

Sally Jones + the Chief = A Relationship Counteracting Species Boundaries

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Abstract

This study analyses the interspecies relationship between Sally Jones, a gorilla, and her human companion, the Chief, in three novels by Jakob Wegelius, focusing on this dynamic relationship and how it reframes the narrative. The research explores three main questions: the modes of interspecies communication, the core elements of their companionship and how their mutual dependency subverts notions of human supremacy. The theoretical framework integrates perspectives from human-animal studies, including Donovan's critique of speciesist ideologies that separate human and animal communication (2017), Haraway's concepts of mutual dependence (2003) and contact zones (2008) in interspecies relations and Derrida's carnofallogocentrism, which interrogates anthropocentric hierarchies (2002). Methodologically, the study employs close reading of the texts paying attention to details in the texts, based on the research questions, theories and previous research, analyzing verbal and non-verbal communication between Sally and the Chief, as well as their interdependent relationship. Findings reveal that their companionship is rooted in mutual respect and understanding, transcending human-animal hierarchies. This relationship critiques notions of human supremacy, as the Chief and Sally navigate their lives as equals, disrupting conventional ideas of ownership and superiority, as well as species and societal boundaries and fostering empathy for 'the Other'. The study contributes to the broader discourse on interspecies relationships, showing how narratives can shape ethical understandings of human-animal relations and potentially reshape perceptions of human-animal relationships in children's literature.

Keywords

Children's literature, Human-Animal Studies, Interspecies Relations, Interspecies Communication, Interspecies Companionship, Human Supremacy

INTRODUCTION

Literature for adults as well as for young readers sometimes provide fictional primates. For adults, there are fictional primates like the ape deity of Hanuman in *Ramayana* and contemporary characters such as the enigmatic Erasmus in Peter Høeg's novel *The Woman and the Ape*. For younger readers, there are also fictional primates, such as the fictive Mangani apes in Edgar Rice Burroughs's books about Tarzan, Curious George in Margaret and H. A. Rey's books for children, and the pet monkey Mr. Nilsson in Astrid Lindgren's books about Pippi Longstocking. The contemporary Swedish author and illustrator Jakob Wegelius contributes to the

tradition of primates in children's literature with the novels foregrounded in this study, *Legenden om Sally Jones* (2008; English translation *The Legend of Sally Jones*, 2018) *Mördarens apa* (2014; English translation *The Murderer's Ape*, 2017) and *Den falska rosen* (2020; English translation *The False Rose*, 2021).

The Legend of Sally Jones is a graphic novel, whereas the others are novels with few illustrations. This study focuses on the relationship between the protagonist, a gorilla called Sally Jones, and her friend, the Finnish mariner Henry Koskela, denoted by his moniker the Chief. As the novels show different phases of their relationship, from their first encounter depicted in *The Legend of Sally Jones* to the

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denouement of the story of *The False Rose*, we consider it essential to include all three novels in this study.

The Legend of Sally Jones delves into the backstory of the protagonist. Sally Jones's origins among humans remain obscure to herself but is elucidated to the readers. They also learn how Sally Jones and the Chief met; together with her boyfriend, an orangutan called Baba, she is a stowaway on a cargo vessel where the Chief works as a chief engineer. The cargo vessel sinks in a storm, so the Chief, Sally Jones and Baba go separate ways. When Sally Jones and Baba's relationship ends, Sally Jones is taken into captivity and set to work outside a bar in Singapore. There she meets the Chief again which is a turning-point for him: 'I took ship to Singapore, where I tried to comfort myself with whisky and cards, and that's how I ended up in the gutter. It was a real stroke of luck to meet you again and at last have a reason to pull myself together!' (Wegelius 2018, p. 87). They start working together and end up the owners of a freighter, the *Hudson Queen*. One of their journeys take them up the Congo River. Sally Jones gets restless and disappears one morning. The Chief searches for her in vain, but when he realizes that he is 'unlikely to see Sally Jones ever again' (Wegelius 2018, p. 106), he sees her saying goodbye to the gorillas. At the end of the novel, Sally Jones and the Chief stay together; the Chief abandons his wife, and Sally Jones does not stay in the African jungle.

The Murderer's Ape tells the adventures of Sally Jones and the Chief, first together in Portugal and later, Sally Jones on her own. Their ship runs aground while transporting what turns out to be illegal weapons. The partners get separated when the Chief is wrongly convicted of a murder, and Sally Jones is branded the murderer's ape. Initially, the separation makes Sally Jones very depressed: 'I had neither energy nor will. The only thing I wanted was for the Chief to come back. But it wasn't going to happen. Not for twenty-five years' (Wegelius 2017, p. 86). Sally Jones survives by befriending a factory worker/fado singer, Ana Molina, and an instrument repairman, Signor Fidardo. In her quest to clear the Chief of his conviction, Sally Jones goes to Southeast Asia in search of clues that will exculpate the Chief, before returning to Lisbon to get the evidence needed to have the Chief released from prison. After four years of imprisonment, the Chief can finally reunite with Sally Jones and together they go up the river to the place where their sunken ship is located and manage to set the *Hudson Queen* afloat.

The False Rose tells the story of Sally Jones and the Chief after recovering the *Hudson Queen*. They live together on the freighter in the Lisbon harbour,

working hard to repair their vessel which lay on the bottom of a river for four years. They must then solve the mystery of a valuable pearl necklace hidden on the *Hudson Queen* and return the necklace to its owner. Therefore, they go to Glasgow and on their quest, they unintentionally get involved with gangsters competing for power. Sally Jones and the Chief get separated and are forced to work for the gangsters. At the end of the novel, they are back in Lisbon.

In the books, Wegelius portrays the profound bond between Sally Jones and her human companions Signor Fidardo and Ana Molina, underscoring the power of empathy across conventional categories and the boundaries between species. Sally Jones is the first-person narrator and the focaliser so her perspective determines what readers see, hear, and understand. As an anthropoid ape, Sally Jones might be considered the closest thing to a human being. She manifests as an adept engineer, having traversed through various vocations. Despite her inability to speak, she possesses a nuanced understanding of several human languages, but resorts to a typewriter to tell her story. She is also literate in several languages, as a previous owner taught her to read and write (Wegelius 2018, p. 38). She can read Portuguese newspapers (Wegelius 2017, p. 61–62) as well as Scottish ones (Wegelius 2022, p. 356–357). Sally Jones herself tells the readers that she has learned 'how you human beings think and to understand what you say. I've learned to read and to write. I've learned how people steal and deceive. I've learned what greed is. And cruelty' (Wegelius 2017, p. 4). The quote makes it clear that Sally Jones is disappointed in human beings. So why would Wegelius portray an ape that problematizes humanity? In fact, the books are multifaceted, problematizing both humans and animals through the lens of Sally Jones.

There are several academic studies on these books. The studies focus readers' online comments on the books, the interplay between visual and verbal communication, and the intersectional elements of the protagonist (Palo & Manderstedt 2016; Manderstedt & Palo 2018; Palo & Manderstedt 2019), as well as the geographical representations and challenges of power structures (Lyngstad & Kielland Samoilow 2022; Lyngstad & Kielland Samoilow 2024; Kielland Samoilow 2022). Furthermore, there are studies on the functions of the books as an attempt to illuminate and reformulate the discourse of intersectional Otherness as Sally Jones is at the centre of the story (Posti 2017). Other academics have worked more specifically with the perspectives of the readers, for example, exploring the places in the novel and in everyday day life of them (Johnsrud 2020).

In a guide for teachers, Helene Ehriander (2015) argues that Wegelius's work should be discussed with children, as Sally Jones is a universal and transgressive character (cf. Nygren on relations between human and non-human animals in horse stories as porous, Nygren 2023, p. 62). There are however, as far as we know, no children's literature studies focusing the interspecies relation between the human and the animal protagonists in Wegelius's works although the relationship between Sally Jones and the Chief is at the core in the stories. Wegelius's works about Sally Jones are possible to read as counter stories concerning power relations. The goal of our study is not only to explore Wegelius's works, but to contribute to research on the function of animals in children's literature and potentially reshape perceptions of human and animal relationships in children's literature. It should be noted that we use the common terms humans and animals as shorthand for human and non-human animals.

The study employs close reading of the literary works, that is paying close attention to details in the texts (Tenngart 2019, p. 26–27). The analysis is based on theories of interspecies communication and relations, as well as on theories problematizing the power relations between humans and animals. In addition, the research on human-animal relations in children's literature forms a basis for the study. The research questions have been the starting point for the selection of quotes.

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within the field of human-animal studies (Lundblad 2024, p. 3), the aim of this study is to analyse the interspecies relationship between the ape Sally Jones and the human, colloquially known as the Chief and how it reframes the narrative. The research questions that are addressed are the following:

- What kind of interspecies communication takes place?
- Which are the bearing elements of the companionship between the human, Koskela, and the ape, Sally Jones?
- How does the mutual dependency articulated in the novels relate to notions of human supremacy?

EXPLORING LITERARY INTERSPECIES RELATIONS

IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE – THEORIES

For young readers, literature can empower and educate by presenting different perspectives (Nikolajeva 2010). Animals often have a certain

function in children's literature. In addition to describing the world around them, it is said that they 'arouse empathy in the child reader, create distance and help to process conflicts' (Boglund & Nordenstam 2010, p. 129. Our translation). They also allow the depiction of things that would otherwise be perceived as 'too inflammatory or taboo' (Posti 2008, p. 193. Our translation). Animals can also function 'as a convenient way to circumvent and smooth over both gender and age categorization in character depiction' or hide ethnic affiliation (Lassén Seger 2008, p. 126. Our translation). According to Maria Nikolajeva, animals in illustrations are often dressed in human clothes in order to be attributed human identities – often with stereotypical attributes that confirm the text's pronouns, she or he, thereby informing the reader about gender (2000). Perry Nodelman exemplifies how humanized animals can reinforce the image of a certain gender affiliation and also evade and destabilize it through unexpected clothing choices (2005, p. 132–133).

Zoe Jaques (2015) explores how children's literature intersects with posthumanism, challenging human-centric views through themes like technology and ethics by redefining 'the human' beyond boundaries, the agency in what she labels non-human characters and ethics and empathy beyond human interests. Children's books are highlighted by Jaques as key in discussing identity, coexistence and interactions between humans and animals. According to Jaques, children's fiction engages 'with [the] constructed sense of a "non-animal animal"' (2015, p. 72). In other words, children's fiction can operate in a discourse that plays with, moves, establishes or problematizes boundaries between animals and humans.

Several researchers follow this approach. According to Maria Lassén-Seger 'humanized animals are protagonists typical of children's literature' (2009, p. 29). Lassén-Seger states that these stories 'depict the monkey as a cunning animal, a trickster figure, who nonetheless represents a threatening slippage between civilized man and savage animal – the awkward dividing between nature and culture which stories of animal-human relations typically address' (2009, p. 30). Lassén-Seger concludes that the humanized animal in contemporary children's books is rather someone to feel with, than educational (Lassén-Seger 2009). The use of animals in literary texts enables the author to deal with topics that might be difficult in an all-human setting (Wolfe 2003). On the other hand, Amelie Björck points out that there is a tendency to reduce the potential of transspecies texts by interpreting the animals as nothing but metaphors for the Other (2013, p. 5). Ann-Sofie

Lönngren (2021) suggests that literary depictions of animals should not only function as metaphors for humans, signifying themselves. To read the animal character as a real animal, a metonymic reading is needed – a call for recognition, connection, self-meaning, correspondence and relationship.

Other researchers highlight how children and animals are intimately connected even in real life. In these studies, the views are often general, not addressing literature or children's literature.

In this study, we work with the theories regardless of whether they deal with (children's) literature or not, aware that most of them do not. It is motivated by the character Sally Jones, that is an intersectional character, nor human or animal, or maybe both (cf. Palo & Manderstedt 2019).

In order to analyse the human-animal relationship in Wegelius's novels, three perspectives are in focus. The first analytical perspective deals with the communication between species. In children's and YA literature, the theme of interspecies communication serves as a lens through which to explore the dynamics of human-animal relationships. Josephine Donovan states that it is incontrovertible that animals communicate through signs and signals (2017, p. 208). Animals 'express themselves in [...] ways, which are not difficult [...] to read – facial expressions, gesture, sound, voice, and language' (p. 212). Thus, Donovan criticises the speciest ideological rationalisation that differentiates between humans and animals when it comes to communication, or the ability to feel pain. Donovan mentions that the same type of rationalisation was applied to African Americans 'to justify slavery' (p. 220). However, there are qualities needed to learn animal languages – sympathy, empathy and attention (Donovan 2017, p. 213). For humans, it is necessary to acquire these characteristics if they are to understand what animals communicate. The fact that humans must take responsibility for learning to communicate with animals also shows how pervasive the power perspective is in an interspecies relationship.

The second perspective applied for the analysis therefore draws on theories on power structures. Donna Haraway (2003) suggests a change in basic assumptions from human exceptionalism towards a more inclusive understanding of kinship and (co-)existence, which acknowledges the inherent (and constructed) value of all life forms. She focuses on the bond between dogs and humans, yet transferable to other species. By foregrounding the agency and significance of nonhuman companions, Haraway argues that humans and animals are not separate entities, but rather co-constitutive beings engaged in ongoing processes of mutual shaping and adaptation.

None of the species would be what it is today without the mutual dependence – a co-existence with microorganisms, which are mutually dependent (2003, p. 11–12). Such interdependence also relates to what Haraway calls 'contact zones' – a space that facilitates interspecies communication and thereby potentially can be norm-changing (Haraway 2008, p. 216).

Haraway observes that 'European culture for centuries questioned the humanity of peoples of color and assimilated them to the monkeys and apes in jokes, medicine, religious art, sexual beliefs, and zoology' (Haraway 1989, p. 154). According to Lynn Turner (2015), Haraway and Jacques Derrida have both contributed to the shift from animal rights to animal ethics, and to the fact that the animal issue cannot be set aside in contemporary critical thinking.

While Haraway is interested in materiality and practice, the third perspective to be applied is concerned by the language as a limiting frame for communication, the performativity of language and the male supremacy, all of them highlighted in Derrida's theory of carnofallogocentrism, observing that reason, in particular the grown-up male reason, is privileged, and the female, the child, and the animal are seen as inferior. Carnofallogocentrism, the notion that animals are valued only if they are valuable to the humans is called into question. Derrida portrays the human as 'caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal' (2002, p. 372). The encounter with the animal in 'a type of *mirror stage*' (2002, p. 377) forces the human to see things from the point of view of the animal, as 'in a face-to-face duel' (2002, p. 379. See also Björck 2013), showing 'the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man' (Derrida 2002, p. 381). Seen through the prism of Derrida's carnofallogocentrism, the fictionalised animal in children's literature is not primarily a didactic tool to foster empathy with a subaltern, but a mirror through which the human beings can see themselves: their own flaws but potentially also how they could – and should – be.

In short, Donovan, Haraway and Derrida collectively support the study's objectives; Donovan with perspectives on interspecies communication, Haraway and Derrida on interspecies companionship and human supremacy and Haraway on mutual dependency.

A RELATIONSHIP OF AFFECTION, RESPECT AND LOYALTY

In this section we will show how interspecies communication, elements of companionship, and mutual dependence between Sally and the Chief takes

place in Wegelius's works, highlighting their relationship of affection, respect, and loyalty.

Interspecies communication in Wegelius's works

Interspecies communication is, as noted by Donovan (2017, p. 212), multifaceted and includes verbal and non-verbal languages, such as gestures, expressions, and actions of communication. An examination of the Sally Jones books unveils an array of communicative modalities employed by the protagonist and the Chief, including but not limited to verbal communication, attentive observation, gaze, body language including tactile interaction, written communication, and musical expressions. Their interactions often draw on a multiple interplay of semiotic resources noted by Lyngstad and Kielland Samoilow (2024).

In *The Legend of Sally Jones*, when Sally Jones and the Chief meet again in Singapore, the Chief takes the initiative to contact: 'He went up to Sally Jones and patted her on the head: "So that's where you've got to! All chained up. I can see that life hasn't treated you too well. Just like me!"' (Wegelius 2018, p. 83). The verbal communication and the touch underscore that the Chief sees Sally Jones and acknowledges her, although in the later novels, the Chief does not pat her on the head which could be perceived as a patronising gesture.

A more complex example from *The Murderer's Ape* shows that living together and working side by side enables them to communicate in a multifaceted way. After the release from prison, Sally Jones observes the Chief closely:

The Chief had changed. Not greatly, but enough for me to notice immediately. He now had an ugly scar on one cheek, and his nose was slightly crooked. His hair was gray at the temples, and he moved in a different manner – always watchful in some way. Sudden noises made him jump, and he never turned his back on anyone if he could avoid it. I don't think it was something he was conscious of. (Wegelius 2017, p. 537)

The observations by Sally Jones are underscored by the verbal communication. Ana Molina asks the Chief whether prison life had been hard, and his answer is evasive: 'Yes, I suppose... but the evenings were good. Mostly I would be left in peace in my cell and could practice the accordion' (Wegelius 2017, p. 537). Thus, readers learn what is communicated through body language, and perceived by Sally Jones's attentive observation, but also from the Chief's evasive reply. The time spent in prison has impacted their communication, Sally Jones realises: 'Before he went to prison, I had usually been able to guess what he was

thinking, even when he said nothing. It was impossible now' (Wegelius 2017, p. 538). Other means of communication, primarily attentive observation, become necessary. Sally Jones observes the Chief playing the accordion that he got while in prison:

When the Chief played, an expression I had never seen before came over his face. He did not look like himself at all, I thought. His head would lean to one side, and his eyebrows wrinkled as though he was in pain. His eyes were looking into the far distance, at something no one else could see.

At moments like that, I wondered whether he would ever really be happy again.

And if that was so, I knew that I should never ever really be happy again. (Wegelius 2017, p. 539–540)

Here, readers could argue that Sally Jones comes to resemble her human since she is deprived of almost all other animal contact.

Another telltale example of a combination of semiotic resources – verbal, visual, sound, touch, etc. – comes from *The False Rose*, from the concluding part where Sally Jones and the Chief reunite after a period of separation. The Chief is to learn what happened to Sally Jones while he was forced to smuggle whisky for the gangsters. The others can tell him part of the story, but that is not enough:

After listening and reading the Chief looked at me and said: 'Once we get back to Lisbon, you are going to have to take out your old Underwood. I have a feeling that it's some story you have to tell!'

And then I noticed that the Chief's jaw was trembling just a little.

'I've been so damned worried,' he said. 'There were times when I thought of jumping ship, but I had the crew to think about as well.'

I nodded and patted the Chief's arm to show that I understood. (Wegelius 2021, p. 433–434)

Compared with the first example, from *The Legend of Sally Jones*, where the Chief patted Sally Jones on the head, we notice the shift in roles when it comes to physical touch. In the example from *The False Rose*, Sally Jones is patting the Chief's arm, indicating that communication via touch now is on equal terms, but also that there is a mutual respect. Sally Jones and the Chief can pat each other on the arm or on the shoulder, not on the head. Despite receiving partial

accounts of Sally Jones's experiences, the Chief implores Sally Jones to articulate her narrative via her typewriter. In this case, the written communication complements touch, gaze, and the oral and visual communication. One might say that this is another way of 'listening' to her — Donovan emphasises that humans can interpret animals' expressions and actions like language (2017, p. 212). Sally Jones has got access to languages, including the spoken languages considered particular to humans, even though she does not speak herself.

The bearing elements of the companionship between the human and the animal

Several bearing elements of companionship between Sally Jones and the Chief are distinguished in the novels. Firstly, their relationship, is characterised by a shared love of mechanics and life at sea. They share work ethics and are morally and ethically responsible characters. They are skilled mechanics, and Sally Jones has learnt from the Chief everything she needs to know in order to be a competent sailor, for example stoking the boilers, checking the pressure and temperature gauges, fixing minor faults with the engine (Wegelius 2018, p. 54–88), or sharpening and making tools (Wegelius 2017, p. 101–214). The human and the animal are active business partners:

The Chief and Sally Jones went ashore in San Francisco. They used their savings to buy tools and machines and open a small mechanical workshop at South Beach, where they repaired car and boat engines. (Wegelius 2018, p. 92)

The use of pronouns such as 'they' and 'their' indicate that their business relationship is on equal terms. In *The Murderer's Ape*, Sally Jones tells the reader that she and the Chief bought their own steamer, the *Hudson Queen* (Wegelius 2017, p. 5). Readers who are familiar with *The Legend of Sally Jones* know that she was the one who made the purchase possible (Wegelius 2018, p. 96–99).

Sally Jones and the Chief are also cohabitants, embodying the essence of companionship and affection in everyday life:

'Who can that be?' the Chief said, shading his eyes with his hand to see better. 'Let's hope it's not someone wanting money from us. Have we paid the harbour master for our drinking water this month?'

I nodded. As far as I knew we had paid all our bills. (Wegelius 2021, p. 44)

This exchange between them, akin to any cohabiting couple, attests to their intimacy and interdependency (cf. Haraway).

Secondly, the relationship is characterised by mutual vulnerability and interdependence, extending beyond conventional boundaries. In *The Legend of Sally Jones* and *The Murderer's Ape*, their domestic life is less prominent than in *The False Rose*, as Sally Jones and the Chief are separated for long periods of time. In the domestic life, they complement each other. Sally Jones is mute, as a reminder of the perceived difference between animals and humans, and/or as a mirror to make the human see his limits (cf. Derrida). She is literate, whereas the Chief speaks, but he finds reading and writing difficult, thus problematizing the supposed borderline between species. In *The Murderer's Ape*, his letters from the prison are short and contain spelling errors, and in *The False Rose*, he attests to his problems reading: 'You know I'm a slow reader' (Wegelius 2021, p. 102). Their mutual vulnerabilities engender a shared sense of responsibility, not only towards each other but also towards those under their purview. Sally Jones and the Chief's relationship, underpinned by understanding and friendship, includes rather than excludes other people.

Thirdly, they choose one another over and over, though they have had other partners, which is obvious in *The Legend of Sally Jones*. While incarcerated at Istanbul Zoo, Sally Jones met an orangutan named Baba, 'and for the first time in a long time Sally Jones had something to be happy about. She did not want to be parted from Baba, not ever' (Wegelius 2018, p. 33). Eventually, she manages to free Baba, and they escape, ending up in the jungle where Sally Jones is not at ease: 'Sally Jones tried to learn how to do everything Baba did, but she felt clumsy and lost. Everything in the jungle was new and strange to her' (Wegelius 2018, p. 59). In the end, Sally Jones must leave the flock of orangutans, as 'she did not belong there and could never become one of them' (Wegelius 2018, p. 63). Similarly, the Chief, has had a love affair with a French singer, Lola de Ville (Wegelius 2018, p. 86), which ended with her falling in love with someone else. The Chief marries Donna Bloom, a coffee house owner in San Francisco, but when she demands that the Chief gets rid of Sally Jones, or she will divorce him, he leaves her and goes to sea with Sally Jones. In other words, the relationship between Sally Jones and the Chief differs from their previous relationships. It is an encounter between subjects.

When Sally Jones takes off her overalls and engineer's cap — the only pieces of clothing that she voluntarily wears — and slips away into the jungle on a trip up the Congo River, the Chief goes looking for

her and returns every night 'tired, lonely and disappointed' (Wegelius 2018, p. 105). When he accepts that Sally Jones might have left to find her home in the jungle, he finds out that she went to say goodbye to the gorillas where she was born. Sally Jones had chosen to make a life with the Chief. In the sequels, the Chief and Sally Jones again and again mutually choose life together over other alternatives.

Notions of human supremacy or of mutual dependencies?

According to Jaques (2015), animals in children's literature are commonly relegated to the archetypes of mere creatures or domestic companions. Sally Jones, too, encounters such classifications. In *The Legend of Sally Jones* (2014), attempts at presenting her as 'the terrifying murderous ape from the green hell' (Wegelius 2018, p. 36) culminate in failure, evoking pity rather than fear amongst observers. Conversely, she is often perceived by other characters as a pet or a creature to be fettered: 'No pets allowed in here!' (Wegelius 2017, p. 405). The Superintendent of a Scottish orphanage suggests during a conversation with Koskela that he 'can tie it to the handrail' (Wegelius 2021, p. 458). The fictional characters perceiving Sally Jones as a pet see her as a thing and miss out on the lack of hierarchy between the human and the animal (cf. Haraway 2003. See also Björck 2014). The readers, however, are aware of the discrepancy between the viewpoint of these other fictional characters, and the way Sally Jones and the Chief see their relationship.

An anthropocentric perspective is, we argue, neither the prevailing relationship between Sally Jones and the Chief, nor between Sally Jones and her other friends. In fact, they built a biosocial network, to use Cynthia Willett's concept (Willett 2014, p. 131–134). In such a network, based on generosity, reciprocity and respect for the foreign, the actual meeting is central, and this argument relies on the notion of other types of orders where anthropocentrism is challenged. In other words, Sally Jones and the Chief's relationship defies conventional delineations of master and pet. Despite the titular reference to *The Murderer's Ape*, neither Sally Jones nor the Chief accedes to such hierarchical constructs. Their relationship transcends ownership, epitomizing comradeship and friendship, but it is not altogether unique to their relationship. None of them differentiates between species – which is not the same as them not being aware of created and enforced boundaries between species. Sally Jones does not expect people to see beyond her species:

When I meet people for the first time, almost everyone treats me as a gorilla. That's only to be expected: after all, I am a gorilla. [...] There are not many people who realize that I can think thoughts of my own and understand what people are saying. Not until they get to know me, that is. (Wegelius 2017, p. 127)

She knows that without the company and protection of a human, she will be seen as 'no more than a gorilla without a master' (Wegelius 2017, p. 253). She voices the conviction that having lived almost all her life with 'human beings and on their terms' (Wegelius 2021, p. 38), she is neither just an animal, nor a human being (cf. Nygren, 2023; Ehriander, 2015). When the Chief, in the second and third novel, must talk about Sally Jones, he refers to her as 'my engineer' (Wegelius 2017, p. 84) and 'a very good and fine person' (Wegelius 2017, p. 84) who is 'her own' (Wegelius 2021, p. 137). The Chief is not in denial regarding the species, but it seems less relevant than Sally Jones's personality and ability, and it is only thrice, in conversations with outsiders – that is, people who are not close friends – that the Chief refers to Sally Jones as an ape (Wegelius 2018, p. 50–51; Wegelius 2021, p. 137).

There is a sense of kinship between Sally Jones and the Chief, and their close friends, not between Sally Jones and all human beings. This kinship depends on the closest friends' willingness to carefully 'listen' to the other party, and to acquire the qualities needed to learn his/her/their language – sympathy, empathy and attention. However, between Sally Jones and the Chief the biosocial relationship is particularly noticeable. Biosocial relationships are crucial, according to Willett (2014). Not even their close friends Ana Molina and Signor Fidardo, who could be described as their extended family, or part of their biosocial network, can be what Sally Jones and the Chief are for each other. Drawing on Haraway's terminology, they are mutually interdependent in the contact zone (Haraway 2008, p. 216. See also Björck 2014, p. 214) which is their shared life.

In *The Legend of Sally Jones* Wegelius's illustrations can often be interpreted as a critique of hierarchies between humans and animals (p. 81; of hierarchies based on pseudo-scientific reasonings (p. 77) where the skull measuring scientists make readers think of the pseudo-scientific and derogatory treatment of indigenous peoples, or of the hierarchies making the male Silvio the Magician treat the female Sally Jones as an object and a slave – she is his dancing gorilla in a tutu, and she is supposed to cook, clean, take care of his fan mail, and to drive his lorry. Unwittingly, he provides her with the key to her freedom, that is leaving him.

Having traversed through diverse ownerships and gruelling periods of domestication, Sally Jones perceives her relationship with the Chief as being precious: 'Many people think the Chief is my present owner, but the Chief isn't the sort to want to own others. He and I are comrades. And friends' (Wegelius 2017, p. 4). The Chief articulates the same ideas, when he refers to Sally Jones as not being his ape, but 'her own' (Wegelius 2021, p. 137) which underscores her autonomy within their relationship.

Neither Sally Jones, nor the Chief, advocates a more inclusive understanding of kinship and coexistence between species, but they live in a relationship where the boundaries demarcating human and animal identities are rendered porous, through the interconnectedness of the human animal and the other animal (cf. Nygren 2024).

However, when Sally Jones is dreading the separation from their friends in Lisbon, the Chief understands and declares that Lisbon is their home port:

'Lisbon, after all, is where all our future voyages will begin. And this is where we will always return at the end of the journey.'

We looked at one another.

I felt the hard lump of sadness in my heart begin to dissolve, like a piece of ice in warm water.

It must have shown, I suppose, because the Chief gave me a little smile. (Wegelius 2021, p. 518)

The quote shows that the Chief is as attuned to Sally Jones's emotions, as she is to his emotional well-being. One could argue that the Chief listens to Sally Jones, even when nothing is being said, just like she listens to what is being said and not said by the Chief. This realisation pushes them to rely even more on non-verbal cues. In essence, the novels depict communication as an ongoing negotiation of signs, sounds, and signals, affirming Donovan's point that humans must learn *sympathy*, *empathy* and *attention* to truly understand what animals (like Sally) communicate. Their relationship is a relationship of mutual dependency. As a result, the Chief and Sally Jones are often portrayed side by side, not face-to-face, as theirs is not a relationship where the animal looks at the human being and sees the moral nakedness of the human (cf. Derrida).

A FICTIONAL PRIMATE COUNTERACTING

SPECIES BOUNDARIES – A DISCUSSION

As shown in the findings, a cornerstone in Sally Jones and the Chief's relationship is their ability to communicate. The analysis of Wegelius's books

reveals a myriad of communicative modalities employed by the protagonist and the Chief, including verbal communication, attentive observation, body language, written communication, and musical expressions, showing the specifics of interspecies communication. Donovan (2017) underscores the complexity of communication between humans and animals, highlighting the richness of non-verbal communication, as shown in the communication between Sally Jones and the Chief. Their relationship where the female primate, not the male human, is the individual with the superior access to the written language, challenges anthropocentric assumptions and could be seen as a subversive tension in relation to the carnofallogocentric order, where the human, male and person with access to spoken languages is superior.

Sally Jones and the Chief's relationship depends on their choice to be companions, a mutually dependent relationship between an animal and a human. While Sally Jones is often treated as an object by others, as in the skull measurements, her relationship with the Chief exemplifies a companionship that transcends societal norms and underscores the transformative potential of literary depictions of interspecies connections. They are, in Haraway's terms, 'bonded in significant otherness' (2003, p. 16).

Haraway's concept of companion species challenges hierarchies and emphasises the importance of recognising the agency and significance of nonhuman companions. Sally Jones and the Chief's relationship exemplifies this, as they transcend conventional human-animal dynamics, epitomise comradeship and defy ownership. The fictional mutual vulnerabilities engender a shared sense of responsibility and mutual reliance, highlighting the transformative potential of interspecies connections. Their companionship exemplifies a mutually dependent relationship that transcends species boundaries, aligning with Haraway's vision of inclusive kinship and coexistence.

Reframing Narratives in Children's Literature

Through characters like Sally Jones, readers are invited to literary worlds where interspecies communication exceeds linguistic barriers. These stories can challenge the notion of human, especially male exceptionalism, inviting readers to reconsider their place in existence. The fictionalised portrayal that literature implies enables an exploration of the realistic species-specific boundaries that interspecies relationships entail and a play with these boundaries.

Our previous studies of Wegelius's works show that many readers reflect upon how different perceptions of species impact the protagonist's life, when she is

treated as an object (Palo & Manderstedt 2019; Manderstedt & Palo 2018). The animal protagonist is perceived as a hybrid between the human and the animal. Comments by readers concern sufferings due to the perceived Otherness (Palo & Manderstedt 2016).

The choice of a primate as the protagonist could be seen as a vehicle for discussing preconceived notions, as humans and gorillas are genetically similar but not identical. Sally Jones's intelligence, compassion, and moral compass make her superior to most human characters in Wegelius's books. The preconceived notions about Sally Jones resemble colonial ideas about racial and cultural supremacy (cf. Posti 2017; Lassén-Seger 2009). However, the preconceived notions do not only concern species, but also gender, and class. The latter is obvious in Sally Jones's relationship with the maharaja (Wegelius 2017, p. 295–401).

Sally Jones is an ethically and emotionally well-developed individual, an excellent mechanic, and a loyal friend. She is the opposite of literary apes who are portrayed as childish, or disobedient (cf. Björck 2013; Lassén-Seger 2009). Although she might be seen as a hybrid between the human and the animal, since she is an animal who masters human skills like reading and writing, she is not the same kind of hero as Burroughs's protagonist Tarzan who is a human who masters animal skills. Sally Jones's closest resemblance in literature might be Høeg's fictional character Erasmus: a highly intelligent animal, in many respects superior to human beings.

To conclude, the results highlight the transformative potential of interspecies relations in children's literature. Sally Jones's and the Chief's relationship serves as a powerful example of a companionship that challenges the carnofallogocentric order and potentially the normalisation of the Other. As previously shown, Wegelius's works about Sally Jones can be read as counter stories concerning power relations. By focusing on the relationship between Sally Jones and the Chief, the animal and the human, exploring their multifaceted communication and mutual dependencies, the main contribution of our study is to offer insights into the complexities of human-animal relationship in Wegelius's works. Sally Jones is an animal protagonist whose gaze, in silence, reveals human flaws (cf. Derrida) but also human qualities. Thus, readers are reminded to question perceived differences between animals and humans. The supposed linguistic borderline between species is constantly problematised, and the notion of human supremacy is challenged, thereby providing

possibilities to reframing narratives in children's literature.

Implications for further study

The discussion suggests avenues for further exploration into the transformative potential of interspecies connections advocating for continued examination of how children's literature through the examination of 'Othering', alternately highlighting and neutralising differences and similarities, shape perceptions of human-animal relationships.

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