

LIONS, HARES, AND DONKEYS: ILLUSTRATING REGAL TRAITS IN JOHANNES MAGNUS' *HISTORIA DE OMNIBUS GOTHORUM SUEONUMQUE REGIBUS* (1554)

Astrid M. H. Nilsson

Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University

Abstract. *Johannes Magnus (1488–1544) was the last Catholic archbishop of Uppsala to hold residence in Sweden. He was also an historian and wrote a major work on Swedish history, the Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus, which was published posthumously in Rome in 1554. The work eventually became the ideological foundation for Swedish patriotism in the 17th century. The Historia de regibus places a very strong focus on the monarchs: the work is actually arranged as a series of royal biographies. Imagery is rare in Johannes Magnus' work, which makes it especially striking when it does occur and also suggests that it is important. He sometimes refers to the animal kingdom to illustrate character traits and actions of the monarchs. In this paper, this animal imagery is analyzed and contextualized in order to explain its implications.*

Keywords: *historiography, Johannes Magnus, animal imagery, kings, tyrants, vice, virtue.*

This paper was originally read at a conference in Vilnius in November 2016, right after the US presidential election. I had had the opportunity of going to New York during the election itself to follow it more closely than is possible from Europe. When news of my trip got out at home, and people knew that I was working on a paper about illustrating regal character traits with animal imagery, I was asked by some what animals I would have chosen to represent the two main presidential candidates, which suggests that animal imagery for political purposes is still an interesting question.

In this paper, however, I shall instead be concerning myself with kings of old and with the use of various animals to de-

pict them in a Renaissance work of history, the *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus*. Its author was Johannes Magnus (1488–1544), the last Catholic archbishop of Uppsala to have held residence in Sweden.¹ In 1526, only three years after his appointment as archbishop, he left his home country for Poland in order to negotiate a marriage to a Polish princess for King Gustavus Vasa and was never to return to Sweden.² A fervent opponent of Lutheranism, Johannes Magnus spent the rest of his life trying to enlist the support of the Catholic Church for reinstating Catholicism in Sweden as well as attempting

¹ Nilsson 2016, 36–49. I thank Dr. David Bell for correcting my English.

² Carlsson 1922, 1–76.

to convince King Gustavus Vasa himself to return his country to Catholicism.³ Johannes Magnus was also an historian, and during his long years abroad, he wrote two historical works: one about the archbishops of Uppsala (including himself) and one about Swedish history, the one that will be discussed in this paper, and which was published posthumously in Rome in 1554.⁴

This work has received somewhat scarce attention in modern research but is the object of study of my 2016 doctoral thesis, *Johannes Magnus and the Composition of Truth*, as well as of a few articles.⁵ It is also the topic of a long chapter in the 1982 work by Kurt Johannesson, *Gotisk renässans* (translated into English in 1991 as *The Renaissance of the Goths*) and a few shorter pieces by Johannesson on the same topic.⁶ In 1975, Johan Nordström's lectures on Johannes Magnus and his work, held in 1929, were published too.⁷ The research into Johannes Magnus and his work is limited, but the topic of animal imagery in general has been studied abundantly with regard to different works and writers, from Homer to the Bible, and to Spenser and Shakespeare.⁸ Animal imagery is, in other words, common, and consequently a very widely studied area, of which it is not possible to present any complete survey here. However, lions in particular appear to be interesting.⁹

³ Spegel 1716, 77–80.

⁴ Magnus 1554 and Magnus 1560, respectively.

⁵ Nilsson 2016, 2014 and 2017a, b and c.

⁶ Johannesson 1982; Johannesson/Larson 1991, and, e.g., Johannesson 1999 and 2009.

⁷ Nordström 1975.

⁸ Alden 2005; Glenn 1998; Horrell, Arnold and Williams 2013; Forti 2007; Perner Cosman 1963; Maxwell 1947; McCloskey 1962.

⁹ Alden 2005; Glenn 1998; Horrell, Arnold and Williams 2013; Wilson 2002.

Johannes' work eventually became the ideological foundation for Swedish patriotism in the 17th century, the "Great Era," during which the Swedish realm expanded greatly through constant wars on the continent.¹⁰ During the reign of King Gustavus Adolphus, who died in 1632, the work was translated into Swedish; the only published translation so far.¹¹ King Gustavus Adolphus was extremely interested in Johannes' work, not least for the opportunities for propaganda it offered. A tournament was held at his coronation where he dressed himself as one of the earliest kings of Sweden.¹² The *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus* places a very strong focus on the monarchs: the work is actually arranged as a series of illustrated biographies of over 200 kings – both good kings and tyrants – from Magog, grandson of Noah and the first king of Sweden, to the beginning of the reign of Gustavus Vasa in the early 1520s, Johannes Magnus' own time.

Johannes Magnus sometimes refers to good kings as fathers of their country in accordance with the ancient Roman honorary title *pater patriae* (or *parens patriae*), bestowed upon Cicero, Caesar and Emperor Augustus, among others.¹³ It was also used to refer to the 12th century Swedish lawmaker Karle av Edsvära.¹⁴ But on the whole, imagery is quite rare in Magnus' work, which, of course, makes it all the more striking when it does appear. After about 100 pages, Johannes refers to tyrants

¹⁰ See, e.g., Jönsson 2002 for an overview of the development of Gothicism; cf. Johannesson 1982.

¹¹ Magnus/Schroderus 1620.

¹² Almquist 1945, 1–7.

¹³ Magnus 1554, 129, 135, 146, 429, 506; Purcell 1996.

¹⁴ Gilligstam 1973–1975, 273–274.

and explains what they are like, using animal imagery to convey the picture. This quotation is one of the earliest cases where he refers to animals and rulers at the same time¹⁵:

Profecto hinc nostri temporis tyranni magis vitile, quam honestum exemplum sumpsisse videntur, qui non existentibus hostibus in quos suae seueritatis frameas exacuant, in subiectorum ciuium viscera crudele & impium ferrum immergere non erubescunt: immo etiam hostibus vndique circumsepti, plures fidelissimos ciues, quam infestissimos hostes perdere conantur. Siquidem in hostiles turmas leporum timiditatem, aut asinorum ignauiam referunt, qui in subditos innocentes, eosdemque inermes, leonum & tygridum ferociam, ac belluinam rabiem imitantur.

Undoubtedly, the tyrants of our time appear to have taken up the more expedient rather than honorable exemplum from this time, that when there are no enemies against which they can use the blades of their cruelty, they are not ashamed to plunge a cruel and impious sword into the very hearts of their subjects: no, even when they are surrounded by enemies everywhere, they try to get rid of more very loyal citizens, than highly threatening enemies. So indeed the [monarchs], who imitate the ferociousness of lions and tigers and their bestial fury against their innocent and unarmed subjects, show the timidity of hares or the idleness of donkeys against enemy armies.

In this quotation, Johannes first mentions *nostri temporis tyranni*, “the tyrants

of our own time” and goes on to enumerate all the animals found in the title of this paper: *lepus* (“hare”), *asinus* (“donkey”) and *leo* (“lion”), together with *tigris* (“tiger”), finishing it off with a reference to *belluina rabies* (“bestial fury”). The animals are also provided with specific nouns: the hare is characterized by *timiditas* (“timidity” or “shyness”), the donkey by *ignavia* (“idleness”) and the lion and tiger by *ferocia* (“ferociousness”). According to Johannes, all these character traits together can thus be found in tyrants: they can be timid and ferocious and idle at the same time. But as we shall see, there is much more to Johannes’ use of animal imagery than this, and quite a lot of information can be gleaned from it, a task which I shall now undertake.

The Hare

First, the hare is associated with the word *timiditas* (“timidity” or “shyness”). Hares are traditionally known for being very swift animals, as in Phaedrus (and, naturally, Aesop).¹⁶ Due to their habit of fleeing in the face of danger, they have also gained a reputation for cowardice. Later, Johannes refers to a tyrant as similar to a hare, prone to fleeing (*fugax lepus*).¹⁷ This is a traditional description also found in Martial 1.48, for example.¹⁸ In the particular case just referred to, the tyrant Iusso has maltreated his subjects for a long time, but when they finally take up arms against

¹⁶ See, e.g., Phaedrus 1.9 – *Passer ad leporem consiliator*.

¹⁷ Magnus 1554, 702.

¹⁸ *Rictibus his tauros non eripuerunt magistri, / per quos praeda fugax itaque redit que lepus; / quodque magis mirum, velocior exit ab hoste / nec nihil e tanta nobilitate refert.* The bold is mine.

¹⁵ Magnus 1554, 116–117. The translations are all mine, unless otherwise stated. When passages already cited in my thesis are referred to, I use the translations found there (also mine), as in this case, sometimes with small changes.

him, he fears for his life and flees rather than bravely facing the consequences of his cruel actions.¹⁹

Tyrants in Johannes' work are, however, generally prone to flee in perilous situations, not just when they need to deal with an uprising but also when they have to fight a war. Johannes refers to this, in a general sense, in the marginal comment *Tyranni timidi in hostes* ("Tyrants are timid with regard to enemies").²⁰ Being timid is one thing, but in the case of the hare, when it is used in likeness to a human, it has obvious overtones of cowardice: it is not about being shy, it is about being a coward, prone to flee and devoid of courage – which is a definite vice in a king. At a time when a ruler would be expected to personally lead his men into battle and carry the main responsibility for martial success, a king who was unable to do so would, of course, be unsuitable for his position. A very young king, still in his childhood, would naturally face that problem until he came of age, but it was an enduring trait in the case of tyrants.

The Donkey

The donkey is associated with the word *ignavia* ("idleness" or "sloth") in Johannes Magnus' work. As it concerns the failure of a tyrant to fulfil his royal duties out of idleness, it might be rendered as "negligence" as well: he harms his kingdom and his subjects by being negligent of their welfare, presumably engaging himself in more leisurely activities.²¹ King Fliolmus, for example, preferred drinking in the good

company of his courtiers to doing any actual work as king.²² It is naturally a great vice in a ruler not to be committed to the welfare of his people. But there is more to it than just general incompetence or negligence with regard to the duty of kings.

Idleness is namely one of the seven capital vices: *superbia, avaritia, luxuria, invidia, gula, ira* and *acedia* – pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth. The customary term, though it took quite some time to settle on it, is *acedia*.²³ An animal, frequently used as a symbol of *acedia*, was the donkey.²⁴ In fact, animal imagery used to represent different vices was rather frequent.²⁵ The mention of the donkey here, which may at first seem slightly odd, is thus a direct reference to a capital vice, and, to a contemporary of Johannes, an obvious one. Being a coward and fleeing like a hare is definitely a negative character trait in a king, but devoting oneself to a capital vice is even worse. It should perhaps be added here that tyrants are frequently associated with greed, another capital vice. Johannes describes how several rulers, driven by their greed, destroy and undermine their kingdoms, for example Botvildus, Visbur, Domalder and Theodatus.²⁶

The Lion and the Tiger

The lion and the tiger are associated with the word *ferocia* ("ferociousness") and with the expression *belluina rabies* ("bestial fury"), which comes directly after it.

¹⁹ Magnus 1554, 702.

²⁰ Magnus 1554, 299.

²¹ Cf. Magnus 1554, e.g., 366, 710.

²² Magnus 1554, 243.

²³ Wenzel 1967, 3.

²⁴ Bloomfield 1952, 247; Wenzel 1967, 105.

²⁵ Katzenellenbogen 1968 (1939), 61–62.

²⁶ Magnus 1554, 102, 245, 246, 342; cf. Nilsson 2016, 154–162.

When such an expression is used about a human being, it signifies cruelty, and though *ferocia* can be a positive trait in certain contexts, its connotations are obviously negative when it is linked to bestial fury and tyrants. This typical feature of the tyrant – cruelty – is found in Erasmus' roughly contemporary work, the *Institutio principis Christiani* ("The Education of a Christian Prince") from 1516, where he depicts the tyrant in the following way²⁷: *Iam si tyranni quaeris imaginem, leonem, vrsum, lupum, aut aquilam cogita, quae laniatu viuunt ac praeda [...]* ("If you search the image of a tyrant, think of a lion, a bear, a wolf or an eagle, who live from tearing to pieces and taking prey [...]").

The use of the image of the tiger and the lion is, both here and in the case of Johannes Magnus, a reference to the actual animals and to their cruel (if natural) behavior. But when this kind of behavior of wild animals is used to provide imagery for human beings, it is a different matter. This is seen from the case of 14th century Swedish King Magnus Eriksson and his wife, Queen Blanche.²⁸ They had several children, among them a son, Prince Eric. During a conflict with his parents about the crown in the then joint kingdoms of Sweden and Norway, he was summoned to see them, and they received him *vt tutius se ad tigrides, & quascunque immanes belluas, quam ad eos* [sc. his parents] *contulisset [...]* ("so that it would have been safer for him to have gone to meet tigers and any brutal beasts, than his parents [...]").²⁹ The episode finishes with the death of the

prince. The royal parents are thus not only getting rid of a subject here but of their own son. This naturally has implications for Magnus' role as king: he was even worse than an animal, the natural instinct of which is to kill, because not even tigers or lions kill their own offspring. But Magnus had his own son killed, so how could he be expected to show mercy toward his subjects, his metaphorical children?

There are a few cases where this kind of bestial cruelty is referred to in less explicit terms, as when Johannes says that *caro, & sanguis miserabilium hominum insatiabilibus tyrannorum dentibus vbique dilaniatur, & absumitur [...]* ("the flesh and blood of the people are ripped to pieces everywhere and consumed by the insatiable teeth of tyrants").³⁰ It is entirely clear that the actions of predators are depicted here – but predators in human form – which recalls the above quotation from Erasmus. This kind of imagery, where predators are used to depict cruelty, goes at least as far back as Plato.³¹ It provides a striking difference to the Homeric image of the lion: the lion as the king of the animals, an image of courage and noble bravery³² – particularly in the *Iliad*.³³ That image concurs with probably the most frequent associations with that animal today. The lion thus has two possible functions from an early stage: it can signify bravery as well as cruelty.

The quotation with which I started this paper, one of the first uses of animal imagery in the entire work, is highlighted later, when Johannes presents two rulers. He

²⁷ Erasmus 1974, 157.

²⁸ Magnus 1554, 661–675; Nilsson 2014.

²⁹ Magnus 1554, 670.

³⁰ Magnus 1554, 600.

³¹ Andersson 1943, 116; Bushnell 1990, 50–56.

³² Wilson 2002, 232.

³³ Glenn 1998, 111; cf. Perner Cosman 1963, 85–86.

claims that in the 7th century AD, Sweden was ruled first by the terrible tyrant Gostagus and then by the very good king Arthus. These kings are contrasted to each other in a number of ways and quite clearly are each other's opposites, but here, I shall focus on the animal imagery used to emphasize the contrast between the two.³⁴

King Gostagus

According to Johannes, Gostagus was a king with virtually no good qualities at all. He systematically oppressed and maltreated his people by fabricating accusations to rob the wealthy and influential of their power and worldly assets, for example. But with regard to his enemies, if a war broke out, he hid to protect himself and stayed with stable boys and others who could not go to war for some perfectly legitimate reason.³⁵

The animals used to describe King Gostagus are the lion and the hare. When Johannes presents his cruel actions toward his subjects, he describes them as *leonis fortitudo* ("the bravery of a lion").³⁶ *Fortitudo* is actually one of the four cardinal virtues, but here, the otherwise strongly positive word is used in a twisted, ironical sense, because Gostagus' own loyal subjects are also the target of his attacks. He directs his so-called bravery against the people whom he ought to protect – making him cruel rather than brave.³⁷

However, a reference to hares is found in the portrait of Gostagus, too. This is also

explicitly linked to warfare, because when enemies approach, he is known to either hide from battle in the hills or climb a nearby tree and wait for it to be over. Johannes explicitly says that in the face of enemies, Gostagus was *omni lepore timidior* ("more timid than any hare").³⁸ The same king can be **both** a lion **and** a hare, both cruel **and** cowardly. In essentials, Gostagus is a coward as a lion, too, because he never attacks his equals – let alone those of superior capacity, where there would be any actual danger. This is best expressed by Johannes himself, who describes that when one of his tyrants (Iusso, who was referred to above) comes under a righteous attack from the oppressed people, he stops being a roaring lion and turns into a fleeing hare *more tyrannorum* ("in the way of tyrants").³⁹ This reference is found elsewhere in Johannes' work as well.⁴⁰

King Arthus

King Arthus, who overthrew Gostagus' vicious, tyrannical rule and became his successor, was a very good king and is obviously described in a radically different manner, basically as an opposite of Gostagus in every respect.⁴¹ The animal imagery for describing them, however, is similar, as both are likened to lions! When it comes to facing his enemies in battle, Arthus and his companions namely always *leonum ferociam imitabantur* ("imitated the ferociousness of lions").⁴² In this case, it is a positive trait, because it is aimed in the right direction: Arthus protects his people

³⁴ For a full discussion of the contrast between them, see Nilsson 2016, 234–258; cf. Johannesson 1982, 164–190.

³⁵ Magnus 1554, 297–300.

³⁶ Magnus 1554, 299.

³⁷ Cf. Pelner Cosman 1963, 87; Horrell, Arnold and Williams 2013, 703.

³⁸ Magnus 1554, 299.

³⁹ Magnus 1554, 702.

⁴⁰ Magnus 1554, 536, 735; Nilsson 2016, 199–203.

⁴¹ Magnus 1554, 300–301.

⁴² Magnus 1554, 301.

and bravely attacks his enemies, exactly the way a proper king should act. He thus matches perfectly the Homeric description of the lion, particularly that of the Iliad.

While Gostagus was likened to a hare, Arthus and his companions, who were just like him, behaved *non secus ac agni* (“no different from lambs”) with regard to their subjects. The lamb is, of course, a somewhat timid animal, just like the hare, but with a completely different set of associations. It is, for example, a clear reference to the virtue of *clementia* (“clemency”), which provides a striking contrast to the *crudelitas* described in the case of Gostagus.⁴³

Religious Overtones

Later in the work, Johannes Magnus writes about a good king, Haquinus, who wanted to be seen as a Christian man, not as a cruel pagan, and as a king, not as a tyrant: *Christianum hominem, non crudelem Ethnicum, Regem, non tyrannum*.⁴⁴ This short extract points to two things that are of great interest here: first, it links cruelty to paganism; second, it suggests a link between Christianity and good kingship, as opposed to paganism and tyranny, by paralleling certain words. Erasmus refers to this link in the *Institutio principis Christiani*: he points out that although there were commendable deeds performed by non-Christians, a Christian prince is superior through his faith and can thus be expected to do even better things.⁴⁵ Conversely, a bad action by a Christian prince is even worse, as he should know better.

The attribution of cruelty to pagans is highly relevant to Gostagus, too, because he is referred to as *Ethnicus* (“pagan”) and his horrible reign was partly *ob veri Dei ignorantiam* (“because of his ignorance of the true God”).⁴⁶ In addition, he is said to have ruled at the same time as Islam begun to spread, which Johannes claims helped bring about his depraved and tyrannical rule. There are thus certain religious overtones in the description of Gostagus through the explicit mention of his paganism.

When it concerns Arthus, the words *clementia* and *agnus* taken together carry certain religious overtones too. Jesus is frequently referred to as a lamb, as in John 1:29 (quoted from *Versio Vulgata*): *Ecce agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi*. It is hardly controversial to say that Jesus, too, was clement. Arthus is, to be sure, a pagan, which Johannes explicitly says, but this is only because Arthus is said to have ruled Sweden before it had become a Christian country, so in his case, it is not presented as an actual problem. Good pagan kings are usually presented in a sympathetic manner, sometimes by excluding any reference to religion entirely. There were, after all, quite a number of pagans who were greatly admired by the people of the Renaissance; Johannes himself refers to the admirable pagans, while still presenting the well-known problem that they were not Christian.⁴⁷ Later on, Johannes actually refers to a non-Catholic figure, Bishop Wulfila, the translator of the Bible into Gothic – an Arian, and thus, in Johannes’ eyes, basically a pagan – who was *sub pelle ouina verae fidei hostis, &*

⁴³ Nilsson 2016, 243.

⁴⁴ Magnus 1554, 579.

⁴⁵ Erasmus 1974, e.g., 161; Nilsson 2016, 163–168.

⁴⁶ Magnus 1554, 300.

⁴⁷ Magnus 1554, 28.

indubitatus antichristus (“the enemy of the true faith and an undoubted antichrist in sheep’s clothing”).⁴⁸ Here, too, a reference to animals is made, and the importance of religion for performing one’s duties well is emphasized.

Conclusion

The reference to a donkey, i.e., to the capital vice of *acedia*, as well as the tendency of ascribing another capital vice, *avaritia*, to tyrants, provide additional links to the religious sphere. And so, an extra dimension is added to the opposing pair of Arthur and Gostagus, and to good kings and tyrants in general.⁴⁹ The contrast between

them can be seen as an attempt at depicting Arthur, although he was a pagan, as an early representative of Christ, while Gostagus’ generally horrific behavior makes him quite a good representative of the devil.

To conclude, by using a few rather frequent animals and the associations related to them in order to provide imagery, Archbishop Johannes manages to depict an almost apocalyptic battle between good and evil, while seemingly only writing about kings. This kind of religious imagery was actually used during the US presidential campaign, where one of the candidates claimed Hillary Clinton to be the devil – which, in the strongly polarized political climate, suggests how the candidate himself could be regarded.

⁴⁸ Magnus 1554, 477. Cf. Nilsson 2016, 166, note 566.

⁴⁹ Cf. Katzenellenbogen 1968 (1939), 14.

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**LIŪTAI, KIŠKIAI IR ASILAI: KARALIŠKŲ BRUOŽŲ ILIUSTRAVIMAS
JOHANNESO MAGNUSO *HISTORIA DE OMNIBUS GOTHORUM SUEONUMQUE REGIBUS* (1554)**

Astrid M. H. Nilsson

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje aptariami ir kontekstualizuojami gyvūnų paveiksai švedų arkivyskupo Johannesio Magnuso (1488–1544) veikale *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus* (*Visų gotų ir švedų karalių istorija*), kuriame aprašoma Švedijos istorija nuo Tvano iki ankstyvojo karaliaus Gustavo Vazos viešpatavimo XVI a. trečiajame dešimtmetyje. Johannesio darbas greitai sulaukė didelės sėkmės ir buvo laikomas kanoniniu švedų patriotizmo (goticizmo) veikalu, ypač XVII a., kai buvo išverstas į švedų kalbą.

Veikalą sudaro daugiau negu 200 monarchų biografijų, kurios išdėstytos chronologiškai ir daugiausia sutelktos į pačius monarchus. Vaizdų aprašymų veikale reta – dominuoja monarchų paveiksai. Aprašydamas Johannesas Magnusas, regis, itin mėgsta pasitelkti gyvūnų paveikslus: pateikiama aiški nuoroda į konkrečius gyvūnus, pvz., liūtus ir kiškius, arba akivaizdžiai implikuojama tam tikru gyvūnų elgesio aprašu, pavyzdžiui, pasakojimas, kaip tironai dantimis drasko savo žmones, orientuoja į natūralų plėšrūno (liūto ar tigro etc.) elgesį.

Monarchus siedamas su konkrečiais gyvūnais, Johannesas pasitelkia skirtingus šių gyvūnų bruožus, pavyzdžiui, liūtą pateikia kaip pavyzdį ir gero karaliaus, ir tirono aprašymuose. Sakoma, kad VII a. karalius Gostagas (tironas) ir karalius Artas (puikus karalius) valdė išsyk vienas po kito. Jie aprašomi kaip visiškos priešingybės ir tam tikslui Johannesas pasitelkia skirtingas galimas sąsajas su liūtais: šie gyvūnai gali būti drąsūs ir didingi, tikri gyvūnų karalijos valdovai, arba žiaurūs ir pavojingi, puolantys ir pražudantys nekaltus žmones.

Numanomos ir kai kurių nuorodų į gyvūnus sąsajos su to meto itin tvirta dorybių ir ydų hierarchija: gyvūnų paveiksai simbolizuoja atitinkamas dorybes ar ydas. Taip kuriama sąsaja su religija – ypatingos svarbos klausimu Reformacijos epochoje, kuomet gyveno Johannesas. Aprašydamas karalius, Johannesas kuria beveik apokaliptinio masto kovos tarp gėrio ir blogio įspūdį: gerus karalius ir tironus jis implikuoja kaip skirtingų kovojančių pusių atstovus ir tai perteikia pasitelkdamas kelių gerai žinomų gyvūnų ir įvairių su jais susijusių konotacijų kontrastą.

Gauta: 2017-09-21

Priimta publikuoti: 2017-12-04

Autorės adresas:

Astrid M. H. Nilsson
Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University
Box 201, SE-221 01 Lund, Sweden
El. paštas astrid.nilsson@klass.lu.se