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A case of rewriting history: how changing attitudes towards controversiality influence the treatment of old children's books, and how we should interpret this treatment

The alteration of historical documents in favour of present convictions, is a practice most people in the Western world would associate with totalitarianism. It is a form of censorship which, in a time and place in which free speech is heralded above all else, seems to have disappeared. However, Dutch author Arthur van Amerongen and journalist Olaf Tempelman claimed that the alterations made in recent editions of Astrid Lindgren's classic, *Pippi Longstocking*, are just that: the falsification of history (*De Volkskrant*, 2014, 2015). Many old children's books contain words, themes and passages that did not raise an eyebrow at the time they were written, but which are considered to be quite controversial today, and this goes for Dutch books as well as Swedish ones. Van Amerongen and Tempelman were not the first, however, in bringing this topic to the table. It has been discussed in Dutch newspaper articles on various occasions over the last few decades. I will provide an analysis of these articles, asking myself where the practice of altering old children's books originates from, and what people's opinion on and reasoning behind this proceeding was. Based on these articles, I will demonstrate that this practice is stimulated by a teleological outlook on history, showing a process of progress (Elias, 1978; Benjamin, 1968; Shavit, 2005). This, I argue, deepens the urge of adapting history to the present, which increases chances of falsification and the use of history as a tool for present purposes (Simissen, 2018; LaRossa, 1997). Next to that, my analysis of the ongoing debate reveals that people still largely view children as passive readers, easily influenced by what they read, and unable to engage in dialogue with a text (Gadamer, 1975; Dasberg, 1984). The opposite, however, has been shown by Marah Gubar (2016) and Karen Sánchez-Eppler (2005).

Keywords: censorship, children's literature, controversiality, history, falsification, childhood.

Theoretical Framework:

Benjamin, W. (1968). *Illuminations* (H. Zohn, Trans.). New York: Schocken Books. (Original work published in 1955).

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Simissen, H. (2018). *The Fourth Blow: Theodor Lessing's Philosophy of History in its Time*. Nijmegen & Heerlen: Open Universiteit.

Charlotte van Bergen has obtained a Master's Degree in Children's Literature from Tilburg University and is now finishing a Research Master in Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies at Radboud University. She was an intern at the Centre for Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature at the University of Wrocław in 2018. Previously, she has written about the differences in representation of masculinity and femininity in Catholic, Protestant and Socialist children's books from the early twentieth century. She has also published research regarding the influence of the second feminist movement on gender stereotyping in children's literature. Right now, she is working on the image of fatherhood in Dutch children's books.