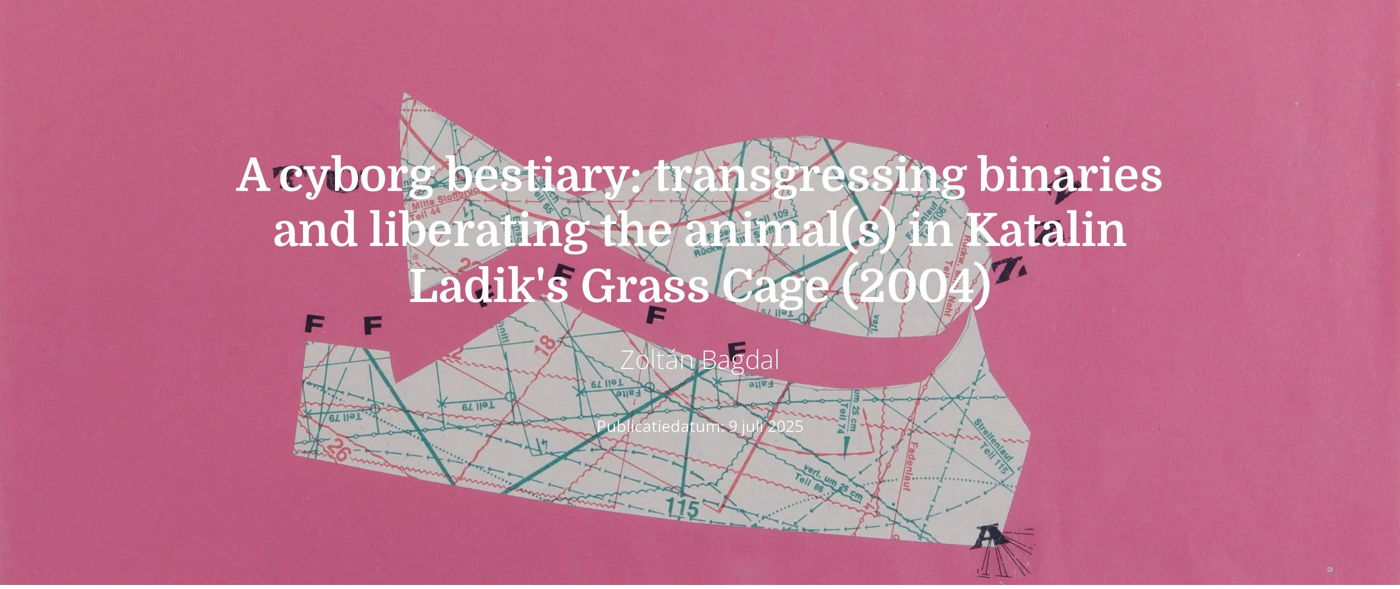

A cyborg bestiary: transgressing binaries and liberating the animal(s) in Katalin Ladik's Grass Cage (2004)

Zoltán Bagdal

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Abstract

The poetry volume *Grass Cage* (Fűketrec) by Katalin Ladik, a Yugoslavian-Hungarian poet, actress, and performance artist, reassesses multiple philosophical concepts related to the human and the nonhuman. The poet uses the traditional proto-scientific, theological, and didactic connotations of the bestiary to explore the potential of literary form. Theoretically grounded in Antonio Gramsci's widely applicable definition of ideology and Donna J. Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, this paper examines how *Grass Cage* as a literary work violates the 'traditional rulebook' of the bestiary, creating a work of art that is horizontally democratized. It demonstrates how Ladik twists the concept of the bestiary in a typically postmodern fashion, inverting the direction of the proto-scientific examination, thus revealing a rampant world inside the (lyrical) subject while constantly blurring the lines between subject and object.

keywords: Katalin Ladik, *Grass Cage*, poetry, postmodernism, posthumanism, animal studies, cyborg, ideology, implicit ideology, bestiary

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Grass Cage is a poetry volume by Katalin Ladik that thematizes human-animal relations from its starting point of the bestiary, which is also the subtitle of the original Hungarian edition. In her foreword, Ladik suggests a direction of potential interpretation within a human/nonhuman framework. This framework is evident throughout the sprawling volume, which I cannot discuss in its entirety in this article. I will therefore focus on only a small selection of the poems.

Historically, the bestiary can be conceptualized as a literary genre that on the one hand made a proto-scientific attempt to categorize and classify animals, yet on the other hand functioned as a – in a theological sense – collection of didactic and moralistic lectures. Covering domestic animals (cats, dogs), animals that were seen as exotic at the time (tigers, elephants), and fantastic and imaginary beasts (griffins, unicorns), bestiaries collected and structured the entire animal kingdom. This genre was not devoid of ideology. For example, the *Physiologus*, a Greek text from the second century AD that is often referred to as one of the first bestiaries, contained obvious Christian references and symbolism: the fox was "[s]pecifically described as a symbol of the devil." [1] Bestiaries were therefore based on a vertical power structure with God at the top, humans in the middle (as they were created in God's image), and animals at the bottom. As written in the Bible, God granted humans dominion over the animal kingdom. [2]

In bestiaries, this power structure manifested itself as a reductive view of animals. This is the reason I use the term 'proto-scientific' to describe these bestiaries: they have a tenuous connection to what we would consider scientific today. The didaxis and moralization, combined with the symbolification, instrumentalization, allegorization, and anthropomorphization of animals, establishes the convention in which animals are used to impart moral lessons. In other words, animals were humanized by humans for their own purposes, reducing them to useful and symbolic objects of anthropomorphization.

Based on the extremely widely applicable Gramscian notion of ideology, a Marxist framework of art as an inherently – and often implicitly – ideological practice can be constructed. From this starting point, I will position *Grass Cage* in the tradition of the bestiary, highlighting the ways in which it subverts this literary genre. After locating these strategies of subversion, I will build on Donna J. Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* to reveal how Ladik's poetry aligns with, or differs from, the concept of the *cyborg*, making apparent the more concrete ideological stakes of *Grass Cage*, such as the rejection of Cartesian dualism, the binarity of subject-object relations, anthropocentrism, and human exceptionalism. While medieval bestiaries reinforced and recreated narratives of human exceptionalism through the symbolization and instrumentalization of animals via didaxis, *Grass Cage* resists such ideologies.

Below, I will argue that *Grass Cage* presents an alternative to these ideologies by producing a radically horizontal and widely democratic piece of art. Through close readings of the selected poems, I demonstrate how Ladik's boundary-crossing poetics simultaneously plays into and surpasses eco-critical and feminist-materialist critiques of anthropocentrism within a broader posthumanist discourse.

Katalin Ladik: An Introduction

Katalin Ladik is a Yugoslavian-Hungarian poet, actress, visual artist, sound-poet, performance artist, and the author of multiple experimental sound and theatre works. She was one of the first contributors to *New Symposion* [Új Symposion], a Yugoslavian journal of art, literature, and philosophy. Due to its immensely diverse nature, her oeuvre defies categorization. It expands into multiple genres and media, yet it also constitutes an investigation of the limits – and oftentimes the limitlessness, a permanent expansion – of poetry.

Ladik was born in 1945 in Novi Sad – then Yugoslavia, now Serbia – into an impoverished family of day laborers. By the age of eleven, she was already working as a child actress in radio dramas and had started writing her first poems. [3] After publishing her first literary works in journals as a child, Ladik studied export trade in high school. Upon graduating, she was faced with a decision: pursue a stable career to support herself and her family, or embrace uncertainty by becoming an artist. [4] In her words: "[I] had enough self-criticism to know that I did not want to be 'just' an actress or a poet; if I was not going to be exceptional, I would rather choose a 'normal' profession in which mediocrity would be sufficient." [5]

There were two key moments in Ladik's biography that had a strong influence on how she was received. The first occurred in 1970, when she read some of her poems alongside the Hungarian poet Jenő Balaskó at a community center in Budapest. This performance transitioned from a traditional reading into sound poetry, eventually breaking down into fragmented sonic expressions. Contemporary Hungarian critics evaluated the performance not on aesthetic or literary grounds, but focused instead on Ladik's clothing and accessories: she wore a shamanic bear-fur outfit exposing one of her breasts, as well as a leather drum and a bagpipe. Using her body as a medium violated the (often implicit) artistic and critical norms of the period regarding the role and socio-cultural position of the poet. [6] In retrospect, we can say that this resulted in stigmatization, since Ladik was branded as "the naked poetess" in the Hungarian press, a nickname that was later adopted by the international media as well. At the arts faculties of Hungarian universities, Ladik was frequently cited as a cautionary example of the "avant-garde-isms." [7]

The second pivotal moment came in 2016, when Ladik received the LennonOno Grant for Peace. Because of this acknowledgment, there has been an exponential increase in academic and media interest in her work, particularly its visual and performative aspects. It seems that the "naked poetess" moniker, combined with the media's negative reaction to her 1970 performance, significantly shaped and changed how Ladik and her work have been received. The more macro-level tendency in Hungarian societal discourse(s) to either ignore or erase the (neo-)avant-garde from art historical narratives also played a role in this. Consequently, there are relatively few academic studies on her poetry and broader oeuvre.

TRANZIT
ZOON

Katalin Ladik: Tranzit Zoon, 2015 in Eger, Hungary, performance photo-documentation, photographed by: Lajos Vígh, courtesy of Katalin Ladik.

The Diffusion of Inner Coherence

Conventionally, bestiaries are viewed as quasi-scientific encyclopedias containing factual as well as fantastical information detailing and classifying nature and its creatures. But bestiaries should not be viewed merely as proto-scientific attempts to describe the outside world or the Othe, as this would also involve projecting contemporary concepts of science and knowledge onto past epistemologies. An equally reductive approach would be to interpret bestiaries strictly as “didactic Christian allegories” [8] or moral lessons. The fact that these texts are not always factual does not preclude a literary reading of their contents. Schenstead-Harris notes that this reductive interpretation treats both the “human” and the “animal” (or the Other) one-dimensionally and in a utilitarian manner. [9] Bestiaries therefore inherently contain inner tensions regarding their potential interpretations. They function as proto-scientific collections of categorized animals while simultaneously serving as vehicles for Christian moral teachings.

Nevertheless, Schenstead-Harris hypothesizes that not even the medieval readers of the genre believed that everything in a bestiary was incontrovertibly true. The bestiary as a literary genre is not a monolith, but rather allows for heterodox streams of interpretation, incorporating its own inner conflicts. For Ladik, this field of tension became the starting point, the conceptual foundation of *Grass Cage*. (Proto-)zoology, ecology, situating knowledge(s), allegory, Christian didactics, and even their antitheses are mingled into what Schenstead-Harris calls – using Angus Fletcher’s term – a “diffusion of inner coherence." [10] Yet the vertical power structure of the genre is persistent and undisturbed: animals are not merely *animals*, they are humanized creatures used specially for human purposes or, in other words, for cultural capital. This suggests that the *diffusion of inner coherence*, along with the bountiful functions and purposes of the bestiary, and its secure, unreflective embedding within anthropocentric thought, contribute to why bestiaries have been reinterpreted and deconstructed by postmodern authors. Notable examples include Umberto Eco’s *The Book of Legendary Lands* (2013), Jacques Roubaud’s *Bestiaire imaginaire* (1982), and Jorge Luis Borges’ *Book of Imaginary Beings* (1957).

In *Grass Cage*, Katalin Ladik gets to the core of this diffusion, playing with the above-mentioned connotations and potential functions of the bestiary as a genre, subverting previous attitudes. Instead of observing and cataloguing the Other, Ladik turns inward, practicing a form of introspection that shatters the (lyrical) self into constellations of minuscule fragments. This introspection’s locality is not outside of the subject, but thoroughly embedded in it. This is arguably *Grass Cage’s* primary artistic method or technique: finding the Other in the self, the subject, and through the quasi-role(play) in the poems, [11] (partly) losing the subject while revealing previously unknown aspects of the self. Ladik subverts the expected direction of observation and accumulating knowledge, situating the genre of the bestiary into an utterly postmodern playing field, reassessing its historical tradition.

The Outlines: Ladik’s Foreword and the Ideological Stakes

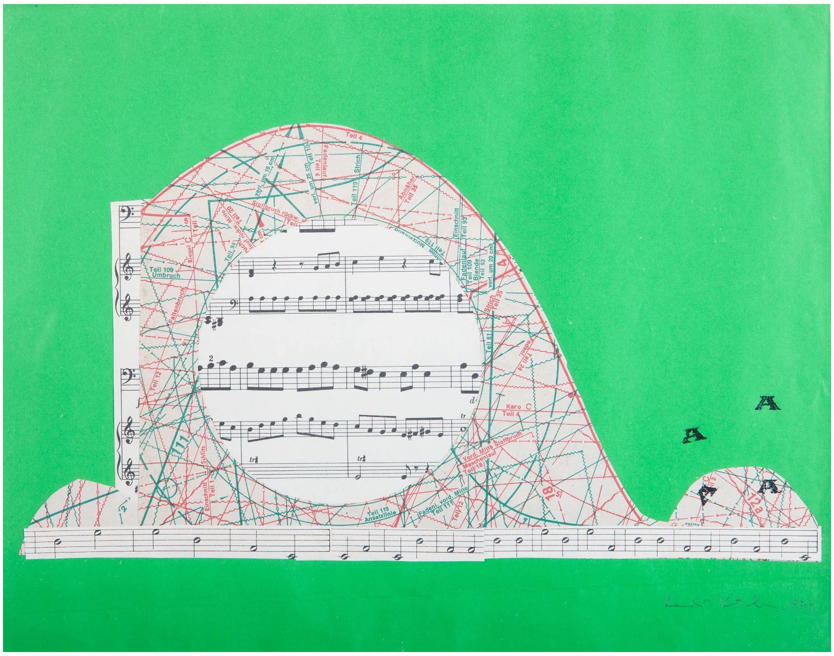
Published in 2004 by Mikes International in The Hague, *Grass Cage* [Fűketrec] contains more than a hundred new and selected poems. The first pages of the book lay the foundation for future analysis in a short foreword written by Ladik herself:

> The book includes selected and new ‘animal poems.’ I could say that they are quasi-‘human,’ if this qualifier wasn’t overly depressing, although I often present the likelihood of a more serene ‘human’ existence. How do those beings that we call ‘animals’ feel the ‘human’ in themselves, and when they reside in our bodies, how do we experience them? Shall we get another chance to coexist harmoniously with the being that suffers us inside the animal? The solace: the order of nature, its justice and transience. The grass cage: one’s breathing in itself in the light of transience. [12]

With this foreword, Ladik crucially thematizes the complex structures and the long-standing demarcation lines of what is and what could be considered ‘human’ and ‘animal.’ Each word or phrase that refers to this particular domain is in quotation marks: *animal poems*, *animals*, *human*. This potentially indicates some amount of skepticism and uncertainty towards the contemporary usage of these terms. It is essential to note that the word *beings* is not presented in quotation marks, foreshadowing the radical democratization and egalitarianism that are omnipresent in the book. This seems to suggest that *being(s)* is the only appropriate term for addressing the animal(s) – the Other.

Although there are many ways to define ideology, this paper is going to use Antonio Gramsci’s definition, because it stretches the context and offers wide applicability. According to Gramsci, “[i]deology is a worldview that is implicitly expressed in art, law, economic activity, all individual and collective life-manifestations.” [13] Gramsci’s notion of ideology and Donna Haraway’s amalgamation of “meaningful political action” and “text” [14] in *A Cyborg Manifesto* are used together to reveal that poetry can be read as ideology, and that it unquestionably carries beliefs and concepts about the world. Using Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* allows me to place emphasis on the erasure of fixed identity categories, anti-essentialism, and the violation of beloved and precious dualities. The demarcation line between human and machine is not a theme in *Grass Cage*. Nature-culture, natural-artificial, human-nonhuman, fact-fiction, subject-object, and self-other are dualisms that Ladik radically disrupts in her book.

Below, I will analyze several poems from the book *Ladik Katalin: Poems*, which includes multiple poems from *Grass Cage. Poems* was published by the Miloš Crnjanski Cultural Center of Vojvodina in 2021 and contains selected English translations of Ladik’s poems, written by multiple translators. Rather than citing extensively from Haraway’s manifesto, this paper – for reasons of space – will demonstrate the kinship between the two authors through a close reading of the selected poems. I argue that both Ladik and Haraway engage in the deconstruction of essentialism(s), albeit through different strategies. Whereas Haraway reassesses the demarcation lines between humans and machines, Ladik explores the uncertainties (and analogies) surrounding the human, animal, and object. Thus, Ladik erases the boundaries between the self and the other, dismantling the remnants of human privilege in ontological and epistemological terms. Haraway’s theory hybridizes, while Ladik’s poetry dissolves safety nets, resulting in the flattening of ontology and epistemology, and implying that the bestiary as a literary form – carrying its historical sediments – crucially needs to be subjected to that act of flattening.



Bannerafbeelding: Katalin Ladik: Snail-aria, 1979, collage score, courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb Gallery (Budapest).

Subject-Object Relations in the Mirror Image of an Amorous Leech

The first poem I will analyze is “A Poem on an Amorous Leech,” as it could easily be considered paradigmatic in terms of this paper’s theoretical apparatus, especially concerning the radical fluidity of subject-object relations:

A Poem on an Amorous Leech
(Vers a szerelmes piócáról)

I have got a big yellow plate.

(There is) a hole in the middle of the plate.
Through the hole my amorous leech
frequently calls on me at the time of full moon.
As I have got a big yellow leech.
(There is) a hole in the middle of the leech.
Thousand wasps call on there
a quince-branch at the time of big plates.
And the black hole
that the big yellow plate calls on
with the singing leech in its middle.

the song of the amorous leech:
thousand wasps are in my throat
a quince-branch is in my croup
a burning goat in the bush [15]

The poem's primary technique appears to be a constant zooming, repeatedly shuffling motifs that carry erotic meanings. It destabilizes the probability of comprehension: no fixed roles or essentialist attributes manifest here, yet we are faced with empty spaces that are occupied and reoccupied by the plate, then the leech, and by any animal, plant, or inanimate object that disrupts the meaning of these spaces. Like bestiaries that assigned fixed attributes and stable meanings to animals, these archetypal empty spaces are not defined by fixed meaning(s), but by the permanent possibility of new interpretations. Accordingly, the poem is an ontological and epistemological attack on the bestiary, especially in terms of the situating knowledge. Neither *Grass Cage* nor the poem shows a (pre)determined attachment between the role and who or what fills it, based on what agencies and attributes. In other words, the poem does not lexically translate, nor does it describe or assign any fixed category to the leech, like a bestiary would.

Initially, the poem uses techniques reminiscent of surrealist-symbolist [16] – or automatic writing – practices, but the fifth line breaks and complicates the text. Although the first few lines already seem rather incidental and dream-like, this is the point where any 'coherence' that has been built up starts to *diffuse*. Because the title of the poem limits the domain of potential interpretation by assigning the *amorous* qualifier to the *leech*, the course of interpretation related to multiple phrases in the poem starts to clarify things: the poetic images of the *plate*, the *full moon, hole(s)*, and the *leech* could be read as outright erotic and blithe. But diffusion and tension can be grasped structurally after the line break: reason-effect, subject-object, subject-predicate, and active-passive roles are all inverted and become fluid, interchangeable positions instead of fixed and permanent ones. What in the first four lines was the plate's attribute swiftly becomes the leech's, and wasps appear to take on the leech's role from two lines before. The time of the full moon turns into the time of the big yellow plate, simultaneously deconstructing, replacing, and connecting the poetic images, as the seemingly incidental hole(s), the full moon, and the plate become entirely interchangeable. This implies that the former categories are not essentially present; they are revealed to be constructs rather than inherent categories.

Structurally, the poem acts like an object in front of a mirror: the six lines that follow the four opening lines could be described as their warped and distorted mirror image. In terms of idiomatic and syntactical attributes, the 'original' and the 'mirror image' are syntactically similar, but in terms of imagery, they are dissonant. Due to this mutation of the imagery, the repetition is obscured. János Samu connects Ladik's writing style to surrealism and dadaism, but despite the fact that Ladik tendentiously uses automatic writing, signs of conscious, strict, and reflexive ambition for composition can be located all over Ladik's oeuvre. [17] Regarding the poem's last stanza, Samu's paper notes a typical Ladikian feature, namely an "epigram-like ending sentence or line" [18] that usually recontextualizes and reinterprets the entire poem. In this case, this recontextualization is brought about by the last stanza, which can be interpreted as a 'poem within the poem,' as if it was brought to life by the leech itself. Two options come to mind: either the leech is 'reappearing,' turning from one of the poem's objects into its speaker/subject, or the (lyrical) subject becomes a vessel for the leech, narrating its perspective. This abrupt change nevertheless changes the poem's meaning, affecting its entire body.

Merging the Domestic with the Ethereal

"The Bat" also uses the aforementioned "epigram-like ending sentence or line," though it employs the device differently:

The Bat
(Denevér)

The sky is a black hot plate.
White moon and a dark sun stretched out on flaming wire

The bat is falling towards a growing hole,
leaving three fat stars behind,
one white and one dark-blue crescent moon.

The dense net of wires rustles,
the bat heaves against my window,
the hot plate hooked into my circulation,
gets fiery and widens,
entangles the cosmonaut. [19]

The first stanza employs elementary, astronomical, and cosmic imagery, such as *sky*, *moon*, *sun*, *flames*, and *stars*. Although the text uses nocturnal references (the moon, stars), it also includes a few canonical or historical symbolic associations, thus leaving the imagery more open-ended. I also have to note – although I would rather not philologize – that in the original Hungarian version of the poem, the first line does not include the word plate. Instead, Ladik uses the idiomatic equivalent of the word cooker or stove. The poem blurs the boundaries between distinct ontological spheres, mixing the sublime astronomical and ethereal imagery with the homely nearby. Thus, it merges – an observation that holds true for *Grass Cage* as a whole – existential stakes with elements that may initially appear minor or insignificant, namely the various living beings (and, at times unexpectedly, inanimate entities) that remain continuously subjected to these existential conditions beyond the scope of their agency. Returning to the closing sentence, the *cosmonaut* might be easily explained by referring to the use of other astronomical images, but it once again destabilizes the subject-object relations of the text. Could the lyrical self be the one who conjoins the hot plate's circulation and the cosmonaut? Or might the bat be the subject that is the cosmonaut? "The Bat" is an example of how empowering the animal with excess agency deconstructs the potential of reading the poem through the lens of human exceptionalism.

The poem titled "The Time Chameleon" further shows how one of the main focuses of *Grass Cage* is combining the existential with the personal through the quasi-scientific methodology of the bestiary as a literary form:

The Time Chameleon
(Időkaméleon)

In the cosmic snowfall
it has left its beak behind. A hardly perceptible stir of it
may cause new worlds to come into being.
As it is just flying out through the window
and shivering.
It will never more find the way back into its
shining cold bones. [20]

With its resemblance to the fantastical creatures of the bestiaries, the titular time chameleon seems quite unnatural and mystical. In the first sentence of the poem, it is described as having a beak, a feature not commonly found in chameleons or other reptiles; yet again we are faced with a creature that deceives us. The second sentence renders the time chameleon stranger still, as it is able to create new worlds with just a simple movement, meaning that the object of the poem is definitely mixed in terms of its bodily attributes, but it is also a quasi-transcendental, nearly omnipotent being able to effortlessly give birth to entire worlds. This generative power emphasizes the singular and quasi-divine abilities of the poem's object. Paradoxically, however, the time chameleon is not able to regain either its beak or its cold bones, meaning that its god-like capabilities potentially have certain limits.

Radical Horizontality and Cyborg Feminism in *Grass Cage*

In the poems cited so far, unclear subject-object relations, unexpected renditions of mystical animals, and substantive endings that recontextualize the texts have unraveled. Through unstable, shifting agencies and roles, the lyrical subject and the animal are allowed to horizontally coexist. But before I continue, I would like to touch on the ideological weight of *Grass Cage*. The implicit ideology that can be located in this volume of poetry raises the question: how would our world operate, and how would it be different, if it were to be rearranged based on the worldview set out in these poems? In *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway writes:

> A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed 'women's

> experience', as well as undiscovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and a fact of the most crucial, political kind. […] This is a struggle between life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. [21]

Grass Cage lacks any sort of coherent hierarchy, or differences between non-identical forms of life; demarcation lines between the human and the animal therefore seem to disappear. From time to time, even plants join this utopic vision, and inanimate objects are able to feel or catalyze human emotions. The lyrical subject unproblematically acts as if it were an animal, speaks like an animal, or turns into a plant. Animals speak in human-like registers, carry out actions that they otherwise could not, and become narrators themselves. Ladik's book does not adhere to a narrow or reductionist interpretation of what can be thought of as a *cyborg*, even if it does not necessarily engage with (contemporary) technology. *Grass Cage* unveils our – often essentialist – divisions as human-made and time-specific, revealing the disruptive potential inherent to the ability to replace these constructs. In this sense, it is akin to Haraway's concept of the cyborg, but while Ladik focuses on the human-animal and the human-nonhuman, Haraway's work deals with the binaries of man-woman, natural-technological, and human-machine.

I will end with two poems that illustrate the above statements:

This Season: Dresser
(Ez az évszak: szekrény)

This dresser is dark, brown and wet
as if it were a woman, laughs.
The pleasure in it is deep and cutting,
Is this the work of insects?

My silk blouse is bloody,
spiders are crawling out of me,
the silence inside is repulsive. [22]

"This Season: Dresser" also exemplifies the mixing of the homely (dresser) with something more massive, in this case the lawfulness of nature and its cyclicality. The dresser from the first two lines soon gains a human ability: it laughs – in a gender-specific way, "as if it were a woman." Although the next line suggests that it is also able to feel with an intensity that can transform delight to anguish, the last line of the stanza twists the concept one more time when the agent behind this experience is revealed to be insects. The poem's animals and inanimate objects receive wondrous new skills, attributes, and capabilities, and there is no formal or logical explanation of how these new capabilities intertwine; they emerge in unexpected and nonlinear ways. The final stanza starts with another feminine, yet violent image, as new creatures appear, and the ending of the poem overshadows the text as a whole, covering it like a dark cloud, recontextualizing the womanly laughter from the first stanza.

The next poem is an emblematic example of how the ideology of *Grass Cage* is often more radical than Haraway's. To clarify, by "more radical" I mean that while Haraway works within the feminist-materialist framework of posthumanism, Ladik's approach exemplifies a cosmic-ethereal posthumanism. While the former involves hybridization, the latter frequently dissolves binaries and demarcation lines:

Neither Swallow, the Odor, as if it's the Birds
(Sem fecske, szaga, mint a madáré)

Neither swallow, the scent is the uplifting dawn
in the morning heat, the whiff of freshly cut grass, enters
me,
forces in Lilith, Amalia
tells stories of the flying doorknob. [23]

The negation in the first line looks multiplicative, as it is not grammatically grounded. The freshly cut grass in the second line plays a crucial role at the end of the poem, when it is intensively anthropomorphized. Because of the title, we might suspect a lyrical self that might be somewhat bird-like, but that resemblance is limited to its smell. The hypothesis of the lyrical self being bird-like becomes increasingly complex if we take into consideration that it being a swallow is unlikely, meaning that some aspects of it appear bird-like, yet a degree of skepticism is indeed valid. The anthropomorphization of the freshly cut grass occurs through its relationship with the lyrical self: it is able to tell stories and to summon mythological figures, accessing abilities that are quite unusual for plants. Thus, the plant morphs into something much more human-like, and the inanimate object (the doorknob) is animalized through its ability to fly, while the lyrical self/speaker stays hidden and undecipherable.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed bestiaries and their historical functions, interpretations, and connotations, placing Ladik and *Grass Cage* within – and simultaneously outside, while still incorporating the genre's diffusion of inner coherence – that tradition. I have also highlighted how the situatedness of knowledge of bestiaries is reassessed by how Ladik disrupts fixed categories and roles, flattening the hierarchy of God, humankind, and beasts. Through the Gramscian notion of ideology, and reading Ladik's work in conjunction with Haraway's theoretical work, the ideological stakes of her poems are revealed, interpreting all "life-manifestations" (Gramsci) as inherently (and often implicitly) ideological. Despite all the similarities discussed in this paper, Haraway is arguably more materialist than Ladik; some poems in *Grass Cage* go further than Haraway's critique by erasing, rather than destabilizing, demarcation lines. Whereas Ladik's posthuman thought is ethereal-feminist, Haraway's is feminist-materialist. Disrupting the preconceived boundaries between humans, other species, and objects while interchanging subject and object, Ladik erases everything that could resemble previous power structures. By connecting to and rewriting the bestiary as a literary genre, she sabotages stable and dogmatic ontologies and epistemologies. Within this 21st-century bestiary, old hierarchies, human exceptionalism, and anthropocentrism all collapse.

Bannerafbeelding: Katalin Ladik: Feinschmecker, 1975, collage score, courtesy of Katalin Ladik and acb Gallery (Budapest).

Notes

[1] Ron Baxter, 'Learning from Nature: Lessons in Virtue and Vice in the *Physiologus* and Bestiaries', in: C. Hourihane (ed.), *Virtue and Vice. The Personifications in the Index of Christian Art*, Princeton 2000: 29-41.
[2] "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" – Genesis 1: 27-28, New International Version of the Bible via https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Mose%201%3A27-28%2CGenesis%201%3A27-28&version=LUTH1545;NIV;KJV
[3] Lajos Jánossy et al., 'Ladik Katalin: It's All Alchemy' [Az egész alkímia], *Litera*, November 25, 2017, https://litera.hu/magazin/interju/nagyvizit-ladik-katalinnal-i.html.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Cf. Emese Kürti, *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik*, acb galery, Budapest 2017: 52-68.
[7] Róbert Alföldi, 'I became the naked poetess: Róbert Alföldi's interview with Katalin Ladik', [Én lettem a meztelen költőnő: Alföldi Róbert interjúja Ladik Katalinnal], August 10, 2016, via https://index.hu/kultur/2016/10/08/en_lettem_a_meztelen_koltono/
[8] Leif Schenstead-Harris, 'Beasts About Us: T.H. White, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Nerruda and a Poetics of the Contemporary Bestiary', 2011, n.p., https://www.academia.edu/5150689/Beasts_About_Us_T_H_White_Jorge_Luis_Borges_Pablo_Neruda_and_a_Poetics_of_the_Contemporary_Bestiary, p.4.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., p.7.
[11 I call these poems "quasi-role poems" or "quasi-role(play) poems" because the question of who speaks is invariably problematic. Of course it would be reductionist to say that the speaker is Katalin Ladik (as a private individual), but is Ladik as an artist (lyrical self) talking? Is the lyrical self (and its attributes, capabilities, characteristics) ever fixed in *Grass Cage*? My answer would be no, these things are always moldable, thoroughly difficult to grasp and decipher: we never know who or what is talking; all we know is that they can provide information through the texts.[12] Katalin Ladik, *Grass Cage* [Fűketrec], The Hague, Mikes International 2003: IX. (translated by this paper's author). Via https://mek.oszk.hu/01300/01328/01328.html.
[13] Antonio Gramsci, *Philosophical Writings* [Filozófiai írások], 1970, Kossuth Kiadó, Budapest: 50.
[14] Donna J. Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 2(4), 1987, 1-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1987.9961538.
[15] Katalin Ladik, *Poems*, Miloš Crnjanski Cultural Center of Vojvodina, Novi Sad 2021: 86.
[16] Bringing forward surrealism is problematic in this case, namely for two reasons. First, there is not enough space to analyze the role of surrealism in Ladik's poetry. Second, after the Second World War, there was an art movement called *folk-surrealism*, whose historical and political analysis would go beyond the scope of this study.
[17] János Samu, *Poems Left Open (The Classicism of Katalin Ladik)* [Nyitva hagyott versek (Ladik Katalin klasszicizmusa)], in: Tudástérkép, Vojvodinian-Hungarian Academic Council, Novi Sad 2014: 28.
[18] Ibid.: 30.
[19] Ladik: *Poems*: 50.
[20] Ibid.: 90.
[21] Haraway 1987: 65-66.
[22] Ladik, *Poems*: 63.
[23] Ibid.: 57.

Over de auteur

Zoltán Bagdal was born in 2001 in Senta, Yugoslavia, a city that is now part of Serbia. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from ELTE (Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest, Hungary) in 2024, and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Aesthetics at the same institution. Bagdal is a poet and a self-proclaimed noise musician. His undergraduate thesis was entitled "The Bestiary of Katalin Ladik: Crossing the Borders between Human and Animal States of Existence in the Poetry Volume *Grass Cage*," insights from which are combined in this paper with a close reading of several English translations of poems written by Katalin Ladik.

Zoltán Bagdal, 'A cyborg bestiary: transgressing binaries and liberating the animal(s) in Katalin Ladik's Grass Cage (2004)', *Locus Scholarly Journal* 28 (2025). https://edu.nl/4rhhw

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locus@ou.n