

Kelly Hübben

Animals and the unspoken: intertwined lives in Martha Sandwall- Bergström's Kulla-Gulla series

Abstract: This article discusses aspects of the human-animal relationships in Martha Sandwall-Bergström's Kulla-Gulla series, using a theoretical framework consisting of ecofeminism and literary animal studies. Ecofeminist scholars demonstrate how the problematic of gender and nature are linked, and this article focuses on how Gulla's relationship with some significant animals enables her to envision a social ideal that undermines the patriarchal power structures that are dominant in her society. The worldview that emerges resists anthropocentric normativity by suggesting a more inclusive, biocentric utopia where the boundaries between nature, humans and non-human animals become fluid. Reading the Kulla-Gulla books from a perspective that is attentive to the presence of animals reveals the extent of the interconnectedness of the human and non-human spheres of life. The narrative attributes agency to a number of animals, which allows them to become a vital part of the social fabric of the novels. Without being reduced to metaphorical devices, they speak up and their voices are heard by some of the human characters. Their status as agents allows them to mediate social changes in a society that is not presented as exclusively human. In the literary universe of Kulla-Gulla, where social hierarchies and gender patterns appear to be firmly established, some characters, both animal and human, are able to destabilize and subvert these patterns with their border-crossing qualities. Their voices and actions express what the human characters are not able to, and by doing so, they undermine strict humanist dualisms.

Keywords: Martha Sandwall-Bergström, ecofeminism, literary animal studies

Martha Sandwall-Bergström (1913–2000) was born in the south Swedish province of Småland, a barren part of the country, riddled with lakes and bogs. The soil, which consists of glacial sediment, made agriculture a labor-intensive and laborious enterprise. It is this landscape Sandwall-Bergström chooses as the setting for her debut *Kulla-Gulla* (1945) that won her an award for “best girl's book.”

© 2013 K. Hübben. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Barnboken – tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Journal of Children's Literature Research, Vol. 36, 2013 <http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/clr.v36i0.23361>

Between 1945 and 1951, six more novels about the fair-haired and good-hearted Gulla followed. In 1972, the prequel *Kulla-Gulla på Blomgården* was published, which describes Gulla's first years as a maid on Bloom Garden. The books, intended for girls in their school years, are set in the period around 1900 and are partly rooted in a social realist tradition, describing in detail the hardships of the poor crofters, who for their livelihood depended on the goodwill of wealthy landowners. Simultaneously, they can be read as Cinderella stories (Heggstad; Söderberg). Gulla, an orphan, is "sold" to one of the crofters as a maid, but turns out to be the long lost granddaughter of the local lord. Instead of indulging in her newfound wealth, she seizes her social transformation as an opportunity to improve the lives of the proletarians.

The series is considered a Swedish classic, and over the years Gulla has become a symbol for a particular type of femininity. Her character is controversial though. Feminist critics, for instance, were concerned with the books' overall romanticism and conformism, and their conservative outlook on gender roles. Gulla was criticized for being saintly, and the books were called Sunday school material (von Zweigbergk; Ehriander). Yet, they also repeatedly challenge the patriarchy and can be said to envision a feminist utopia (Söderberg; Heggstad).

In this text, I analyze the role of the human-animal relationships in the Kulla-Gulla books from an ecocritical, more specifically, ecofeminist, perspective, that is attentive to the interconnectedness of humans and non-human nature in the narrative. Ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm, xviii) aims to influence the way we interact with our environment. It actively seeks to change readers' attitudes, and does so by shifting the focus away from an anthropocentric worldview towards a more inclusive, biocentric one. Although the Kulla-Gulla books are not environmental in the sense that they purposefully propagate environmental awareness, the values upheld in them do speak of an ecological consciousness, a sense of holism that says that happiness and wellbeing are not arrived at through individualism, but in a collective effort that does not exclude non-human nature.

Ecofeminism expands ecocritical theory by stating that nature and gender issues are closely interwoven, and the same strategies of domination are used in the feminization of women and nature. It critiques the dualistic view of the human/nature relation that according to Val Plumwood causes "the problematic features of

the west's treatment of nature which underlie the environmental crisis, especially the western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature" (2). She therefore insists on "integrating nature as a fourth category of analysis into the framework of an extended feminist theory," alongside those of race, class and gender (1).

This dualism also organizes the representations of animals, women and children in children's fiction by grouping them together and isolating them from masculinity, reason and adult culture. Notably, agency and intentionality are categories that are not normally open to children and animals. Plumwood argues that "[t]o be defined as 'nature' in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place" (4).

Ecofeminism therefore has much to contribute to the study of children's books. As Alice Curry argues: "[a]n ecofeminist reading of fiction for young adults can offer to children's literature an examination of the processes and productions of gender differences that 'feminise' categories lying outside the parameter of the adult white male subject" (1). Looking at the Kulla-Gulla books through an ecofeminist lens allows us to highlight Gulla's compassion for the weak and suffering, without explaining it away as either girlish sentimentalism or proof of a conservative and outdated ideal of femininity.

As Marion Copeland's ecofeminist reading of Beatrix Potter and Gene Stratton-Porter demonstrates, depictions of animals and nature in children's literature can further the ecofeminist idea that the "other" needs to be "appreciated and respected rather than dominated or exploited" (77). My focus on the animals as mediators of social change stems from an acknowledgement of their significance as agents in the narrative, which I share with certain advocates of human animal studies (HAS).¹ HAS starts from the "assumption that the presence of nonhumans is a cultural constant" (McHugh, 2009, 24). But in dominant humanist discourse, animals, similar to other minorities such as women and children, are not allowed to speak for themselves. They are instead "locked in representations authored by humans" (Weil, 4). Weil defines the project of HAS as an inquiry into the question of how to "bring animal difference into theory? Can animals speak? And if so, can they be read or heard?" (5). Discussing animal narratives, McHugh asks "what exactly goes on in acts of reading and writing animals?"

(2009, 32) She stresses that “animal agency can never simply oppose human identity, and that animal agents in turn are never entirely separable from human forms or presences” (2011, 12).

In this reading of the Kulla-Gulla series, I show that the interconnectedness of humans and non-human animals has consequences for the social ideal the books propagate. We see how the animals stand with one foot (hoof, paw) in a humanist tradition, and with another touch on a posthumanist future. At times they are employed as metaphors in the service of an anthropocentric worldview (McHugh, 2011, 212). But in the literary universe of Kulla-Gulla, where social hierarchies and gender patterns appear to be firmly established, some characters, animal and human, are able to destabilize and subvert these patterns with their border-crossing qualities. The interconnectedness of the animal and human sphere in the narrative makes it possible for animals to speak for humans, without being reduced to narrative functions of allegory or metaphor. Their voices and actions express what the human characters are not able to, and by doing so, they undermine humanist dualisms.

Intertwined lives

The ox plodded slowly up the hill, its bony body tousled and wet from the pouring rain, its hoofs so deep in the muddy road that they were invisible. [...] Behind him walked a girl of twelve, anxiously trying to protect her rough leather boots from the mud of the road. [...] She walked in silence behind the crofter, who from today onwards was to be her master and employer, her eyes resting seriously on his slowly swaying back. The ox plodded on. The load was not the heaviest it had known, only kegs of herring and a few sacks and barrels containing things Karlberg had fetched in town for his landlord, but it was heavy-going all the same. The wagon wheels sometimes sank right up to the hubs in the mud, and Karlberg had to keep bringing his long whip down on to his ox's back. Then the ox shook its head with its long overgrown horns, stretched its neck under the yoke and lowed. “Muuooooo. . .” The sound was hoarse and sorrowful and long-drawn-out. “Muuooooo. . .” a plaintive sound, expecting no reply. [It was a cry that spoke of hardship, of toil and oppression without end.] (*Anna All Alone*, 7–8)²

In the Kulla-Gulla series, the very first voice to reach the reader is not human, yet includes the humans in its expression of suffering.

The ox's wordless complaint speaks of the misery and hopelessness shared by the three creatures, whose relationship is obviously complex, and reflects intricate power structures. What is clear though, is that all three are victims, united by the experience of oppression, physical and mental, and by a mutual recognition of their suffering.

This scene sets the tone for a story in which animals are an essential part of the lifeworld of the protagonists, where human identities emerge in interaction with non-human nature. In a utopian vision of a society in which compassion and gender- and class equality replace a conservative patriarchal hierarchy, animals are spokespersons for that which either escapes or cannot be expressed by the human protagonists. By speaking up and being heard, traditionally muted animals undermine the Cartesian dualism that strictly separates culture and nature, animality and humanity. In the Kulla-Gulla books, animal voices are subversive in their denial or resistance of human power structures.

The realistically depicted animals in the books often function as catalyzers, propelling the narrative forward and accommodating human communication. To the extent that they underline certain ideological stances related to class and gender roles, we might read them as functions within an anthropocentric context. But they are always more than that. In the Kulla-Gulla books, human and animal lives are intertwined, and animals are individuals with agency. The resulting fluidity of the boundaries separating nature and culture, men and women, children and adults, humans and animals, that follows from their agency in turn enables the emancipation of otherwise oppressed (human) groups/characters. This is worth noting, since the depiction of animals in children's books not always allows for such readings.

Nature and animals in children's literature

Animals in children's literature serve multiple, even contradictory purposes. Their cultural and literary histories within a humanist tradition make them vulnerable to being used metaphorically or instrumentally. They can for example function as estrangement devices, supporting the status quo and naturalizing dominant ideology, by "circumventing some aspects inevitable in a narrative with human characters, such as age and social status" (Nikolajeva, 157), as well as gender and race. Although Nikolajeva chiefly writes about animals that are to some extent anthropomorphized, animals in realistic children's fiction can have a similar function, as Kathleen

R. Johnson shows in *Understanding Children's Animal Stories* (2000). She describes how animals, on the one hand, introduce child characters (and readers) to a kind of empathy-invoking otherness. Yet the occurrence of only a limited number of (pet) animals has an excluding effect: it reinforces the idea that only a few species are worth our attention and sympathy. Some animal stories thereby maintain a clear distinction between culture and nature and support an anthropocentric ideology.

In spite of this, children's literature has an enormous subversive potential to address and undermine the domination of nature. In an article on the evolution of ecologically conscious children's books, Carolyn Sigler discusses the tradition of biocentrism in children's literature from the 18th century onwards. Especially women writers "were very aware of the organic subjectivity that has come to define biocentric writing – a perception of the self as part of a larger, unified natural world" (148). They "represented a radical break with the masculine Cartesian model of nature as mechanical and with René Descartes's assertion that developing an objective identity requires the rejection of childhood and its associations with subjectivity and sense-experience" (ibid.). The Kulla-Gulla series subverts this idea of child- and adulthood by presenting a maturation process that does not include a denial of traditionally "child-like" qualities such as emotional sensitivity, playfulness and compassion for weaker creatures (including the poor, the sick, the handicapped, animals).

The depiction of nature for 18th century women writers implied a critique of society, and the appearance of animals in works by these writers often expresses a "concern for helpless victims generally" (Sigler, 149). With Gulla showing a similar concern for the weak and vulnerable, regardless of their species, Sandwall-Bergström inscribes herself in this tradition. She presents her readers with a complex picture of human-animal interaction that demonstrates both how animals can be employed in defense of the dominant ideology, and how they can refer to an ecofeminist ideal, where they play an important role in the emancipation process of the protagonists, male and female.

Although fictional animals may create a sensibility for the needs of other species, they do not necessarily neutralize the anthropocentrism that informs much of western culture (Johnson, 17). One and the same narrative can contain both anthropocentric and biocentric aspects, and while promoting a biocentric attitude, the Kulla-Gulla books at times reflect how anthropocentric attitudes

determine the fates of vulnerable characters. In *Kulla-Gulla på Blomgården*, a connection between 7-year-old Gulla and a female calf is established when both of them find a new caregiver and a new home. Farmer Hermansson purchases the calf at a market place where he, in a surprisingly similar auction, procures Gulla. Girl and calf are selected for comparable reasons: they are both young and therefore cheap, but they will eventually pay their keep, either by their labor or by the production of dairy products, offspring and meat. This parallel brings to mind the claim made by Carol Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), that the exploitation of animals for their meat and the oppression of women are intimately linked.

Hermansson is described as a sympathetic man who does not mean Gulla or the calf any harm. Still, both of them are objectified and reduced to their promise of productivity. The importance of sexual reproduction for female animals and women recurs later: when Gunilla is to take over the estate from her grandfather, he urges her to marry an appropriate partner who will provide the family with an heir. This brings to light a discourse in which women, children and animals find themselves at the mercy of male dominance, which is, however, subverted by the actions and behaviors of some human and animal characters. The reciprocity of the human-animal relation in the series is expressed in acts of helping and being helped.

Helping animals and animal helpers

The animal helper is a recurring motif in children's books, folklore and fairy tales. In the Kulla-Gulla books, animal helpers come in many guises. There is the mysterious cat that warns Gunilla when she is in danger. And at a critical point in the narrative, when the children at the Kulla-cottage are near starvation, outcast Dal-Pelle saves their lives by lending them his animals: a few chickens and a goat. They share the cottage with the Karlbergs, and their eggs, milk and almost motherly presence help them through the winter. Dal-Pelle also regularly visits the cottage to provide food for the animals. The mutual dependence is presented as beneficial to all parties involved, and no one becomes instrumental in the process.

Living in close communion with animals is common in pre-industrial farming communities, and a large portion of Gulla's work consists of caring for the farm animals. Working the land with the ox is one of her tasks; so is milking, feeding and watering the animals. Bovines constitute the larger part of the farmer's livelihood and therefore it is essential that they are treated with considerable care.

Because of this mutual dependency, the interconnectedness of their lives defies strict dualisms.

The animals are a material and vital part of the farmer's lives and are described as individuals. This acknowledgement of the singularity of each animal is what Kari Weil identifies as the essence of the "animal turn." So when Skrålla the cow disappears in the woods, Gulla initially mourns the loss of a companion, the loss of a source of food, however important, is secondary: "Skrålla dear ... sweet friend ... make a sound," she begs, "just once, so that I can hear that you're alive." Only upon realizing she is dead, the material consequences strike Gulla: "But what shall we do now, shouted Gulla, who in the middle of her grief was overwhelmed by the thought of the consequences the dear cow's death would have" (*Kulla-Gulla vinner en seger*, 36–37, my translation).

For people depending on animals for food, companionship and the ability to communicate with them are no luxury. Failure to understand this can be disastrous, as is illustrated by temporary maid Ida's treatment of the cow: her rough behavior triggers aggressive objections from Skrålla who would have injured her if Gulla had not prevented it. In the relationship with the farmers, bovines are not just passive victims. They can and will object when taunted – which becomes dramatically clear when Gulla's cousin Regina is killed by a bull.

Although most animals are described realistically and in accord with the social realism of the depiction of the working classes, some are reminiscent of fairy tale creatures. The cat belonging to the mysterious Dal-Pelle is an interesting case of an animal representation that participates in a tradition that employs animals as metaphor, but at the same time, he is endowed with agency. First and foremost, the cat is a companion animal, and most of the time he shows "normal" cat behavior. Yet on a number of occasions, he appears to warn Gulla. Cats in fairy tales, fables, folk tales, and children's fiction, have a dual nature as evil tricksters and benevolent, often magical, helpers (Nikolajeva, 158).

Dal-Pelle's cat fits both interpretations. To Gulla, he is a welcome companion who senses danger long before she does. To Regina however, he appears to be an evil messenger who thwarts her schemes to destroy Gulla. He provokes her on several occasions and ultimately literally attacks her horse when she is chasing Gulla, resulting in a fall that paralyzes Regina and kills the horse. Nikolajeva notes that: "because of their trickster nature, cats can be easily employed as carnivalesque figures, turning order into

chaos and interrogating higher authorities" (161). This is precisely what Dal-Pelle's cat does: he overturns the established order by undermining the authority of the representatives of the ruling classes. In the process, he is ascribed agency and intentionality. The cat is a creature that is able to breach boundaries (Nikolajeva, 165), and in this case the boundaries concerned are those of the real and the imaginary, the natural and the supernatural, the human and the animal.

The common association of the black cat with witchcraft contributes to the association of Dal-Pelle with the supernatural, but his appearance borders on the animal. When Gulla touches his hand, she realizes that "it was almost like a paw, hairy and with nails so long that they could be mistaken for claws" (*Kulla-Gulla*, 94, my translation). Gulla fears that the old man might be a troll, but in his appearance and behavior he also resembles Pan, the goat-legged god of nature in Greek mythology. Dal-Pelle plays the flute and has a special connection with animals and nature: he can sense danger and the presence of beings, humans and non-humans, even when they are far away. It seems that he taps into the fabric of nature to read the signs that are invisible to most. The parallel between Pan and Dal-Pelle continues when he fulfills an important function as a teacher of nature: he shows Gulla which plants are medicinal and which ones are edible in case of food shortage and he teaches her to heed the warning signs of the animals in the woods.

Dal-Pelle appears as a savior on several occasions: he finds and looks after the Karlberg baby when she wanders off into the woods, and later he saves the entire family from starvation. When Gulla suffers from serious burns after the cottage burned down, he is the one who finds her and nurtures her back to health using local plants. Because of his border-crossing traits, Dal-Pelle can be considered the inversion of his cat: while the cat is an animal with "human" agency and intentions, Dal-Pelle is a man with the instincts and heightened senses that are more commonly ascribed to animals. They blur the categories of humanity and animality to allow the voices of nature to be heard and understood.

Animals support the subversion of gender patterns

It has been argued that it no longer makes sense to view nature and culture in terms of oppositions. Rather, they should be considered hybrid entities (Gersdorf & Mayer, 14). In the *Kulla-Gulla* books, we can observe how traditional dualisms are breached and make room for an alternative, more inclusive, worldview. Gulla hears the voices

of the muted, but she also actively inverts traditional gender patterns, paving the way for a society that takes commitment to equality and compassion seriously. When Gulla has to decide which man to marry, she has a choice between Ivan, who represents the conservative, patriarchal order and Tomas, who stands for a modern social idea in which men and women are each other's equals (Heggstad, 104). The way they interact with animals reveals their ideas about gender and class, and this in turn determines Gulla's decision.

As an army lieutenant, Ivan is a skillful rider, but the way he treats horses indicates an aggressive disposition. He forcefully asserts his dominance by whipping the animals into obedience, and inconsiderately risks their health by making them perform dangerous stunts. This way he heightens his prestige in certain circles, but it doesn't endear him to Gulla, who doubts that a man who mistreats his animals can ever be a fit match. Her suspicion that once in charge of the estate, he will treat his human subordinates in a similar fashion is confirmed when he states that "man and beast require a tight rein to lead them. When a worker is ill, get rid of him and replace him with a healthy one" (*Kulla-Gullas sommarlov*, 10–11, my translation).

The opposite holds for Tomas, who, as the son of a city physician, has no notable animal skills. When local farmer Semmel is injured, Tomas takes over his duties and learns how to work a yoke of oxen. He has no idea how to communicate with them, but he shows patience and a willingness to handle them gently and with care, even when the other men ridicule him. Later, when faced with the choice of selling the oxen or giving them to Semmel's family, he finds it is cruel to separate the young boys and the oxen they had come to care for. When he gives his sentiment priority over profit he is stepping away from an ideal of masculinity that promotes wealth and individualism.

The very idea of masculinity is interrogated through the men's relationships with animals and social outcasts. While Ivan respects hierarchy and order, Tomas is the one to whom difference is secondary to continuity: he shows an uncommon compassion for the voiceless and the excluded, which for example finds expression in his efforts to involve the little handicapped girl Ester in the dances and games of the other children. Gulla's decision to marry Tomas is therefore partly informed by the way he interacts with "others." Her choice implies a subversion of traditional gender patterns that rests on a broader transgression: the person who represents the hope of a better society, has to be willing and able to

review the boundaries that traditionally separate class, species, and gender. The nature of the relationship of the men and the animals supports and justifies Gulla's decision.

Eva Heggstad's conclusion that the Kulla-Gulla books ultimately defend a progressive ideal of femininity is based on the nature of the relationship between Gulla and Tomas (98–99). Their union propagates new gender roles based on mutual understanding and compassion. I would like to add that it is not only the inter-human relationships that contribute to the feminist and utopian outlook of the Kulla-Gulla books, but that the relations with non-human nature, too, form a vital contributing factor.

The social ideal presented in the Kulla-Gulla books is partly grounded in Gulla's relationship with animals, which exists in a continuum with inter-human relationships. As Sigler observes, 18th century women writers have used their depictions of nature and animals to formulate their critique of society. Sandwall-Bergström's critique of patriarchal domination follows this tradition when she foregrounds Gulla's active interest in the wellbeing of the poor, and her rejection of a man who embodies a conservative way of life. But Gulla's compassion extends to non-human animals, and must be viewed as part of a holistic and inclusive worldview that opposes domination and hierarchical relationships.

Horses vs. cows: a class conflict?

As mentioned above, some animals are given a voice in the judgment of human behavior, and this also shows in the portrayal of class conflict, which in the Kulla-Gulla books is mediated by horses and cows. In her dissertation, Söderberg discusses the two equipage scenes by which Gulla enters a new stage of her life, and a new world: when farmer Karlberg's oxcart takes her to the Kulla croft, and when she is taken to the estate by her grandfather's carriage (95). The species of the animals enabling this relocation is significant since they will come to represent two different spheres of life. Throughout the books, bovines are associated with the working classes, while the horses are in the service of the upper classes. Using certain species as symbols of class and political orientation is a common phenomenon, and Sandwall-Bergström's association of certain animals with classes of people relies on a tradition that classifies horses as noble creatures, and bovines as gentle, somewhat dull providers of labor and food. Whereas many animals are depicted as agents, all but one of the horses remain mere representatives of their species. This can be interpreted as a reversion to a use of animals as metaphor or allegory.

Whereas cows are depicted as kind and gentle, the horses are distant and unapproachable. The alliance between Gulla and bovines that is established at the very beginning of the narrative is continued throughout the series and forms a sharp contrast with her relationship with horses, for whom she cherishes no special affection. When Ivan suggests that she ought to learn how to ride, Gulla is reluctant. She experiences it as a duty, one she endures only out of loyalty towards her grandfather. It is not particularly clear whether Gulla is unwilling or unable to muster affection for the creatures that so often frightened her. She might also be afraid of the physical position riding puts her in: elevated above the land and the people she feels most connected with. Gulla's distaste signals her rejection of the upper class lifestyle, which is also reflected in her partner choice: Ivan is consistently associated with horses, Tomas with oxen.

Gulla's bias towards horses stands in sharp contrast with Lada's attitude. For a simple farm boy, gaining access to saddle horses can be a means of emancipation, and in Lada's case it leads to a subversion of class conventions. When he takes the liberty of riding the filly Clio, which he was explicitly forbidden to do, he defies his masters and assumes the superior position that is reserved for the higher classes. Clio is certainly a companion, but also a means to escape the hardships of his childhood, and she symbolizes a step up the social ladder. Lada's disobedience gives him an outlook on emancipation that he would have never experienced without his animal companion.

While horses are a means of escape for Lada, they more than once constitute a threat to Gulla's life or personal integrity. In the Kulla-Gulla books, animals, especially horses, are instrumentally used as weapons by representatives of the upper classes in the struggle for dominance. Ivan and Regina both assert their superiority through the literal elevation above the crowd. Ivan's horse kills a farmer boy, and Regina attempts to murder Gulla by driving her off a cliff. Thanks to Dal-Pelle's cat, she becomes a victim of her own device and is paralyzed for life.

The competition between Gulla and Regina can be read as a collision of two ideals of femininity, mirroring the conflicting ideals of masculinity in the depictions of Tomas and Ivan. Both girls resist traditional gender patterns and actively try to be in control of their own destinies, but Regina's adoption of masculine traits (clothing, aggressive behavior) ends in her self-destruction. That her downfall is mediated by an enraged bull can be viewed as a form of poetic justice: a representative of the animals that she has used instrumentally and without consideration brings about her fall. Yet because

her death is an act of self-sacrifice – she uses her own body to protect the children – the animal also brings about redemption.

Conclusion

A reading of the Kulla-Gulla series with a focus on the animals as agents and significant others in the narrative allows us to see human-animal interaction as a symbiosis of the human and non-human sphere. Although it is impossible and undesirable to separate the animals from their cultural histories, it is at the same time possible to view their individuality and uniqueness. The Kulla-Gulla books open the readers' eyes to the way human and non-human lives are connected, and how strategies of domination can cross species lines. However, subversive reading strategies are available when we are attentive to the "border-crossers" in the narrative: the animals who act as executors of justice; those who are mediators between people, speaking for humans when it is not appropriate for them to do so; and those that reveal a message that for the time being escapes the human characters.

Even in children's books, the human-animal relationship is complex, and in the Kulla-Gulla series this is expressed in the constant tension between humanist, patriarchal values and competing bio-centric visions. As a female child, the narrative seems to side Gulla with the animals, by presenting the relationship between the girl and the animals as natural. But rather than defending a patriarchal humanist outcome that devalues the animals and the girl by association, Gulla's attunement with the animals and nature discloses emancipatory possibilities. Animal presence and the acknowledgement of their importance for the human protagonists undermine the humanist idea of human (male) superiority. They support a utopian vision of a society freed from conservative patriarchal dominance, where animals, human and non-human, are part of the living matter of a community of creatures.

Biographical information: Kelly Hübben is a PhD student at the Department of Literature and History of Ideas, Stockholm University, and works with picture book research and animal studies. Her dissertation deals with visual and verbal animal representation in the American Little Golden Books.

Notes

¹. Although there is controversy among scholars concerning the name of the field, I have chosen to use the term HAS.

²The last sentence, which intimately links animal and human fates, is missing in the English translation. The Swedish text goes: "Den var ett klagorop, som sändes upp utan väntan på svar, en trälagråt över mödor och förtryck, som aldrig kunde tänkas lätta" (*Kulla-Gulla*: 5–6). My translation.

Works cited

Adams, Carol. *The sexual politics of meat. A feminist–vegetarian critical theory*. Cambridge: Blackwell, Polity Press, 1990.

Copeland, Marion W. "The wild and wild animal characters in the ecofeminist novels of Beatrix Potter and Gene Stratton-Porter" In *Wild things; children's culture and ecocriticism* edited by Sydney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004, 71–81.

Curry, Alice. *Environmental crisis in young adult fiction. A poetics of earth*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Ehriander, Helene and Toijer-Nilsson, Ying. "Älskad av läsarna men föraktad av kritiken". *Abrakadabra*. (1993): 3, 3–5.

Glotfelty, Cheryll & Fromm, Harold. *The ecocriticism reader: landmarks in literary ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Haraway, Donna. *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Heggestad, Eva. "Fru Marianne och Kulla-Gulla. Ideal eller avskräckande exempel?" In *Från handskrift till XML. Informationshantering och kulturarv* edited by Kerstin Rydbeck. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2003, 91–106.

Johnson, Kathleen, R. *Understanding Children's Animal Stories*. Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 2000.

McHugh, Susan. *Animal Stories: narrating across species lines*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

McHugh, Susan. "Animal farm's lessons for literary (and) animal studies". *Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies* 1 (2009): 1.

Nikolajeva, Maria. *Power, voice and subjectivity in literature for young readers*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. London: Routledge, 2002.

Plumwood, Val. "Nature, self and gender: feminism, environmental philosophy and the critique of rationalism". *Hypatia* 6; 1 (1991): 3–27.

Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Anna all Alone*. Trans. Joan Tate. London: Blackie, 1978.

Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Anna at Bloom Farm*. Trans. Joan Tate. London: Blackie, 1978.

- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla finner sin väg*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gullas första bal*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla håller sitt löfte*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla i skolan*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla löser en gåta*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gullas myrtenkrona*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla och Tomas Torpare*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla på herrgården*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla på Blomgården*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gullas sommarlov*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sandwall-Bergström, Martha. *Kulla-Gulla vinner en seger*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1978.
- Sigler, Carolyn. "Wonderland to Wasteland: toward historicizing environmental activism in children's literature". *Children's literature association quarterly* 19; 4 (1994): 148–153. *Project MUSE*. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.
- Söderberg, Eva. *Askunge, madonna eller feminist? Kontextuella läsningar av Martha Sandwall-Bergströms Kulla-Gullasvit*. Diss. Umeå: Umeå University, 2004.
- Toijer-Nilsson, Ying. "Martha Sandwall-Bergström". In *De läses än. Porträt av elva svenska barnboksförfattare* edited by C-A. Lövgren. Lund: Bibliotekstjänst, 1980, 99–113.
- Weil, Kari. *Thinking animals: why animal studies now?* New York: Colombia University Press, 2012.
- Westling, Louise. "Literature, the environment, and the question of the posthuman". In *Nature in literary and cultural studies* edited by C. Gersdorf, and S. Mayer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, 25–48.
- Zweigbergk, Eva von. *Barnboken I Sverige 1750–1950*. Stockholm: Rabén och Sjögren, 1965.