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## Human-animal relationships, silliness, and queer homemaking in Sven Nordqvist's *Pettson and Findus*

Relacions entre humans i animals, ximpleries i mestresses de casa queer en *Pettson and Findus*, de Sven Nordqvist

Relaciones entre humanos y animales, tonterías y amas de casa queer en *Pettson and Findus*, de Sven Nordqvist

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## Abstract

This article argues that the picture book series *Pettson and Findus* by Sven Nordqvist can be a valuable resource when looking at ethics of matter and thinking through relationships with the more-than-human. *Pettson and Findus* is a series of picture books written and illustrated by Sven Nordqvist. The books depict the relationship between old man Pettson and his cat Findus, who live in an old farmhouse in the south of Sweden together with chickens, invisible "muckles" and a variety of other creatures and people. The books centre on relatively mundane activities, made into small adventures by the various different creatures. This article analyses the *Pettson and Findus* series through Donna Haraway's analysis of human animal relationships in *When Species Meet* (2008) and calls for the making of oddkin in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). This article, using Will McKeithen's analysis in *Queer Ecologies of the Home* and Monica Flegel's *Pets and domesticity in Victorian culture*, argues that Pettson and Findus live in a queer kind of household, and participate in queer home making. Using Jack Halberstam's analysis in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) this article centres Pettson as a figure that is both queer and silly, and through this queer silliness creates certain openings for queer community with the more-than-human, and the making of oddkin.

## Keywords

Posthumanist; oddkin; animals; queer; relationships; silliness.

## Resum

Aquest article sosté que la sèrie de llibres il·lustrats *Pettson and Findus*, de Sven Nordqvist, pot ser un recurs valuós per a analitzar l'ètica de la matèria i reflexionar sobre les relacions amb el més-que-humà. *Pettson and Findus* és una sèrie de llibres il·lustrats escrits per Sven Nordqvist. Els llibres descriuen la relació entre l'ancià Pettson i el seu gat Findus, que viuen en una vella granja del sud de Suècia juntament amb gallines, "aneguets" invisibles i altres criatures i persones. Els llibres se centren en activitats relativament mundanes, convertides en petites aventures per les diferents criatures. Aquest article analitza la sèrie de *Pettson and Findus* a través de l'anàlisi de Donna Haraway sobre les relacions entre humans i animals en *When Species Meet* (2008) i reivindica la creació de oddkin en *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). En aquest article, a partir de l'anàlisi de Will McKeithen en *Queer Ecologies of the Home* i de Monica Flegel en *Pets and domesticity in Victorian culture*, s'argumenta que *Pettson and Findus* viuen en una mena de llar queer i participen en la creació de llars queer. Utilitzant l'anàlisi de Jack Halberstam en *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), aquest article se centra en Pettson com una figura que és alhora queer i imple, i a través d'aquesta ximpleria queer crea unes certes obertures per a la comunitat queer amb el més-que-humà, i la creació de oddkin.

## Paraules clau

Posthumanista; oddkin; animals; queer; relacions; estultícia.

## Resumen

Este artículo sostiene que la serie de libros ilustrados *Pettson and Findus*, de Sven Nordqvist, puede ser un recurso valioso para analizar la ética de la materia y reflexionar sobre las relaciones con lo más-que-humano. *Pettson and Findus* es una serie de libros ilustrados escritos por Sven Nordqvist. Los libros describen la relación entre el anciano Pettson y su gato Findus, que viven en una vieja granja del sur de Suecia junto con gallinas, "patitos" invisibles y otras criaturas y personas. Los libros se centran en actividades relativamente mundanas, convertidas en pequeñas aventuras por las distintas criaturas. Este artículo analiza la serie de *Pettson and Findus* a través del análisis de Donna Haraway

sobre las relaciones entre humanos y animales en *When Species Meet* (2008) y reivindica la creación de oddkin en *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). En este artículo, a partir del análisis de Will McKeithen en *Queer Ecologies of the Home* y de Monica Flegel en *Pets and domesticity* in Victorian culture, se argumenta que *Pettson and Findus* viven en un tipo de hogar queer y participan en la creación de hogares queer. Utilizando el análisis de Jack Halberstam en *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), este artículo se centra en Pettson como una figura que es a la vez queer y tonta, y a través de esta tontería queer crea ciertas aperturas para la comunidad queer con lo más-que-humano, y la creación de oddkin.

### Palabras clave

Post humanista; oddkin; animales; queer; relaciones; estulticia.

### Pettson and Findus

The *Pettson and Findus* book series is a series of picture books written and illustrated by Sven Nordqvist. In this article I look specifically at *When Findus was Little and Disappeared* (2008), *Pettson goes Camping* (2010) and *Pancakes for Findus* (2007). I will analyse Nordqvist's work and consider what it has to say about Pettson's kinships with the more-than-human, and how this places him outside of interhuman relationships. I will specifically analyse silliness as a tread trough how Pettson's openness to relationships with non-humans is perceived, both by the humans in the text and by the reader.

The internal chronology of the book series starts when old man Pettson's neighbour, Betty Andersson, comes over for coffee. Betty tells him she is worried about him and that he really ought to have a wife. Pettson argues that he really would not be able to manage having a whole wife. The next week Betty Andersson returns with a box, formerly containing Findus green peas, now containing a small kitten. Pettson names the kitten Findus, after the green peas, and immediately starts talking to him. Findus starts speaking, and demands a pair of green overalls to wear. From then on Pettson and Findus live in companionship in the old farmhouse and yard. The other inhabitants of Pettson and Findus's world are a group of white chickens and the "muckles", small strange creatures that live in the house, yard and surrounding countryside. Pettson cannot see them, whereas Findus can.

"Muckles" are partially invisible but interact with the world around them – most of the time they are playing, occasionally they are helpful or mischievous. The chickens are given almost human-like characteristics; they are both

women and birds, eating worms from the ground, but also curling their combs and having tea parties. Findus finds them annoying, but they are also his best friends.

Previous scholarship on *Pettson and Findus* and other works by Sven Nordqvist has often focused on the translations of the books from Swedish into other languages (Goodwin-Andersson, 2016; Gossas, Axelsson, Norberg & Van Meerbergen, 2015), or on Nordqvist's distinctive illustration style (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). This article will focus on the story Nordqvist is telling, in both illustration and text, and how the *Pettson and Findus* books can be used as valuable ways of thinking through different kinds of kinship. This paper will analyse the role Pettson occupies in his human community as well as his more-than-human community, and how those relationships intersect. In *Pettson and Findus* it is clear that certain kinds of kinship with the non-human make kinship with humans more challenging. This paper aims to explore the way Pettson relates to various non-humans and what these relationships mean for his relationships to the humans in his community. In this paper, I am not arguing that Nordqvist intends to make an argument about post-human ethics; rather, I argue that due to the clear love and attention he devotes to the world of more-than-human

beings and things within his body of work, that work becomes a valuable philosophical resource for the exploration of a post-human ethics.

### Otherness and Oddkin

Donna Haraway in *When Species Meet* (2008) critiques both Jacques Derrida in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2010) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) for lacking a certain curiosity for the animal. According to Haraway, Derrida sees his cat as a cat, but also refuses the call of curiosity, instead only seeing her as a mysterious other. Deleuze and Guattari identify the animal as a metaphor, which Haraway argues refuses to see the animal as real and turns the animal into a mere discursive tool. "Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (Haraway, 2008, p. 36). Haraway discusses the uneasy act of caring, in her encounter with wolf-dog hybrids. Here, Haraway argues that caring leads to the obligation of curiosity, which leads to learning. Haraway seems to suggest, although she does not outright state this, that curiosity is a kind of ethical demand that the Other – in this case the animal Other – makes on us. This ethical demand seems to be related to her later call for the making of oddkin in *Staying with the trouble* (2016), where she argues that we need to collaborate with the unexpected:

Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not no place, entangled and worldly (Haraway, 2016, p. 4).

Haraway refers to compost throughout the book, claiming that we are all living in compost piles. Haraway states we are compost, rather than post human, which is a play on words, but

also a statement about the way everything is living in a kind of symbiosis with each other. It makes the human less powerful and earthlier and more situated; we are part of the compost pile community. The kind of oddkin we make is therefore unexpected and often more-than-human, and requires the kind of curiosity Haraway examines in *When Species Meet*.

In *Nature Unnested: Kin and Kind in Switched Egg Children's Stories* Kathleen Forrester (2020) explores different works of children's literature featuring a "switched egg", i.e., an egg being hatched by non-biological parents. Forrester analyses these stories and argues that, although the switched egg often is an effort to move towards normativity, as in *The Ugly Duckling* and *Tango makes Three*, in *Odd Egg* this same motif is used for a more counter-normative story about a male duck raising a crocodile. Forrester argues that the question "What if?" can function as a powerful ontological tool to re-read normative stories in a non-normative way and make space for forms of oddkin. In this paper, I endeavour to read the books in the *Pettson and Findus* series, not as a pedagogical tool to teach children about human-animal relationships, but rather as something facilitating a certain kind of encounter with the more-than-human. I will be looking at "What If" questions regarding kinship: what if Pettson, Findus, the chickens, the "muckles" and the house exist in a queer relationship of kinship? What would that mean for the ways in which it is possible to relate to the more-than-human?

Perry Nodelman in "Fish is People" (2020) describes the anthropomorphic quality of fish in picture books. Fish in picture books, according to Nodelman, are almost always representations of humans and human emotion. Nodelman argues that the anthropomorphic animals, merely a stand-in for humans, do not prepare children to encounter the Other, and only create sympathy for the animal that is just like the child. Nodelman states that "captured in the net of human language, fish are hard to think of as just fish" (Nodelman, 2019, p. 16). The Fish

loses its otherness within human language; they become only conceivable as metaphors and humanoids. In *Pettson and Findus*, Findus is a relatively anthropomorphic cat; he speaks, wears trousers and sleeps in a bed. In many ways, Findus is a child as much as he is a cat. Partially, this is because an unruly cat and an unruly child have many similarities. However, the chickens are much more slippery as entities; they are clearly women, but they are also clearly chickens. I will explore the possibilities for reading the animal-people in *Pettson and Findus* as both human and animal at the same time.

In *Children's Literature and the Posthuman* (2015) Zoe Jaques explores the relationship between childhood and animality. She argues that children are often viewed as animal-like proto-humans. They often have the capacity to still become something else. She analyses *Peter Pan* by James Barrie, in which a crow teaches Peter, despite his limited human body, to be like a bird. The crow states that to learn this would make Peter neither a bird nor a human but something "betwixt-and-between". Jaques uses this concept of being betwixt-and-between to analyse children's literature, and the position of animals and children within it. She argues that "being 'betwixt-and-between', [...] is a powerful route to upsetting human dominion" (Jaques, 2014, p. 10). The position of humans and animals, as well as adults and children, is challenged in children's literature. And this challenging fluidity of boundaries makes children's literature capable of questioning and arguing against the human dominion over animals. In *Pettson and Findus*, Findus, as well as the chickens, take up this "betwixt-and-between" position between the animal and the human.

New materialist perspectives recognize reading as a process where "knowing/becoming/doing are intertwined" (García-González, Véliz & Matus 2020) and the book is a material object with a certain kind of "thing power" (Bennett, 2010). The book is not merely a passive object awaiting interpretation, but a thing with its own power participating in

the encounter. In this paper, I endeavour to enter an encounter with these picture books, and examine what *Pettson and Findus* can add to ongoing conversations in the field of new materialist literary analysis.

In his chapter "Feminist New Materialism and Literary Studies" in *How Literature Comes to Matter* (2021) Tobias Skivern gives an overview of feminist literary analysis, and its relationship to feminist new materialist analysis. The relationship between the body and discourse features large in the relationship between feminist literary analysis and new materialism. Skivern argues for an approach to literature that is not merely critical, but also takes "response-ability" or makes the reader-researcher able to respond, and be sensitive and compassionate towards material and its affects. He argues for an approach that includes listening and experiencing through literature as "a significant technique for producing alternative patterns of response, changing our perceptual modes and ability to be affected by the corporal materialities around us" (Skivern, 2021, p. 149). Through an explorative reading of *Pettson and Findus* I am endeavouring to encounter this text as a work that has the ability to affect, and give new insight on the relationships with the material around us.

### Silliness and queerness

Throughout the book series, we are reminded that Pettson is a figure that we as the reader like, but who is ridiculed and considered silly by the other humans in the book. Depending on the moment, the other human characters are either benevolently patronising or outright ridiculing Pettson. On the first page of *Pancakes for Findus* (2007) we get the introduction to the story, and we see how the people in the village are ridiculing Pettson, and discussing how it "isn't normal the way he talks to his cat" (p. 3). A large part of what makes Pettson ridiculous is his relationship to Findus, in which Pettson is immediately feminised and additionally queered by his own acceptance of this prescribed femininity. Pettson receives Findus from his neighbour Betty Andersson

when Findus is a kitten, which is depicted in *When Findus was little and Disappeared* (2008). When Pettson wonders if the kitten will not miss his mother, Betty replies that Pettson must be his new mother. Pettson takes the role of Findus's mother easily. He is unbothered by being Findus's mother rather than his father, and does not question the role Betty assigns him.

In *Pets and Domesticity in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2015) Monica Flegel discusses the difference between the Victorian portrayal of a spinster and that of a bachelor, and the kinds of pets they keep. Where bachelors are often depicted with working dogs, in what Flegel calls "a homosocial relationship", the spinster is depicted with her cats and lap dogs as antisocial. Where the working dog is depicted

connection that would be implied in having a human child, queers the spinster.

The spinster with cats almost inevitably leads to the image of the "crazy cat lady". Will McKeithen in "Queer ecologies of home: heteronormativity, speciesism, and the strange intimacies of crazy cat ladies" (2017) argues that the "crazy cat lady" is still an important archetype or stereotype in pop culture, and interviewed self-identified "cat ladies" as well as looking at current media representations of women-with-cats. McKeithen argues that the "crazy cat lady" is partially identified as crazy through owning too many cats, or having too intimate of a relationship with them. When the cat takes the place of a heterosexual male life partner, or child, a woman who has a cat is transformed into a

partner, or child, a woman who has a cat is transformed into a

There was once a man called Pettson who had a cat named Findus. They lived in a little red house with a tool shed, a hen house, an outside toilet, a woodshed and a garden. Paddocks lay all around, and beyond them was the forest.

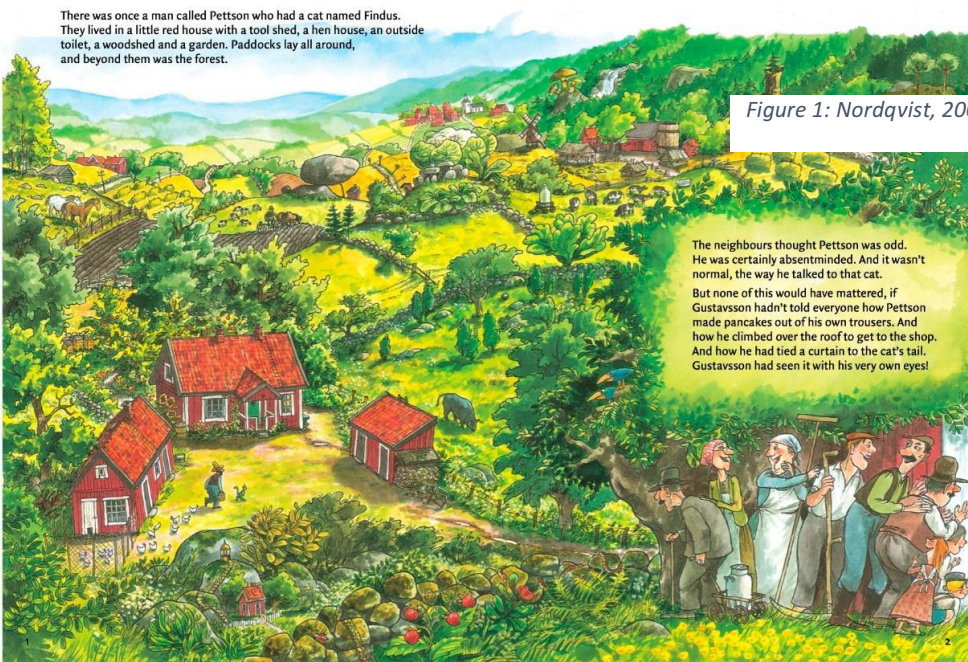


Figure 1: Nordqvist, 2007, pp. 1-2

The neighbours thought Pettson was odd. He was certainly absentminded. And it wasn't normal, the way he talked to that cat. But none of this would have mattered, if Gustavsson hadn't told everyone how Pettson made pancakes out of his own trousers. And how he climbed over the roof to get to the shop. And how he had tied a curtain to the cat's tail. Gustavsson had seen it with his very own eyes!

as a fellow man – and a true companion to the bachelor, the cat is depicted as a sign of an anti-social disposition in the spinster. The spinster is either depicted as lacking the maternal instinct to get married and have children, or otherwise as "misguidedly" projecting her maternal instinct upon an animal that will be a surrogate child. This surrogate child, acquired without the heterosexual

"crazy cat lady". This connection between the queerness of the cat lady and her craziness mimics strongly the Victorian writing conventions Flegel discusses. Part of the way that the spinster and the "crazy cat lady" are objects of ridicule is the way in which they have "unnatural" or "abnormal" relationships with their

animal companions, often cats or lap dogs. These animals do not have a use beyond their companionship, as opposed to the working dogs that the bachelor is often associated with. In the series Pettson is ceaselessly contrasted with his neighbour Gustavsson, who has a hunting dog, and a wife and children to firmly anchor him in normalcy and outside of queerness. Gustavsson has a "normal"

relationship with his dog: he does not talk to his dog, and his dog does not speak back. The people in the village are aware of Pettson's relationship to Findus being queer – "it isn't normal, the way he talks to his cat" – (Nordqvist, 2007, p. 2) but are forgiving of it as long as it remains a non-threatening queerness. They say none of this would have mattered, if Gustavsson had not told everyone how strange Pettson had been behaving. It is acceptable that Pettson is odd, and silly, but it must not tip over into madness.

In *Pettson and Findus*, as readers, we encounter Pettson, a single older man, for whom the cat Findus is explicitly presented as a surrogate for both a wife and a child. He is gifted with cat because he does not desire a wife, and becomes the mother of the cat. I argue that Pettson is not depicted as a bachelor, but his depiction is closer to that of a male spinster. His relationship with Findus is depicted as something close to crazy by the other humans in the text. This proximity to insanity is most often non-threatening; it is funny to his neighbours, and often to the reader, but does not tip over into actual "madness". Anytime Pettson almost gets "crazy", we as the readers are given mitigating factors to prove he is relatively sane. In *Pancakes for Findus* Pettson breaks a tray of eggs by falling on them, and while he is cleaning the mess, Gustavsson comes by. When Pettson explains he is making pancake batter and cheerfully adds his egg trousers to the eggshell filled mixture, Gustavsson concludes "The old man must be crazy". Gustavsson decides to pretend nothing is wrong and adds, "Pancakes for you and the cat? That sounds good!" (Nordqvist, 1984, pp. 20-21). It is clear to us as readers that Pettson is trying to mess with Gustavsson – however, he is standing in the yard in his underwear putting his trousers in pancake batter. This kind of proximity to being crazy is a type of silliness. Pettson is queered, but not in a way that is threatening, only ever in a way that is funny; he is silly.

Jack Halberstam in his influential book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) analyses queer failure in popular culture texts, for example children's animation. Halberstam explores the animated film *Finding Nemo*, and the forgetful fish Dory as an expression of queer failure:

Dory represents a different, a queer and fluid form of knowing, that operates independently of coherence or linear narrative or progression. By some standards, she might be read as stupid or unknowing, foolish or silly, but ultimately her silliness leads her to new and different forms of relation and action (Halberstam, 2011, p. 54).

Dory, according to Halberstam, is cut off from traditional heterosexual ways of knowing through kinship. She does not remember her family, she forgets Marvin, her fellow traveller and father to Nemo, instantly. She will not become a mother to Nemo or a wife to Marvin, but she has a form of kinship with them. Her forgetfulness, naiveté, and silliness make it possible for her to engage the underwater world in different ways that Halberstam describes as "crooked knowing". Pettson, similarly to Dory, is capable of this "crooked knowing" through his proximity to insanity. By embodying something of the "crazy cat lady" Pettson is able to enter into new and different forms of relation and action. His comfort with taking on a feminine role in this way, by being the mother of a cat, queers him, in a similar way that the women with cats are queered by prioritising their cats over relationships with men. His silliness often takes the form of a certain kind of curiosity for what others assume is unimportant.

In "Dunja Barnes and queer interiorities" which appears in *How Literature Comes to Matter* (2021), Laura Oulanne analyses Dunja Barnes's work as work of queer interiority, a play between the interiority of the characters, and the spaces they inhabit, and the porous nature that causes these to bleed into each other. Oulanne states that a queer new materialist

reading of a work has the power to both point out the possibility for queer intimacy and turn towards interpretations that make visible the agency of non-human fictional bodies. In this paper, I will look at *Pettson and Findus* through this lens. Arguing that Pettson appears as queered, through his non-normative intimacies with the non-human. Oulanne states that “[t]he destabilisation of spatial interiors affects the anthropocentric categorisations of subjectivity as well as the norms of gender identity and sexuality” (Oulanne, 2021, p. 156). According to Oulanne the way that special interior is describes as messy and strange also influence the norms and categories of gender and sexuality. Within a, as Helen Palmer (2020) calls it, “defamiliarised” space, the categories of gender and sexuality appear unfamiliar as well, making space for queerer forms of intimacy.

As shown in the examples of “crazy cat ladies” and spinsters, these queer relationships to animals exist in proximity to madness, and are, like the category of madness, gendered. There is something silly, almost mad – while at the same time endearing enough to be non-threatening – about curiosity to things that are familiar or unimportant. The inner life of non-human animals and things easily falls into this category of things that do not deserve curiosity.

### Queer home making



Figure 2: Nordqvist, 2007, p. 22.

In *Pettson and Findus*, Pettson is making home with Findus the cat, and this home is clearly a queer kind of household. Pettson is Findus’s surrogate mother, and Findus is both a cat and Pettson’s child. Pettson is queered through this relationship, taking both a feminine responsibility as a mother, and a queer one as a mother of a non-human child. In addition to Findus, Pettson’s queer home making extends to other creatures and things in and around the home. The illustrations in the *Pettson and Findus* series show an imaginative take on the Swedish landscapes and old farmhouses. Pettson’s farmhouse is cluttered with fanciful objects and boxes of things. He lives there with Findus, his chickens and the “muckles”. The chickens, like Findus, talk, but unlike Findus they are in many ways much more clearly animals. They dig for worms and sleep in the hen house. The “muckles” are little invisible creatures that live around the house; Pettson cannot see them, but Findus and the reader can. They are occasionally helpful, sometimes disruptive and hiding things around the house. McKeithen describes the homemaking of women-with-cats as multi-species-homemaking:



'Women-with-cats' queer ecologies of home unfold in untidy ways not only because of the non-opposition of reinvention or the multiplicity of desire, but also because this homemaking is multispecies in nature, articulating through hybrid yet differentiated, more-than-human agencies (McKeithen, 2017, p. 9).

In Pettson's homemaking, we see a similar multispecies approach to home making. The home is Pettson's but the homemaking – the construction of the domestic sphere – is a multispecies and multi-agential affair. In popular imagination there is an easy distinction made between the artificial, or cultural, and the natural. In *Pettson and Findus*, the illustrations, and especially the inclusion of the "muckles", disrupt this distinction. The boundaries between the natural and the artificial are blurred with these invisible creatures building their homes inside Pettson's house. The chickens drink tea from little teacups, and eat pancake pie made for Findus's birthday. In the same illustration there is a little "muckle" house in the right-hand corner, which seems to have grown on a lingonberry bush.

In *Perceptions of the Environment* (2000), Tim Ingold draws a comparison between trees and houses to illustrate the way these habitats, or dwellings as he calls them, are constantly constructed by everything that inhabits it. Neither the tree nor the house is a static space, but they are constantly transformed:

[...] the house also has many and diverse animal inhabitants – more, perhaps, than we are inclined to recognise. Sometimes special provision is made for them, such as the kennel, stable or dovecote. Others find shelter and sustenance in its nooks and crannies, or even build there. And all, in their various ways, contribute to its evolving form, as do the house's human inhabitants in keeping it under repair, decorating it, or making

structural alterations in response to their changing domestic circumstances. Thus, the distinction between the house and the tree is not an absolute but a relative one – relative, that is, to the scope of human involvement in the form-generating process (Ingold, 2000, p. 187).

Ingold argues that houses and trees both experience a kind of natural growth due to being

inhabited by animals of all sorts, as well as being subject to alterations and decay. There is, according to Ingold, not a distinction of

kinds between the tree and the house, the house and the tree are of similar kinds, and only differ relatively. When looking at the illustrations in *When Findus was little and disappeared* (2008) this organic nature of the house becomes affectively apparent. The house, and the things in it, look like they naturally grew there, and from the illustration it is unclear which elements were contributed by Pettson and his human relatives, and which were provided by any of the non-human dwellers. This seems to be a visceral illustration of Ingold's argument that dwelling is always a multispecies collaboration, there is no clear boundary between the artificial and the natural; they run into each other. In *When Findus was little and disappeared* (2008), when Findus crawls through the foundations of the house, the border between the inside and the outside seems porous. The outside of the house leaks into the inside in the form of plants, critters and the little muckle doors hidden throughout the house. Through these inclusions of other creatures in the household, often omitted in the text and visible only on illustrations, we as readers experience Pettson's household as



bustling with life. There are always a variety of actors shaping the home, making home with Pettson. He is, both knowingly and unknowingly, cohabitating with a variety of home making partners.

When little Findus explores the foundations of the house, he finds there are “muckles” living there who have tiny doors throughout the house. They seem to have taken some of Pettson’s belongings, like a teacup, a pair of boots, and some paper that looks like it may once have been important, however, it seems equally likely that the teacup just appeared here out of its own accord. Here we see that the borders between the natural and the artificial are porous and they leak into each other. It is unclear where the human influence over the house ends and the “natural” influence begins. The house, like Ingold details, is never a purely human endeavour, and is always constituted by many more-than-human factors.

Figure 3: Nordqvist, 2008, pp.8-9.

Helen Palmer in her book *Queer Defamiliarisation* (2020) describes the acts of defamiliarising, queering, and mattering. She describes how language matters, the reuniting of matter and discourse, Palmer describes queerness, or the act of queering, as an act of defamiliarisation. Palmer describes this process as a linguistic process. Taking Emily Dickinson’s poetic line “Tell the truth but tell it slant” (Dickinson, 2009, p. 137), Palmer states: “Dickinson tells us that the focus is on the truth to be accessed via the slant, whereas in queer defamiliarisation the focus is on the slant itself” (2020, p.18). For Palmer the act of defamiliarisation is not aimed at eventually finding a truth, which will be truer because it was arrived at via defamiliarisation, it is rather the defamiliarisation itself that is the purpose of the defamiliarisation. The ongoing process of queering matter, in Palmer’s case through language, and making it strange, is a goal in

and of itself. In *Pettson and Findus*, a familiar world is made strange to us, matter is defamiliarised through illustration and text, rather than only by description. Nordqvist illustrations defamiliarised both the landscape and the domestic space of the house, by filling it with hidden objects, jokes, and small invisible creatures.

I argue that the playful back and forth of realism and fantastical elements in Nordqvist’s illustrations show the interesting relationships within the natural world of the seen and the unseen. Pettson’s household is pictured for us readers as a porous household. It is clear to us that the “muckles”, the chickens and the objects in the pictures help make Pettson’s home. Often the real and the fantastical leak into each other. For example, in *Pettson goes camping* (1992), there is a parsnip rendered in loving detail on the page break, it is however also the size of a tree, and serves as a hiding place for one of the chickens.



Figure 4: Nordqvist, 1992, p.3.

Max Weber in *The Sociology of Religion* (1956) identifies that modernity, by introducing the scientific method and the ability to calculate everything, has led to, what he calls, disenchantment. Weber claims that forests and seas, for example, used to be imbued with unknown magic but in modernity have become merely objects. Jane Bennett in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2016) argues that

this disenchantment is not a necessary consequence of modern life, and that in modernity there is enchantment. In *Pettson and Findus* there is a certain kind of enchantment in the relationships between Pettson and his fellow creatures, as well as in the way realism and fantasy blend into each other. The depiction of houses growing on trees, and little invisible creatures building doors in the foundations of homes is a kind of re-enchantment of multispecies dwelling. It gives an image of a world where we recognise the enchantment of domesticity with the more-than-human.

In *The Use of Literature* (2008), Rita Felski argues that Bennett's and Weber's analysis are not so far removed from each other. Although modernity encourages disenchantment, it is not a necessary consequence of modern life. Felski argues that though there are clear negative sides to certain kinds of enchantment that rely purely on naiveté and childlike dreaming, enchantment itself is not necessarily only this. Enchantment can be, as it is for Bennett, a way to engage with the non-identity of things. Bennett quotes Theodore Adorno as saying, "Objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno, 1973, p. 5), which is to say there is always more to things than merely what we can describe. In Nordqvist's work the playful back and forth of the accuracy of the illustrations, mixed with the fantastical elements make it possible to encounter the enchantment of the things in and around Pettson's home. This creates a world in which the fantastical elements, rather than removing the reader further away from the recognisable world of mundane things, makes the things we, as readers, see in the images feel more real and affective. This visceral encounter is rife with the curiosity Haraway (2008) describes as necessary for the construction of relationships with the other. Pettson seems to be somewhat of a hoarder: every page is filled with things, things he uses for his inventions, boxes, large quantities of shoes and coats and teacups.

Jane Bennett in her article *Powers of the Hoard* analyses hoarding and hoarders through a vibrant materialist lens. She argues that hoarders may be exceptionally susceptible to building relationships with the more-than-human:

A vibrant materialist would say that hoarders have an exceptional awareness of the extent to which all bodies can intertwine, infuse, ally, undermine, and compete with those in its vicinity (Bennett, 2012, p. 256).

Furthermore, Bennett argues that the hoard made up out of innumerable things may have a power of its own. Hoarders frequently assign will to the hoard, and extend their sense of bodily self to encompass the ever-growing hoard. Bennett, rather than pathologising this, argues that hoarders may be particularly sensitive to the power things have, and the relationships things can have. Bennett argues that all bodies can be in relationships to other bodies, and hoarding may be one of the ways those relationships play out. The hoard we see in Pettson's house also enhances the organic nature of the home. There is no significant difference between the inside and the outside; the attic and the woodshed seem as organic as the garden and the forest. The boundaries between a natural heap and an artificial one become less meaningful.

In *Pettson and Findus* we see this porous relationship to the things around Pettson's house. The distinction between what is natural and what is not becomes fluid, and the way the more-than-human participates in homemaking with Pettson becomes clear. This makes it apparent that Pettson is participating in multispecies home making, with all sorts of other actors. This fluidity in the boundaries of the home is visible in the illustrations, and brings a certain kind of enchantment to the text. This enchantment makes it possible to imagine a multispecies household where the home is constructed by many human and non-human actors.

### Tears in multispecies kinship

In *Pettson and Findus*, we see curiosity take place in the domestic sphere. Pettson and Findus are domestic life partners, and have this ebb and flow of curiosity between them. Pettson is curious about Findus, and what he wants. Both Pettson and Findus occasionally fail in this curiosity. Pettson's curiosity for Findus, and his engagement with Findus as something worth being curious about, is part of his silliness in the eyes of other characters. Findus wants to celebrate his birthday four times a year, and Pettson makes him a pancake pie. Making your cat a birthday cake is, for people who do not engage with animals that way, very silly. Pettson's neighbour Gustafsson certainly finds it strange that Pettson would behave in such a way.

Pettson and Findus often want different things from life, and despite being life partners they are often not of one mind on how the household should be run, and what kinds of activities are of importance. Findus wants to play and run around when Pettson wants to rest; Pettson thinks a rooster is a wonderful thing to have while Findus hates it. When humans relate to other animals, there is an element of a tear that occurs occasionally, where we as the human component in the animal-human relationship are suddenly horrified by our companion species' animal nature. With cats, this often occurs when she brings you a half dead animal, a mouse for example, and plays with it, with no regard for the other animal's feelings. Haraway in *When Species Meet* describes a less horrific tear when she and her dog, Cayenne Pepper, are doing agility training, and Haraway and Cayenne suddenly each run in different directions. They look at each other, confused as to what happened, before they moved as one, connected; now they are suddenly separate.

The horror of the otherness of the animal Other is not necessarily captured by Haraway's example. This is more of a surprising tear, a

miscommunication, than horror. The tear between the human and the animal often occurs when we are confronted with the very real otherness of the animals we love. We forget that the animal that cuddles and loves us is also a killer of other animals. When I was a child, we had rabbits, and so did the neighbour across the road. One day she told us she only had one rabbit, because when she had bought him "a friend" the rabbit had immediately killed him. Even an animal that seems so innocent as a bunny can commit murder.

This is, in part, what Derrida describes in his encounter with his little cat in *The Animal Therefore I Am*. He becomes suddenly aware of her gaze as the gaze of the Other. What is lacking here, according to Haraway, is curiosity. The little cat is gazing at Derrida, perhaps with curiosity, but he is not curiously gazing back. Haraway argues that "Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (2008, p. 36), so caring makes one susceptible to the demands of curiosity, and curiosity is what prompts us to learn. When we do not meet the demands of curiosity, we miss an opportunity for what Haraway calls otherworlding. The opportunity to create another world between this animal and this human.

In Pettson and Findus's relationship, there are a few of these tears. However, there are clearly tears also between Pettson and the chickens, where the animal nature of the chickens makes them suddenly strange. Haraway describes an ebb and flow of curiosity and regard between the animal and the human; this implies that the relationships we have with animals are fluid, and flow between the radical otherness and estrangement Derrida describes in his encounter with his little cat, and the radical closeness and of-one-mindedness that Haraway describes in her relationship with Cayenne.

The Chickens, in *Rumpus in the Garden* (2005), continuously dig up the yard Pettson is trying to grow vegetables in. Pettson feels very bad

about it, but eventually decides to fence the chickens in until the garden has grown. Despite being able to talk to the chickens, it is impossible to tell them not to dig up the yard, they just cannot help themselves. Despite the chickens being able to talk to Pettson, there is still a tear where Pettson's human desires are incompatible with the desires of the chickens, and he chooses to use his human methods to force them to do what he wants. He coops them up to prevent them from digging up his vegetables. Here, despite caring for the chickens, and showing them a certain level of curiosity, there is no solution in which both Pettson and the chickens will be happy with the outcome. Merely mutual care and curiosity towards the animal other does not guarantee balance and harmony, even in the pastoral world of *Pettson and Findus* there is friction between the desires of the multispecies others cohabiting.

In *Findus Rules the Roost* (2017), Pettson acquires a rooster, since he feels "I thought it a pity to let Gustavsson turn him into a stew" (p. 1). The rooster crows a lot, Findus hates the rooster and the way the chickens suddenly only have eyes for the rooster and no longer want to play with Findus. Even for Pettson the crowing eventually gets too much. They make some rules for the rooster, but Findus lies to the rooster and tells him he can only crow once a day and otherwise he will be eaten. The rooster, unable to adhere to these restrictions, leaves. Findus feels bad and confesses what he has done, Pettson is angry with him and makes him apologise to the chickens.

When the rooster arrives Pettson remarks, he is "Just what we needed" (p.3), to which Findus responds, "Never in my life have I needed a rooster even for a single second" (p. 3). Pettson responds that Findus may not need a rooster but "These scatter-brained hens need someone to look after them" (p. 3). Prillan, the head chicken, pushes back against this, saying, "If anyone is scatter-brained, it's you. It's not like that at all". Being able to communicate with animals does not mean

knowing what they want, or that human and animal desire might not interfere with each other. Both Pettson and Findus here also lack some curiosity about the chickens. Pettson fails to show curiosity for why the hens might want a rooster, and instead falls back on an assumption of a specific kind of heteronormative partnership where a rooster is there to organise and take care of scatter-brained hens.

Haraway suggests that curiosity may be an ethical obligation we have to our animal Others, and that this obligation is at times an unsettling one. In *Pettson and Findus*, as readers, we see this ethical burden of curiosity spread not only over animals, but also over the environment of the household. There are tears, and failures of curiosity, in Pettson's relationships with his animal companions. However, we as readers, are privy to these failures, and get encouraged to be curious about the household. *Pettson and Findus* as a series of illustrated books invite a curiosity for the mundane and the more-than-human, by depicting a world where the mundane is always weirder and more fanciful than we imagine it to be.

### Curiosity, silliness, and making oddkin

In *Pettson and Findus*, we see how Pettson and his cat Findus are life partners. Findus is both a surrogate for a wife and a child, and is both a cat and a kid. Pettson is both an old man, and Findus's mother. In *Pettson and Findus*, the categories of identity are blurred, and queered. In this article I relate Pettson to the figure of a spinster, or a "crazy cat lady". He occupies a space in which his relationship with Findus is seen as both a sign of his anti-sociality and as not "normal". He is queered and feminised by his relationship to Findus; made mother, rather than father. Pettson's human neighbours think he is strange, and we as readers, are encouraged to think of Pettson as silly, but he always remains unthreatening. His silliness always exists in the liminal space on its way to madness, but never quite crosses this threshold.

Haraway here expresses that kin is a wild category, that humans try to domesticate by ruling what kind of kinships are acceptable, and what kind of kinships are not. In *Pettson and Findus* we see Pettson live in the liminal space of the border between acceptable and wild kinships. He is not fully outside of acceptability into the madness of the “crazy cat lady”, but he is a liminal figure through his relationships with the more-than-human. His relationships, though not mad, are deemed silly, and his curiosity harmless but unserious. Kinships with hoards or with animals over people are not seen as acceptable. Haraway argues that in addition to more normative kinships like biological family, we need to make oddkin. Haraway describes making kinships with companion species, pigeons and microbes, and engaging in “tentacular thinking”, while doing this. Haraway describes tentacular thinking as a way of recognising that everything hangs together and collaborates with other things, nothing ever acts alone (Haraway, 2016).

Haraway expresses the ethical obligation of curiosity to non-human others (Haraway 2010). *Pettson and Findus* are curious about each other, and the illustrations encourage this kind of curiosity about the domestic world around

*Pettson*. They invite curiosity and further investigation; they invite the reader to take a closer look. In *Pettson and Findus*, homemaking is depicted as a multispecies act. No home is ever established by only human actors. Pettson is depicted in the middle of a bustling home full of creatures and artefacts, making the home together. This homemaking is not a frictionless process. The invisible “muckles” hide things Pettson needs, the chickens dig up the yard, and Pettson misunderstands what his non-human dwellers want. However, the household is always multispecies, and they are always making home together in a non-traditional way. They are making a queer household of oddkin.

What Nordqvist provides us with in *Pettson and Findus*, is a re-enchantment of the domestic sphere. As readers, we are introduced to a perfectly recognisable and precisely illustrated world, in which there is always more beneath the surface. Pettson shows us a version of multispecies homemaking that is silly and queer, of which others might disapprove. However, this silliness is precisely what makes it possible for Pettson to be curious about his fellow homemakers and create a community of oddkin.

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