

## Introduction: Dog

A central starting point for launching a theme on the dog in children's and young adult literature is Stacy Alaimo's observation that "nonhuman animals are also *cultural* creatures" (2010, 57, our italics). In a similar vein, Boel Westin (2016) has drawn attention to the use and significance of the culture rabbit in children's literature. Children's literature research abounds with studies on the presence and depiction of animals. And while the dog and the horse according to Walter Hogan are the domesticated animals that, "by large margin," appear most frequently in books for children and adolescents (2009, 87), there is considerably less research on the dog in children's literature than on the horse. *Barnboken: Journal of Children's Literature Research* wished to remedy this by inviting scholars to an exploration of and a theme on the dog in children's and young adult literature.

Dogs of all shapes and sizes can be found in Nordic books for children and adolescents as well as in literature from other countries and language regions. These dogs are often supporting sidekicks to the protagonists of the stories, such as the dog Bosun in Astrid Lindgren's TV script and books about Seacrow Island, but they can also invoke fear or represent wildness and threat. In other narratives the dog's life and fate become the subject of animal ethical reflections, which may also express adults' ideas of children and childhood. An example of this is the Norwegian children's literary classic "Berre ein hund" (Just a dog, 1887) by Per Sivle. Dogs can also be the protagonists of stories for children and youth. Here the reader gains access to the dog's way of experiencing the world, including human beings. This is reflected in, for example, the Finnish picturebook *Koira nimeltään Kissa* (*A Dog Called Cat*, 2015) by Tomi Kontio and Elina Warsta, the Icelandic picturebook *Enginn sá hundinn* (Nobody saw the dog, 2016) by Hafsteinn Hafsteinsson and Bjarki Karlsson, and the Norwegian young adult novel *Et hundeliv* (*A dog's life*, 2017) by Arne Svingen. In the latter two the dog is the story's narrator. Modern-day reading promotion projects, where the dog functions as the child's study partner, also suggest that there is a special relationship between children, dogs, and children's literature (Ehriander).

The longing for a dog of one's own is a common motif in children's literature and it appears in both fiction and non-fiction. In [“Hunder er det beste jeg vet!': Om barne- og hunderelasjoner i Tor Åge Bringsværd's Karsten og Petra-bøker”](#) (“The things I like the most are dogs!': Exploring child and dog interactions in Tor Åge Bringsværd's books about Karsten and Petra), Inger-Kristin Larsen-Vie takes her starting point in a contemporary Norwegian book series about two children's games and friendship. It belongs to a type of idyllic depictions of ordinary life that is prominent among publications for young children, but that has seldom been the focus of research. Larson-Vie examines the dog's role in the two children's everyday life and the function given to dog-child-relations in the picturebooks' construction of childhood. The dog mainly serves as the children's companion and contributes to depicting the child as competent. In contrast to the adults, the girl, in particular, has an ability to understand the dogs' needs and she treats them with respect. As Larsen-Vie notes, although these narratives portray dogs as cultural beings, the animals are not entirely integrated into the human world. They act in accordance with their dog nature and parts of the animal character remain alien and elusive from a human point of view.

According to Inger Marie Vik and Bodil Moss, the dog as the child's companion is also a central motif in war narratives for children. In [“Mer enn helt og bestevenn? Hundens rolle i relasjon med barn i barnelitteratur om andre verdenskrig”](#) (More than a hero and a best friend? The dog's role in a relationship with a child in children's literature on the Second World War), the dog's function and its relationship to children are compared in two Swedish and two Italian children's books taking place during the Second World War. War memorial narratives tend to focus on human suffering and human rights, but they may also show how the conflicts impact other creatures and life-forms. In the analysed books, Vik and Moss find that the dog is given three roles in relation to the child reader: protector and hero, initiator for the child's development, and loving companion. The common denominator is that the dogs in different ways help the child to deal with the extreme situation of war and to get through it. The four books thereby put forward an anthropocentric world view. Even so, Vik and Moss suggest that these narratives have the potential to bring attention to animal suffering in times of war and support the reader's critical thinking on interspecies relationships.

Eva Lindström's picturebooks *Lunds hund* (*Mr Krup's Pup*, 2013) and *Musse* (*My Dog Mouse*, 2016) depict less human-centred storyworlds. Björn Sundmark explores how human and non-human

characters interact in these works in [“Undogmatic Re\(ve\)lations: Eva Lindström’s Picturebooks and the Animal-Human Gaze.”](#) The theoretical framework is based on, among others, Martin Buber’s relational theology and Jacques Derrida’s discussions of animal-human relationships. In his article, Sundmark lets the picturebooks enter into a dialogue with – and formulate an alternative to – the anthropocentric starting point of the theories. He pays special attention to the characters’ gazes, and the extent to which dog and human look or avoid looking at each other in Lindström’s works. The gazes are not primarily indicative of human domination but hint at the reciprocity of common creaturehood.

The last article of the theme, Kristin Ørjasæter’s [“En selskapshund på Nordpolen: Relasjonen mellom hund og polarhelt i to mediefremstillinger fra 2022 av terrieren Titina”](#) (A companion dog at the North Pole: The relationship between dog and polar hero in two media portrayals from 2022 of the terrier Titina) compares the depiction of dog and human when transferred from film to book. Titina was the Italian airship engineer Umberto Nobile’s terrier, and she accompanied him on two trips to the North Pole during the 1920s. In 2022, the dog was the subject of the Norwegian animated family film *Titina* and an illustrated non-fiction book for children inspired by the movie. Ørjasæter analyses the two media portrayals through adaptation and literary humour theory. She shows how the film and the book position themselves in different traditions of polar literature, and how the different media affect the description of the dog’s subjectivity. Especially in the film, the polar hero is dethroned when depicted from a dog’s point of view. The close relationship between Titina and her human also points to a future where the domestic dog, which could serve as both sled dog and emergency food during the polar journeys, has been replaced by the family dog. In *Titina*, this means a relationship characterised by reciprocity and an acknowledgement of difference.

The field of human-animal studies constitutes a common frame of reference for the four articles within the theme, but they also offer a perspective of their own by focusing on dog-child relationships and the portrayal of dogs in children’s culture.

*The editorial team*

Barnboken – Journal of Children’s Literature Research

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