The Sense of November

Strange Emotions and Entanglements of the Self and the World in Tove Jansson's *Sent i november*

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Introduction

Sent i november (1970, transl. *Moominvalley in November* 1971) is the last novel in Tove Jansson's Moomin suite and it is often read as a book in which the writer is saying farewell to the Moomin world (see, e.g., Niemi 1995, 83; Karjalainen 2016, 232).[194] It is a story not only about autumn, loss and sorrow but also about creativity, hope and new beginnings.

In many ways, *Sent i november* is not a book that a reader would expect from the Moomin series. For one, the Moomin family is missing from the story and the familiar sunny and paradise-like environment that the readers know from earlier novels has undergone a strange transformation. However, at the same time the novel brings the suite to a closure, repeating many themes and motifs that Jansson had developed in earlier stories: unsettling changes of nature and the comfort and joy found in art and acts of creativity. As usual, Jansson's text can be enjoyed by a 'dual audience' of both child and adult readers although Jansson herself thought that the book was rather depressing and complicated and might not appeal to children (see Karjalainen 2016, 235).[195]

The readers of *Sent i november* find both melancholy and consolation in the book. They speak of a strange combination of 'anxiety and safety' (Valkeajoki 2003, 101), how the book *feels like* autumn and how it brings light to those who are experiencing depression and anxiety during the darkness of November. This is visible, for example, in many literary bloggers' comments about the novel.[196] Some readers even return to *Sent i november* every autumn or they wait for a rainy, dark November day to read it: they curl under a blanket (as Mymble does in the book) and read about the solitary characters who arrive in the Moomin valley one by one in search of the Moomin family.[197] *Sent i november* could also be described as a highlight of Jansson's work as a modernist writer. She focuses on the subjective perspectives of the characters and on the complex relations between loss and creativity. The novel brings forth evocative experiences of melancholy and anxiety while also examining how these painful experiences can be turned into art. Moreover, Jansson emphasizes the interactions between the characters and the November valley which is in the process of change and which changes the characters in turn, as many academic readers have noted (see, e.g., Valkeajoki 2003; Ojajärvi 2007; Heinämaa 2018).

In this chapter, I am particularly interested in the atmospheres and emotions constructed in the novel and in readers' engagement with the text. What draws both academic and non-academic readers to read the novel again and again? How is the combination of 'anxiety and safety' that is persistent in the novel constructed?[198] How is this related to the way Jansson portrays her characters engaging with their environment? I use the term 'sense of November' to capture the overall atmosphere of the novel. It refers to the affective states that many readers of the book describe and it can also be connected to the difficult states of mind and collective emotions that are often characterized as 'arctic hysteria'. It is simultaneously an embodied and

imaginary experience: a strange feeling of anxiety and melancholy that emerges in a subject's engagement with a northern environment and that is also a source of creativity. In what follows, I offer a close reading of the novel, looking at the narrative, poetic and visual[199] elements that create the peculiar atmosphere; furthermore, I supplement my own reading with other academic and non-academic readers' experiences and interpretations, constructing a dialogue with other actual readers[200].

First, I situate the novel in the Moomin series and discuss how Jansson bases the story in the northern environment. I also link her description of the entanglements between the characters and their material environment to phenomenological and embodied cognitive theories of the mind that emphasize how the mind is shaped by the world in which it is embedded (Merleau-Ponty 2002; Colombetti 2013). Secondly, I look more carefully at the strange emotions constructed in the novel and the overall atmosphere they create: on the one hand, there is the sense of safety that emerges when one gathers one's belongings and curls up in the warmth of a home when everything outside is cold, dark and threatening; on the other hand, the autumn environment evokes feelings of loss, anxiety, disgust, melancholy and anger. Finally, I discuss how Jansson's exploration of creativity and use of metafictional elements afford comfort in an environment that is otherwise distressing.

Tove Jansson's Narratives of the North

In the beginning of *Sent i november* – as well as almost throughout the book – it is raining. As Jussi Ojajärvi (2007, 324) notes, the rain begins, stops for a few moments, only to begin again, creating a background and mood for the story. The narrator describes the valley on the west side of the Moominvalley covered in mist and rain:

> Time passed and the rain went on falling. There had never been an autumn when it had rained so much. The valley along the coast sank under the weight of this water that was streaming down the hillsides and the ground rotted away instead of just withering. Suddenly summer seemed so far away that it might just as well have never been and the distances between the houses seemed greater and everyone crept inside. (*Moominvalley in November* = *MN*, 8)
>
> Tiden gick och regnet föll. Aldrig någon höst hade det regnat så mycket. Dalarna kring kusten blev sanka av allt vatten som rann ner över kullar och berg, och marken ruttnade istället för att vissna. Plötsligt var sommaren så långt borta som om den aldrig hade funnits och det blev mycket lång väg mellan husen och var och en kröp in i sitt eget. (*Sent i november* = *SN*, 11)

There is a sense of social alienation and abandonment that is emphasized in Jansson's drawings which show no living creatures, only houses (see Image 1). After the de-

Image 1. Lonely houses. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*, 7. © Moomin Characters™

scription of this northern November world, the readers are led to peek under Hemulen's boat where we encounter little Toft, curled inside a coil of rope (see Image 2) and imagining the Moominvalley and its inhabitants. Jansson's drawing of solitary Toft creates a contrast to what he is imagining: "[– –] Toft would tell himself a story of his own. It was all about the Happy Family" (*MN*, 9).[201] His description of the valley offers an escape from the rain and the loneliness. He focuses on sensory details: he imagines the smells, colours and shapes of the valley and brings forth the Moomin world as it is usually remembered and imagined by its readers – as a paradise-like world of (almost) eternal summer and happiness (see also, Westin 1988, 276).

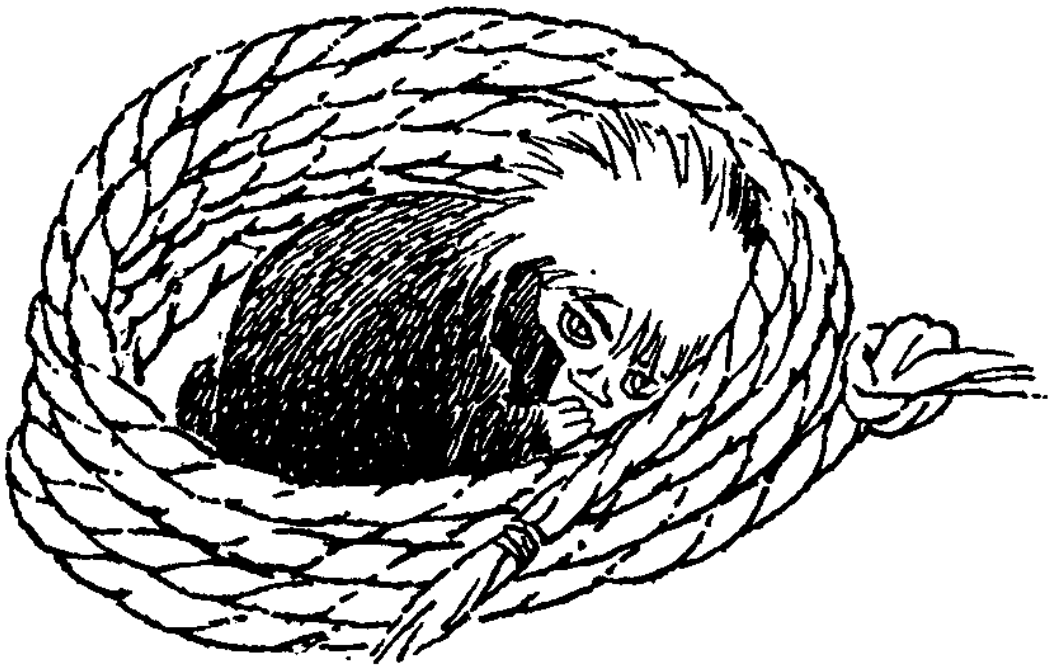

Image 2. Toft inside a coil of rope. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*, 14. © Moomin Characters™

Toft's story about the summer valley can easily be read as a metafictional comment about the Moomin world (see e.g., Westin 1996, 44; Kivilaakso 2003, 85, 90; Happonen 2007, 239). Besides the feel of the environment, he captures some important, familiar elements of the storyworld: there are the fruit trees, the creek and the blue, lighthouseshaped house surrounded by Moominmamma's garden. Toft's story also taps into Jansson's readers' previous knowledge about the Moomin stories and their usual atmosphere: even though different catastrophes threaten the valley and the characters end up on dangerous adventures,[202] everything is enveloped in a sense of humour

and warmth. We can especially recall Moominmamma who takes care of all the valley's large and small creatures and offers a source of comfort and stability.

In contrast to the story Toft is telling himself, *Sent i november* brings its readers to a world that is very different from what is usually recognized as the Moomin world. It might even seem surprising to connect the Moomin books to the notion of arctic hysteria and to literary portrayals of the north. However, as readers of Moomins know, there has always been a dark and melancholy side to the stories. The origins of the Moomin world are tied to experiences of anxiety and loss during the Second World War (see e.g., Niemi 1995, 83) and the upheavals of the first books – the comets and floods that threaten the valley – emerge from the unstable social environment in which the stories were written.[203] In later Moomin books, the 'upheaval' is no longer a natural catastrophe but rather a more ambiguous rupture that is portrayed especially through the changing seasons and the characters' experiences of their environments.[204] The themes that Jansson develops are typical in many narratives of the north: for instance, strong distinctions between interior and exterior spaces, variations of solitude and alienation (or cabin fever), a special relation to temporality (e.g., the stagnation of time) and psychological meanings of ice and coldness (see Kankkunen 2022, 113; Chartier 2021).

It is especially noteworthy in the last Moomin books that the characters' identities are tied to the spaces they inhabit. Many researchers note that there is a change towards the 'psychological', towards the inner lives of the characters as well as a change in the environment (see e.g., Westin 1988; Happonen 2003, 201; 2007, 14).[205] However, maybe an even more apt characterization would be that the stories take a turn towards what phenomenologists and theorists of embodied cognition describe as *experiential worlds* and *lived spaces* (see Merleau-Ponty 2002; Colombetti 2013; see also, Happonen 2007, 256).[206] Jansson examines the entanglements of the self and the world and focuses on how the experiences of the characters are shaped by their environments. For example, in *Trollvinter* (1957, transl. *Moominland Midwinter* 1958), the Moomintroll wakes up alone from hibernation and is confronted with a strange, cold winter world that he has never experienced before. The same motif is later repeated in a lighter manner in the short story 'Granen' (transl. The Fir Tree) in *Det osynliga barnet och andra berättelser* (1962, transl. *Tales from the Moominvalley* 1963). In that story, the whole family wakes up and learns about Christmas that is approaching, believing it to be some kind of a dangerous creature that needs to be appeased with presents and a tree. In *Pappan och havet* (1965, transl. *Moominpappa at Sea* 1966), in turn, the family and Little My leave the safety of the Moominvalley and begin a life on a deserted lighthouse island which becomes a life form of its own: an unruly place that shapes each character. *Sent i november* can be read as a highlight of this development: the book portrays six solitary characters who are deeply entangled with an unfamiliar, changing world and looking at it from different perspectives. It is almost as if they have never experienced autumn before; in fact, Jansson portrays November for the first time in any of the Moomin novels.

In a way, *Sent i november* seems to be situated after an upheaval or a catastrophe has already happened: as if the story was "a reaction to and a recovery from it" (*Tainan ja Tommin aarrearkku* 14.3.2020, transl. A. O.).[207] Furthermore, as Ojajärvi (2007, 324, transl. A. O.) puts it, "we are late, something is irrevocably in the past".[208] The enormous change in the storyworld is, of course, the fact that the Moomin family is gone. The readers who are familiar with the previous book, *Pappan och havet*, can perhaps imagine that they are at the lighthouse island (see, e.g., *Jokken kirjanurkka* 16.12.2013; *Muumittaja* 9.3.2013) but the characters of *Sent i november* do not know this. As many readers note, the family members are present in the book only through their absence and everything is reminiscent of them (see, e.g., Kauppinen 2020; Karjalainen 2016, 232; *Hurja hassu lukija* 27.12.2017; Rantakokko 10.3.2017; *Kirjakaapin kummitus* 29.11.2014).

The absence or the loss of the family can be seen as a central source of the atmosphere that is constructed in the novel. Each character – Toft, Fillyonk, Snufkin, Hemulen, Grandpa-Grumble and Mymble – is looking for something. Many of them awaken at the beginning of the book to a feeling that they need to become something other than they are.[209] They also believe that they will find what they are searching for from the Moominvalley and from the family but when they arrive, they discover that the house is empty. The absence of the family is heart-breaking especially for little Toft who in the beginning notices that he has become unable to imagine the Moominvalley: when he tells himself the story about the valley and the family, a strange mist appears before he can see them clearly and he falls asleep. He decides that he must travel to the valley to introduce himself to the family. Toft also offers a point of identification for the readers for whom the absence of the family is heart-breaking, too (see also, Westin 1988, 279).[210] There is a sense of betrayal: "He felt as though they had deceived him somehow" (*MN*, 42).[211] The experience is echoed in many readers' experiences. As one blogger writes: "[t]he heart of the place is lost" (*Hurja hassu lukija* 27.12.2017).[212] Another puts it even more bluntly: "I think this [the absence] caused quite a tear and I didn't really like it" (*Lintusen kirjablogi* 24.11.2014).[213]

Such experiences of loss and grief as well as the ambivalence of identity are often listed as key themes of the book by academic readers (see, e.g., Valkeajoki 2003; Kivilaakso 2003; Ojajärvi 2007). In both academic and non-academic readers' experiences, the strange atmosphere is tied to the absence of the family and the changes the environment and the characters undergo. A key question for the characters is how they experience their existence in this strange, new environment, which is not at all what they were expecting and even threatening: how are they able to find comfort and safety in their surroundings, or, using the terminology of embodied cognition, how are their affective states environmentally 'scaffolded' or supported by the material world, other people and their interplay (Colombetti and Krueger 2015, 1157)? This is also an important question when considering the readers' experiences of the novel.

The Autumn World: Spaces of Safety and Anxiety

> The quiet transition from autumn to winter is not a bad time at all. It's a time for protecting and securing things and for making sure you've got in as many supplies as you can. It's nice to *gather together everything you possess* as close to you as possible, to store up your warmth and your thoughts and burrow yourself into a deep hole inside, *a core of safety* where you can defend what is important and precious and your very own. Then the cold and the storms and the darkness can do their *worst. They can grope their way up the walls looking for a way in, but they won't find one*, everything is shut, and you sit inside, laughing in your warmth and your solitude, for you have had foresight. (*MN*, 3–4, emphasis added)
>
> Höstens lugna gång mot vinter är ingen dålig tid. Det är en tid för att bevara och säkra och lägga upp sö stora förråd man kan. Det är skönt att *samla det man har* så tätt intill sig som möjligt, samla sin värme och sina tankar och gräva sig en säker håla längst in, *en kärna av trygghet* där man försvarar det som är viktigt och dyrbart och ens eget. Sen kan kölden och stormarna och mörkret komma bäst de vill. *De trevar över väggarna och letar efter en ingång men det går inte*, alltihop är stängt och därinne sitter den som har varit förtänksam och skrattar i sin värme och sin ensamhet. (*SN,* 6–7, emphasis added)

The novel begins with several descriptions of the autumn that has arrived. One of these is focalized through Fillyonk (the focalization turns to Fillyonk from Snufkin who is leaving the Moominvalley for the winter, as he always does, and walking past her house, trying to avoid her the best he can). Through Fillyonk, the narrator describes a process of prepping for the winter and learning to make one feel safe in a space that is dying. There is a sense of safety that is emphasized by the familiar objects: Fillyonk gathers her possessions around her and creates a "core of safety". Her actions could be, at first, seen as a form of 'practical anxiety': a positive anxiety that helps one to prepare and act in the face of an uncertain threat or a difficult situation (see Kurth 2018, 16). From an embodied cognitive perspective, Fillyonk's experiences are extended into her home environment which creates an affective scaffolding for her: her actions, thoughts and emotions are supported by her familiar material surroundings.

For the readers, in turn, the book itself can function as an affective scaffolding: it can shape our emotions and help us to cope with the winter darkness.[214] Moreover, the environment in which the readers read scaffolds the reading and shapes the reading experience.[215] The novel even invites reading in a certain environment: as noted, many readers purposely read *Sent i november* in November and some even imitate characters like Mymble who later curls under a blanket in Fillyonk's bed at the Moominhouse (see *P. S. Rakastan kirjoja* 5.12.2013; also *Wilde Things* 19.11.2017). As another reader writes: "It makes one feel safe; also there everything is grey and stormy

but everybody is taken care of" (*Ajatuspolkuja* 19.12.2020, transl. A. O.).[216] Thus, the novel invites reflection on the ways people are entangled with their worlds and how our experiences are shaped and supported by the spaces and objects around us.

Fillyonk's fear and anxiety

However, in addition to "the core of safety", the fear of the 'worst' that the cold and the darkness could do comes through in the text: "They can grope their way up the walls looking for a way in [– –]". (See the quotation above.) The readers get a first glimpse of Fillyonk's fear and anxiety which is initially negated ("[– –] but they won't find one") but will grow in the following chapters. As Jansson wrote in a short story 'Mörkret' (transl. The Dark) in her first book for adults, *Bildhuggarens dotter* (1968, transl. *The Sculptor's Daughter* 1969), a few years earlier: "Nobody is safe and therefore it is terribly important to find a hiding-place in time".[217] There is a threatening undercurrent: safety is a mere illusion.

The description of cold and darkness "groping their way up the walls" anticipates how the feeling of anxiety becomes overwhelming and how Fillyonk is forced to leave the safety of her home. Whereas in the first books the Moomin valley was portrayed as a home of not just the Moomin family and their friends but also different kinds of happy little creatures, for Fillyonk in *Sent i november* even the small creatures, the insects, are becoming a threat (see also, Happonen 2007, 270, 277). One day, she decides to clean the attic windows but suddenly notices something that unsettles her:

> It *looked like* a little bit of cotton fluff but Fillyonk knew immediately what it was: it was a horrid chrysalis and inside it was a pale white caterpillar. She *shivered and drew in* her paws. Wherever she went, whatever she did, she always came across *creepy-crawly things*, they were *everywhere*! (*MN*, 14, emphasis added)
>
> Det *såg ut* som en liten bomullstott men Filifjonkan visste genast vad det var; det var en otäck puppa och inne i den fanns en blek vit larv. Hon *ryste till och drog* tassarna åt sig. Var hon än gick, vad hon än gjorde så råkade hon ut för *det som krälar och kryper*, det fanns *överallt* ! (*SN,* 17, emphasis added)

The narrator offers a detailed portrayal of Fillyonk's experience of disgust: her body reacts automatically and there is an effort to move away from the thing that is perceived as disgusting. The thing *looks like* something clean and comforting (a cotton fluff) but is actually *something else*: something that moves and fills the space in an unsettling way; it *creeps* and *crawls* and is *everywhere*. She pushes the insect out of the window but when she then climbs to the wet roof to clean the window from the outside, she starts sliding and is unable to get back.

In Jansson's drawing of the scene, we see Fillyonk on the roof, glued to the window, shaking and anxious (see Image 3). Fillyonk's own emotions and movements on the roof begin to resemble a crawling creature (see also, Happonen 2007, 276):

> Fear *crept* through her and stuck like an inky taste in the throat. [– –] Fillyjonk made an agonized *creeping* movement upwards, her paws *groped* over the slippery metal roof but she slid back again and ended up where she had started from. [– –] With her eyes tight shut and her stomach pressing against the roof, Fillyjonk *crawled* round her big house [– –]. (*MN*, 16–17, emphasis added)
>
> Rädslan *kröp* igenom henne, den satt som en bläcksmack I halsen. [– –] Filifjonkan gjorde en ångestfull *kryprörelse* uppåt, tassarna *famlade* över den hala plåten och hon gled tillbaka igen och alltihop var likadan som förut. [– –] ögonen hårt slutna och magen pressad mot taket, så *kröp* Filfjonkan runt sitt stora hus [– –]. (*SN*, 18, emphasis added)

She crawls and crawls and ultimately, she herself becomes something else: "Now she was nothing at all, just something that was trying to make itself as flat as possible and move on" (*MN*, 18).[218] In the middle of the panic, she also makes a promise to herself: "I shall be something quite different but not a fillyonk ... " (*MN*, 19).[219] Finally, she manages to drag herself back inside. After the incident, she is shaken. The whole world is seen in a new light; everything looks different and nothing seems to matter anymore. She notices that she owns too many things and later she realizes that she has lost one key feature of her identity: her ability to clean. On the spur of the moment, she decides that she must go to visit Moominmamma.

Fillyonk's experience invites psychopathological frames of reading: one could argue that her anxiety begins to manifest itself as disgust. In psychoanalytic terminology, she encounters an abject creature, a thing that is between categories in an unsettling way: not alive but not dead either, not part of her but not external from her either, familiar, yet strange. It is something that needs to be pushed away like scraps of food, bodily fluids and other liminal things (see Kristeva 1982, 2–4). As Sara Heinämaa (2018, 57–58) points out, particularly movements that are felt as alien and unpredictable and growth that seems excessive elicit horror and disgust. Fillyonk's solution is that she tries to find a new place of safety from the Moomins' but when she arrives, the house is cold and empty (even though the other characters are there) and she begins to feel that the creatures are following her: hiding in cupboards and crawling everywhere under the wallpaper. What used to be a familiar, warm and safe home has become *unheimlich*, something uncanny and horrifying (see Freud 1978b).

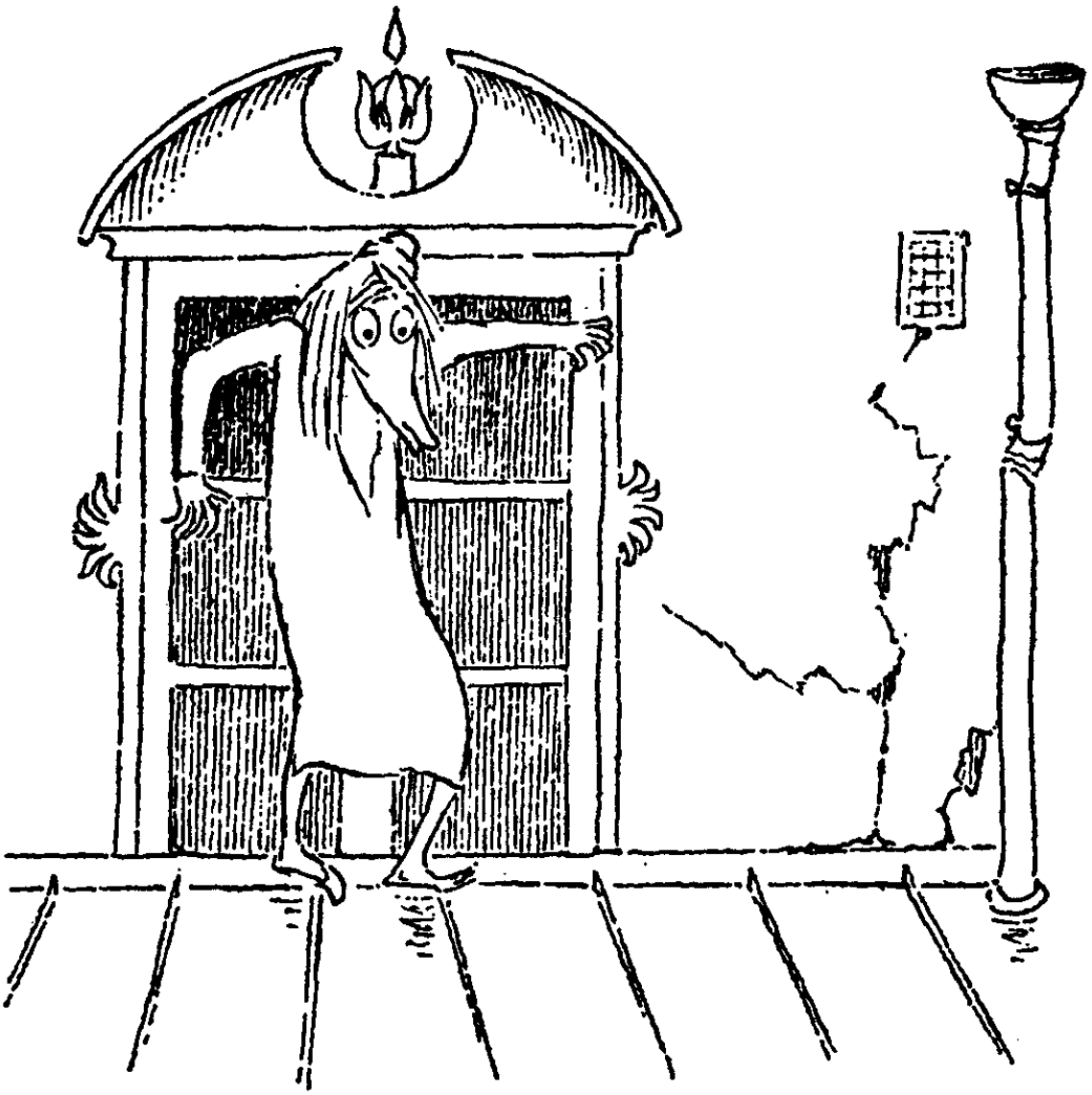

Image 3. Fillyonk on the roof. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*, 19. © Moomin Characters™

Different Perspectives to the Autumn World

The different characters have different perspectives on the autumn world and the abandoned house, but there are also deep connections: on the one hand, there is the strangeness of the autumn that requires seeking shelter and comfort; on the other hand, there is a sense that the Moominvalley and the house are not at all what they were supposed to be. Let us see how this becomes visible in Snufkin's, Hemulen's, Grandpa-Grumble's and Mymble's experiences and in Toft's stories.

As we saw, Fillyonk was initially looking for safety by gathering the objects around her and curling up and then by going to visit the Moomins. Meanwhile, Snufkin, who has walked past Fillyonk's house and continued towards the south, observes how everything around him is dying yet at the same time vigorously alive. There is the rain and the nature that is rotting and decaying, as well as a new, strange growth:

> The forest was heavy with rain and the trees were absolutely motionless. Everything had withered and died, but right down on the ground the late autumn's secret garden was growing with great vigor straight out of the moldering earth, a strange vegetation of shiny puffed-up plants that had nothing at all to do with summer. (*MN*, 23–24)
>
> Skogen var tung av regn och träden alldeles orörliga. Allting hade vissnat och dött men nere på marken växte senhöstens hemliga trädgård med rasande kraft rakt upp ur förmultningen, en främmande vegetation av blanka svällande växter som inte hade någonting med sommar att göra. (*SN*, 25)

The November forest has become a hostile, dying environment in which strange new plants are growing; yet, at the same time, Snufkin sees the incredible colours of autumn:

> The late blueberry springs were yellow-green and the cranberries as dark as blood. Hidden lichens and mosses began to grow, and they grew like a big soft carpet until they took over the whole forest. There were strong new colours everywhere, and red rowan berries were shining all over the place. But the bracken had turned black. (*MN*, 24)
>
> Det nakna blåbärsriset var gulgrönt och tranbären mörka som blod. Undanskymda lavar och mossor började växa, de växte som en stor mjuk matta tills de ägde hela skogen. Det fanns nya starka färger överallt och överallt på marken låg röda rönnbär och lyste. Men ormbunkarna var svarta. (*SN*, 25)

On some level, he enjoys the changed world and the rain but when he decides to write a song about the rain, he realizes that he has lost his notes. This leads to a

sudden experience of meaninglessness (similar to what Fillyonk went through earlier) and an existential question: "But what did the rain mean to him as long as he couldn't write a song about it?" (*MN*, 25).[220] The ability to create is more important to him than reality and he realizes that even though he had already left the valley for the winter, he must return to look for his missing five bars.

Hemulen and Grandpa-Grumble, in their respective corners of the Western valley, do not actually even really remember the Moominvalley very well but they also realize that they have to go there. Everything is a little hazy and it might even be that they have imagined the whole valley. The narrator conveys this doubt about the existence of the valley through Grandpa-Grumble and offers a metafictional hint: "It was just possible that he had only heard about this valley or perhaps he had *read* about it, but it made no difference really" (*MN*, 45–46, emphasis added).[221] Hemulen, in turn, seems to anticipate readers' experiences of the way the valley has suddenly changed. When he arrives, he does not at first realize that it is autumn; everything just feels very strange:

> Something wasn't right. Everything was the same but somehow not the same. A withered leaf floated down and landed on his nose. How silly, the Hemulen exclaimed. It's not summer at all. It's autumn! In some way or another he had always thought of Moominvalley in summer. (*MN*, 31)
>
> Det var någonting som inte stämde. Det var likadant och ändå inte likadant. Ett visset löv singlade ner och fastnade på hans nos. Nej så dumt, utbrast Hemulen. Det är ju inte alls sommar, va. Det är höst! På något vis hade han alltid tänkt sig sommar i Mumindalen. (*SN*, 31)

Finally, Mymble is the last to arrive and she too notices the change. For her, there is a sense of unreality in the autumn. The Moominvalley has become a strange, deserted landscape that resembles a stage decoration:

> She stared out of the window absentmindedly at the garden, which the autumn had changed and turned into a strange and deserted landscape. The trees were like grey stage decorations, screens standing one behind the other in the wet mist, all quite bare. (*MN*, 62)
>
> [– –] hon betraktade förströtт den stora trädgården som hösten hade förändrat och gjort till ett främmande och övergivet landskap. Träden liknade grå kulisser, skärmar som stod den ena efter den andra i regndimman, alldeles tomma. (*SN*, 55)

The characters embody different relationships to the environment, and they seem to complement each other. Snufkin, Hemulen, Grandpa-Grumble and Mymble emphasize the aesthetic and imaginary sides of the changed nature. The ambivalent relationship between inner and outer worlds and extreme emotions are thematized particularly

through Fillyonk and Toft. Whereas for Fillyonk, there is something abject and disgusting in the changed world, for Toft, the experiences of loss and sorrow gradually turn into anger; he particularly feels anger towards Moominmamma who has 'deceived' him. At the Moomin house, he starts to read a book about strange creatures called 'Nummulites'.[222] He hopes that the book would tell him where the family is but instead a completely new story begins to take shape in his mind; it is a story about a Creature that is growing and becoming angry: "It became so big that it almost didn't need any family ... " (*MN*, 97).[223]

Three Interpretive Paths

In past research, different interpretations have been given to the main themes and motifs of the novel. For example, Ojajärvi (2007, 324) interprets the constant rain in the novel as crying, and sometimes *Sent i november* is described as a first book in a trilogy about sorrow (see Karjalainen 2016, 230–232).[224] It is easy to connect the way Toft misses Moominmamma to the death of Jansson's mother Ham, Signe Hammarsten-Jansson, in the summer of 1970 when Jansson was writing the book. As readers familiar with the origins of the Moomin world know, Ham was the role model for Moominmamma and Toft bears a resemblance to Tove in many ways, beginning with the name (see, e.g., Westin 1988, 111, 279, 282; Karjalainen 2016, 232, 235). A biographical reading would suggest that Jansson is writing about the loss of her childhood world and her mother.

In addition to the biographical reading, the text also offers itself for psychoanalytical readings: if the rain is deep sorrow and grief, the decaying nature could be seen as an inability to mourn. In Sigmund Freud's (1978a) famous distinction, mourning is a 'healthy' response to loss, whereas in melancholia what is lost is incorporated inside oneself as an eternal source of sorrow. Similarly, if read through Julia Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, the lost becomes the 'abject', neither subject nor object but something in between, a disgusting, unsettling thing that needs to be pushed away. At the heart of Kristeva's theory is the idea that abjection is a process of separating oneself from the maternal body and creating borders between the self and the other. It is necessary but painful. Creativity, in turn, is a way of responding to both melancholia and abjection: it is a way of turning the experiences of loss and unsettling separation into words, images and symbols, hence alleviating them (see Kristeva 1982; 1989).

However, following a third interpretive path through a kind of a 'surface reading' (Best and Marcus 2009), the rain, the decaying nature, and the absence of the family can just as well be read as what they are: as portrayals of the autumn and a family that has moved away. This is a mode of reading that has been adopted especially by many non-academic readers. As Juha Kauppinen (2020) states: "When the family is gone in *Sent i november*, my reading is that the family is gone. Not a story about depression, nothing symbolic. The family is gone and will not return".[225] The readers can simul-

taneously hold on to all these readings whether of loss and melancholia or unsettling abjection or just matter-of-fact absence and change. Boel Westin, for example, sees both sorrow and hope in the book's description of the autumn:

> In late November, the rain falls, as if it is washing away the image of the summer valley and the happy family. The paradise-like garden fades away, but in its stead something new is growing. (Westin 1988, 277, transl. A. O.)[226]

The rain creates a sense of cleansing: it washes away the past. At the same time, it creates a space for new things that are growing. It appears to be a matter of perspective whether the changes and new forms of growth are interpreted as something frightening and disgusting (death, decay, rot) or as something comforting (new beginning).[227] According to Jansson's notes, three other possible names for the book were *Det övergivna paradiset* (The abandoned paradise), *Dröm i november* (Dream in November) and *Den lyckliga familjen* (The happy family) (see Westin 1988, 276). These can all be seen in the relationships that the different characters have with the Moominvalley and the family and which also different readers adopt. There is a sense of 'paradise lost' and a dream-like quality but also the memories (or the imaginings) of the happy family that participate in the construction of the peculiar atmosphere.

Metafiction and Spaces of Creativity

As the story progresses, the feelings of anxiety, disgust and melancholia gradually begin to fade away: they make room for more positive emotions, forms of creativity and new changes in the characters. As we saw, Snufkin had lost his five bars and returns to the Moominvalley to look for them but he cannot find them, as Heinämaa (2018, 62–63) has suggested, until he is able to create an intersubjective connection to the other (five) characters. There is a need not just for objects and spaces but also other living beings to create an affective scaffolding.

Gradually this begins to happen to all the characters: they create connections to one another and find new ways of perceiving the world. For example, one evening Fillyonk is at the kitchen door and listens to Snufkin playing outside. The narrator describes how the light is directed at her and how she is susceptible to whatever could be threatening her from the outside. However, she does not think about any of this:

> She listened breathlessly. She forgot all the awful things; tall and thin, she was silhouetted against the lighted kitchen, an easy prey to all the lurking dangers of the night. But nothing happened. (*MN*, 111)
>
> Hon lyssnade andlöst, hon glömde sina hemskheter, stor och mager avtecknade hon sig mot det upplysta köket, ett lättfångat byte för all nattens farlighet. Men ingenting hände. (*SN*, 97)

It is in fact the readers who are situated where the dangerous creatures could have been: *we* are looking at Fillyonk from the shadows (see Image 4). As Happonen (2007, 202–206) has shown, Jansson's way of composing her pictures has an important role in the construction of atmosphere and she paid special attention to the questions of seeing and being seen. We, for example, do not often see the same things as the characters. Here the readers became part of the dark, autumn forest that is no longer dangerous.

Especially the metafictional features of the novel emphasize the theme of creativity and the aesthetic frame that creates a sense of safety and can alleviate the readers' experiences of sorrow and loss. Researchers have listed different metafictional and self-reflexive motifs in the book. For example, the absence of the Moomin family can be read not only as a portrayal of loss but also as a comment about the suite coming to an end and as an effort to invite the readers to think about the fictional Moomin world in new ways, as Katri Kivilaakso (2003, 83–84) has suggested. We can also recall Hemulen's, Grandpa-Grumble's and Mymble's experiences of the fictionality of the Moominvalley (see also, Kivilaakso 2003, 87–88) or the way Toft's stories about the summer valley and the Nummulites creates both connections to earlier books and mise-en-abyme structures that reflect the construction of the novel itself (see also, Westin 1988, 283; Kivilaakso 2003, 90–91).[228]

Moreover, to balance the mood of the story, Jansson uses comic elements, parody and irony (see also, Kivilaakso 2003, 97). She creates comedy through the rhythms of the text: punctuation marks, changes of paragraphs and the organization of the dialogues. The portrayal of the actions and movements of the characters, the way the characters speak to each other and the ways they rush and blunder in both the texts and drawings contribute to the atmosphere of the text (see also, Happonen 2003, 200–201; Happonen 2007, 24). The characters also often become metafictional parodies of themselves. For example, when Hemulen arrives at the house and no one opens the door, he mimics a policeman and tries to scare the family, telling them to "open in the name of the Law" (*MN*, 32).[229] The comic effect relies on the fact that readers know that hemulens are the policemen of the Moomin world (see also, Ojajärvi 2007, 335).

The Party

The metafictional and self-reflexive elements are particularly strong in the party scene which is the culmination of the novel. During the party, the characters come together and begin to function as a group, as Heinämaa (2018, 60) has suggested: an interpersonal component of affective scaffolding is found. Each character performs something that characterizes their situation in the novel (see also, Rantakokko 10.3.2017). The first to perform is Hemulen who has written a hyperbolic and highly intertextual poem about how "life is only a dream".[230] After Hemulen's poem, Mymble dances and interrupts the sense of stagnation that otherwise permeates the text, as Happonen (2007, 143) has noted.[231] Grandpa-Grumble takes the other partygoers to see the ancestor with whom he has been talking since he came to the house and who is actually only his own reflection in a faded mirror. Toft, in turn, reads aloud about the Nummulites and shares his inner world with the others for the first time. Finally, Fil-

Image 4. Fillyonk at the door. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*, 96. © Moomin Characters™

lyonk shows a shadow-play, "The Return", in which we see the Moomin family sailing back to the valley (see Image 5).

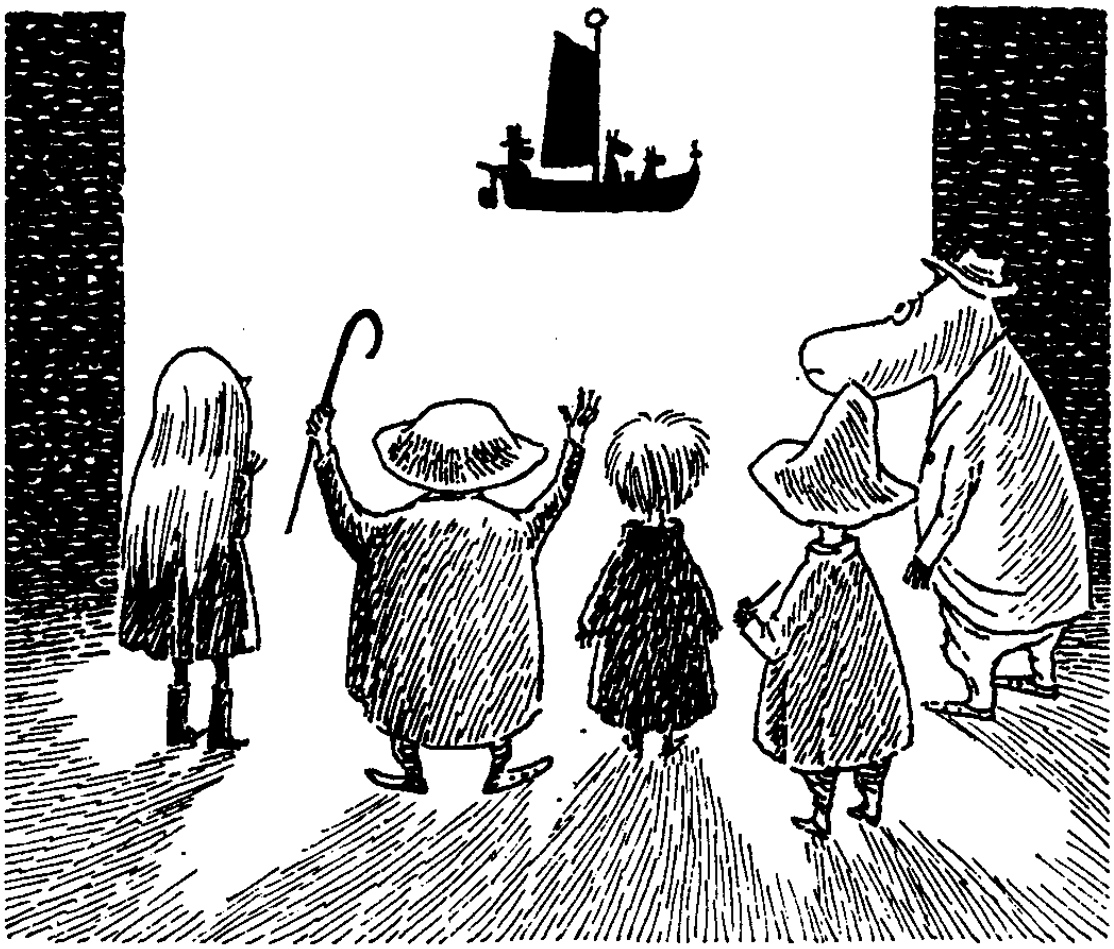

Image 5. The Shadowplay. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*, 138. © Moomin Characters™

The performances at the party emphasize how art, creativity and imagination can function as sources of comfort and safety. This becomes particularly visible through Fillyonk's experience: the party ends in a bit of chaos because after the shadow-play is over, Fillyonk cannot find matches and the group ends up blundering around in darkness. When the light is lit again, everybody leaves and Fillyonk remains alone in the kitchen in the middle of all the leftovers and debris. She takes a bite of a sandwich but then just leaves everything as it is and goes out. Suddenly the disgusting "creepycrawly things" are no longer there and there is only the rain: "It was raining outside. She listened carefully but could hear only the rain. They had disappeared" (*MN*, 163).[232] She then takes Snufkin's mouth organ and begins to play:

> She played Snufkin's songs and she played her own; she couldn't be got at, nothing could make her feel unsafe now. She didn't worry whether the others could hear her or not. Outside in the garden all was quiet, all the creepy-crawly things had disappeared and it was an ordinary dark autumn night with a rising wind. (*MN*, 164–165)
>
> Hon spelade Snusmumrikens visor och hon spelade sina egna, hon var onåbar och inne i en fullkomlig säkerhet. Hon tänkte inte på om de andra hörde henne eller inte. Därute it trädgården var det tyst, allt som kröp var borta, det var bara en vanlig mörk höst med ökande vind. (*SN*, 144)

As Ojajärvi (2007, 336) writes, creativity takes a hold: "one thing leads to another". During the night, Fillyonk forgets all the norms that usually guide her and her efforts to keep things uncontaminated and unambiguous: to be diligent like a fillyonk, or calm and warm like Moominmamma.[233] Early the next morning, Fillyonk begins to clean the whole house and when the others arrive, the action becomes contagious; everyone except Grandpa-Grumble participates (see Image 6).

The Forest of Anger

After the autumn cleaning, the first snow falls. Mymble and Fillyonk leave, GrandpaGrumble goes into hibernation and only Toft, Snufkin and Hemulen are left. The story is almost over, as the narrator states: "They were waiting for their story to come to an end" (*MN*, 179).[234] Ultimately Toft is alone waiting for the family and it is his turn to see the valley in a new light (but we can also recall Hemulen's, Grandpa-Grumbles and Mymble's earlier perceptions of the valley):

> The whole of Moominvalley had somehow become unreal, the house, the garden and the river were nothing but a play of shadows on the screen and Toft no longer knew what was real and what was only his imagination. He had been made to wait too long and now he was angry. (*MN*, 192)
>
> Hela Mumindalen hade blivit overklig, huset och trädgården och floden var ingenting annat än ett spel av skärmar och skuggor och homsan visste inte vad som var riktig och vad han bara hade tänkt. Han hade fått vänta för länge och nu var han arg. (*SN*, 167)

In addition to offering a space of safety in a world that is otherwise threatening, the book affords a space to experience negative emotions. Toft ends up in a strange forest behind the house where Mymble has said that the Moomins go when they are angry. Earlier Toft hasn't believed Mymble but now he is ready to change his perspective:

> It was a different world. Toft had no pictures and no words for it, nothing had to correspond. No one had tried to make a path here and no one

Image 6. The cleaning. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*. 147.
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> had ever rested under the trees. They just walked around with sinister thoughts, this was the forest of anger. He grew quite calm and very attentive. With enormous relief the worried Toft felt all his pictures disappear. 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 on through the forest [– –] thinking nothing at all [– –]. (*MN*, 193–194)
>
> Det var en ny värld. Homsan Toft hade inga bilder och inga ord för den, ingenting behövde stämma. Här hade ingen försökt göra en väg och ingen hade någonsin vilat under träden. De hade bara gått omkring med mörka tankar, det var vredens skog. Han blev alldeles lugn och mycket uppmärksam. Med oerhörd lättnad kände den bekymrade homsan hur alla hans bilder försvann. Hans berättelse om dalen och den lyckliga familjen bleknade och gled undan, mamman gled undan och blev avlägsen, en opersonlig bild, han visste inte ens hur hon såg ut. Homsan Toft gick vidare genom skogen [– –] han tänkte på ingenting alls [– –]. (*SN*, 168–169)

"The forest of anger" offers one last cleansing experience. Toft realizes that sometimes Moominmamma has also been angry and has wanted to be alone and he gives up the images he has created in his mind. The text thematizes the dangers of imagination, of letting "things get too big" (*MN*, 127),[235] as Snufkin has warned Toft, and shows the way creativity offers comfort, a safe place to be angry or whatever one needs to be. Fiction creates a place where aggressions can be dealt with; this is something that Jansson emphasized as a children's book author but it is likewise an important message for adults (Jansson 1961; see also, Kivilaakso 2003, 82).

The Open Ending

Perhaps the most important metafictional element in the story is its open ending. As the characters say their goodbyes to one another and as the readers also prepare to say goodbye to the valley, we are invited to tell a new story (see also, *Tainan ja Tommin aarrearkku* 14.3.2020). Author Johanna Venho captures this in her recent novel about Jansson, bringing to mind Toft's stories:

> It always feels like a miracle when a story is reaching its end and the best ending is also a new beginning. Nothing really ends and the reader knows that at this point a new story begins: a story which one can tell oneself. (Venho 2021, 70, transl. A. O.)[236]

A close reading shows that *Sent i november* is filled with themes and motifs that are repeated from Jansson's earlier stories especially in the collection *Det osynliga barnet och andra berättelser* (1962) and creates new variations of them. For example, Fillyonk's story in the novel resonates with the short story 'Filifjonkan som trodde på katastrofer' (transl. Fillyjonk who believed in disasters) which is about a fillyonk

who is afraid of something that she is unable to articulate but is finally released of everything when a hurricane destroys all her possessions. In 'Hemulen som älskade tystnad' (transl. Hemulen who loved quiet), Jansson created a story about a rainstorm that goes on and on and washes away everything. In 'En hemsk historia' (transl. A Tale of Horror), she explored how something imaginary and horrible can become something very real in a little *homsan*'s mind. 'Vårvisan' (transl. The Spring Tune), in turn, is about the loss and discovery of creativity. Finally, 'Berättelsen om det osynliga barnet' (transl. The Invisible Child) is – among other things – about the importance of being able to become angry. These connections to other texts that function as links within the Moomin world offer another scaffold for the readers; we can always return to the stories, read again from new angles and see things in a new light. This is also how Jansson, as a modernist artist, created the Moomin world: she painted a picture of the 'Happy Family' again and again but, as Westin (1988, 275) notes, changes the lighting, colours and forms. There is always a new perspective.

Moreover, what appears as important for many Nordic readers of *Sent i november* is the evocative portrayal of the November atmosphere: the comfort, the warmth and the ways to survive the darkness and the cold even though it is threatening. In some readers' experiences the intertextual links even extend into the real world. The events described in the novel such as curling under a blanket, lighting candles and eating sandwiches become actions in reality:

> In a way, the book also offers advice on how to survive the darkest time of the year – it is worth resting a little under a sweet eiderdown blanket, reading a book about wonderous things in candlelight and sometimes it is even good to decorate one's home with paper lanterns, make warm cheese sandwiches and drink a glass of wine with friends, to celebrate good companionship. *(P. S Rakastan kirjoja* 5.12.2013; see also, *Wilde Things* 19.11.2017. Transl. A. O.)[237]

Conclusion: the End and the Return

> I will tell a story about how dream is more important than reality. (Jansson's note on *Sent i november*, quoted in Westin 1988, 275, transl. A. O.)[238]

At the very end, as Toft gives up the images and the stories that he has created of the Moomin family, he finally lets the family be what they are (as Snufkin and Mymble have pushed him to do). His recognition can also be tied to Jansson's overarching idea about freedom:

> I have tried to tell [a story] about a very happy family. The Moomin family is happy in such an obvious way that they themselves don't even realize it.

> They are comfortable with each other and give each other freedom. Freedom to be alone, to think in one's way, to keep one's secrets until one is ready to disclose them. Not to give each other a bad conscience and to be able to experience responsibility as something fun and not just a duty. (Jansson's lecture in 1983, quoted in Westin 1988, 18, transl. A. O.)[239]

Jansson's stories about the Moomins emphasize the freedom involved in letting each person find and maintain what one 'really' is and *Sent I november* offers a final variation on this theme. The characters begin by wanting to become something other than they are but they end up finding their authentic selves, as many academic readers point out (see Valkeajoki 2003; Heinämaa 2018). This is also what Mymble seems to emphasize when the whole group gathers for the last time:

> And why should it be different? Mymble asked. A hemulen is always a hemulen and the same things happen to him all the time. [– –] "Will you always be the same?" Fillyonk asked her out of curiosity. "I certainly hope so!" Mymble answered. (*MN*, 171)
>
> Och varför skulle det vara olika? frågade Mymlan. En hemul är alltid en hemul och det händer honom bara samma slags saker [– –] Kommer du alltid att vara likadan? frågade Filifjonkan nyfiket. Det hoppas jag verkligen! svarade Mymlan. (*SN*, 149)

There is safety and comfort in repetition and sameness: in the same stories, characters and themes. The ending is not an ending but a new beginning. Letting go is about creating freedom to experience, to imagine and to find what one wants to be.

In the final passage of the novel, the narrator describes how Toft sees a boat far away:

> And then Toft saw the storm lantern Moominpappa had hung up at the top of the mast. In threw a gentle, warm light and burnt steadily. The boat was a very long way away. Toft had plenty of time to go down through the forest and along the beach to the jetty, and be just in time to catch the line and tie up the boat. (*MN*, 195–196)
>
> Och nu såg homsan Toft stormlyktan som pappan hade hängt i masttoppen. Den hade en mild varm färg och den brann stadigt. Båten var mycket långt borta. Homsan Toft hade god tid på sig att gå ner genom skogen och följa stranden till båtbryggan, precis lagom för att ta emot fånglinan. (*SN*, 170)

In Jansson's last illustration, we see Toft at the swimming hut (see Image 7). When reading the last words and looking at the last picture, we can also remember Fillyonk's silhouette of the Moomin family returning (see Image 5 above). As Happonen (2007, 26) notes, Jansson's vignettes can – among other functions – move the story forward.

Here the last vignette can be read as referring to the future: it extends the story to times and spaces that are not described in the text. Readers never learn if the family really returns; the ending could also be just a reflection of the shadow-play (see also, Karjalainen 2016, 232). As Westin (1988, 285, transl. A. O.) writes: "We get to see only their shadows – the reader is left outside of the return itself".[240] Nevertheless, it is important that what readers see last is Toft waiting for them, ready to reach for the mooring rope. The open yet comforting ending can be seen as the final element that creates the sense of safety that is emphasized by both academic and non-academic readers.

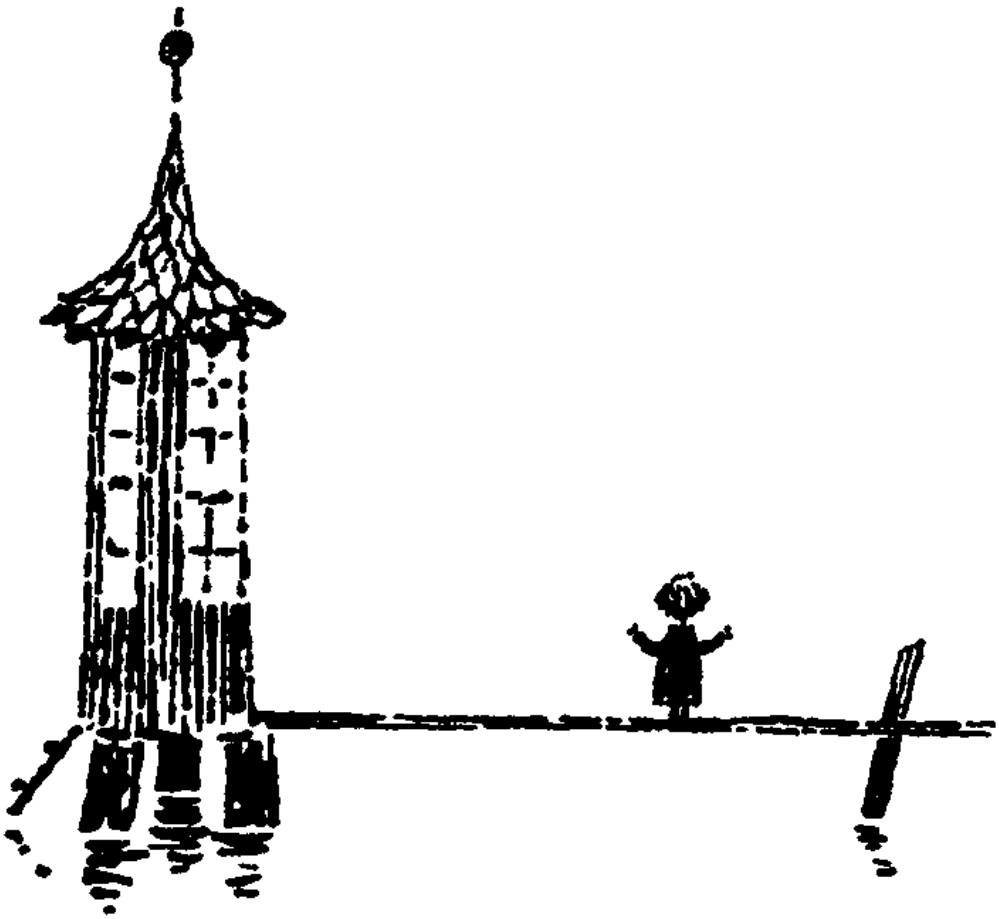

Image 7. Toft at the swimming hut. Illustration: Tove Jansson, *Sent i november*, 170. © Moomin Characters™

Sent i november was Jansson's last Moomin novel. The environment has changed, the Moomins are gone, the house is empty and cold, it is raining and nature is dying and decomposing. At the same time, the valley is depicted as a safe space where the characters can undergo painful experiences of anxiety, disgust, fear, grief and anger. They can break the norms that cause them suffering. They can imagine themselves and the worlds around them in new ways and they can also surrender these stories and images when they become too large and real. The novel is simultaneously about losing the valley and saying goodbye to it. There is pain evoked by the loss and an understanding of the fictional nature of the valley: an embodied experience of sorrow, disgust and anger as well a sense of fictionality, creativity and agency. Both are brought forth in the 'sense of November': loss and death but also something new growing from the decay.[241]

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