THE CHILD IN THE FOREST. Performing the Child in 20th Century Swedish Picture Books

The forest, as Robert Pouge Harrison suggests in his book *Forests* (1992), is a part of the natural world but also vital to our self-understanding – historically as well as conceptually and culturally: »We dwell not in nature but in relation to nature.«¹ As such, »the forest« encompasses conceptions of both the human and the wild.² In her monumental and poetic book of essays, *Herrarna i skogen* [The Gentlemen in the Forest], Kerstin Ekman writes: »If the forest has been – and is – a space of transformation that can remake consciousness, it is also a space in constant change in the eye of the beholder.«³ The theme of transformation is often enacted in fiction and, as such, the forest serves many functions. In Swedish children's literature especially, the forest often appears as a safe, secure space, far away from hectic city life, or as a discrete space that allows room for reflection and relaxation. But it has also been known to represent the wild and the dangerous, a place filled with challenges that children need to master in order to achieve maturity. Regardless of the function of a forest setting in children's books, there is always a more or less implicit conception of nature in each tale told about the forest.

The aim of this article is to explore the relationship between concepts of children and concepts of the forest in Swedish picture books published during the 20th century. The focus will be on books where the forest constitutes a distinct, accentuated motif of a child clearly placed in a forest setting. No attempt is made to provide a comprehensive mapping. Instead, we want to draw attention to several prevalent trends that we think stand out in 20th-century publications selected from the picture book genre. We use these trends to problematize a number of previously held presuppositions regarding the image of the child.

The forest, and nature in general, has been the subject of several previous Swedish studies of children's books.⁴ In addition, the significance of nature has been addressed peripherally in several further studies, or treated using approaches other than a pronouncedly ecocritical one.⁵

In a Swedish context, the specific relationship between nature and childhood has been treated Gunilla Halldén (2011).⁶
She discusses the development of and changes in the perception of nature in history till the present day. In particular, she deals with the symbolic meaning of the concept nature and how the idea of the child and of childhood are linked to nature. Her primary material consists of memories, empirical studies, and literary descriptions of children temporarily entering various environments. Hallén tries to reveal how the childhood concept has been shaped and how conceptions of nature have affected it, primarily with reference to stories by Elsa Beskow and Astrid Lindgren. Our article covers some of the same material, but we take an ecocritical approach, highlighting the potential of ecocritical theory, and specifically analyse the relationship between the image of the child and Scandinavian or Swedish nature/forests.

Since the 1990s, there has been a greater commitment to ecocritical research.\(^7\) In the Anglo-Saxon field, an important anthology of scholarly ecocritical articles on children’s literature was published in 2004: *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism*.\(^8\) In the Nordic sphere, a 2010 issue of *Barnboken – Journal of Children’s Literature Research* was devoted to the theme of »Nature in literature for children and young adults«. Since then, scholarly articles with this focus have been published regularly in this journal.\(^9\) Ecocriticism is currently an expanding research field, addressing one of the most urgent issues of our time: the relationship between humankind and nature, or the environment.\(^10\) Timothy Clark describes how ecocriticism has sometimes been perceived as one methodology, a view that he opposes by pointing to the many different fields and self-imposed commitments to such matters as the mapping of different attitudes to nature and their impact on societal development; the study of meta-issues of representation and value; and the critique of the canon or the concept of identity. These strands represent some areas of study in ecocriticism and, in terms of the point at which they became established as such, are listed here in more or less chronological order.\(^11\) Recently, further perspectives have been incorporated into an ecocritical approach, such as post-humanist and new material perspectives; there is also a growing overlap with animal studies.

In this study, however, we chose to adopt the first perspective, that is, the mapping of different attitudes to nature, to explore how a number of Swedish picture books for young children create an image of a specific child when pictured in the Scandinavian forest. To this end, we draw on a number of concepts often used in the ecocritical field: 1. *Anthropocentrism*: a value perspective involving the assumption that it is only in relation to humankind that other more-than-human agents or perspectives have value and that humankind is the only true ethical agent; 2. *Biocentrism*: the antithesis to the
anthropocentric perspective, claiming that all living organisms (including animals) have their own intrinsic value, on a par with humankind; and 3. Ecocentrism: semi-synonymous with biocentrism; however, this perspective celebrates the strong link between living organisms and the inanimate, a view that also ascribes ethical agency to the more-than-human environment.  

Anthropocentric perspectives share the notion that nature has an instrumental value for humankind and places humans at the centre of creation or the narrative. In fiction, this could be done by giving nature anthropomorphic features, for example, Elsa Beskow’s blueberry boys which is a device that foregrounds the human-centred interpretative model. Nature that is depicted anthropomorphically can either be interpreted literally or symbolically/allegorically, or both. The reader can choose to understand the fictional world as magical, or can read fairies and trolls as "something else" (or do both). The biocentric and ecocentric perspectives, on the other hand, strive to emphasize animals and nature on their own terms and try to avoid letting human categories entering into the interpretation of the significance of nature even though we simply have to accept that we cannot know what a bat thinks (if bats do indeed "think") or refrain from referring to a tree’s self-understanding. Against the background of differences between anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric perspectives in particular, we study the prevalent relationship between nature and the view of the child that emerges in a number of Swedish picture books. According to Sverker Sörlin, our "views of nature" encompasses "the views, attitudes, aesthetic and moral conceptions of nature that we hold." Sörlin notes that the views of nature is derived neither from society or history, but that "different epochs have different predominant views of nature." The dream of an idealized state of nature is also discussed by Birgitta Svensson (2001), who emphasizes how interwoven our notions of nature and culture are. Changes in the view of nature, Halldén argues, can be traced through the study of relevant concepts, concepts that she claims also shape our conception of the function of nature. In the anthology *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Eco-criticism* (2004), the editors Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd argue that, historically, there have primarily been two representations of children’s relationship to nature in literature. One is the innocent child, which, in romantic works such as those of Rousseau and Wordsworth, is privileged in relation to nature. This mode of representation recurs in pastoral works with common motifs of the secret garden or the beneficial influence that nature has on the mischievous boy. Nature is a good force flowing through the child alleged to be naturally good. The second representation of children’s relationship
to nature derives from empiricism and John Locke, and is the »empty« child who has to be »filled« with »the right kind« of nature. There is clearly an ideological dimension to the representation of the relationship between child and nature: in the first case, the relationship is highly idealized; the second implies political and ideological agendas aspiring, so to speak, to »fill« the »empty« child. In this article, we show how the forest serves different functions in a number of 20th century Swedish picture books, which in turn reflect how various conceptions of the child and her relation to nature emerge as various ideological agendas compete.

---THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE FOREST IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY---

As William Cronon writes in »The Trouble with Wilderness«: »As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires.« In Swedish children’s literature, an intense love of nature and the forest is manifested in many idyllic portrayals of nature. Before 1900, most of the population of Sweden lived in the countryside. Swedes were then socialized into a certain relationship with the forest through spending a great deal of time in it. One acquired knowledge of the forest by picking berries, looking for lost cattle or by travelling to relatives and friends. The relationship between the human being and nature was at this time largely utilitarian and pragmatic, but the forest was also a magical place and the home of banshees, wood nymphs and other creatures that many perceived to be real.

During the 20th century, urbanization progressed apace as people moved towards the cities and pre-industrial cultural landscapes were gradually superseded by new mental maps as a result of the industrial and cultural process of dividing up time and space in accordance with the needs of work and leisure. But Sörlin (2000) also claims that there is probably a relation between Swedes’ opportunities to partake in outdoor activities such as picking berries and mushrooms, and the level of commitment to the environment displayed in Sweden. Halldén even claims that the close relationship between children and nature is strengthened by the pronounced narrative tradition that makes particular use of nature in Swedish children’s literature. Concepts of the forest seem to be created in connection with physical activity as well as through literary discourses. The language generally used in the early 20th century testifies to a more intimate feeling for one’s natural surroundings. People were not simply in »the woods« but in »näverskog« [bark woods], »fågelskog« [bird woods], »älgskog« [elk woods] or »timmerskog« [timber woods]. Also Kerstin Ekman shows that the forest was often named after the use that people made of it.
Early children’s nursery rhymes were meant to facilitate the learning of plant functions, which indicates that people sustained a close (dependent) relationship with nature.

This close contact and the sense of unity between home and surroundings are depicted particularly often in early 20th century picture books such as *Puttes äventyr i blåbärsskogen* [Peter in Blueberry Land] (1901) and *Tomtebobarnen* [Children of the Forest] (1910), both written and illustrated by Elsa Beskow. These fantasy stories are grounded in the early 20th century community’s interaction with the forest, while the stories clearly reveal a national romantic view that conjures up the magical powers of the forest. In both picture books, the pixies and fairies are natural parts of the imagined world (Picture 1). The magical elements have the function of translating inconceivable mysteries, that is, the wild, into comprehensible categories with the help of fantasy, myth, and the telling of tales. Frightening forces and mysteries are filtered through human interpretation and become helpful human-like elves.
and pixies, or mean and scary but still human-like trolls. Such tales are clearly anthropomorphic in the sense that the frightening forest is at times ascribed familiar qualities and human-like features. By transforming the unknown into the known, mastery over nature is achieved and thus nature is rendered less frightening.

The romantic view of nature as animated by all kinds of creatures remains throughout the 20th century and recurs in many guises. These creatures are often, but not always, on the side of the humans in children’s books. A later example is a Swedish fairy-tale figure that gave voice to the mysteries of nature in the middle of the century is Inga Borg’s nature »informant«: the invisible Plupp.

--- MAGIC AND REALISM ---

For more than fifty years, Plupp has inspired generations of children to explore Sweden’s natural world, especially the mountainous northern regions. Since the publication of *Plupp och renarna* [Plupp and the Reindeers] (1955), Borg has conveyed a realist view of nature with a focus on animals, all mediated by the invisible Plupp, a magical creature who imparts knowledge of nature. In *Plupp i storskogen* [Plupp in the Woods] (1983), Plupp discovers that parts of the forest in the valley have disappeared. He sets out to discover what has happened and on his way he meets Squirrel, Heathcock and Willow Tit, Hare and Boreal Owl, all of whom are speaking representatives of each animal species. On the shore of a lake he encounters the Beaver family felling some trees. At the end, Fox tells Plupp that the forest has vanished because of the deforestation carried out by humans. Plupp, who is aware of the vulnerability of flora and fauna, becomes extremely upset and voices his despair at the humans’ abuse of the forest: »Oh, the humans must preserve the primeval forest! They mustn’t take the wild mountain woods [...] I hope they understand that.« Even if Borg uses speaking animals and wishes to explain the lives of animals through human means, we can also see how Borg incorporates a clear biocentric perspective into the stories by thematizing the rights of animals in relation to humankind. Even the mountain woods have intrinsic value and should be preserved.

The fictional worlds of Inga Borg and Elsa Beskow display conceptions of nature that are in some respects similar. Both Plupp and the Forest Children are elements of nature that humankind has to take seriously and handle with care. However, they differ in that while the Forest Children blend in with nature in their fly agaric caps, the magical Plupp is an invisible observer whose intense orange scarf and blue spiky hair contrasts sharp with the mountain heaths and the muffled colours of the forest. His observations signal a pronounced,
external perspective, which means that in Borg’s stories there is a traceable shift from a purely anthropocentric view towards a biocentrism that is concurrent with an environment critical perspective. Nature is vulnerable to human beings’ unbridled and dangerous excesses. Borg’s fictional forest is primarily a safe space. There are no scary trolls and the forest animals enjoy the freedom to live a natural life (Picture 2). However, humankind does pose a threat to both land and animals. Nonetheless, Borg’s books incline towards defining nature and forest as being on an equal footing with the child and therefore the ecocentric tendency is clearly displayed. At the same time, her narratives draw on the romantic tradition by using the narrative device of an elemental being as a spokesperson and didactic tool. Through Plupp (the anthropocentric filter),
the child is enabled to see what it cannot in fact see, and to listen to the animals speaking. The communication channel between the child and nature is again depicted in the form of a human-like figure whose function is to educate the child, thus inscribing the child as an empty vessel to be filled with the »right kind« of information about nature.

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**THE FOREST THROUGH A MAGNIFYING GLASS**

The literary idylls, containing strong fantasy elements, of children amid burgeoning green birch trees or of snowdrifts that invite children out to play, were subjected to particularly robust critique in the politically conscious 1970s. Many stories set out to involve and create awareness of social circumstances as well as of nature. To contextualise this interest, we can compare nature in storytelling with how the forest was represented in a common 1970s genre, namely the non-fiction photographic picture book for children. There are no Beskowian little people or trolls in such books, nor do they offer a magical cicerone to guide the child into the mysteries of the forest. Instead, we accompany the curious and inquisitive child herself while she explores her surroundings.

In the 1960s and '70s, photographic picture books were widely available that dealt in a realistic manner with birds, animals and plants. A well-known Swedish nature photographer, Sven Gillsäter, created some photographic picture books that centred on his daughter Pia. Astrid Bergman Sucksdorff produced a series entitled »Astrid’s Nature books«, these being photographic picture books on Swedish flora and fauna, in which common Swedish flowers and birds are presented in excellent colour photographs and short texts adapted for children. Her story *Micki rävungen* [Micki the Fox Cub] was published in 1953, followed by *Ödetorpet* [The Empty Cottage] in 1964.

Bergman Sucksdorff’s *Förstoringsglaset* [The Magnifying Glass] (1975) is a story about a boy who visits his grandfather in the forest for some weeks in the summer. The surroundings comprise a lush idyll. The boy finds a magnifying glass that used to belong to his grandmother. It clearly symbolizes the scientific joy of discovery; the boy looks at nature through the magnifying glass without any inference of the presence of elves or other anthropomorphic magical powers. In this story, the child is like a detective, an external observer of the world of the forest, magnifying glass in hand. Or, he is like the objective scientist, observing and attempting to understand the workings of nature. The boy in the story is also the reading child’s guide to nature, but the narrative structure’s didactic streak, which aims to teach the young reader about nature and the forest, also reveals that the forest is subject to human control and the boy’s
critical gaze. The motif of discovery is not least associated with a long narrative tradition in which the human being is in the position of control and privilege in relation to nature. The world is given in terms of knowledge founded upon inherent laws, and the young boy as explorer or detective reveals its logic. This infers an optimistic view of knowledge and this optimism clearly belongs to modernity, but ecocritical research has come to question the basic anthropocentric assumption on which modernity’s optimism concerning knowledge rests. 

Ecocritical research concerning children’s literature has also emphasized that the kind of didactic tales about individual development, as found in the books discussed so far, often tend to be anthropocentric. Even if Sucksdorff’s book was written at a time when literature aimed to raise awareness about the importance of nature and the forest, there is nothing in the story to suggest a challenge to humans’ domination of nature. With the magnifying glass, the child can both understand and make the non-human intelligible, thus preserving the sense of the forest as a familiar and controlled space. At the same time, the magnifying glass foregrounds a new distance between the observer and the object, a distance which increases gradually in tales of the forest told during the course of the 20th century. Late 20th-century stories increasingly portray children as visitors to the woods who no longer belong in such sylvan settings.

--- A VISITOR IN NATURE ---

In 1970, Gösta Frohm published his first book about the Skogsmulle [the forest gnome] – a little gnome, dressed in green and born in the forest, who calls out: »Hi there, kollikok!« The educational purpose is explicit and the books are frequently used in the Skogsmulle outdoor activities initiated throughout Sweden under the auspices of Friluftsförbundet, the Swedish Association for the Promotion of Outdoor Activities. The purpose was, and still is, to teach young children to feel at one with nature and to awaken their interest in protecting the environment. Gösta Frohm clarifies his view of nature in a preface simply entitled »To the reader« in Skogsmulle, natursagor för barn [The Forest Gnome: Nature Fairy Tales for Children]: »Skogsmulle was born in the forest. That’s why he understands nature and knows about all living things. He wants to tell all children about this and teach them that we are just visitors in relation to nature.« The tales told are clearly educational and addressed to children as well as adults. Parents, the activity leaders and participating children, are expected to find inspiration for educational activities in the forest. The 1970 Skogsmulle manifesto also emphasizes that we are mere visitors in relation to nature, inferring that we are no longer a primeval and integrated part of the forest.

Gösta Frohm’s declaration can actually be understood as
an explicit formulation heralding a great number of later literary depictions of children visiting a forest that is no longer perceived as a familiar space. The previous sense of familiarity and unity – the legacy of the early 20th century and its representations of the human-nature relationship – has been replaced by a tendency toward alienation.

There have been more and more reports on children spending less time in nature. Children are no longer socialized directly into a given knowledge domain and the distance between learning and experience has gradually increased – not only in children’s books. Already in the 1970s, it was noted that textbooks, posters and school as an institution had come to replace lived experience of nature. In this light, it is hardly surprising that the child’s distance from the forest has increased even in picture books published in the second half of the 20th century. To further highlight this tendency of alienation and an increasing fear of the forest, we turn to the motif of being lost in the forest as developed in picture books where the forest is a central theme. This motif is in itself an interesting field of study, whatever the setting.

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**LOST IN THE FOREST**

In the picture book *Lille Truls äventyr i skogen* [Little Truls’ Adventures in the Forest] (1934), Eva Billow develops a version of the motif of the child lost in the forest. It is a romantic tale of how the fearless little Truls still feels at home despite being lost in the forest, and of how he creates harmony between the animals. In Hans Peterson’s use of the same motif in *När Per gick vilse i skogen* [When Peter was Lost in the Forest] (1969), a boy spends a whole night in the forest. He is not afraid because he has enough knowledge to feel safe and at home in the forest, together with the forest’s animals. Harald Wiberg’s illustrations radiate warmth and community. Both books’ foregrounding of this motif convey the sense of community between humans and the forest that could be detected in Beskow’s illustrated forest settings. These representations of forests and children are characterized by a sense of proximity and intimacy that is safe and accessible; and they are didactic in propagating a sound relationship to nature through performing a nature-literate and nature-competent child. Even if the concept of the competent child was established in the 1980s to describe how the child had come to be viewed in the wake of the stringent didactics and political environment of the 1960s and 1970s, it is possible to discern a great deal of confidence, initiative and knowledge in the lost child motif. If the competent child of the 1980s is expected to have natural talents, or inherent competence, then it is almost to the complete neglect of stimulating the child’s nature literacy. In terms of forest and nature, there is no longer any safety or
Camilla Brudin Borg & Margaretha Ullström, »The Child in the Forest«

competence to be taken for granted; children nowadays often get lost in the fictional woods.

In Kristin Westerlund and Sara Grimbergsson’s picture book, *Vilse eller tomtens moped* (2007) [Lost, or, Santa’s Moped], the forest is a dangerous place although it is neither big, thick nor particularly frightening. In a secluded house in the forest, a man lives alone and, to the lost girl in the story, he seems very dangerous. She eventually falls asleep from exhaustion under a fir tree, but is later found by the lonely man, who then turns out to be neither scary, nor mean. The title »or Santa’s moped« suggests that the man is in fact sufficiently kind to be compared to Santa Claus. Thereafter, the girl even finds the forest to be a friendly place. The story, in other words, has a didactic streak in terms of aiming to demystify the forest for the alienated child. It is also noteworthy that there are no frightening trolls. The only scary things these days may well be evil, strange or odd (male) human beings.41

In Pija Lindenbaum’s book, entitled *Gittan och Gråvargarna* [Bridget and the Grey Wolves] (2000), the girl Gittan is also lost.42 Some of the illustrations of the horrible, dark forest are akin to the horrified Moomintroll fetching milk for Mother in Tove Jansson’s *Hur gick det sen?* [Moomin, Mymble and Little My] (1952).43 And it is not just one wolf, as in *Little Red Riding Hood*, that Gittan meets in the woods, but a whole pack of the unpleasant beasts. The story has clear links to the tradition of tales about the lonely child lost in the forest even if Lindenbaum’s story develops into a success story, where the little girl overcomes her fears and becomes friends with the forest as well as the (initially) scary animals. There is very often a didactic tendency in the development of the lost child motif, geared toward teaching the child reader to deal with the forest encounter – whether the forest is presented as dangerous or benign. In this sense, all stories of children being lost in the forest have an anthropocentric dimension. The child must finally learn to conquer her fears and handle encountering the unknown. But, while earlier depictions portray children as already competent in dealing with the forest, contemporary narratives present children who seem less well equipped to handle the unknown. This could be interpreted as reluctance on the part of contemporary authors to anthropomorphize the forest, which would provide an explanation as to why their narratives tend to foreground the difference between the child and nature.

--- IN A SCARY PLACE FAR, FAR AWAY ---

In terms of books that portray the forest as a dangerous place, it is interesting to consider Thomas and Anna-Clara Tidholm’s *Förr i tiden i skogen* [In the Past, in the Woods], which is set in a bygone era but was written and published in the 1990s.44 As
the title suggests, the story sets out to describe what it was like to be in the dark Swedish forests »in the past«. For today’s city children, a very different and harsh existence is depicted. The main character is the narrator’s great-grandfather Jonathan as a little boy, named Natan. He lives on a small farm deep in the forest. His home surroundings are described as archaically rough and frightening:

— There are big forests with tall trees and wild animals crying and flapping among the trees. There are eagles and bears and wolves, and all are hungry. The people live in small huts, which are their homes. The people have animals that are not wild. But the wild animals want to eat the people’s animals.45

The remoteness of the early 19th century and the hostile environment described in the passage above evoke a picture of the human being in a vulnerable position amidst the towering trees. The wild animals are not the friends or helpers of human beings. They are, on the contrary, a concrete threat to the survival of the family. Förr i tiden i skogen depicts a particularly strong form of alienation from the forest.

Image 3. »In the Past, in the Woods« by Thomas & Anna-Clara Tidholm.
In the book *Förr i tiden i skogen*, we are also told about the arrival of a schoolteacher in the neighbourhood as general education was introduced in Sweden, in 1842. Through her, a contrast is established between the tough and poor woodcutter life in the forest and the light, warm and imaginative life to be discovered during the course of a school education. In this way, a number of dichotomies are constructed: past and present; hardship among the poor and enlightenment among the educated; nature and culture; male and female; hard work and imagination and education in addition to man and nature.

In Tidholm’s narrative, the forest thus functions as an inhospitable space in which the first part of the dichotomies are enacted. However, since the book was *not* written in 1842 but in 1993, this reveals a literary attitude to the forest that is more common in the 1990s. As we have seen, a distance between the characters and the forest gradually opened up in forest narratives as the 20th century proceeds. By the end of the century, the forest is often portrayed as an inhospitable place, which at best people merely visit (Picture 3). In the book about Natan, the child does not feel secure in the threatening forest, which is described as an adversary.

A further story from the 1990s that portrays an alienated relationship to the forest is the book *Bu och Bä i skogen* [Boo and Baa in the Forest] (1999) by Olof and Lena Landström. To the two sheep (read »contemporary children«), the forest is a strange place where people go for picnics and to experience something new and exciting and Boo and Baa are uneasy visitors in the unfamiliar environment: »I hope there won’t be any ants«, says Boo, and reveals his ignorance and fear.46 The book very clearly portrays a situation in which child and forest are separated. The forest is no longer to be understood. The distanced and unfamiliar features of the forest in both *Bu och Bä i skogen* and *Förr i tiden i skogen* emphasize a much more alienated view of nature, especially when compared to the dominant view in early 20th century picture books. Gone are the earlier attempts to make the forest familiar and intelligible with the help of various personification devices, embodied in fairies and trolls. With the introduction of biocentric elements in the Plupp books and ecocentric ones in the Skogsmulle stories, the unknown, wild, dangerous and threatening were let in through the backdoor. The result is a tension that highlights the more-than-human as unfamiliar and is thus perceived as a danger to the child; and the child is no longer competent in dealing with this relationship.

**HUMANS AND THE FOREST IN COEXISTENCE**

In our concluding example – Eva Lindström’s book, *I skogen* [In the Forest] (2008) – there are many philosophical and ideologi-
cal undertones that are typical of the present time.\textsuperscript{47} The story is about three little friends who live in a place in the woods, which seems to be completely cut off from the rest of the world.

Initially, Maggan, Snuten and the first-person narrator Trim are all introduced together in a single picture. They are framed by pine trees and some leafy trees but are depicted in a dominant and central position. The narrator and his friends state: »We are in charge.«\textsuperscript{48} Thereafter, it becomes apparent that these children even think that they are in control of rain, wind and sun: »We let it rain, because we have decided that it should be wet.«\textsuperscript{49} The mantra is repeated: »We are in charge all the time.«\textsuperscript{50}

However, in contrast to the children’s interpretation of their domination of nature, the forest in this book is animated by a will of its own (Picture 4). The trees in the pictures have small feet and they talk about »setting off«.\textsuperscript{51} The forest is rebelling and the trees simply walk away and abandon the three friends,

\textit{Image 4. »In the Forest« by Eva Lindström.}
who are left alone with some bushes and an injured bird. The trees have decided to walk to an island in a beautiful lake. We see this as a rebellion against human sovereignty, society and norms. At the same time, it is portrayed anthropomorphically: the trees have feet and walk away.

When they are gone, things look very barren and cold. The three friends sit on a bench, looking out on the lake. Abandoned. The rebellion of the trees clearly challenges the children’s previous anthropocentric view of nature. The process is only reversed once the friends change their behaviour. When they take care of an injured bird and ask it to stay, the trees return and as the leaves rustle in the breeze, the first-person narrator notes with new insight: »We didn’t decide that the wind should blow, but it’s blowing anyway«. When the sound of the trees is too loud, the friends beg the trees to calm down. The children no longer dictate the rules; their approach is more accepting and humble, and existence is less dominated by work and activities. »We take it easy and don’t really do anything. We just wait.« Then, even the delicate aspen trees return and, with the restoration of nature, there is harmony in the interplay of animals, forest and humans. The bird says that summer is here and the three friends agree.

The perspective thus gradually changes in the book. The strictly anthropocentric opening gives way, via a crisis, to an ecocentric perspective placing nature and the children together at the centre. The basic conflict in the story concerns the human-nature relationship. The underlying view of nature emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature. We read Lindström’s *I skogen* as an attempt to diagnose a relationship between humans and the forest that has gone awry. To live in harmony with nature, humankind must not only return to nature, as per the adage of the romantic paradigm, but also stop oppressing and dominating it. Only then can the forest return to humankind.

To conclude, it is evident that the picture book examples from the early 20th century present a strong sense of unity between humans and nature, and an approach to the forest that includes a view of the child as competent, that is, involved with and dependent on the forest. Thus the forest is understood in terms of human categories that emphasize an anthropocentric aspect of the child–nature relationship. As modernity runs its course, the child gradually becomes divorced from her natural surroundings and the forest. This development is apparent in books from the mid-20th century onward, in which there is a widening gap between the observer and the observed, for example, in the photographic books of the 1970s. The distance between humans and the forest can also be traced through the visitor theme that first appears in environmentally committed books such as Borg’s and Frohm’s books about
Plupp and Skogsmulle, and later develops into an independent and frequently covered theme signifying contemporary alienation from the land and the forest. A strong commitment to environmental issues also seems to coincide with the growing alienation of humankind from nature, a phenomenon that calls for deeper and more systematic studies. Contemporary narratives often include discussion of human dominance over nature. None of these perspectives were inscribed in children’s literature at the turn of the previous century but seem to be a product of early 21st-century analysis of alienation from nature. Whether this means that we, at the turn of the millennium, have ‘moved beyond’ in some sense, or only view our surroundings differently remains to be explored. In our view, the view of nature and animals inscribed in children’s books is a potentially rewarding area of future research because it enriches and modifies our understanding of how the child is performed.

**ENDNOTES**


14 Sverker Sörlin: *Naturkontraktet: om naturumgångets idéhistoria* (Stockholm, 1991), 26; see also Ekman and Clark above.)

15 Sörlin: *Naturkontraktet*, 27.


17 Halldén, *Barndomens skogar*, 43.


19 William Cronon: »The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature«, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, (New York, 1995), 69.


21 Jonas Frykman and Orvar Lövgren: *Den kultiverade människan*, (Lund, 1979), 73.


24 Halldén: *Barndomens skogar*.


26 Ekman: *Herrarna i skogen*, 42.

27 Elsa Beskow: *Puttes äventyr i blåbärsskogen* (Stockholm, 1901) and *Tomtebobarnen* (Göteborg, 1910).


29 Inga Borg: *Plupp i storskogen* (Stockholm, 1983).

30 Ibid., 22.


34 *New World Orders in Contemporary Children’s Literature*, ed. Bradford and Mallan et.al., 91.

35 Skogsmulle was born in 1950s at Lida, which is a farm belonging the Swedish Association for the Promotion of Outdoor Activities since the 1930s. See http://www.lida.nu/om-lida/historia/
36 Gösta Frohm and Björn Gidstam: Skogsmulle: natur-
sagor för barn (Stockholm, 1970), 2. Also Skogsmulle och
Fjällfina: natur sagor för barn (Stockholm, 1971).
37 Halldén: Barndomens skogar, 20ff.
38 Frykman and Lövgren: Den kultiverade människan, 51.
39 Eva Billow, Lille Truls äventyr i skogen (Stockholm,
1934) [published under the name Forss, which was Billow’s
maiden name].
40 Hans Peterson, När Per gick vilse i skogen (Stockholm,
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41 Sara Grimbergsson and Kristin Westerlund, Vilse eller
Tomtens moped (Stockholm, 2007).
42 Pija Lindenbaum, Gittan och gråvargarna (Stockholm,
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43 Tove Jansson, Hur gick det sen? (Stockholm, 1952). The
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holm, 1999).
47 Eva Lindström, I skogen (Stockholm, 2008).
48 Ibid: 1.
49 Ibid: 2.
50 Ibid: 3.
52 Ibid: 16.
53 Ibid: 19.