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Breaking the Silence about the Animals We Eat

Representations of the Inherent Value of Nonhuman Animals in Children's Picturebooks

*Abstract: Some 77 billion terrestrial animals are reared for human consumption globally every year. The moral implications of killing animals for food and the material conditions of these animals in intensive animal agriculture have seldom been discussed in children's literature. The purpose of this article is to examine how these socially and culturally maintained silences are broken in two Nordic children's picturebooks, Swedish *Älskade lilla gris* (Dear Little Pig, 1982) by Ulf Nilsson and Eva Eriksson and Finnish *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* (Little Ham's Christmas Surprise, 2010) by Teija Rekola and Timo Kästämä. The books' pig protagonists are determined not to die, embodying the dualistic status inherent in the animality of farmed animals; they are subjects and objects, living beings and food-to-become. Further, this article explores the representation of the inherent value of so-called farmed animals and how it can be narrated-to-exist by concepts gleaned from Western animal rights philosophy, especially the capabilities approach by Martha Nussbaum. In the two books, inherent value is expressed in significantly different modes. *Älskade lilla gris* discusses multispecies families, autonomous animality, and emancipation, whereas *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* uses a more traditional mode involving an anthropomorphic animal story, idyllic setting, and humanized subjectivity. Analysis focuses on the representation of nonhuman individuality, agency, sentience, animality, and interaction with humans. Both books present active and sentient individuals with varying degrees of animality. One celebrates its protagonist's pigness but also contrasts it with the confined conditions of an animal industrial complex. The other employs a human-like pig protagonist on the run from his slaughterer and whose pigness is limited to his appearance and intended use.*

Keywords: farmed animals, animal rights, inherent value, slaughter, picturebooks, Ulf Nilsson, Eva Eriksson, Teija Rekola, Timo Kästämä

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“Det här var en fin gris”, sa bonden. “Snart är han färdig för slakt.”
(“What a fine pig”, the farmer said. “Soon he will be ready for slaughter.”)
(Nilsson and Eriksson)¹

*Minusta ei kyllä tehdä joulukinkkua, se puhisi itsekseen ja vilisti
ovesta ulos Korvatunturin aamuun.*
(I will not become a Christmas ham [Kinkkuli] huffed to itself as it
rushed away into Christmas Town.) (Rekola and Kästämä)

Like the nearly eighty billion terrestrial farmed animals who populate the Earth, pigs, cows, sheep, and chickens populate the pages of children’s fiction. They frequently appear as food products and as emblems of rural idyll (Cole and Stewart; Dimick; Hoult-Saros). However, their agency, voice, and personality are suppressed.

The representation of the inherent value of farmed animals in children’s picturebooks is an oxymoron because the term “farmed animal” implies instrumental value. Instrumentality constitutes every phase in the farmed animal’s life, from the moment of insemination to the date of death. In children’s literature, farmed animals’ inherent value is silenced as the discussion would evoke moral uneasiness: If farmed animals were granted inherent value, industrial complexes and abattoirs would have to be altered and likely abolished (see also Hübber 200).

In fact, studies confirm that the connection between meat and animals is dissociated by denying farmed animals’ cognition (Bastian et al.; Rothgerber), processing meat in such a way that the animal origin is not apparent (Bratanova et al.), and by avoiding pictures and words relating to animals such as “pig” and “slaughter” (Kunst and Hohle). Thus, silence around farmed animals is either consciously or subconsciously pursued and usually the role of children’s culture is to support this *status quo*. The fictional farmed animals are “commodity owners who willingly exchange useful products for the benefits of farm life” (Hoult-Saros xiii). The link between a living animal and meat is disconnected and silenced.

In this article, I examine how two Nordic children’s picturebooks challenge the silenced animal subjectivity, agency, and animality by portraying the inherent value of nonhuman animals. To my knowledge, Swedish *Älskade lilla gris* (Dear Little Pig, 1982), written by Ulf Nilsson and illustrated by Eva Eriksson, and Finnish *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* (Little Ham’s Christmas Surprise, 2010), written by Teija Rekola and illustrated by Timo Kästämä, are two of the earliest Nordic picturebooks to problematize the ethics of meat. They follow the

literary tradition of courageous pigs who defy their sole purpose in life: being slaughtered.

Pigs are prevalent in children's stories that address animal ethics because they make the ultimate production animal – their dead body is the only product they manufacture. Pigs are very intelligent, even more so than dogs. Like canines, the cultural doctrine about their edibility varies. Folklorist Liisa Kaski also notes that playful piglets have appealed to people, especially children, for centuries (211; see also Malcolmson and Mastoris 24), resulting in a rich collection of rhymes and poems.

The central question in this article is how the long-silenced issue of farmed animals' inherent value is narrated-to-exist in these two books. Narrate-to exist is a narrative strategy developed by posthumanist scholar Karoliina Lummaa. It narrates something that already is (surrounds us), shares it with someone else and expresses the existing phenomenon by means of literature and writing (277, 280).

I begin by establishing the factors that create the silence around farmed animals. After reviewing the concept of inherent value within the framework of animal rights philosophy relevant to my analysis, I explore how inherent value is conveyed in children's picturebooks by means of individuality, agency, sentience, animality, and interaction with human animals.

Silencing Strategies in an Animal Farm Context

As long as animals were killed and dismembered at home, there was no reason to hide these acts even from children. Indeed, animals flee from slaughter in many early children's stories. John Amos Comenius' *Orbis sensualium pictus* (1658), one of the first illustrated children's books, dedicates a whole section to butchery. However, by the end of the 19th century, increasing hygienic and moral concerns relocated slaughter to industrialized facilities out of sight (Malcolmson and Mastoris 101–102). Simultaneously, the depictions of slaughter started to disappear from children's fiction.

Farmed animals have until recently been surprisingly little researched in children's literature. Amy Ratelle has examined ethics and animality in E.B. White's classic novel *Charlotte's Web* (1952), while Stacy Hoult-Saros and Janae Dimick have critically explored the representations of animal farms in children's books. Hoult-Saros' extensive research investigates the use of recurring myths about farms and farmed animals in some eighty books for young children published during the past five decades. Dimick draws from

the same methodological orientation as I, namely critical animal studies. It aims to challenge the various power formations that affect humans, other animals, and the environment. Based on her sample of five recent, non-fiction books for children about farmed animals, published since 2009, Dimick discovers non-fiction children's books to be misinformative and to present the opposite of reality (see also Hoult-Saros xiv). Dimick connects the misleading representations to consumer ignorance and to North American "ag-gag" laws judicially silencing activists about animal abuse and violations on farms (82).

How do children's books maintain this silence? Based on my broader sample of some 80 animal farm books for children, at least three silencing strategies surface. The most common strategy is to depict farms as idyllic, self-supporting, pre-industrial-age havens where a range of farmed animals live together in small family units of mother, father, and child (see also Dimick 86; Taneli 6-7; Hoult-Saros 27; Cole and Stewart 33-34). This pastoral bliss includes lush, green grass; open, blue sky; quaint straw-strewn barns and chicken coops; low fences and open doors implying freedom to roam (Dimick 108-109; Hoult-Saros 124). This trope is reproduced both in fiction and non-fiction children's books such as Anne V. Kennedy's *The Farmer's Away! BAA! NEIGH!* (2014) and Helen Chapman's *Little Explorers: Farm* (2017).

The second strategy is to frame farmed animals as dirty and stupid, and lacking all cognitive, psychological, and emotional aspirations. For example, in Sven Nordqvist's Pettson and Findus books, Pettson's dim-witted and fussy hens are illustrated shooting eggs out of their rear ends when they get excited, even though egg laying is a very a private process for real-life hens (Alm et al.). Dimick calls this method "desentienization" (93-106). According to animal studies and children's literature scholar Kelly Hübben, likeness to humans and/or anthropomorphism can convey a message about "a clear and fundamental difference between certain categories of animals" (188). As Hübben argues,

based on this difference we decide which ones can safely be consumed. Some are more like us than others, and deserve moral consideration. Animals that are less like us have bodies that are merely useful, either as commodities or as food. (Hübben 188-189)

The third strategy normalizes eating another animal's flesh to the point of cannibalism, sometimes referred to as "suicide food" in vegan activism. For example, in Richard Scarry's works, pigs frequently

barbeque pork chops for their families (Cole and Stewart 139), and in Pirkko Koskimies' Pupu Tupuna books, hens hand out their own fetuses (eggs) as birthday presents.

These three silencing strategies serve to reinforce the notion that farmed animals are neither interesting nor important and that they are perfectly happy in human hands. In *Our Children and Other Animals: The Cultural Construction of Human-Animal Relations in Childhood* (2014), critical sociologists Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart call "the pleasurable consumption of other animals" a cultural norm (20). They state that idealized representations of other animals *and* animal products are made sensible to children "while the situations and experiences of the real animals exploited to 'manufacture' those products are absent" (21).

My broader research focuses on the ways in which the ethics of animal-based foods have been problematized in children's picture-books. Based on the sample for my doctoral thesis, 85 illustrated books or picturebooks collected for this purpose,² I have discovered that the silence around the animals used in food production was broken around the 1970s after the rise of modern animal rights philosophy, animal studies and ethology, and animal activism. At the same time, children's literature underwent internal changes and opened up to new, controversial topics (Heikkilä-Halttunen 9–14). Critical stances towards eating animals have rapidly increased during the 21st century and now occupy even mainstream children's literature. For example, Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2021 laureate Jean-Claude Mourlevat addresses meat eating and slaughter in his novel *Jefferson* (2018), while the popular Finnish *Puluboi* (Pigeon Boy) series by Veera Salmi and Emmi Jormalainen (2021) depicts "muscle chickens" and fish who refuse to be eaten (Salmi and Jormalainen 52–55).

Animal Rights Oriented Children's Books and Inherent Value

Among all the books I have collected, I have discovered a group of books that I call animal rights oriented. These books stand out in two different ways. First, they narrate nonhuman animals' inherent value to exist. The animals' value is not dependent upon usefulness for others, nor can their lives be traded or substituted without loss. In these books, inherent value includes all individuals of the same species or group, without exclusions or limitations. Second, animal rights oriented books narrate-to-exist human actions' negative impact on nonhuman life. These depictions include institutionalized

and industrialized nonhuman animal exploitation (often referred to as animal industrial complex) and/or slaughter – while depicting animals’ inherent value.

In previous research on the ethics of meat in children’s fiction, such as Ratelle’s analysis of *Charlotte’s Web* (1952) and Hübben’s work on George DuPlaix’ *Gaston and Josephine* (1948), domestic animals are saved from being eaten due to their human-like virtues and values. Cleanliness, kindness, and good manners set them apart from others of their kin. They become persons (Hübben 192, 199), unique individuals (Ratelle 77). However, as is made poignantly clear in these books, this uniqueness does not extend to other animals of the same species or use. Ratelle claims that White undermines his arguments “for an inclusive notion of animal subjectivity by presenting a second individual pig [at the market] that reinforces negative porcine stereotypes of filth, stupidity and indolence” (83). Thereby “White sacrifices all the others of the porcine species to ensure the safety of his hero” (Ratelle 83). In this article and in my ongoing research, I discuss books that extend (or at least do not exclude) inherent value from the exceptional individual to others of the same species or same kind of use.

At the basis of animal ethics lies the idea that nonhuman animals have inherent value which originates within themselves (Aaltola, “Ihminen” 24). While space constraints prevent me from discussing animal rights philosophy in depth, I want to briefly mention a few relevant philosophers in this context. Peter Singer, a utilitarian philosopher, and a central figure in the modern Western animal rights movement, claims that it is sentience, or the ability to suffer and to feel joy and happiness, that grants an animal intrinsic value³:

Surely every sentient being is capable of leading a life that is happier or less miserable than some alternative life, and hence has a claim to be taken into account. In this respect the distinction between humans and non-humans is not a sharp division, but rather a continuum along which we move gradually, and with overlaps between the species, from simple capacities for enjoyment and satisfaction, or pain and suffering, to more complex ones. (Singer 112)

The deontological ethicist Tom Regan considers every “experiencing subject of a life, a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others” to have inherent value (186). By the same token, political philosopher Martha Nussbaum introduces the capabilities approach to animal ethics,

stating that if a list of human capabilities is a template for constitution making (“Moral” B6), such lists can be applied for other animal species. The capabilities consist of generic categories such as bodily integrity, health, and the ability to move (Nussbaum, “Women” 235), and they emphasize personal autonomy that enables the individual to flourish (Nussbaum, “Moral” B6).

Based on these theorizations, I analyze *Älskade lilla gris* and *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys*, examining the nonhuman animal sentience (Singer), individuality (Regan), and agency, animality, and interaction with humans (Nussbaum). Because farmed animals are instrumentalized cultural constructs, these aspects are usually silenced. Philosopher Elisa Aaltola describes how the value of nonhuman animals is dependent on use categorization: “the personhood of animals is denied on the basis of lack of independent value, and the lack of independent value is denied on the basis of lack of personhood” (*Animal Individuality* 137).

Agency, or the ability to act for the betterment of one’s circumstances, and to protect one’s own life and perhaps the lives of others, is a precondition of flourishing (see Nussbaum, “Women” 235). It is also a vital component of *Umwelt*, or *surrounding-world*, a species-specific, spatio-temporal, “self-in-world” subjective reference frame defined by Jakob von Uexküll. According to Uexküll, all organisms that react to sensory data as signs should be considered living subjects comparable with human subjectivity (152–153).

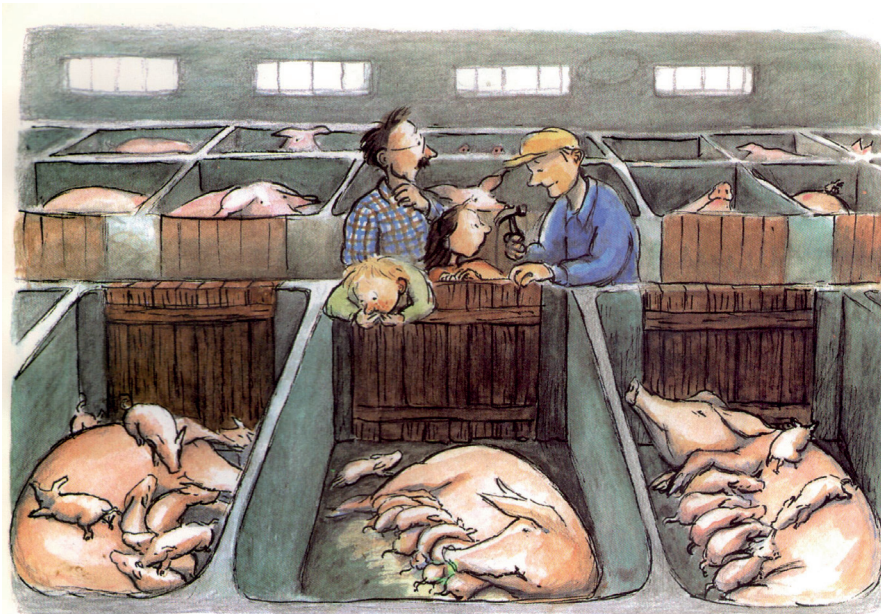
Domesticated animals, such as the pigs in the factory of *Älskade lilla gris* or the eponymous hero of *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys*, do not live in their species-specific, self-in-world surroundings. They live supposedly free but remain controlled. Domestication entails subjugation to human dominance – and animal agribusiness restricts the farmed animals’ ability to act and react to sensory data in extreme fashion, or prevents it completely. Animal industrial complexes also lack *features* (*Merkmale*, see Uexküll 127) that are relevant for farmed animals’ *Umwelt*. Consequently, *Umwelt* is always compromised when it comes to farmed animals, and extreme breeding and housing methods have compromised the domesticated animals themselves. Still, they are nonhuman animals with sentience and needs. A major question is where the farmed animals should live if their inherent value was recognized. In children’s literature this is especially relevant for the books’ endings because the killing and dismemberment of the protagonist – the fate of almost all farmed animals – is not portrayed.

In terms of anthropomorphism, I concur with Hübben who states that “within a humanist frame of thinking, each fictional animal almost by necessity becomes a human” (73). Anthropomorphism is the *human point of view*. For primatologist Frans de Waal “anthropomorphism is problematic only when the human-animal comparison is a stretch, such as with regards to species distant from us” (24). De Waal has even coined the term “anthropodenial” to describe “the a priori rejection of humanlike traits in other animals or animallike traits in us” (25). Traditionally, Western culture has described nonhuman animals as reactive bodies who lack reason and even emotions – an approach which highlights the animals’ bodily and sensory experiences but dismisses them in humans (even though bodily experience is a vital part of all species’ existence). Furthermore, it denies the existence of nonhuman minds despite the fact that animal cognition is a thriving academic field in natural sciences.

In addition to Hübben, I draw on literature scholar John Simons’ categories of trivial and strong anthropomorphism, the latter of which, like the concept of Umwelt, challenges the human-animal divide:

strong anthropomorphism is a category of representation which deals with animals as if they were humans but does it in such a way as either to show how the non-human experience differs from the human or to create profound questions in the reader’s mind as to the extent to which humans and non-humans are really different. These two modes [...] work towards a single representational strategy in that they begin to challenge the distinction not only between animals and people, but also between representation and reproduction. (Simons 120)

Finally, despite the many similarities, human and nonhuman animals also differ in terms of various aspects such as cognition, choice of food, shelter, and company. Senses, too, are employed differently. These differences and similarities form animality, by which I refer to the nonhuman subjectivity and agency based on species-specific behaviour and its correlation with the Umwelt. In terms of farmed animals, they are exposed to physical, material, emotional, and even genetical control by humans. This affects their animality and the way humans perceive and acknowledge it, if at all. Thus, for the purpose of this article, it is necessary to reflect on farmed animals’ animality in conjunction with their interaction with humans. Next, I look more closely at these aspects in *Älskade lilla gris* and *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys*.



Images 1 and 2. From *Älskade lilla gris* [Dear Little Pig], written by Ulf Nilsson and illustrated by Eva Eriksson. En bok för alla, 2012.

Freedom and Animality in *Älskade lilla gris*

Älskade lilla gris is one of the first books in Western children's literature to narrate-to-exist animal industrial complexes. The book opens with two subsequent illustrations of farrowing stalls in which sows give birth. The first illustration shows a safe, womb-like space in which a farmer is attending to a mother and her piglets (image 1).

The next illustration zooms away from the stall, exposing the rows of farrowing stalls filled with sows and piglets (image 2). This new perspective, focalized from below and thus from an oppressed position, makes the reader/viewer side with the pigs. The shift from a conventional children's book farm into an animal industrial complex is dramatic and the text mirrors the change: the opening page (recto) describes the farmer talking soothingly to the sow, and the next (verso) reveals his intent to kill Pellen (the Runt), the smallest in his litter, because the mother sow will not be able to nurse him. Thus, Pellen personifies the faceless mass of surplus animals who are annihilated on farms simply because it is more profitable than to improve their care or conditions. Luckily for Pellen, a human family happens to visit the farm just as the piglets are born, and when the farmer raises his hammer, the children beg him to stop and offer to take care of the piglet. This brief moment indicates a change in ownership and immediately turns a meaningless surplus piglet into a "dear little pig".

Farrowing stalls, both in this illustration and in animal industrial complexes at large, impede most of the natural interaction between mother sows and their piglets, usually even preventing the sows from turning around. Still, the stalls are the surrounding-world of the pigs who follow their own behavioural patterns, instincts, and needs under these circumstances. In the picture, silences about extreme confinement and looming death (by the visual aid of a hammer) are broken. Further, the pigs are narrated to be sentient individuals. With bodily gestures and simple dots for eyes, Eriksson manages to transmit an array of feelings in the pigs: some sows seem content nursing their piglets, others look worried and uncomfortable. Some piglets are eating but others climb all over their mothers to play. They do not flourish, but as sentient agents they actively try to adapt, to avoid pain and seek pleasure.

Once rescued, text and illustrations indicate that the piglet becomes a family member, acting sometimes in the role of a family dog, sometimes more as a baby or a doll, and sometimes maintaining and exhibiting his porcine traits. It is his status as a pet animal and the human family's love that first narrates-to-exist his inherent

value. Pellen becomes unchangeable, unique. On such occasions, as discussed by Hübben, the animal also becomes inedible (173).

Later, when the family comes by the pig factory again, they visit the unit where weaned pigs are fattened for slaughter. Crates have substituted stalls and the floor is slatted. The crates are crowded, and the pigs climb on top of each other. Again, Eriksson portrays pigs as individuals: curious, sad, passive, and nuzzling in a hall filled with pig crates. Like Pellen, the pigs in the factory are sentient agents but their agency is confined by bars and other pigs' expanding bodies.

Throughout the book, Pellen's family is mostly depicted through extradiegetic narration with only occasional references to their feelings and moral values. The scene in the pig factory is no exception; it is difficult to discern the family's sentiments as they are standing in the middle of a sea of pigs. The father has tucked Pellen under his shirt, which makes him look like he is pregnant. It is a desperate attempt to make Pellen a part of the human family. The farmer addresses them:

“Det här var en fin gris”, sa bonden. “Snart är han färdig för slakt.”
Sådana ord ville familjen helt enkelt inte förstå. Men Pellen gjorde det
nog. Han försökte bita bonden.

“What a fine pig”, the farmer said. “Soon he will be ready for slaughter.”
The family simply did not want to understand the meaning of such words.
But Runt did understand. He tried to bite the farmer.
(Nilsson and Eriksson)

Is Pellen's human family sad, angry, or disgusted? Do they recognize the sentience and the frustrated agency in the agitated movements of the pigs behind the bars? The text implies that they do not want to think about killing Pellen, but it is not clear if the narrator gains this knowledge through their external or internal reactions or both. This textual ambiguousness, silence, allows more space for the reader to contemplate her own values against the backdrop of pig exploitation. For Pellen, this is a decisive moment that ends his carefree existence. He notes the suffering of other pigs and realizes that he, too, is soon full-grown and ready to be killed.

The visit to the pig factory forces Pellen and his family to face Pellen's pighood and his status as a production animal. The family's commitment was for a runt, and they did not consider all the consequences of a pig adoption. The problem is that the pig outgrows being a runt – and the human norms for a pet. The ever-growing boar and his family start to lose their bond:

Pellen förändrades. (Var det för att bonden så ofint talade om slakt?)
Han låg ensam i badkaret och funderade.

Runt changed. (Was it because the farmer spoke so indiscreetly about slaughter?) He lay alone in the bathtub and pondered.
(Nilsson and Eriksson)

It is hard to decipher whose thoughts are mediated within the parentheses but the subsequent illustrations show Pellen and the human family members turning away from each other. The dark and red-brown colour palette around Pellen suggests loneliness and isolation, emphasizing this distancing. Before the visit to the pig factory, lighter brown colours create a sense of comfort and security. Desperate, the father decides to liberate his family from the distress caused by Pellen's presence and kill him.

Tyst och försiktigt öppnade de dörren och pappan smög in. Pellen sov och snarkade högt. Han hade den lilla luvan i famnen. Pappan höjde hammaren. Då öppnade grisen plötsligt ögonen och tittade på honom. Länge, länge tittade de på varandra.

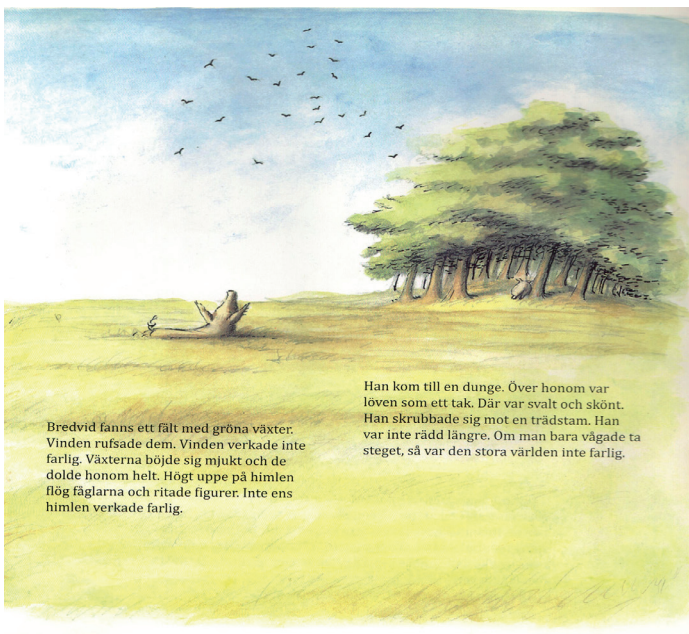
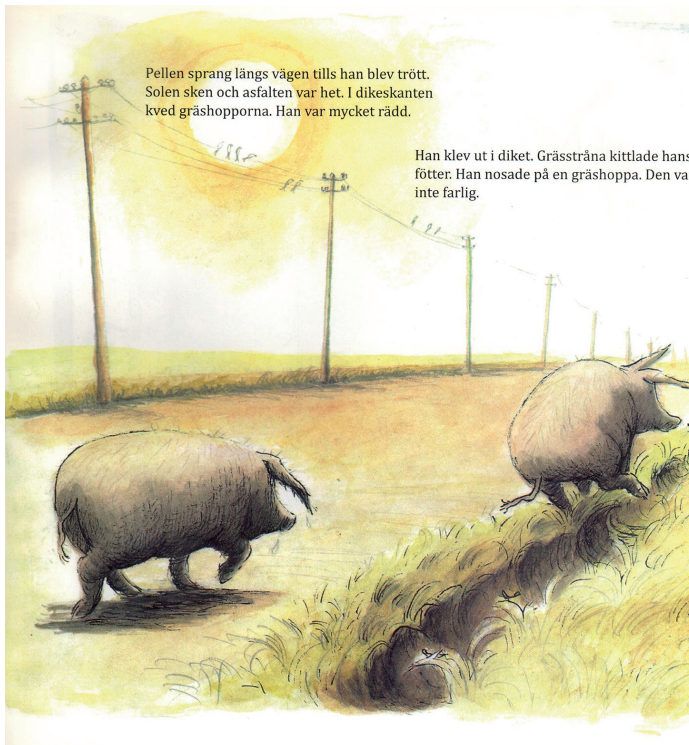
“Älskade lilla gris”, sa pappan tyst och slängde hammaren på golvet. Och Pellen reste sig upp och tänkte:

Här kan man ju inte stanna, alltså!

They opened the door slowly and silently and the father crept in. Runt slept and snored loudly. He had the little beanie in his arms. The father raised the hammer. At that moment the pig suddenly opened his eyes and looked at him. They looked at each other for a long, long time. “Dear little pig”, the father said quietly and threw the hammer on the floor. And Runt stood up and thought to himself: I cannot possibly stay here! (Nilsson and Eriksson)

The scene shows the unhappy Pellen in a bathtub he has outgrown, clutching his old beanie in his hooves, indicating that his time as the family pet is over. His animality, his pigness, has taken over and he needs a new identity. Having reached the size when pigs are usually slaughtered, his future is unknown and uncertain; his childhood is over and there is very little room for porcine adulthood. Nevertheless, when the father and Pellen look at each other, the father recognizes his love for the pig. Pellen, however, understands the father's intention and decides to run away and save himself, leaving the house.

Although initially wary of his new environment, Pellen soon finds himself safe and embraces his true surroundings. His quick and im-



Images 3 and 4. From *Älskade lilla gris* [Dear Little Pig], written by Ulf Nilsson and illustrated by Eva Eriksson. En bok för alla, 2012.

pressive adaptation to nature proves him to be a sentient agent who, despite his life in the human household, has the capabilities needed to survive on his own. The book underlines the importance of his liberation by describing it in nine subsequent pages. In a whole-spread illustration using the device of simultaneous succession from bottom left of the verso to upper right of the recto, Pellen travels from a human context (a road) towards an increasingly nonhuman context: to a field, then a wood, a lake, and finally wilderness where his liberation is fulfilled (images 3 and 4). His progression complies with the Western reading strategy and communicates temporality and even causality. The text presents Pellen's first contact with nature, using repetition:

Han klev ut i diket. Grässtråna kittlade hans fötter. Han nosade på en gräshoppa. Den var inte farlig.

Bredvid fanns ett fält med gröna växter. Vinden rufsade dem. Vinden verkade inte farlig. Växterna böjde sig mjukt och de dolde honom helt. [...]

Där var svalt och skönt. Han skrubbade sig mot en trädstam. [...] Om man bara vågade ta steget, så var den stora världen inte farlig.

He stepped into the ditch. The blades of grass tickled his feet. He sniffed at a grasshopper. It wasn't dangerous. Next to him lay a field with green plants. The wind ruffled them. The wind didn't seem dangerous. The plants bowed softly and they hid him completely. [...] It was nice and cool. He scratched himself against a tree trunk. [...] If one was just brave enough to take the first step, then the big world wasn't dangerous. (Nilsson and Eriksson)

Pellen's actions – climbing, sniffing, hiding in vegetation, and scratching – are species-specific behaviours for pigs. His capabilities are narrated-to-exist for this environment where he not only finds shelter, nourishment, and society among other wild animals, but also feels safe. He is capable of acting for the betterment of his circumstances: choosing his own food and swimming in a lake instead of a bathtub. However, Pellen's ultimate emancipation takes place at night, adding a dreamlike quality to the story. Moreover, most people sleep at night which implies the out-of-place nature of free pigs in a world where pighood is considered an interphase before turning into food.

At sunrise, Pellen's family finds him in the forest, apologizes to him and invites him to come back home. Pellen refuses but accepts

a new beanie the children offer him as a keepsake of their time spent together. The beanie can be seen as a token of reconciliation but also as a symbol of domestication and its implications for nonhuman animals – it always leaves a mark. In Pellen’s case, the mark is ultimately a positive one. The ending is very optimistic: Pellen gallops towards the sun, starting a new day and embarking on a new adventure. No mention is made of the cold Swedish winters or lurking predators that would threaten real-life domesticated pigs in the Nordic countries.

Fractures in Idyllic Life and Anthropomorphism in *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys*

Whereas Pellen’s initial destiny to die as surplus is voiced in the opening pages of the book, the fate of Kinkkuli, the protagonist of *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys*, hangs in the air, silent and pressing. The only pig in Korvatunturi (Christmas Town), Kinkkuli (Little Ham) is not aware of the anthropocentric view of a pig’s sole meaning in life. On the contrary, the book begins with a declaration that Kinkkuli is the happiest pig in Korvatunturi who had heard so many stories of Christmas that he could barely wait any longer.



Image 5. From *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* [Little Ham’s Christmas Surprise] written by Teija Rekola and illustrated by Timo Kästämä. WSOY, 2010.

In the first illustration of the book, Kinkkuli is unaware of the threat facing him (image 5). Instead, he looks happy and full of anticipation. For the reader, however, the combination of Kinkkuli's name and the illustration evokes a sense of danger. In Finnish Christmas traditions, pigs only serve one purpose: ham. In the illustration, Kinkkuli is moving away from the Christmas preparations and towards his home barn. The elves are busy in the background and the pig glances at them over his shoulder. The direction of his movement and his tilted head reveal that he is distinctively separate from the group of elves, even though he would like to be one of them. The bright sky serves to connect Kinkkuli with the elves, although snow starts to fall over the Christmas preparations. In later illustrations, this contrast of light and shadow emphasizes the gulf between Kinkkuli and the elves.

Kinkkuli is anthropomorphized to such an extent that his animality is only revealed through his porcine appearance and his name. Cognitively he is an inexperienced child, dependent on the goodness of others superior to him. As Hübben points out, traits of vulnerability make fictional animals an easy target of identification for child readers (20). His looming death only adds to his empathetic appeal. Based on John Simons' categories of trivial and strong anthropomorphism (118), Kinkkuli is mostly anthropomorphized in a trivial manner, meaning that humanlike traits – such as bipedal walking and clothes – do not challenge the traditional human-animal divide. Interestingly, his level of anthropomorphism parallels him with the elves who want to slaughter him. In Hübben's research on the Little Golden Books, the eater and the intended animal supper must be on distinctively different levels of anthropomorphism (184–185), otherwise the characters would be “close to committing cannibalism” (194–195). Kinkkuli is also visualized to be very small, not much bigger than a freshly weaned piglet. Consequently, there is very little in him to eat which makes it even more incomprehensible that he would be killed for food. Kinkkuli's high level of cognition, his cuteness, childlike demeanour, and innocence all provide clues for the child reader that Kinkkuli will survive the future horrors.

The day before Christmas, an old elf comes to kill Kinkkuli. The illustration is focalized from below so that the viewer's gaze first catches Kinkkuli standing upright, vulnerable and scared in a corner of his pen (image 6). The room is dark, and the slightly menacing-looking elf is invading Kinkkuli's personal space. The text takes the lead:



Image 6. From *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* [Little Ham's Christmas Surprise] written by Teija Rekola and illustrated by Timo Kästämä. WSOY, 2010.

– Se on menoa nyt, valkoparta sanoi ja kapusi karsinaan.

Menoa? Minne? Kinkkuli ihmetteli ja alkoi vetäytyä [sic] epäluuloisena kohti takaseinää.

– Äläs nyt tempuille! Olen minä ottanut nirrin pois isommiltakin joulukinkkuilta kuin sinulta, tonttu tuhahti ja otti pari askelta lähemmäs.

Kinkkuli alkoi vapista.

Nirri pois... Sehän tarkoitti... Iik!

Kinkkuli kiljui kovaa ja kimeästi, mutta se ei hidastanut tonttua, joka eteni uhkaavasti kädet ojossa. Kohta se tarttuisi Kinkkulia kurkusta. Vain pari askelta enää.

Kinkkuli sulki kauhuissaan silmänsä ja jäi odottamaan.

“Your time has come”, the whitebeard said as he was climbing into the pen. Come? Where? Kinkkuli was perplexed and started to retreat suspiciously towards the backwall. “Do not try to mess with me! I’ve finished off bigger Christmas hams than you.” Kinkkuli started to tremble. Finish off... But that would mean... Eeee! Kinkkuli squealed at the top of its lungs but that wouldn’t stop the elf from approaching it with his hands stretched out. Soon he would clasp them around Kinkkuli’s throat. He was only a few steps away. Horror-struck, Kinkkuli closed its eyes and waited. (Rekola and Kästämä)

In this scene, the textual and visual narration only imply killing. The illustration does not show the elf holding any tools such as an axe or a knife, the most common visual motifs of slaughter (Koljonen 72–73). The text paraphrases killing into “finishing off”, an expression that first prolongs the anticipation but then reveals the horrible truth to Kinkkuli: The elves want to kill him. The old elf already considers Kinkkuli to be Christmas ham, a piece of meat. At this point, textual focalization provides insight into Kinkkuli’s recognition and fear of death. The shift to external focalization describes his agency. Kinkkuli has no way of protecting himself. At the time of slaughter, all he, and his real-life counterparts, can do, is squeal. This scene thereby explicitly narrates to exist the killing inherent in animal-based foods which is rarely seen even in children’s non-fiction picturebooks (Taneli 6; Dimick 86, 102–106).

Kinkkuli escapes his execution when the elf leaves to fetch a sack for the pig’s dead body. He stays in Christmas Town, trying to find a new occupation within it. Like Pellen, he struggles to find a place and a purpose for his life. Kinkkuli is forced to run for his life throughout the book, in the end escaping to Father Christmas’s sleigh, not only saving himself but also Christmas (because Father Christmas has a cold and cannot deliver presents). Kinkkuli replacing Father Christmas can be considered a moment of strong anthropomorphism, as described by Simons, in which the main course of the Finnish Christmas feast, an object, becomes the greatest hero of commercialized Christmas: Father Christmas himself. A similar moment takes place immediately after Kinkkuli’s escape when he thinks rebelliously that

Jos se olisi tarpeellinen jossain muussa tehtävässä, joulukinkuksi laitettaisiin ehkä hanhi, poro tai lehmä. Tai tonttu, niitähän Korvatunturilla riitti.

If it [Kinkkuli] was needed in some other occupation, a goose, a reindeer, or a cow might be turned into Christmas ham. Or an elf, there were plenty of elves in Korvatunturi. (Rekola and Kästämä)

Simons describes the strategy of strong anthropomorphism as reversing “norms of anthropomorphisation so completely that all sense of the distinction between humans and nonhumans is lost” (125). Kinkkuli, having just escaped murder, is filled with feelings of dignity and self-preservation. He knows he does not want to die. In his opinion, there is no reason why pigs should become ham. If ham is needed, it can be sourced from another animal, even from an elf, the most humanlike character in the book. This short scene narrates speciesism, a form of discrimination based on species, to exist. In the vein of Singer, Kinkkuli is a sentient being and for him, all sentient beings are equal, no matter what species they belong to.

Conclusion

This article has examined two Nordic animal rights oriented picture-books that aspire to deconstruct the silencing strategies discussed previously. In these books, individuality, nonhuman sentience, agency, and animality constitute the inherent value of their porcine protagonists – aspects that are usually underrepresented in depictions of fictive farmed animals and repressed in their real-life farmed counterparts.

As signs of individualized humanness, the names in *Älskade lilla gris* and *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* are significant. The pig protagonists’ names are very descriptive of the human(like) attitudes towards them. Pellen’s name (the Runt) is given by the children at the beginning of his life – it is what saves him and makes him special. Kinkkuli (Little Ham) is given a name that carries the curse of his existence – he lives now only to be eaten later. Unlike in *Charlotte’s Web* and other children’s books depicting outstanding nonhuman animal individuals, there is nothing in *Älskade lilla gris* and *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* that deprives the other farmed animals of the individuality and inherent value that Pellen and Kinkkuli are shown to possess; the suffering and looming death of the pigs in the pig factory is narrated to exist, and Kinkkuli’s ponderings challenge speciesist cultural conventions about eating and edibility.

Pellen’s animality, agency, and sentience are unleashed during the extensive liberation scene in the end of the book. It narrates domesticated pigs’ potential to exist and flourish in the right Umwelt, free from humans. Nilsson’s writing avoids anthropomorphism and emphasizes Pellen’s animality, adding to the notion of inherent value as an ethical stance: pigs are unique and valuable as pigs. By means of anthropomorphism, *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys*, on the other hand, breaks

the silence around slaughter by empathetically adopting the position of the animal who is about to be slaughtered. Kinkkuli's animality relies on physical traits, yet the narration manages to voice the most important similarity between human and nonhuman animals: the will to live.

Compared with their real-life counterparts, the fictional pigs in the discussed books have a variety of real and imaginary means of protecting themselves against humans and other animals. Both understand human language and have some humanlike abilities. These narrative decisions add a fictive layer to the pigs' agency but, at the same time, without them the pigs would not stand a chance to survive their intended fate. However, trivial anthropomorphism can evoke empathy in readers (Hübben 120), and that is what most likely happens when reading Kinkkuli's story.

The milieu of *Kinkkulin jouluyllätys* matches the trope of idyllic farms, whereas *Älskade lilla gris* introduces a factory farm. This goes to show that the ability to present nonhuman animal's individual value is not dependent upon its degree of anthropomorphism, nor upon the setting of the story. In their separate ways, both books break the silence by narrating to exist that within the present society and culture, nonhuman animals' inherent value is either granted or denied by humans.

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Notes

1 My sample books do not have page numbers. All translations from Swedish and Finnish are my own.

2 I have collected the sample by making free Internet searches with the key words "children's book", "animal rights", "animal protection" or "vegan" in several languages. My main sources were animal rights organizations' webstores, vegan online magazines, and blogs.

3 Singer uses the term *intrinsic value*, meaning “inner value”. In animal rights philosophy, inherent value, derived from Kantian ethics, is more common (Aaltola, “Ihminen” 26).

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