A LITTLE LIKE US. A PIG’S TALE
By Kristoffer Hatteland Endresen

What's up with the pig?

Not only is it the animal we have eaten the most in the world for the last fifty years. The pig has been an invaluable model for the human body throughout the history of medical science. This reveals an important truth: Pigs and humans are often astonishingly similar. Or as Winston Churchill put it: “Dogs look up to us, cats look down on us. Give me a pig! He looks you in the eye and treats you as an equal.”

Yet the story of the pig is essentially a story of contempt.

Long before the religious scriptures forbade Jews and Muslims to eat pork, the pig had become an outcast in the Middle East. Jesus was no big fan either. He was the one who raised the lamb to the symbol of innocence, while at the same time reducing the pig to the animals of the demons. There may be deposits of this old dislike that are still left in our everyday language, where the pig is and will be a bright living metaphor for the dirty, ugly, shameful and sinful.

You know you did something wrong if someone shouted "pig" at you in the street. "Swine" is not so positive either, it is often the result of accumulated sins throughout a lifetime. This is how we can continue for a while, and everything is part of a thousand of years of demoralization of the species *sus scrofa domesticus.*

About 2,000 years after Jesus caused a herd of pigs to plunge down a cliff in collective suicide, just under one billion pigs live in the world. In many countries there are more pigs than there are humans. This is also the case on Jæren, on Norway's southwest coast. Yet no one sees them, for the pig is a captive, well hidden from the eyes of mankind.

In the pig farms, the pig lives a cramped and passive life, surrounded by steel and concrete. Because as many have pointed out, the pig is still an underrated animal in our agriculture. The reports from the Norwegian control authority for animal welfare and food safety testify to the same thing: Nowhere are the conditions as serious as in the pig industry.

This is paradoxical, basically. For, as George Orwell said, in the novel Animal Farm: The pig is "generally recognized as being the cleverest of animals". Recent research on animal behavior emphasizes the same thing: The intelligence of the pig is unsurpassed among our domestic animals. They can outcompete dogs and rival chimpanzees in primitive video games. They recognize themselves in a mirror, and they seek social interaction with humans in the same way that our pets do. So, what really separates a household animal from a pet? Of course, it is just language and social constructions all together.

In the hunt for the animal he loves to eat, Kristoffer Hatteland Endresen has taken a job in an industrial pig farm on Jæren. There he follows a litter of pigs from birth to slaughter, while he tries to get to the bottom of the pig's being and mysteries. He learns about cleaning, feeding routines and insemination of sows. Meanwhile, the pigs are growing and the work is getting heavier. Together, *A Little Like Us* has become a story about science, cultural history, food and morality. An exploration of boundaries between humans and animals, and an attempt to get to the bottom of a question that is driving more and more of us: Is it possible to maintain dignity as an industrial meat eater in a world where one's morals are increasingly judged by what one puts in the mouth?