlessness extends past her adolescence, when she literally saves Blomkvist’s life in Martin Vanger’s lair. Her almost predatory nature is described as she takes action:

[Lisbeth's] voice was rough as sandpaper... Her teeth were bared like a beast of prey. Her eyes were glittering, black as coal. She moved with the lightning speed of a tarantula and seemed totally focused on her prey as she swung the club again, striking Martin in the ribs. (*Tattoo* 409).

Lisbeth proceeds to beat Martin with the golf club, taking over Pippi's role as the protector of seemingly weaker men. Lisbeth's "lightning speed" plays an important role in her ability to protect herself, and comes from her courage and lack of hesitation. The second novel also emphasizes this when the famous boxer Paolo Roberto shares the story of his past experience with a younger Lisbeth, who had turned up at his boxing club. He tells the others, "she boxed instinctively and landed a few more smacks. Then I started blocking seriously and found out that she was quicker than a fucking lizard" (*Fire* 481). Unlike Pippi, however, Lisbeth does not brag about her strength or speed, nor does she speak about her own life in general. In fact she only casually mentions to Blomkvist, "I spar a little now and then against the guys in the club in Soder" (*Tattoo* 351). Blomkvist, however, admits he is unsurprised by this revelation, indicating how he has come to expect the unexpected with Lisbeth.

Nevertheless, Lisbeth's strength is quite surprising when one considers the description of her physical appearance. Larsson writes that she "had simply been born thin, with slender bones that made her look girlish and fine-limbed, with small hands, narrow wrists, and childlike breasts. She was twenty-four but she sometimes looked fourteen" (*Tattoo* 34). Often described by sources as androgynous or even pre-pubescent, Lisbeth's body not only makes her more similar to Pippi but defies ideals of curvaceous femininity. Andrew Stuttaford, in the *National Review*, writes that "[i]ntriguingly, Larsson's heroine and Blomkvist's sometime lover, Lisbeth Salander ... is less than five feet tall, 'doll-like,' and, until some breast-augmentation surgery in the second book comes to the rescue, 'flat-chested, as if she had never reached puberty.' Make of that, Dr. Freud, what you will" (47). While her androgynous body positions Lisbeth in a more fluid gender identity, it also allows her to catch any attackers off guard and creates even more shame for the hard-edged thugs and gangsters whom she mercilessly beats up.

Along with their physical strength, both Pippi and Lisbeth exhibit an intellectual power that is often attributed to the redheaded stereotype as well. Furthermore, their genius can be seen as gender bending because it occurs outside of the structured classroom, where girls are often expected to perform well, at least in certain subjects such as the humanities. Pippi acts out terribly in school, although this is often because she simply does not understand quite how things

work since no one has ever made her attend before. This is evident when the teacher asks her to answer a multiplication table and Pippi looks cross, responding, “well if *you* don’t know, don’t think I’m going to work it out for you!” (34). Misbehaving in class can be seen as stereotypically male, whereas female pupils are expected to be quiet, complacent and good students. In contrast, Pippi is described by her teacher as “not a very patient pupil”, can barely spell and has terrible grammar (104). Lundqvist notes that Pippi does not attend school because “knowing all she has to know, there is no need” (100). Instead, her intelligence comes from practical knowledge and common sense gathered from her global travels with her father, linking Pippi to a world of rationality and experience often preserved for male scholars and explorers.

Lisbeth is likewise unenthusiastic about institutionalized education, yet it is her mathematic genius which truly situates her in a commonly male-dominated arena. In elementary school, she discovers that her math textbook has an incorrect answer, and refuses to back down when her teacher, Birgitta Miåås, does not think she is right. Instead, Lisbeth ends up throwing the textbook at Birgitta’s head, strongly emphasizing her distaste for school and authority in general. Despite this incident, Lisbeth’s passion for math continues in her adulthood, and she spends a good portion of the second novel working out Fermat’s Last Theorem, even though it remained unsolved for over 400 years.

Lisbeth is also described as having “unusual intelligence” in her work at Milton Security (*Tattoo* 37). Her boss, Armansky notes “Salander had imagination and she always came back with something different from what he expected” (32). Additionally, she is unafraid of sharing her opinion or seeming smarter than her male counterparts. When Martin Vanger dies in a car crash after his secret life as a sexual predator and serial killer is revealed, it is Lisbeth who tells the head of the company, Frode, to call a special meeting of the board to let them know their CEO has died. Frode is shocked that:

[h]e was the old attorney and problem-solver who was expected to have a plan ready to meet any eventuality, yet he felt powerless to act. It suddenly dawned on him that here he was, taking orders from a child. She had somehow seized control of the situation and given him the guidelines that he himself was unable to formulate. (421)

Despite being much younger and more inexperienced in the business world, Lisbeth expresses her recommendations and her orders are quickly followed.

This refusal to remain voiceless is similarly evident in *Pippi Longstocking*, but extended to the point of telling tall tales in order to capture the listener's interest. Roach notes that redheads have historically been stereotyped as untrustworthy (14), which appears to be quite consistent with Pippi, a consummate liar who admits nonchalantly that she knows it is very wicked but "forget[s] once in a while" (Lindgren 6). *Pippi Longstocking* also makes a specific point of emphasizing how adults commonly do not listen to or respect children. For example, when Pippi goes to a tea party hosted by Tommy and Annika's mother, the ladies are discussing their "servant problems" and Pippi pipes in with her own tale of her Grandmother's servant, Malin. Yet, the ladies "acted as if they had heard nothing. They continued to talk" (97). While Lindgren subtly inserts a class commentary into the women's conversation about how they have to do the housework themselves if they want it done well (despite knowing they certainly will not), the chapter is a commentary on ageism at the same time, highlighting the way in which children's opinions are often ignored. Pippi, however, rejects this standard of silence and often continues on with her stories regardless.

Hardly a child at twenty-four years old, Lisbeth faces a similar situation to Pippi because she is under state guardianship and therefore has limited rights. Although declared unfit to take care of herself, Lisbeth is in reality the victim of a cover up by the Swedish security police and, if anything, has Asperger's syndrome, characterized by high intelligence and poor social skills. Boyd Tonkin writes in *The Independent* that Lisbeth "has such fire and heft in part because Larsson lets her escape every label that criminology, psychology – and the crime writing that feeds on them – devises for maverick females. As a crooked psychiatrist puts it, 'no complete diagnosis was ever established for her'" (par. 5). Lisbeth must fight against her position as voiceless, often avoiding the law and her past in order to reclaim her own power and be heard. Ultimately, she establishes her autonomy by black-mailing her guardian Bjurman with a video of him sexually assaulting her, regaining control of her own funds and life decisions.

Lisbeth and Pippi are also highly self-sufficient because they spend many of their formative years without parental guidance. As Ryan Pat notes, the "singular beginnings" of Pippi and Lisbeth are one of their biggest similarities and allow both young women an independence they would not otherwise experience (par. 4). Pippi is said to have "neither mother nor father, which was really rather nice, for in this way there was no one to tell her to go to bed just when she was having most fun, and no one to make her take cod-liver-oil when she felt like eating

peppermints” (Lindgren 1). In actuality, Pippi’s father is stranded on an island in the South Sea, however she believes him to be forever lost at sea and she spends the first of the *Pippi* books alone at Villa Villekulla with only her pet monkey and horse. Her mother is described merely as an angel in heaven, and appears to have died early in Pippi’s childhood. Similarly, Lisbeth’s mother is unable to exert influence over Lisbeth as she remains incoherent in a nursing home and passes away during the first book. Her father is absent from her life as well, although the second novel of the *Millennium Trilogy* reveals that like Pippi’s father, he is actually alive, albeit the former Soviet spy known as Zalachenko.

Evidently influenced by their freedom at home, both young women’s independence continues in other areas of their lives. In her job at Milton Security, Lisbeth does not talk to her other colleagues or seem to have “the right attitude” and as Armansky notes, “[i]t was evident that Salander had no intention of adapting to Milton’s office routines” (37). She likewise works on her own schedule and shows a complete disregard for keeping her office or apartment tidy. The only plant on her desk at work is dying because she rarely even comes into Milton Security, and when she finally notices it, she “looked thoughtfully at the plant, as if it were the first time she had seen it, then she deposited it firmly in the waste paper basket” (103). Pippi also refuses to submit to standards of the proper homemaker, and although she is a good cook after learning how on her father’s ship, she admits “I’m not all *that* fond of cleaning. It’s fun, sure enough, but not for *every* day” (56). Furthermore, when she does clean it is in quite an unconventional way, as Pippi straps on scrubbing brushes and “skates” around her wet floors. According to Lundqvist, Pippi “incarnates several ideas that were discussed in the field of education during the thirties and forties ... she is a completely *free child*, nobody brings her up, leads her, confines her, punishes her” (99). Instead, Pippi takes on the role of the clear leader among her childhood friends, who follow her suggestions and exploits with admiration.

Rather than worrying about their plants or dirty floors, it seems that both young women are busy escaping the confines of the kitchen or the home in order to explore the outside world. Roach notes that in comics and literature all the “action adventure” girls tend to be redheads – those who are not merely the sidekick in the story, but who have their own mind and independence and she consequently describes Pippi as a “(junior-model) kick-ass girl” (158). Pippi is constantly going on adventures whether in her own backyard, at the circus, or in the South Seas, and having her own horse allows her the ability to move around independently.

Lisbeth also has access to some horsepower – her own Kawasaki motorcycle. She admits it is only a lightweight 125 cc, “but it was hers, and she could handle it. She had restored it, one nut at a time, and she had souped it up just a bit over the legal limit” (317). Not only does Lisbeth’s bike provide her with freedom and an adrenaline rush, it locates her in the traditionally masculine sphere of automotives and mechanics.

While both protagonists search for excitement in their lives, they also engage in exploration and discovery, which can likewise be seen as a historically male pursuit. In Chapter Two of *Pippi Longstocking*, “Pippi is a turn-up-stuffer and gets in a fight,” Pippi discusses the made-up job of a *turnupstuffer* as “[s]omebody who finds the stuff that turns up if only you look” (13). The word is translated from the Swedish “sakletare”, which similarly means a person who finds things. When asked what sorts of things she turns up, she replies “Oh, *all* sorts ... Gold nuggets and ostrich feathers and dead mice and rubber bands and tiny little grouse, and *that* kind of thing” (14). In contrast, as a private investigator and internet hacker, the things that Lisbeth turns up are often more sinister, such as secret spy pasts and scandalous affairs. In her job at Milton Security, in which she is hired to look up information for clients, Armansky notes that “[i]f there was any dirt to be dug up, [Lisbeth] would home in on it like a cruise missile” (32). Blomkvist describes her as “an information junkie with a delinquent child’s take on morals and ethics” because Lisbeth’s methods are often highly illegal as she breaches firewalls and company computer passwords with ease (344).

Lisbeth’s technological expertise is further significant because it allows her to break down another gender stereotype. Jenny Wolmark, in an essay in the *Feminist Companion* entitled “Cyberculture,” writes about the masculine language and symbolism of technology, arguing that women are historically linked with nature and it is assumed that “they would therefore develop less exploitative science and technology” (217). While men are often linked to rational thought and progress, “[b]y linking women and nature in this way, femininity is associated with the irrational and unscientific” (Wolmark 217). Furthermore, the internet allows for the possibility of virtual genders or alternatively, complete anonymity. Wolmark writes that “the interface between body and technology inevitably begins to address the question of whether or not the interpenetration of information and flesh will resolve itself into the obsolescence of the body” and she sees the online world as a space in which gender becomes less important and more fluid (227). This appears to hold true for Lisbeth, whose online persona excludes her from any gender

boundaries. She states that most of her internet associates “knew her only as ‘Wasp’ and did not know who she was or where she lived” (354). In the third novel, Lisbeth reveals her association with “Hacker Republic”, an underground group of elite internet hackers, and similarly refers to the fact that she does not know or even care if her online friends are male or female.

Wolmark’s comments on the fluidity of identity in the cyberworld are expanded in other feminist theorists’ work on the fluidity of gender itself. Sara Mills argues that in gender theory “[w]hat has to be reconsidered is the simple binary division between female and male” (141). Rather, the term “queer” has been embraced, not only to describe those who do not fit heterosexuality, but also who do not fit into the gender-binary. Coats writes that *Pippi Longstocking*, “takes us beyond sexuality itself into that space of desire and subjectivity that is called queer” (110). She claims that out of all the characters in children’s literature, Pippi is the queerest of all, and that her orphaned childhood allows her to “come into being without access to the usual identity markers that we use to position ourselves as subjects ... she is forced to make them up, to perform an identity that includes a nod in the direction of all these positions” (111). Appropriately, neither Pippi nor Lisbeth reject femininity altogether, rather they move between both a masculine and feminine space without restricting themselves to one side entirely. Pippi may be shockingly strong and independent, but she also chooses to wear dresses and drink tea with the ladies. Equally, despite her association with lesbian friends (and lovers) Lisbeth would hardly be described as butch, a term the lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender (LGBT) community often uses to describe someone with entirely masculine characteristics. Instead, she also enjoys dressing up in very feminine attire when she is in disguise as Irene Nesser, and even buys herself breast implants in the second novel. Like Greek nymphs and historical tales of Lilith, Lisbeth conversely engages in a very feminine sexuality while at the same time seducing members of both sexes *and* taking on the masculine role of initiating such encounters.

Overall, both Pippi and Lisbeth do not embrace their masculine characteristics as a rejection of their femininity, but as a rejection of the binary and limitations in general. Their location in literature enables them to permeate contemporary gender norms, creating a new script for readers through language and discourse and allowing for the possibility of performing a new acceptable role. They simply do what they want, regardless of gender stereotypes and expectations. As Pippi replies in response to Tommy’s question, “Why am I walking backwards?

... This is a free country, isn't it? Can't I walk as I please?" (6), and like many redheaded female figures before them, both she and Lisbeth proceed to do precisely that in all manners of life.

## Lisbeth Salander's Sexuality: The Entropic Chaos Factor

While Pippi and Lisbeth continually lead the way both in their exciting adventures and in challenging gender restrictions, Lisbeth has also been described by Tonkin as a “sexual adventurer” (par. 3). Deciding to live free of constraints evidently extends to her sex life, which Lisbeth admits:

wasn't quite as modest as she'd led Advokat Bjurman to believe. On the other hand, sex had always (or at least most often) occurred on her conditions and at her initiative. She had had over fifty partners since the age of fifteen. (Larsson 212)

This passage highlights two important aspects of Lisbeth's personality; not only is she sexually liberal but as she points out, she has a proclivity for instigating her own intimate relationships and is not afraid to make the first move. Her notion of sex as an “enjoyable pastime” provides her with a carefree attitude towards the activity granted it is on her terms, and her lack of guilt means that she goes for it whenever, and with whomever, she wants (211).

In *The Girl who Played with Fire* this is exemplified when Lisbeth initiates a sexual relationship with George Bland, the sixteen-year-old black boy she meets on her trip to Grenada. Despite their vast age difference, George “evidently thought that life had become much more interesting. He had met a woman who was teaching him about mathematics and eroticism” (38). Their relationship sees a reversal of typical gender roles, establishing Lisbeth as the older and wiser partner. Much like her relationship with George, Lisbeth assumes the position of the assertive seductress in her encounters with Blomkvist, with hardly a complaint from the men in either scenario. After sharing a cabin with Blomkvist while they work to solve the mystery of Harriet Vanger's disappearance, Lisbeth takes their professional relationship to the next level by merely walking into his bedroom dressed only in a sheet and kissing him (*Tattoo* 356). Then, when he does not protest outright, she climbs on top of him – a position she seems to enjoy taking in all facets of her life and which draws parallels to the historical figure Lilith, who refused to “lie beneath” anyone.

It often appears as though Lisbeth purposely chooses men over whom she can easily have control, and George and Blomkvist are prime examples of this. In fact, Joan Acocella, in an article about Stieg Larsson entitled “Man of Mystery” goes so far as to argue that the most crippling weakness of the trilogy is actually Blomkvist himself, whom she describes as:

so anti-masculinist that, in a narrative where people are brandishing chainsaws, he can take no forceful action. That goes for his sex life, too ... Mikael is irresistible to women, we are told, yet he never makes the first move. *Not that Larsson's women have a problem with this.* (My italics, 70)

Despite her obvious need to have a dominant role in her relationships, Lisbeth is also comfortable seducing much older men, and was arrested at seventeen for being drunk in the back of a car with one such suitor. Moreover, after Armansky admits his feelings for her, Lisbeth states she finds him attractive but firmly refuses his advances – pointing out that it is not because he is well over fifty years old – but because he is her supervisor at work. In the third novel, Lisbeth spends months in the hospital recovering from Zalachenko's attack and after finally being acquitted of her own charges and released, she flees to Gibraltar. She then proceeds to pick up an obviously married man and propositions guilt-free sex with him, telling him, "I'm feeling an irresistible urge to have sex with somebody. I don't care if you're married and I don't want your phone number" (*Hornet's Nest* 527).

Despite the innumerable examples of Lisbeth's casual encounters, however, Larsson manages to present his leading lady as not mindlessly promiscuous but rather as an independent, empowered woman who is not afraid to satisfy her own needs. Specifically, it is pointed out in the first book that Lisbeth has only had one regular sex partner in the past year and the narrative emphasizes that Lisbeth's sexual relations are not motivated by low self-esteem. Lisbeth states she "no longer felt the need to please anyone who bought her three beers in a pub, and she did not experience the slightest degree of self-fulfillment by going home with some drunk whose name she could not remember" (*Tattoo* 211). It is also demonstrated that she is not merely a sociopath (the label sometimes assigned to her) who feels no emotion towards her lovers, as she admits to falling in love with Blomkvist in the first novel, and shows a clear compassion for her lover Mimmi Wu, even flying to Paris to visit her.

Although she claims that if she had to choose, she prefers men and they are "in the lead, statistically speaking" of her sexual partners, Lisbeth has an extended relationship with Mimmi, whom she had met at the Pride Festival the year before (*Tattoo* 293). Lisbeth's choice of partners is presented in accordance with her making up her own rules in life:

[She] had never thought of herself as a lesbian. She had never brooded over whether she was straight, gay, or even bisexual. She did not give a damn about labels, did not see that it was anyone else's business who she spent her nights with. (293)

As Sara Mills notes, feminist theory often works to move beyond binary thinking and draw attention to the variety of sexual identifications that cross the strict divide between female and male, asserting that “the simple belief in ‘only two’ is not an experiential given but a normative social construction” (139). Likewise, even the terms ‘homosexuality’ and ‘heterosexuality’ set up a similar binary of social construction, with some questioning the term ‘bisexuality’. It is to Larsson’s credit then, that he does not specifically label Lisbeth as anything and this lack of label is a strong quality in adding to her enigmatic persona. Mimmi repeats this sentiment in the second novel, in which she tells Lisbeth casually, “most of all you’re sexual – you like sex and you don’t care about what gender. You’re an entropic chaos factor” (*Fire* 140). This seems an apt description since Lisbeth’s life is characterized by disorder and restless energy, and it is therefore unsurprising that these features extend to her sexuality as well.

Just as her own attraction is not limited to men, Lisbeth’s sexual magnetism strongly extends out in all directions. Tonkin contends that both her enemies and lovers struggle to keep up with her, and rather than the disturbed villain she is often made out as in the press, “she looks in the dazzled eyes of admirers – from her fetish-fancying performance-artist girlfriend to the big-hearted prize fighter who rides to her rescue – more like ‘some sort of princess’” (par. 4). Her relationship with Armansky epitomizes this; despite her rejection of him, he continues to like and support Lisbeth, providing his employees from Milton Security to help during her trial and investigation in the third book. Though he claims she is not his type, Armansky admits:

Even so he had caught himself having inappropriate daydreams about Lisbeth Salander, and he recognized that he was not completely unaffected by her. But the attraction, Armansky thought, was that Salander was a foreign creature to him. He might just as well have fallen in love with a painting of a nymph or a Greek amphora. (38)

It is noteworthy that Armansky compares Lisbeth to a painting of a nymph considering the connotations of the term “nymphomaniac”, which can be ascribed to hypersexual women. The term originates from the Greek mythology of nymphs, who appeared as young pretty maidens and commonly seduced members of both sexes. Additionally, nymphs have historically been depicted in paintings with long, flowing hair, often red in colour, for example in John William Waterhouse’s 1896 painting, “Hylas and the Nymphs”.

Similarly, Armansky’s reference to Lisbeth as a “foreign creature” highlights her exoticism and allure, another quality often attributed to the redheaded women of literary and cultural history. Sherrow writes that the strong feelings associated with red hair “may stem from

the fact that this colour is relatively rare throughout the world and that red hair may be quite striking in appearance” (152). Like many redheads before her, Lisbeth is seen as markedly unique, not only in her appearance but through her intelligence, independence and fierce fighting spirit. Her vibrant sexuality only adds to her feminist qualities, establishing her as a fearless leader in the battle for gender equality.

## Feminism or Misogyny?

Despite what now appear to be quite obvious links between Lisbeth Salander and a long cultural history of strong, independent redheads, significant controversy has been raised over suggestions that Larsson can be seen as writing with a feminist agenda. In a review of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Missy Schwartz states she has “a hard time reconciling [Larsson’s] ostensibly feminist agenda with all the male fantasy coursing through the books” (par. 2). She writes that Blomkvist is presented as a successful womanizer envied by all readers and a likely stand-in for the author himself, who even positions Lisbeth as one of Blomkvist’s many admirers (Schwartz, par. 2). What she fails to note, however, is that Lisbeth is equally presented as a successful player herself and that despite her admiration for Blomkvist she can hardly be seen sitting around waiting for him, often being involved in other relationships instead.

Although Lisbeth’s libidinous nature characterizes her as a strong female willing to break contemporary double-standards of sexuality, current scholarship also argues whether Larsson’s portrayal of graphic sexual scenes in the trilogy is actually misogynist and undermines Lisbeth’s stance as a feminist role model. Taraneh Jerven, in an article in *Bitch Magazine: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, claims that the instances of rape in the novels are overly eroticized and explicit. Jerven asserts that “Larsson’s vivid scenes of sexual violence against women, particularly Salander, occur so frequently that it’s hard not to question whether they’re there as much for titillation as for social commentary” (9). While the first novel does depict scenes of rape and sodomy, at times with Lisbeth herself as the target, they can be seen as necessary in portraying the horror of sexual assault and criticizing society’s inability to prevent or punish these offences. The tone in which they are written expresses the fear and psychological torture experienced by Lisbeth, rather than focusing only on physical actions or “titillating” details.

Furthermore, these experiences are actually another way in which Lisbeth demonstrates her strength through her refusal to be seen as a victim and her retaliatory action. She avoids going to the crisis centre, claiming they exist only “for *victims*, and she had never regarded herself as a victim. Consequently, her only remaining option was to do what she had always done – take matters into her own hands and solve her problems on her own” (213). More importantly, Lisbeth proceeds to do precisely that, relying on her own actions rather than waiting to go through the bureaucracy of the government’s elaborate cover-up of her past. She hatches a plan to black-mail her rapist Bjurman, pretending to assent to his requests and leading him to bed before using a

taser gun on him. The control Lisbeth re-establishes is emphasized in Bjurman's thoughts after he wakes up, realizing he is hand-cuffed and that:

Salander had crushed him. He was never going to forget it. She had taken command and humiliated him... She had handcuffed him to his bed, abused him, and tattooed him with I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST. (*Fire* 41)

By saving herself rather than being regulated to the position of a damsel-in-distress, Lisbeth reasserts her dominance and is presented as a knight-in-shining-armor (or a redheaded warrior woman) tattooing Bjurman from his nipples to just above his genitals in order to prevent any future abuses on other women.

Lisbeth's behaviour entirely contradicts Jerven's assertion that Larsson "establishes his heroine in victimish terms – she's pubescent, anorexic, emotionally hollow, [and] the product of an abusive upbringing" (9). In reality, Lisbeth's petite frame only aids her in catching her attackers off guard with her speed and strength, and Jerven's allegation of her anorexia is inaccurate and defamatory. Closer reading of the third novel reveals that Lisbeth's only avoidance of food ever occurred as a deliberate protest against a corrupt and abusive psychologist who was drugging her meals, and she is frequently described as eating copious amounts otherwise. Joan Acocella agrees that "another consideration that would seem to deflect charges of misogyny is simply the character of Lisbeth" (72). She focuses on Lisbeth's complexity, stating that she is flawed but certainly not a sociopath, citing as evidence the love she displays for both her mother and Blomkvist (Acocella 72). Lisbeth may *appear* emotionally hollow to those who have not broken through her defenses, however her inner thoughts reveal she has feelings just like everyone else. Like Acocella, Sarah Seltzer similarly praises Lisbeth's complexity in her article, "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo: Why we should cheer Lisbeth Salander". She notes that Lisbeth "suffers from Asperger's or a similar disorder, which gives her genius capabilities on the one hand, and a non-emotive persona on the other. From the outset, she's a unique creature: characters with these kinds of ultra-quirky traits are almost never women" (1). Lisbeth's flaws illustrate that she is not typecast as a one-dimensional, flat character in the role of the sidekick, but rather allowed the multifaceted intricacy of a heroine (or anti-heroine).

Larsson's feminism is also highlighted through a background knowledge of his writing inspiration. According to Laurie Penny, Larsson "was disgusted by sexual violence, having witnessed the gang rape of a young girl when he was 15 ... [he] never forgave himself for failing

to help the girl” (par. 4). The original Swedish title of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Män som hatar kvinnor*, translates more literally into “Men who hate women” and similarly sheds light on the novel’s original emphasis. The impact of translation also becomes evident when comparing two alternative covers for the first novel; the original Swedish version shows a woman’s face and eyes while a British publication focuses only on Lisbeth’s naked back and dragon tattoo. In a way, Lisbeth becomes the object of the gaze, rather than a subject herself, not only minimizing the feminism of the book but also increasing the sex appeal for marketing purposes. Like the new, perhaps more exciting cover, parts of the novel are sensationalized yet the core message remains the same, and as Blomkvist notes “[w]hen it comes down to it, this story is not primarily about spies or secret government agencies; it’s about violence against women, and the men who enable it” (514). Although he is referring specifically to Lisbeth’s trial, Blomkvist’s statement is a good indication of the trilogy’s standpoint as a whole; it may incorporate thrilling aspects of government conspiracies and Russian spies, but its main focus is to condemn violence against women.

Furthermore, in the criticism of Larsson’s misogyny or Lisbeth’s lack of feminist qualities, some critics have failed to take into account the distinct differences between his novel and the Nordisk Film Company’s 2009 movie adaptation *Män som hatar kvinnor*. Directed by Niels Arden Oplev, the film not only minimizes the significance of Lisbeth’s red hair (failing to mention it completely) but some of the strength of Larsson’s original novel as well. This is primarily evident in the film’s sex scenes, which do sometimes appear overly eroticized and extended. In *The Guardian*, Viv Groskop writes that the novel “spares us many graphic descriptions, leaving a lot of the worst to our imagination. It seems, then, that the film has betrayed not only some of the book’s original subtlety but also its feminism” (par. 9).

Much like the English titles have changed the focus of the series to Lisbeth, the film version also places a greater emphasis on her relationship with Blomkvist. Karen Polvsen, in her article, “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo: Adapting embodied gender from novel to movie in Stieg Larsson’s crime fiction,” notes that “to secure international distribution and popularity and maximize ticket sales, the combination of crime and love story is particularly favourable” and it is evident that marketing and sales projections play a large role in influencing the direction of the film (74). She highlights that Lisbeth’s lesbian relationship is barely even suggested in the first film nor are Blomkvist’s other affairs, returning the movie to a more traditional love story in

which “Lisbeth is reinstating Mikael as a lover and a winner, Mikael is reinstating Lisbeth as a sensitive feminine woman” (Polvsen 72). By eliminating or minimizing Lisbeth’s other lovers and therefore, some of her independence and defiant sexuality, the film also eliminates some of the gender ambiguity that makes Lisbeth such a complex character in the novel. Instead, readers need only to return to the original trilogy in order to see that, like Pippi, Lisbeth is presented as an adventurous, rebellious and ground-breaking (redheaded) feminist and that she will hopefully be remembered as such in the literary landscape to come.

## Conclusion

While the translation of Larsson's original work, both between languages and media forms, leads to obvious limitations and imperfections, overall the international phenomenon of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* has led to the dissemination and discussion of ideas about gender roles, feminism and violence against women far beyond the borders of Sweden. It is particularly interesting then, that another Swedish literary figure exactly 60 years before was also responsible for subverting gender expectations of female protagonists and women, in general. As Tiina Meri notes on Sweden's official website, *Pippi Longstocking* has become a source of inspiration in the struggle for gender equality and "throughout the world, girls have been encouraged to have fun, to be a bit more daring and to have faith in their own ability. Pippi Longstocking has performed wonders" (par. 14). In the same way, Lisbeth has become an iconic image for a new generation of feminists who embrace her enigmatic and intriguing characteristics while recognizing her imperfections at the same time. Furthermore, the words used to describe both Lisbeth and Pippi – strong, fearless, independent, adventurous – are historically reserved for male characters, and are situated under the influence of language and discourse. As Judith Butler notes, gender can be seen as something that is performative and established through repetitive cultural scripts, rather than strictly set by a scientific basis (*Bodies That Matter*); therefore, by challenging notions of gender and femininity through popular literature, both Lindgren and Larsson's writing establishes a viable precedent for *changing* these cultural norms themselves.

As this essay has recognized, however, Lisbeth is hardly the first female protagonist or cultural figure to take on a feminist platform, and in fact, originates from a long history of redheaded women portrayed as feisty and sexually uninhibited. While their methods of seduction are often described in terms reminiscent of feminine wiles such as charming voices, poisonous kisses or long, luxurious hair, these redheaded women conversely have taken on historically masculine characteristics by incorporating control, choice and freedom into their sexuality. Despite the obvious need to refrain from sexual references in children's literature such as *Pippi Longstocking* or *Anne of Green Gables*, the redheaded heroines of these books have both been recognized for their audacity, passion for life, and refusal to remain within boundaries, making it easy to see how with maturity these traits can be transferred to the confidence and liberated sexuality that has become associated with redheads. Furthermore, their direct link to influencing and inspiring the creation of a character like Lisbeth becomes less surprising once the three

novels are read in conjunction. Scenes such as standing up to one's bully – Anne smacking Gilbert over the head with her slate, Pippi throwing her bullies over a fencepost, or Lisbeth tasing and then tattooing her attacker Bjurman – seem to echo one another, albeit in increasingly violent terms. Moreover, the refusal to submit to any sort of subjugation resonates all the way back to the quintessential redheaded figure Lilith, and can be embraced by feminists all around.

Although Lisbeth's hair is often dyed black, her overall image is created to set her apart from her peers – much like red hair is seen as doing – and Pippi's iconic bright red braids add significance to the reference of Lisbeth's natural red hair. Larsson's subtle irony manifests itself in direct allusions such as Lisbeth's comment that "somebody'd get a fat lip if they ever called me Pippi Longstocking" (45), in which she denies her "roots" in more ways than one. Lisbeth remains however, inextricably tied to Pippi and therefore tied to the long cultural history of redheaded women stereotyped as far back as Renaissance paintings on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Additionally, her disapproval of any likeness to Pippi is similar to the experience redheads commonly have growing up – the very thing for which they are teased in childhood often becomes the reason they are appreciated later in life. Likewise, despite her once adamant rejection of Pippi, Lisbeth herself concedes the connection by naming her apartment after Villa Villekulla, and eventually accepts the nickname bestowed upon her by Blomkvist.

Along with Lisbeth's grudging acceptance of her distinctive similarities to Pippi, the rise of feminism has also seen a trend towards embracing many of the features for which redheaded women are so well-known. Yet with only three per cent of the world's population believed to have red hair, it still remains viewed as different and exotic – and therefore continues to contain the elements of danger, risk and a little mischief. These exciting characteristics are ideal for creating a captivating literary protagonist, and the global fascination with Lisbeth Salander makes it evident that Larsson has accomplished precisely that. As Acocella and Seltzer note, Lisbeth's complexity makes her highly original for a lead female role; yet while Steig Larsson appears to be able to avoid the stereotypes of a female character, he is, however, guilty of type-casting Lisbeth as an intelligent, feisty, fiercely independent, and sexually adventurous redhead. Then again, perhaps that's not such a bad thing.

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