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## Secrets of Universal Reading. The Moomin Books by Tove Jansson from the Perspective of Implied Reader and Literary Response

Tove Jansson's Moomin books are generally perceived as major works in the history of Scandinavian children's literature. The first novel of the nine-volume series, *The Moomins and the Great Flood*, from 1945, is considered, together with the literary debuts of Astrid Lindgren and Lennart Hellsing, a breakthrough of modern children's books (Westin 1999: 24-31).<sup>1</sup> In this article I revisit Jansson's works from the perspective of an implied reader and literary response and with a focus on philosophical intertexts. A theoretical overview at the beginning introduces the notion of two or even multiple simultaneous voices, as the observation that children's literature implies more complex interpretations addressed in fact to adult readers has accompanied literary studies for a few decades. In spite of the fact that the Moomin series is broadly perceived as children's literature with a successively growing adult readership, I attempt to show that the multiple mode of address already characterises Jansson's second, and third books, *Comet in Moominland* (Jansson 2011a, = CIM) and *Finn Family Moomintroll* (Jansson 1990, = FFM) respectively, which comprise intertexts available to more experienced readers. Using the comparative method I demonstrate that the characterisation in these books alludes to readings of Oswald Spengler and Henri Bergson. Next, with reference to Norman Holland's theory of the dynamics of literary response, I posit another potential explanation for the Moomins' global popularity, based on his theory of suspension of disbelief and gratifying introjection of a phantasy embodied in the book.

The implied child reader was a clear, distinctive and satisfactory quality of children's literature before it started to build its own theory. But with time, within the academic discourse there appeared a new reflection about a double or even multiple address revealing that children's books appealed to another, implicit and immanent addressee: the adult. Many approaches arose around this observation; for example, Zohar Shavit presented the notion of *ambivalent texts*, by which she means "texts that synchronically (yet dynamically, not statically) maintain an ambivalent status in the literary polysystem. These texts belong simultaneously to more than one system and consequently are read differently (though concurrently) by at least two groups of readers" (Shavit 1986: 66). According to the Israeli scholar, by addressing a book to children and adults, and pretending that it is only for children, writers can expect its acceptance.

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<sup>1</sup> Since then the Moomins have become a world-wide phenomenon with translations into over forty languages. In this article I focus only on the literary aspect of the Moomins, though the literature opened the way to their broader cultural success.

A different perspective is presented by Barbara Wall, who analyses the narrative voice, proposing a triple typology that has become popular within the study of children's literature. As she argues, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the category of *a single address* gave way to a *double address*, and understanding the difference between these two forms of appeal is of great importance, as it implies the departure of an adult narrative voice and its replacement with a voice genuinely concerned with child readers: "The adult teller with whom adult readers had comfortably identified had disappeared and a teller committed to pleasing child readers regardless of what other adults might think had emerged instead" (Wall 1991: 147). The third category, *a dual address*, is a fusion of the two previous ones (Wall 1991: 9).

The Danish researcher, Torben Weinreich, presents a view similar to that of Zohar Shavit but without any evaluations concerning literary status. In his opinion, though children's literature transmits on one channel, which proves the identity of the work, it does not exclude the possibility of many levels of meaning and consequently a diversified readership:

When a work is read with profit by an adult it – to keep to the channel imagery – can be because adults can receive in two channels, an adult and a child's channel. The adult carries the child within him, perhaps the child or the idea of the child that the respective adult was once, and who in reality actualises the text. The adult casual reader is thereby also a type of nostalgic reader. However, the nostalgia is not tied to a specific work but to a more general children's universe and a children's literary universe. (Weinreich 2000: 101.)

Another approach proposed by Emer O'Sullivan, questions Wall's model and objects to ascribing the address to age categories. The scholar suggests instead many modes of reading, conditioned by relative factors, and replaces unequivocal taxonomies with the notion of *a multiple address*:

More appropriate to the description or analysis of inscribed readers or addressees would be rather a sliding scale rather than two poles. It would therefore seem preferable to speak about multiple address, which of course includes double and dual address. Premature identification of the nature of the address in a text also ignores the fact that there are various 'adult' ways of readings children's literature. An adult may read aloud, read on behalf of the child, or read children's books for their own sake, as if they were peer readers. (O'Sullivan 2005: 16.)

Similarly, Perry Nodelman disputes clear-cut divisions into two radically different addressees, children and adults, and proposes a new perspective. In his opinion children's books imply "a more complex shadow text – one reader can access by reading the actual simple text in the context of the repertoire of previously existing knowledge about life and literature" (Nodelman 2008: 77). This more difficult, subtle layer of meanings is hidden under a primary one and seems to be a distinctive quality of children's literature. Hence there are two sets of perceptions,

a simpler one and a more complex one, traditionally associated with an implied child and an implied adult reader. “But there is no reason to ignore another possibility: that the single implied reader of these texts, whether a child or an adult, is expected to experience a double awareness of the events described, seeing them simultaneously or, perhaps, in turn, in both ‘childlike’ and ‘non-childlike’ ways” (Nodelman 2008: 209). At the same time, the scholar points out the inevitable presence of a ‘hidden adult’ in children’s fiction and its specific binarism, which is a consequence of the fundamental premise – an adult having a mission of special writing for children (Nodelman 2008: 339-340).

As this short overview demonstrates, the observation about an adult being an inherent reader of children’s literature has accompanied the theory for a long time. Although scholars point out many modes of address, which are diachronic and relative, they are in agreement on either the overt or covert presence of adults within a readership of children’s fiction. Emer O’Sullivan puts this idea synthetically and convincingly. I consent that there are not only many ways of reading, but there are also many ways for adults to read children’s fiction. Therefore I use the notion of ‘multiple address’ when referring to the category of diversified implied readers, whereas when discussing an audience of a more sophisticated text I employ the term ‘experienced reader’.

Maria Nikolajeva (2000) calls the Moomin suite a rare work, which spans all categories depicting children’s fiction as a continuum between a myth and its disintegration.<sup>2</sup> She interprets the Moomin novels as texts that take “their protagonists from a world of complete idyll through a period of quests and picnics beyond the point of no return” (Nikolajeva 2000: 231). In other words, they represent successively: the first prelapsarian stage of fiction introducing readers to the sacred; the second – the carnivalesque, taking them out of Arcadia and bringing them back; and the third – postlapsarian, being the departure from childhood and the entrance to adulthood. The literature classified as the first utopian phase creates a myth of childhood as a never-ending paradise, based on a circular pattern of time (*kairos*) and a number of other recurrent features like a secluded setting, a general sense of harmony, a significance of home and absence of death. In the second stage, circular time opens into linearity (*chronos*) and the fiction can be here described in terms of carnival: protagonists play the role of brave, strong adult heroes, but finally they are brought back into the cyclical state and their progress into adulthood is stopped. In the last, postlapsarian stage there is no possibility of a return to the Arcadia of childhood, and the awareness of linearity carries a clear implication of death.

This interpretation helps us to understand why the early, idyllic novels of the Moomin series were often considered by educationalists

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<sup>2</sup> Although Nikolajeva points out that her study “eradicates the difference between the implicit addressees, which are two very heterogeneous groups generally referred to as children and adults” (Nikolajeva 2000: 264), she also notes that “As always when speaking of children’s fiction we are dealing with a double set of codes. Unlike adult fiction, in children’s fiction we have double narratees and double implied readers. An adult writer evoking an adult reader’s nostalgia is merely one aspect. Hopefully, the child reader is targeted as well, although in a different manner” (Nikolajeva 2000: 263-264).

to be suitable for children, whereas the last two works tended to be regarded as books for adults. It does not seem coincidental, as Jansson herself began to depart from a genuine implied child reader already in *Tales from Moominvalley* from 1962, a matter which she openly expressed in her diary, discussed by Boel Westin:

She talks about starting to write short stories and links the form to her change as a writer – she writes for children but is starting to be an adult. It works as a way of distancing herself from writing for children, a kind of double movement that will henceforth characterise her writing. The short stories are also about her longing to write herself away from the children – so she makes the child invisible. (Westin 2007: 362).<sup>3</sup>

This tendency grew stronger within the novels that followed and was confirmed by the writer's explicit wish in 1970 to distribute the last part, *Moominvalley in November*, as a pocket book for adults (Westin 362: 433). It is therefore not a revelation that the Moomin suite expands its multiple address and gradually develops the appeal to a more experienced readership. However, my purpose here is to prove that the second and third books, *Comet in Moominland* from 1946 and *Finn Family Moomintroll*<sup>4</sup> from 1948, traditionally perceived as books with a single address, already include intertextual references indicating the multiple character of their appeal.

### ***Catastrophism and other philosophical stances***

The turbulent events of the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made many people perceive history as a series of catastrophes similar to natural ones. It is therefore not surprising that Oswald Spengler enjoyed remarkable popularity, and it is impossible to discuss the decadency and catastrophism of those years without mentioning his work *The Decline of the West* from 1918. Jansson read this book (Westin 2007: 190), and it can be viewed as a significant sphere of reference to *Comet in Moominland*. The story is based on the motif of a comet approaching the Earth and threatening to destroy Moominvalley. The world is experiencing annoying, pre-apocalyptic changes, and it is noteworthy how the characters react to them: the Muskrat seems to ignore the comet, the Professors from the Observatory calculate the time of its arrival but do not care about the consequences, Sniff is scared, Moomintroll wants to explore and understand the phenomenon, whereas Moominmamma and Moominpappa continue going about their normal lives. The parents send Moomintroll and Sniff to the Observatory in the Lonely Mountains to examine the comet, with the intention of diverting the children from the Muskrat's gloomy prophecies. The plot is episodic, cumulative, as new figures – Snufkin, Snork Maiden, Snork and Hemulen – join the main characters; and circular – the adventurers set out from home

<sup>3</sup> Translations of Westin's book by Eeva-Liisa Bastman.

<sup>4</sup> The citations are from the English translations, but the discussion is based on both the original and the translated version.

and eventually return there. The story concludes with a happy ending in accordance with Jansson's recipe for a good children's book. In her opinion, children enjoy being scared and are attracted by disasters, but safety must always return at the end of a story like peace after a storm (Jansson 1978: 9). Initially the plot of *The Comet* seems quite simplistic, but on the level of the adventure there are deeper layers of meaning which are open to more experienced readers. These are intertexts of Spengler's book and the imagery of the titular comet.

In *The Decline of the West* (1918) Spengler rejected the traditional Eurocentric perception of history as a set of facts, dates and figures in a cause-and-effect sequence with a division into epochs like "Ancient", "Mediaeval" and "Modern" (Spengler 1991: 12). Although he was aware that such a belief dominated the European way of thinking, he put forward an alternative, controversial way of perceiving world history as eight cultures, each marked by their own distinctive courses and similar to a human life encompassing birth, youth, growth, maturity and decay. Hence cultures are dynamic and evolve like nature, their final stage being death, which Spengler identified with civilisation. As he argued, his times represented the decline of Western culture:

A century of purely extensive effectiveness, excluding big artistic and metaphysical production – let us say frankly an irreligious time which coincides exactly with the idea of the world city – is a time of decline. True. But we have not chosen this time. We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full Civilization, instead of on the golden summit of a ripe Culture, in a Phidias or a Mozart time. (Spengler 1991: 34.)

In this approach civilisation also means that the soul and spiritual values give way to reason, whereas its members, which Spengler called "Faustian men", are characterised not only by their lack of religion but by a lack of tradition and slavery to the Machine.

The *Decline of the West* guaranteed Spengler the position of an extreme pessimist and together with Ortega y Gasset's concept of dehumanisation, coupled with the First World War and the Great Depression, contributed to the popular belief in the inevitable extinction of civilisation in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A symbol of this vision in Jansson's second Moomin book is the comet, while a consistent prophet of the catastrophic prospect is Muskrat. He is a secondary character who appears as a victim of Moominpappa's bridge building. In a sense, a prototype of this figure is Jansson's fiancé from that time, Atos Wirtanen:

The philosophical muskrat has to do with Atos and the representation of the male thinker, but what the muskrat personifies is rather the philosopher as an idea than the person himself. In a bog near the villa in Grankulla lived a muskrat, and the bog became a place for contemplation over Moomins as well as over philosophers: "Atos went to the muskrat bog and contemplated Nietzsche", writes Tove in the almanac the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1945. Atos was working on a book on this "Great Idol" and Tove writes about it in her notes. He read Spengler, but was by no means a prophet of downfall. (Westin 2007: 194.)

The Muskrat is also a reader of Spengler's book, which Jansson displayed unambiguously in a picture above a heading of the second chapter. It depicts the hero, tightly wrapped in a blanket and lying in a hammock, under which there is a book signed "Spengler". This is not the only instance in which the artist employs the potential of iconotext – in two other illustrations Moomintroll and the Hemulen are portrayed in 'philosophical postures', reminiscent of *The Thinker* by Auguste Rodin. Both are sitting with the faces resting on their paws, deep in thought. Although they too are contemplating the same impending disaster, they do it in two significantly different fashions. The Hemulen worries in his egocentric manner, commenting on the red sky: "It can be spotted for all I care. I hardly ever look at it. What worries me is that my beautiful mountain stream is nearly dried up. If it goes like this much longer I shan't be able to splash my feet" (CIM: 81-82). On the other hand, Moomintroll ponders in an altruist-hedonistic way:

He sat staring out over the desolate sea bottom. It was lit by the red glow of the comet, and shadows like black velvet lay across the sand. Moomintroll thought how frightened the earth must be feeling with that great ball of fire coming nearer and nearer to her. Then he thought about how much he loved everything; the forest and the sea, the rain and the wind, the sunshine, the grass and the moss, and how impossible it would be to live without them all, and this made him feel very, very sad. (CIM: 123-124.)

In Muskrat's catastrophic vision the comet is inevitably going to lead to the end of the Earth. When in the morning Moominvalley was covered with a mysterious layer of grey dust, he was in no doubt as to what it indicated, announcing in a calm voice: "The destruction of the Earth, certainly", this phrase being dropped in the English translation. A while before this, he had tried to persuade the annoyed Moomintroll: "'Now I think I shall go to sleep,' said the Muskrat. 'Run off and play, my child. Play as long as you can'" (CIM: 35), and continuing in the original text with a sentence which again has unfortunately disappeared in the translation: "If we cannot do anything we have to take it philosophically". For the Muskrat 'philosophically' means 'stoically', as he seems to repeatedly express opinions of this school of thought. His statements represent a fatalism typical of the Stoics which, in facing the impossibility of affecting a course of events, implies a rejection of all emotions. A real Stoic accepts his fate, whatever it is, thanks to his intellectual perfection, and this enables him to overcome emotions that are destructive in nature. Material things are of no importance, whereas real happiness can be achieved through wisdom and virtue. The Muskrat seems committed to these principles, at least in theory. He expresses this attitude explicitly in the very first scene while talking to Moominpappa:

'I am the Muskrat,' said the wretched creature faintly. 'A philosopher, you know. I should just like to point out that your bridge-building activities have completely ruined my house in the river bank, and although ultimately it doesn't matter what happens, I must say even a philosopher does not care for being soaked to the skin.' (CIM: 22-23.)



It is characteristic that each of Muskrat's observations is completed with a *but* that introduces a correction to his 'philosophy'. In the cited passage the *but* is used to discomfort Moominpappa and make him feel guilty. It has the same function in another of Muskrat's statements: "'I'm not a great one for beds,' said the Muskrat, 'they are unnecessary furniture really. It was only a hole I lived in, but I was happy there. Of course it's all the same to a philosopher whether he is happy or not, but it was a good hole...'" (CIM: 23). His indifference disappears absolutely when the situation concerns the philosopher's dignity. This he puts more explicitly in a scene in *Finn Family Moomintroll* when he has fallen out of his hammock and decides to retreat to his cave:

The earth can crack and fire come down from heaven for all I care – that sort of thing doesn't disturb me – but I do not like to be put into a ridiculous situation. It isn't dignified for a philosopher. [...] Last year, for example, a comet fell on us. It was nothing. But as you perhaps remember, I sat on your wife's chocolate shape. It was the deepest insult to my dignity. (FFM: 49-50.)

In spite of the damage to his dignity, Muskrat still reads philosophical literature – "The uselessness of everything" – a sarcastic allusion to Schopenhauer – and, supposedly influenced by the reading, speaks about the insignificance of material things, for instance when Moominmamma's handbag has disappeared: "'Of all unnecessary things,' said he, 'your mother's bag is the most unnecessary. After all time passes and the days change exactly the same whether she has her bag or not.'" (FFM: 136.)

*The Comet* includes many subtle allusions to philosophy, but the dominant intertext is the catastrophism inspired by Spengler's readings. It is expressed both in Muskrat's stance and in the apocalyptic atmosphere evoked by the approaching comet, which covers the whole story. Muskrat is certainly not a pure herald of Spengler's ideas but rather a caricature, a would-be philosopher suited to a book with a strong multiple address, including children. Tove Jansson is consistently sarcastic towards pseudo-philosophising and preaching elevated theories, which stand in opposition to a preacher's life; senseless fatalism, whose predictions do not come true but only scare a close circle of friends and family; a show of asceticism that conflicts with one's ego. These aspects are open to more experienced readers, whereas a good adventure guarantees good reading for others.

### *Vitality, freedom and order*

Henri Bergson was one of the most influential philosophers at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He accused philosophical thought of limiting nature in static concepts and emphasised the importance of 'becoming'. In his *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson, drawing on Darwinian evolutionism, subjected the human intellect to a thorough critique and put forward a non-mechanistic conception of the nature of living beings. He argued that "our thought in its pure logical form

is incapable of presenting the true nature of life, the full meaning of the evolutionary movement” (Bergson 1983: ix-x). As we are used to dividing reality into separate states, we inevitably miss the principle of duration. In this endless dynamic, the philosopher rejected finalism or determinism and pointed out the possibility of randomness.

Bergson considered both the Darwinian and Lamarckian theories to be true up to a point and completed them with the notion of a life force, *élan vital*, which drives evolution on its creative path (Gunter 1983: xxxii). He stated that, apart from intellect, there are other forms of consciousness, of which we have only a faint idea, but which express something immanent and essential in the evolutionary movement. In other words, he built his biological theory of knowledge on the distinction between intellect and instinct – the latter perceived as a mode of knowing – and argued that its intuitive character could lead us to new insights. In this theory, intuition is an essential epistemological complement, which helps us understand the duration of time. The intuitive perception is linked with the above-mentioned ‘vital impetus’, *élan vital* – the key concept in Bergson’s work, understood as humanity’s creative impulse, widely identified with dynamism, vitality and spontaneity. The Moomin family seems to be an incarnation of these qualities, constituting a counterpart to the Muskrat’s fatalism and ‘stoicism’. Tove Jansson knew Bergson’s works too:

The 1940s was a period when Tove cultivated her interest in philosophy, an interest partly inspired by the acquaintance with Atos Wirtanen and his literary circles. Earlier she had read Schopenhauer (whom she disliked), Nietzsche and Bergson. She returned to Bergson in late summer 1945 when she was writing *The Comet*, and she celebrated her 31st birthday alone in Åland, reading the great French philosopher. (Westin 2007: 193.)

When the comet is nearing the Earth and Muskrat is spreading his defeatism, the Moomin parents almost instinctively come up with the idea of sending Moomin and Sniff to the Observatory in order to focus their energy on a more meaningful purpose.<sup>5</sup> The decision about sending the children to the Observatory in the Lonely Mountains comes quickly and easily, and this ‘there-and-back’ journey reveals characteristics typical of the positive life vitality: surprise, quest, novelty and effort.

In spite of the seemingly inevitable destruction of the world, the Moomin parents go about their normal lives, a fact rendered in Mamma’s farewell words to the departing children: “‘Don’t forget to give my regards to all the house-troll relatives!’ cried Moominmamma. ‘The shaggy ones, you know, with round heads. And put on your woolly trousers when it’s cold! The tummy powder is in the left-hand pocket of the rucksack!’” (CIM: 38). Her care and pragmatism never give way to hysteria or apathy, which one might expect of someone whose days are numbered. She

<sup>5</sup> The English translation has omitted the phrases expressing this focalisation: “‘Vi måste få dem att göra någonting’, sa mamma bekymrad till Moomintrollets pappa. ‘De vill inte leka. De kan inte tänka på någonting annat än de här undergångsidéerna som Bisamrättan har lurat i dem’. ‘Jag tycker vi skickar dem hemifrån ett slag’, sa pappan.” (Jansson 1997: 25.)



is unceasingly the same mother, full of vitality and energy, fearless and constantly planning for the future. As the end of the world draws closer, Moominmamma makes food, and as the family prepares its evacuation to a nearby cave, she becomes an ace of logistics: packs provisions from the pantry, a set of curtains, a bathtub, bedding, shells and roses from her flowerbed. Finally it is the optimistic, seemingly careless attitude of the parents that wins over Muskrat's fatalism.

The attitude represented by Moominmamma is not an implication of any reflection or intellectual calculation, nor is it supported by any theoretical declaration. Her unreflective knowledge seems immediately converted into action. Her behaviour is natural, almost instinctive, and in this respect it bears parallels to the Bergsonian life force that drives evolution on its creative path. It is certainly not the philosopher's strict use of the term referring to the process of evolution but rather its broader implication applied in a cultural discourse – here employed additionally in a book whose audience includes children.

Bergson, while questioning reason as the only premise of the proper development of humankind, inclines towards irrationalism,<sup>6</sup> and this tone manifests in *The Comet* as a critique of intellectualism. Idle activities and achievements of self-centred scholars undergo covert judgement in the characterisation of the professors at the Observatory, the Muskrat and the Hemulen. When the fearless adventurers finally arrive at the Observatory, they encounter the following scene: "Inside, scientists made thousands of remarkable observations, smoked thousands of cigarettes, and lived alone with the stars. [...] Two professors bustled here and there, tightening screws, pushing knobs and making notes" (CIM: 71). While waiting for the comet, they do not care about the world, people and their problems, and ignore the Moomins' attempts to make contact. Only Sniff is privileged enough to observe the comet through their telescope as he starts a conversation with flattery: "I am very interested in comets, and I've heard so much about your wonderful discoveries here.' The professor was very flattered and put his spectacles up on his forehead. 'Have you now?' he said. 'Then you must come and have a look, my little friend'" (CIM: 73).<sup>7</sup> The professor is able to give precise information about the comet's arrival – 7<sup>th</sup> August, eight forty-two in the evening – but he does not wonder what it means. He claims he had no time to think about it but is going to record the course of events in detail. His work and efforts are academic, pointless, and he does not notice that his hermetic intellectualism costs him sensitivity both to others and the beauty of the world.

The Hemulen, whose world is confined to stamp collecting, acts in a similar way. The character is so unnaturally focused on his album that he is unable to understand the approaching danger. His own fixation does not deter him from criticising the same fault in his cousin: "He is very

<sup>6</sup> Bergson's intuitionism, questioning reason as an infallible epistemic tool, can be perceived as an irrationalist philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> This English translation skips the information that the professor wants to name the comet after himself. In the original text, he says also: "Det här är en ovanligt vacker komet. Jag funderar på att låta uppkalla den efter mig själv" (Jansson 1997: 60).

stupid. We don't even know each other now. I broke off our relationship.' 'Why was that?' asked Sniff. 'He had no interest in anything but his old butterflies,' said Hemulen. 'The earth could crack under his feet and it wouldn't bother him'" (CIM: 128).

In the theory of creative evolution Henri Bergson does not exclude the freedom of a human being, but, as he argues, if somebody wants to experience it, they have to surmount pragmatism and utilitarianism. When individuals break free from collective practises, conventions and automatisms, they can become capable of creative activities:

Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it. The word turns against the idea. The letter kills the spirit. (Bergson 1983:128.)

Snufkin is the character that most features the freedom opposing automatisms of habits. He leaves the valley every autumn and sets out for secret destinations. As the most reticent person within the whole Moomin constellation, Snufkin embodies the principle of Bergsonian mistrust in the formula and the "imperfect letter", and expresses himself in the sounds of his harmonica. He also constitutes a counterpoint to Sniff's greed. When the latter wants to collect all the rubies from a giant lizard's cave, Snufkin gives him permission and explains that everything he can see in the world belongs to him (CIM: 48-49). His non-materialistic philosophy of absolute freedom is emphasised on different occasions, for instance when the family finds the Hobgoblin's top hat:

"Now you've got a new piece of furniture again," he said, grinning, for Snufkin could never understand why people like to have things. He was quite happy wearing the old suit he had had since he was born (nobody knows when and where that happened), and the only possession he didn't give away was his mouth-organ. (FFM: 21.)

His characterisation is formed within the first books of the suite – in being a counterbalance to the bonds of the Moomin's family and Muskrat's empty words, he represents a creative attitude. In contrast to this pseudo-philosopher, Snufkin lives in compliance with his words. Furthermore he is an artist, and his affiliation to the artistic circle is confirmed by his indispensable attribute – the harmonica.

Another interesting epistemological motif referring to Bergson's theory is linked to the Hobgoblin's top hat. It possesses magic powers and transforms its content into something beyond recognition in a series of episodes: eggshells are turned into clouds, the water in the river into raspberry juice, Moomintroll into an unrecognisable creature. All these metamorphoses constitute starting points for exceptional games, perhaps with the exception of Moomintroll's transformation, which illustrates the power of a mother's love.

It is particularly noteworthy that the Moomin household was transformed into a tropical jungle by Moominmamma when she light-

heartedly threw Hemulen's perennials into the hat. Additional factors – heavy rain and sunshine – accelerated vegetation and made plants grow, flowers blossom and fruit ripen at an incredibly fast pace, whereas winding lianas barricaded the doors and further complicated traditional family life. Moominpappa, busy with writing his diary, suddenly noticed a ripe plum fall on to his papers and automatically suspected it was the children's prank:

“Bless my tail!” bust out Moominpappa. “Moomintroll and Sniff must be home again!” And he turned around to scold them. But nobody was behind him: instead he found himself staring at a thick bush covered with yellow berries. He jumped up, and at once blue plums rained down on him from every side. Then he noticed that a great branch was growing slowly towards the window with green shoots sprouting in all directions. (FFM: 106.)

This temporary distortion of the normally functioning Moomin house evokes Bergson's concept of order. The philosopher theorises about its negation, disorder, a state traditionally perceived and defined by its contrary notion, order. It raises the question as to why theory would not suggest an inverse sequence. In practice, disorder implies the dissatisfaction of someone who expects the opposite order. But in theory one order substitutes the other, so we are in fact dealing *de facto* with two kinds of order. Bergson positions them in relation to the entirety of life, interpreted as creative evolution, and specifies: “We may say then that this first kind of order is that of the *vital* or of the *willed*, in opposition to the second, which is that of the *inert* and the *automatic*” (Bergson 1983: 224). The whole situation appears highly relative, and this relativity is portrayed by the jungle (disorder) in the Moomin house – although it represents an absolute opposition to the accustomed state of the home and the practices of its dwellers (order), it is still a source of positive experiences. Moomintroll and Sniff get into the house despite the overgrown door, Moominmamma becomes enchanted by the garlands of white flowers hanging from the ceiling, and the children lose all sense of time in a fascinating game of Tarzan and Jane. The motif of the gripping play referring to the popular book and film figures is directed mainly at young readers and makes this motif particularly child-friendly, leaving deeper insights to the more experienced readership.

When the sun sets, everything returns to its initial state:

It had stopped raining, and night began to fall. And at the moment that the sun went down something happened to the green mound that was Moominhouse: it began to wither as quickly as it had grown; the fruit shrivelled and fell to the ground; the flowers drooped and the leaves curled up, and once more the house was filled with rustlings and cracklings. (FFM: 112.)

In Moominvalley the traditionally viewed order interchanges with the traditionally viewed disorder smoothly, suggesting the impossibility of drawing a borderline between these two utterly different states, which could perhaps ultimately be simply two variants of the same unity of life.

## Eternal phantasies

A representative of the modern reader-response criticism, Norman Holland approaches the problem of the relation between literature and the human mind employing the concepts of psychoanalysis. His interpretation of a reader–book contact, presented in *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1989), rests on references to the Freudian oral stage when *self* and object were not differentiated. The mechanisms – when inner and outer are still blurred – arise again when people read. They perceive the text both consciously – giving it a meaning that is unconditionally required by the ego, and unconsciously – responding to it with a matrix of infancy.

Readers come to a literary work with an expectation of gratification, similar to that experienced while being nursed by one's mother, and a promise not to be forced to act on the external world. This is why they willingly suspend disbelief and in some way 'regress' to early infancy to evoke the old matrix of perception:

It is true that we suspend disbelief or, more exactly, we do not reality-test as we do in everyday life. But something much more profound has happened. We do not reality-test because, in part at least, we have ceased to feel we are separate from external reality. To some extent, we fuse with the literary work. In absorbing it, we become absorbed. (Holland 1989: 78.)

Holland holds that writers express their childhood fantasies in their works: "In effect, the literary work dreams a dream for us. It embodies and evokes in us a central fantasy; then it manages and controls that fantasy by devices that, were they in mind, we would call defences, but, being on a page, we call 'form'" (Holland 1989: 75). For example, irony resembles reversal reaction-formation, omission functions like repression or denial, improbable causality in a story is similar to projection, and presenting a moral looks like rationalisation (Holland 1989: 58).

A literary work finds in us a matrix reaching back to the many experiences of gratification at numerous stages of our life and makes the mental process embodied in literature become a process within us. Nonetheless, not all readers respond to texts with the same involvement. The crucial thing is introjection, which can take place only if the transformation in the literary work matches the reader's basic psychological patterns (Holland 1989: 96).

Tove Jansson completed the Moomin suite with the ninth novel, *Moominvalley in November* (Jansson 2011b, = MIN), written in the summer and autumn of 1969 and published in 1970. She was overwhelmed with new projects, jobs, ideas and a chronic lack of time, and she found it more and more difficult to establish a satisfactory balance between work and pleasure. She greatly missed the freedom from work and expressed this yearning in the novel, finally letting the Moomins go after twenty-five

years. The book also became a symbolic farewell to children's literature.<sup>8</sup> This farewell occurs in Moominvalley without the titular characters, who stayed on a remote island in the preceding book *Moominpappa at Sea*. Moreover, there is no Moomintroll, the central hero, which Maria Nikolajeva interprets as a thoughtful move – thus Tove Jansson removed the primary identification object and her own projection in order to subdue pain (Nikolajeva 2000: 250). Instead a number of so far secondary characters decide to visit “the Happy Valley” each with a reason of their own: Snufkin loses five bars of music and searches for inspiration; Fillyjonk cannot clean anymore, which evokes strong anxiety; Hemulen questions his own lifestyle of collector and organiser; Grandpa-Grumble wants to return to the happy state of childhood; the lonely and timid Toft dreams of Moominvalley as a paradise, though he has never been there before. Though they represent different ages, all of them go through some kind of crisis – often connected with their identity or a sense of life.<sup>9</sup> These conflicting personalities meet in the same place, with the same wish – to experience the Valley – and with time they are able to find a platform of agreement: the dream of the ideal family. They even try to reconstruct this dream: Fillyjonk takes over Moominmamma's role, locks herself in the kitchen, prepares food, tries to be liked by the others and looks after the orphan Toft, whereas Hemulen acts like Moominpappa, building a treehouse and asking Toft, the substitute for Moomintroll, for help. The climax of the story is a magic moment during a party when Fillyjonk performs a shadow puppet show: “the dark shadow took on colours, the silhouettes seemed to move and all the time Snufkin went on playing so fittingly that no one was conscious of the music until it stopped. The family had come home” (MIN: 129-130). The Moomins have not returned, but a new family has been constructed. The feeling of community helps the visitors to overcome their crises so that they can leave the Valley, which has not disappointed and has proved to be an infallible remedy for a life dilemma. The only one who stays is Toft.

The novel includes many references to dreams and the unconscious. The most illustrative scene is at the end the book when Toft wanders through a forest to welcome the Moomins, who it seems are returning:

Inside there was perpetual dusk. The trees stood uneasily close to one another, there wasn't enough room for their branches [...] It was a different world. Toft had no pictures and no words for it, nothing had to correspond. [...] His descriptions of the valley and the Happy Family faded and slipped away, Moominmamma glided away and became remote, an impersonal picture, he didn't even know what she looked like. Toft walked through the forest, stooping under the branches, creeping and crawling, and thinking of nothing at all and became empty as the crystal ball. (MIN: 155-156.)

<sup>8</sup> Jansson returned to the Moomin theme only in a script and a picture book (Westin 2007: 421).

<sup>9</sup> The only character that is an exception is Mymble, who is always content with herself. This is part of her consistent characterisation.

Darkness, a thick forest, the motif of creeping and the impossibility of verbalising are typical features of the unconscious that collects repressed phantasies.

For all these characters Moominvalley is a dreamlike space, and it can be read on an intratextual level as a fulfilment of their central phantasy. Furthermore, Jansson seems to blur the borderline between reality and fantasy, the characters and the readers. This is expressed, for instance, in a scene in which Grandpa-Grumble decides to set off for Moominvalley: “There came a moment in the darkness of early dawn when he knew that he wanted to go to a valley where he had once been a very long time ago. It was just possible that he had only heard about this valley, or perhaps had read about it, but it made no difference really.” (MIN: 43) There is no clear-cut distinction between readers, the writer and the fictional figures that might have read about the Valley, which suggests an interesting extratextual interpretation that can be viewed on two levels. First, it concerns the writer’s relations with fiction, her incarnation in the figure of Toft, and her longing for her beloved mother, Ham. Boel Westin states unequivocally that Toft is Tove’s *alter ego*:

In *Moominvalley in November*, the author Tove Jansson is present under a new name, derived from her own name: Tove has become Toft. He gives voice to the narrator who tries to call forth the family of the valley, depicts the impossibility to continue writing the earlier story and gives voice to the possibility of finding a new one – this happens at the end of the book. (Westin 2007: 424)

Second, we can recognise ourselves in a crowd of people who have read the Moomin books for many decades and view this situation from the perspective of Holland’s model. If Grandpa-Grumble might have read about the Valley, which is explicitly expressed, and could get there, we – real readers – can do exactly the same thing. We can reach that magic space through perfect immersion, using the old matrix of infancy. The metafictional suggestion that the characters might have dreamt or read about the Valley and the recurrent implications of the unconscious connote a fusion of self and fiction which takes place inside the reader.

Tove Jansson embodied her central phantasy in a suite of literary works and shaped it as an eternal arcadia: a happy family, living in a beautiful valley, with wonderful summers and overslept winters. Temporary dangers that protect this place from boredom are always obviated and each adventure is rounded off with a happy ending. It is a surprisingly simple phantasy, perhaps so simple as to be confounding. But it works and has worked for a long time, so we can assume – in line with Norman Holland – that plentiful introjections were possible thanks to a perfect match between the literary transformation and the readers’ expectations.



## Final considerations

In summation, the essential condition for understanding children's literature is to perceive it as directed not exclusively at an implied child reader. Furthermore, complex layers of meaning and form appealing to more experienced readers often decide its success. Books with a remarkable multiple address, i.e. which appeal successfully to young children and experienced academics – with an endless number of other implied readers in between, positioned in different spaces and times – are the domain of the greatest artists, and Tove Jansson was undoubtedly one of their number. Her narration perfectly balances on a long line of multiple address, offering infinite readings. Though the Moomin suite is traditionally viewed as 'maturing' with each successive volume, analyses have proven that even the early novels contain philosophical intertexts accessible to more experienced readers. Indeed, this may be viewed as one of the keys to the popularity of the series. These are the clear references to Spengler's catastrophism and their counterpoint, Bergsonian *élan vital*, which reveal that Jansson had other readers in mind than merely children. However, they do not constitute the only explanation of the Moomins' exceptional literary position – the series certainly offers a fascinating 'naïve' reading, allowing a wider audience to enter the world of simple solutions and unconditional love. In terms of Norman Holland's theory, it transforms a popular phantasy – here of a happy family – which is introjected by readers who willingly suspend disbelief to enjoy pleasure and, as it were, dream a sweet dream.

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