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“Sorry, my mind just blew up, gotta go home.” Embracing Finnish weird and Arctic hysteria in the Finnish comic *Fok_it*.

This article offers an overview of a popular Finnish internet and newspaper comic, *Fok_it*, aiming to analyse its characteristic features, mainly how concepts such as “Arctic hysteria” and “Finnish weird” are represented in it. The genres are usually used in a literary context (when referring to novels and short stories), yet rarely when describing comics or graphic novels. Therefore, the aim is to explore if and how the above-mentioned concepts are shown in the selected comic and how well they could be applied to comics in general.

Keywords: humour, Finnish weird, Arctic hysteria, comics, carnivalisation

1. Background

Having taught Finnish literature abroad for many years, I have tried to offer a versatile picture of Finnish contemporary literature to my students. During courses, when asked to provide an opinion of the theme we have covered, the students would say that “it was very Finnish”. When asked to specify or give an example of what they meant by this, what makes Finnish literature Finnish, certain adjectives were repeated: different, unique, dark, *weird*. This led me to wonder whether these adjectives are applicable when analysing Finnish comics. What could be said to make Finnish literature fit those above-mentioned adjectives is a genre called “Finnish weird” and another genre, that is relevant not only in the Finnish context but also used when arctic, cold regions are studied: Arctic hysteria.

In this article, I analyse a Finnish three-panel comic *Fok_it*, drawn by Joonas Rinta-Kanto, to see how the textual and visual representation fits the characteristics of Finnish weird or Arctic hysteria. The objective of this article is to study the material in these three-panel comic strips using content analysis, to determine

the presence of certain themes and concepts – in this case how the concepts of Finnish weird, Arctic hysteria, and carnivalisation are represented in it and whether we can apply these genres or concepts to other comics.

With regard to Arctic hysteria, it is an umbrella term for many concepts or behavioural patterns, including very strong feelings, melancholy, sadness, and, on a more positive note, feelings of overtly felt joy. Finnish weird, as the name implies, is something specific to Finland, which is also strange, weird – in the positive sense of the word. Arctic hysteria, on the other hand, is not only used to describe Finnish literature but Nordic literature in general. The final key concept, carnivalisation, is a phenomenon that can present certain concepts, even dark and difficult ones, in a playful, alternative way⁶, which is what Rinta-Kanto does. However, in this instance, carnivalisation is not the focus of the article but is used as a cohering factor: does the description of carnivalisation apply when studying the ways in which weirdness or strong emotions are shown?

Fok_it is a three-panel comic strip that depicts unnamed people and creatures in various situations. The author, Joonas Rinta-Kanto, has captured the true essence of Finnishness in his comics: awkward, yet unavoidable encounters with colleagues, burn-out, overall tiredness of life, people struggling with seasonal affective disorder – and, in addition to this, he shows these extravagant people and creatures living their lives to the fullest. The comic is published, among others, in the Finnish national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, which is the largest circulation newspaper that requires a paid subscription, reaching over 2,1 million readers in Finland every week (HS 2021). In addition, Rinta-Kanto publishes the comic on social media platforms that also reach a large readership.

This article aims to gather reoccurring uses of Arctic hysteria and Finnish weird in *Fok_it* – concepts that have mostly been used in the context of other literary works, such as text-based novels and short stories – to explore and better understand their uses as well as assess whether these concepts might be applied to other comics. After having introduced the comic and its main themes, I define briefly what humour is, given that *Fok_it* is a humorous comic, and how the Finnish sense of humour might be defined. It should be noted that the aim is not to analyse humour, Finnish humour, or humour on different levels presented in comics (verbal and visual) *per se* but to focus on the fact that *Fok_it* is a traditional three-panel humorous comic. After this, I explain what Finnish weird and Arctic hysteria mean with examples from selected comic strips from the *Fok_it* series. Finally, I will discuss briefly how well the genres apply to comics in general before concluding the paper.

⁶ See for instance: Jokelin, J. (2020); Niemelä, J.K. (2014); Karnevaali (n.d.).

2. The world of *Fok_it*

The first *Fok_it* was published on Rinta-Kanto's blog on the 21st of February in 2009. *Fok_it* also appeared in the weekly supplement *Nyt* of the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, which started to publish the comic on April Fool's Day in 2011 (Mansikka 2019). Readers can enjoy the comic on the website and paper version of Helsingin Sanomat, which is the most widely read of the Finnish media (MediaAuditFinland 2020). This provides a useful platform to reach a wide range of readers both online and in paper format. Moreover, the Facebook page of *Fok_it* has 33 thousand followers as of August 2023 (Fok_it n.d.), and the Instagram profile of the now officially discontinued *Nyt* supplement, where *Fok_it* was also published from time to time, had 82,9 thousand followers, as of February 2024 (hs_nyt n.d.). Seven books of the *Fok_it* comic strips have also been published (Kulttuuriuutinen 2018).

Usually, *Fok_it* consists of three panels, and at least one-quarter of the panels is taken by a person's head and the rest is usually either one big speech bubble or several smaller ones. Behind the person's head, there is a background – a monochromatic, bright-coloured wall that does not reveal where the events or encounters between people take place. The bright colours and dark topics that are usually the content of the comic contrast with one another. The people who appear in the comic are not known to the reader as they differ from strip to strip and are not named. However, if need be, they are named after the action they perform or the feature they represent, such as “mietiskelijä” (ponderer, thinker) (Fok_it, blog n.d.).

The panels look hand-drawn and the text in the speech bubbles is written with capital letters, giving the comic a less official, easy-to-approach look. The text in the speech bubbles can be a monologue, a dialogue between two characters, or animated objects. The number of people taking part in a conversation is not specified, as usually only one head can be seen at a time and the rest of the speech bubbles come from outside the panel. This gives space for the reader to fill in the missing information – moreover, it provides readers with the opportunity to see themselves in the funny situations and thus they are relatable. This is also probably one of the reasons why the comic is so popular. The characters have distinct looks: big, large eyes that gaze in different directions from left to right while they are talking (this usually being the only movement in the comic strips), and their skin is covered in lines, dots, and wrinkles.

In the panels, there is little to no real action (i.e. actual movement), other than the previously mentioned eye movement. Due to this static configuration, the eye movements and direction of the gaze play a crucial role in giving the reader insights into the characters' thoughts and moods. Sometimes the characters even seem to be looking at the reader, which could be seen as a deliberate decision to break the so-called fourth wall or as a metareference. These concepts will be introduced later in the article.

Journalist Ossi Mansikka does not spare adjectives when describing the comic in Helsingin Sanomat: “delirious stories of malformed characters whose monologues and conversations are often enthusiastically moronic, sometimes apathetic”, yet “the somewhat simple characters are fundamentally sincere and contemplative, and their everyday observations grow into, at best, a stinging critique of the world, time, and human nature” (Mansikka 2019). The monologue, or conversation, is typically an inner-monologue type, a form of wondering about one’s life or recent news, absurd connections between things, and commonly spoken language and/or slang expressions. Mansikka points out that the three-panel stories do not necessarily have a plot, beginning, or end, “rather they could be extracts taken from a stream of consciousness”, which can bring the characters and themes closer to the readers, who can ponder over similar dilemmas or worries, such as microplastic in the ocean (translation by LS) (Mansikka 2019).

One of the first animals to make its debut in the world of *Fok_it* was a unicorn called *Säihkyturpa* (“sparkly snout”). Rinta-Kanto explains that the creature initially appeared to a very tired man who was the only one able to see it; “[t]he man had gone completely nuts” (translation by LS). That episode turned out to be the most popular up to that point, so the unicorn stayed. *Fok_it* is home not only to the unicorn but also other fictional creatures and animals that are referred to as *voimaeläin* (lit. power animal; similar to spirit animal) (Kulttuuriuutinen 2018). A strip featuring the unicorn is shown below:



Picture 1. Sparkly snout appears to a man

Source: <https://fokit.wordpress.com/2011/12/16/671/> (accessed: 14.08.2023).

Panel 1: “Hurray! You made it through this week! Hurray! I’ll go now, but I’ll return when Monday is at its worst! *Säihkyturpa* is always near!” “Thank you, *Säihkyturpa*! Thank you!”
 Panel 2: “Hey! What are you doing? Who are you talking to?” “What? To my power animal!”
 Panel 3: “What on earth, to a power animal? Where have you been the whole week? We have been looking for you everywhere! Are you alright?” [vomits rainbow] (Translation by LS).

Both characters have wrinkly-looking skin, the background is monochromatic and provides no information about the location, and the eyes and direction of the gaze play a central role as there is little other movement shown. The anonymous character has been missing for a week and when finally found, claims to be talking with his “power animal”. He then proceeds to vomit a rainbow. The little flowers in the second panel refer to the way the unicorn departs – leaving bright flowers behind it as a form of spreading positivity.

It cannot be certain whether the person really sees the unicorn who manages to leave the scene before other characters arrive, or whether the whole encounter simply took place in the main protagonist’s mind (after all, he might be drunk or otherwise intoxicated). The reader is left to come to their own conclusions – whether the person has been drinking somewhere all week and imagines the meeting with the unicorn, or he can truly see it. Rinta-Kanto does not aim to criticise or justify anything – the reader must decide and also fill in the blanks of what occurred before and what happens after.

3. Humour – and Finnish humour

In this section, I provide a brief definition of humour and analyse what is meant by Finnish humour, since *Fok_it* is a typical humorous three-panel comic. It is important to note that humour is a very culture-bound concept. Additionally, in comics, humour can exist on many levels – textual, visual, and in combination, which provides a wide scope for analysis.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English offers the following definition of humour: “the quality in something that makes it funny and makes people laugh” (Longman Dictionary n.d.). Underneath the description, there is a list of related adjectives or nouns that often appear with “humour”. The list includes, among others, dark humour (“jokes, funny stories etc. about the unpleasant parts of life” (Longman Dictionary n.d.)), gallows humour (“jokes, funny stories etc. which make very unpleasant or dangerous things seem funny” (Longman Dictionary n.d.)), dry humour (“when someone makes it seem as if they are being serious, but really they are being funny” (Longman Dictionary n.d.)), or wry humour (“when someone makes something seem both funny and sad” (Longman Dictionary n.d.)). What seems to be missing from the list is black humour, which appears occasionally when describing humorous comics. However, the term is said to have acquired pejorative features over time. “Black humour” can be characterised as being “variously grotesque, ironic, satirical, absurd, or any combination of these” (O’Neill 1983: 79, 82).

Tanja Rasila has written about humour in comics, noting that the three-panel newspaper strip could be seen “as a prototype” of humorous comics that “make people laugh and get them in a good mood”. However, she also states that the concept

“humorous comic” is a useful term “but it includes much more than just joking”, since “fundamentally, humour is a very subtle and complex phenomenon per se” (translations by LS) (Rasila 1996: 61). Humour is, moreover, a culture-bound phenomenon, in addition to holding a complex position within a given country or culture. What is found funny in a certain country or part of the world, can be seen as inappropriate elsewhere.⁷ In connection with this, it is necessary to determine what is found funny in Finland.

When defining Finnish humour, it is useful to ask someone who has not acquired the Finnish sense of humour – but who needed to learn it. An observer of Finnish culture and creator of Finland-related memes, Joel Willians, author of the book *The Very Finnish Problems*, as well as a blog and a social media site, notes that “Finnish humour is often described as dry, ironic, and absurd”, and continues by saying that “it’s a reflection of the Finnish mindset. In a country of extremes, with long periods of darkness and isolation, and a history of resilience and perseverance, humour is a coping mechanism, a way of dealing with life’s challenges uniquely and creatively.” (Very Finnish Problems 2023) This definition takes us closer to Arctic hysteria, which will be covered in more detail later.

Culture journalist Riitta Koivuranta has written about humour in a Swedish comedy series *Finska rycket*, created by Swedish-Finnish Tiffany Kronlöf. The series aims to embrace the differences in humour between Finland and Sweden. Koivuranta cites Kronlöf’s character who claims that “when a Finn tells a joke, the style is laconic and declarative, and that is what makes it even funnier for many” (translation by LS). Commenting about the series, which relies on stereotypes, Kronlöf concludes that “in Finland, they prefer *synkkä* [gloomy, sad, pessimistic, dark] and weird in art, music, and humour. Unemployment, being poor and depression are acceptable topics for jokes. That is Finnish self-irony. Absurd and weird have been important in Finnish humour” (translation by LS) (Koivuranta 2021). It can be seen, therefore, that even harsh or difficult topics are not regarded as taboo in Finland.

To summarise, the adjectives used to define the Finnish sense of humour are: dry, ironic, absurd, laconic, declarative, gloomy, sad, pessimistic, and dark. These do not immediately suggest humour; they even sound like antonyms of humour. When returning to Longman and O’Neill’s definitions, therefore, it can be argued that Finnish humour is dark (making fun of the unpleasant parts of life), gallows-type (making fun of unpleasant things), dry (saying something funny but with an emotionless expression), wry (funny and sad at the same time) and/or black (absurd).

⁷ See for instance: Jiang, T., Li, H. and Hou, Y. (2019).

4. Finnish weird

In this section, I define what is meant by Finnish weird and where the term comes from. Finnish weird cannot be described without mentioning Johanna Sinisalo and her genre-defining novel *Not Before Sundown* (published in 2000). In the journal, *Finnish Weird* (2014), Jussi K. Niemelä claims Sinisalo's work is "the epitome of Finnish Weird" and "the genre's first de facto representation". In her ground-breaking novel, Sinisalo combines elements of Finnish mythology with the ordinary world. The term itself, "Finnish Weird" (*suomikumma*) was created by Sinisalo in 2010.

Niemelä alludes to the duality of safety and fear that stems from the wilderness and the unknown: "the call of the wild versus the fear of the unknown" serves as a setting in many stories that can be placed within the frames of this genre. For many Finnish people, in fact, the forest and nature in general, provide a source of "safe haven", a place of "recreation and refreshment" (Niemelä 2014: 7). These elements – the unknown, darkness and fear that stems either from internal or external factors – have something in common with Arctic hysteria.

Despite forests and nature serving an important role in the lives of Finnish people, the story does not have to be centered around or within a forest to fulfil the criteria of Finnish weird. For Sinisalo, 'weird' means something that "encapsulates all 'diagonal' or hybrid or as yet unnamed approaches to everyday situations and societal problems". 'Diagonal' here means "some other angle than reality, or as a matter of fact, any angle other than reality that's not possible to pigeonhole into any established genre". According to Sinisalo, what is common to writers whose literary work could be categorised under the label of *weird* is that it blurs genre boundaries (Niemelä 2014: 8).

Niemelä summarises Finnish Weird as an "overall genre, an umbrella term that encompasses all diagonal, that is to say non-realistic approaches to any story we cannot label as science fiction or fantasy without being unjust to both the author and the readers". He further explains that meanwhile there is a lot of realistic action occurring in the story and then something strange happens randomly – that's "where the 'weird' steps in". (Niemelä 2014: 8). This shows how fluid, yet open the genre is. It is up to the reader to define whether a certain literary product represents this genre.

The concept of Finnish Weird has primarily been used to describe literature, as in novels and short stories. In terms of comics and graphic novels, applying this genre or concept is problematic: comics and graphic novels are known to be full of super people who fly and fictional creatures equipped with paranormal powers, meanwhile, the borders of what is real and what is not, tends to be difficult to discern. There are mythical creatures and talking animals within the world of *Fok_it*, as well as speaking food and inanimate objects, such as the hostile cheese in the example below. Unicorns are creatures usually found in fairy tales or fantasy novels, while talking animals are also something that appears in similar genres.

In the following example, the strip starts with a person reasoning why he could not be a vegan – he could not stop eating cheese. In the first panel, apart from the main protagonist and his declaration, there is a second speech bubble, although it is not yet known who demands an answer to the question. Then, in the second and third panels, some very angry-looking, different types of cheeses are shown, who kidnap the person and take him out of the frame.



Picture 2. An example of a weird encounter between a man and a talking cheese
Source: <https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000006008790.html> (accessed: 14.08.2023).

Panel 1: “Otherwise I could be a vegan, but I could never give up cheese.” “Oh really?”

Panel 2: “For me it’s not an issue whatsoever to get rid of you.” “W-what?”

Panel 3: “Take him away! Grate him to the last piece!” “No! Feta! You too?” “Or melt him onto a piece of bread!” “No! No! Where are you taking me you Muensters?” (translation by LS).

In the original strip, the person asks the group of cheeses where they are taking him: “Mihin the briette mua?” There is a wordplay that consists of the verb “to take” (viedä) and its plural imperative form (viette) and the cheese type Brie (hence, briette). Aiming to preserve the wordplay in the translation, I used another type of cheese, Muenster cheese, as in “you monsters”.

Despite the strip showing an angry mob of cheeses, as was mentioned above, such themes (i.e. talking objects) are not completely unfamiliar in the world of comics, which is known to feature flying people, time-traveling, talking animals and many other, unnatural phenomena. Is *Fok_it*, then, a fantasy comic? The answer is that it is probably not. This is because the world of *Fok_it* appears to be *too ordinary*: people struggle with their work and the expectations of society, try to keep up with new trends and maintain relationships with others and then, suddenly, there is food that talks back to us, a unicorn (see section two), and other talking animals – features that can also be seen in fairytales and fantasy novels. Moreover, *Fok_it* does not fit neatly into the category of science-fiction. However, as already noted, Finnish weird is a flexible genre and works of literature do not necessarily need to be categorically

placed on a continuum that has fantasy at one end and science-fiction at the other end. What is worth noting, however, is that *Fok_it* is not an underground comic but has an established audience in the largest national newspaper in Finland, despite showing rather absurd topics that could be found too alternative in other countries.

5. Arctic hysteria and extreme emotions

In this section I define the concept “Arctic hysteria”, which is an older term than Finnish weird. The concept has also recently begun to interest researchers in the context of Finnish literature. After defining the term, I use some examples from *Fok_it* that represent the concept.

The term was already in use in the 19th century, when anthropologists aimed to describe various unknown phenomena from Siberian shamans to Sami people. At this time it had colonialist overtones. The concept was also used when researchers aimed to classify strong feelings, certain behaviour, and tendencies shown in Finnish literature. This is also what is meant by Arctic hysteria in this article, although without colonial intentions.

Aiming to define what the concept means and its underlying history, Jantso Jokelin analyses the yet-to-be-discovered world of Arctic hysteria in the Finnish literary context in his article “Different routes. The Nordic peoples endure calmy until they finally snap – literary researchers bite into the myth of Arctic hysteria” (translation by LS) (Jokelin 2020). He introduces a research project carried out by researchers from Helsinki and Tampere universities, citing docent Riikka Rossi who studies Nordic primitivism and feelings. She understands Arctic hysteria as “a large bundle of emotions and reactions” (translation by LS). Additionally, Rossi says her research group is interested in “strange, negative and ambivalent feelings that Nordic literature has depicted and produced” (translation by LS) (Jokelin 2020). This is in spite of the fact that literature has produced a certain image of the Finnish nations that depicts people as quiet and rather melancholic. However, under “the gruff, semi-lethargic gawking”, there is an ever-present risk of uncontrollable fits full of rage which is always there.. In national literature, the concept has also been used to “justify violent tendencies and gloominess, but carnivalistic madness as well” (Jokelin 2020).

According to Rossi, “[a] journey to the ends of the world or north has usually been depicted as a journey outside the hypothetical common sense and order, into a world affected by different, primitive desires” and that “[i]n cultural representation, the north has been used to elicit fear” (translation by LS) (Jokelin 2020). Some believe that when it comes to weird outbursts of emotions, the Nordic nations are particularly prone to them and that this type of phenomenon is given the name of “Arctic hysteria”. Although the term is known, it is not, however, a straightforward task to provide a simple, specific definition for it. What comes to mind, consequently,

is alcohol, life in dark and cold environments, seriousness, and “extravagant spikes of energy” (translation by LS) (Jokelin 2020).

Similarly to the way Finnish weird cannot be defined without mentioning Johanna Sinisalo, Arctic hysteria cannot be satisfactorily described without mentioning Marko Tapio. Tapio is the author of the novel *Arktinen hysteria* (Arctic Hysteria), originally published in 1967. Literary scholar Markku Ihonen has studied the concept and Tapio’s book. Ihonen believes that “Arctic hysteria is largely a matter of construction, a culturally produced and maintained perception”, “[e] specially when it comes to the Arctic hysteria in Finnish literature” (translation by LS) (Ihonen 1999: 220).

Ihonen (1999: 215) cites a fragment from Tapio’s book, which describes the unfortunate death of a man called Ville Lommola, who got run over by a locomotive: “In fact, it [the accident] was nothing more than the materialisation of a feature of Finnish mentality”. Moreover, Tapio describes the incident to be “over-the-top, Slavic-type exaggeration”. It should be noted, however, that the main aim was not to diminish or disrespect the person or his death but to tell the story of the incident objectively. Additionally, Tapio describes the Finnish nation as patient and concentrated (i.e. focusing on specific tasks carefully). However, due to its geographical location, “in the middle of snowstorms and darkness [those features] take on the dimensions of melodrama”, and it is possible to believe that “the person going through the events, at least to some extent, enjoys their part in them and their exaggeration, and intensifies them [until it becomes too much]” (translations by LS) (Ihonen 1999: 215).

Ihonen also lists several features that describe the Finnish nation and can be found within Arctic hysteria. These include *metsäläisyys* [being a hillbilly; country pumpkin; living in/near a forest] and main characters who are depicted as antiheroes. He also says that “we move up the extremes of the emotional scale – either in extreme depression and anxiety, even paralysis-like numbness, or in the uncontrolled bodily expression of emotions. This expression could just as well be a euphoric scream or ecstatic dancing rather than uncontrollable crying or violent behaviour” (translation by LS) (Ihonen 1999: 217).

In *Fok_it*, an example of such a euphoric scream can be seen in the following example which occurs at an undefined workplace.



Picture 3. An example of Arctic hysteria

Source: <https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000006010563.html> (accessed: 14.08.2023).

Panel 1: [shrieking] ”Wow wow wow what the hell are you doing?”

Panel 2: “It’s ok, this is my Spring Scream. Give it a g-“ [screaming]

Panel 3: [shrieking] “I’ll just very quickly close the door to the negotiation room if that’s ok with you.” [shouting]

Interaction between people is what makes this comic strip interesting: instead of asking the shouting man to leave or calm down, the second person gives shout-ing a try and the third one (not visible in the strip) just casually closes the door to the negotiation room – as if this was something completely expected and normal. It implies such strange behaviour is acceptable, even at work (the shouting man seems to be wearing a collared shirt, and the “negotiation room” suggests the inci-dent occurs in a formal company setting).

What is meant by “Spring Scream”, is not explained – whether it is frustration, feeling energised as the amount of light increases or something work related. Rinta-Kanto offers the reader a chance to draw their own conclusions based on their own life situation. That might be the key to *Fok_it’s* success – readers are able to see themselves in the situations, hoping they could behave the same way as the characters without having to face (negative) consequences. On the visual level, accompanying the rather strange scene, the faces of the people are distorted by the force of the scream and the eyes seem to melt over their faces while saliva flies from their mouths, giving near grotesque touches to the comic strip.

Another example, which may show the essence of embracing the darkest time of the year and a particular mindset even better than the previous strip can be seen below:



Picture 4. An example of Arctic hysteria

Source: <https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000006008790.html> (accessed: 6.02.2024).

Panel 1: “Erkki, tomorrow you can open the first door of the advent calendar.” “No way! Yay!”

Panel 2: “What do you think it will be, Erkki?” “I don’t know! I don’t know! The end of the world?” “What? Well, not qu-”

Panel 3: “Maybe it’s going to be the end of the world!” “For fuck’s sake Erkki it’s a chocolate calendar! Get down!”

Erkki, the man shown in the comic, is elated with joy, barely unable to contain his excitement while hoping to find the end of the world in an advent calendar. He seems to be fine with the idea, even embracing the evident destruction that such an incident would cause. Again, Rinta-Kanto does not offer background information on what led Erkki to dream about such a catastrophe – it is up to the reader to fill in the blanks.

The shade of pink in the background and the rather dark theme form a contrast, which is typical for *Fok_it*. In the same way, as shown, people can be seen smiling while dealing with difficult, hard-to-bear events or encounters. When living in such a climate where the sun cannot be seen for months and (stereotypically) people keep to themselves, certain coping mechanisms are needed, and humour is one of them.

6. Embracing Arctic hysteria and Finnish weird in *Fok_it*

In this section, I define carnivalisation, a concept I use to tie together Finnish weird, Arctic hysteria, and the humorous nature of *Fok_it*.

The Helsinki Term Bank for the Arts and Sciences (HTB) defines carnivalisation through Mihail Bahtin’s carnival theory: “Carnevalesque, countercultural literature questions authorities and offers alternative solutions” and “in fact, carnivalism is about liberation and revolution” (translation by LS) (HTB 27.1.24). When it comes to alternative solutions for everyday problems, *Fok_it* offers them, and with quite a dark twist, which can be seen in the example below.

In his article *Carnival, Carnivalism and Bakhtin's Culture of Laughter*, Rainer Gröbel writes that “[c]arnival enriches the concept of realism with the incompatible, the unlimited and the unfinishable” (2022). As seen above, the situations in *Fok_it* start without background knowledge and end without the reader being told what is going to happen next. The reader is left to fill in the blanks. As a result, this offers a chance for the reader to be involved in telling the story.



Picture 5. Offering an alternative solution to an everyday problem

Source: <https://www.pinterest.ch/pin/565131453243070725/> (accessed: 27.01.2024).

Panel 1: I don't know. Sometimes you just hope that someone will come next to you and take your hand.

Panel 2: Whisper into your ear: "Don't be afraid".

Panel 3: And then break that hand so you can take some decent sick leave and finally get some rest.

The comic strip starts innocently – who does not dream of being supported? The person looks down in the first and second panels as if appearing a little shy. Suddenly, in the third one, however, when the imaginary situation escalates to painful measures, his gaze is directed straight at the reader. He speaks with a straight face, so the reader cannot be sure if he is joking about a serious matter, creating a contrast to what he is saying and how he says it.

What makes the situation even more intense, is the fact that looking directly at the reader breaks the so-called fourth wall, which is a concept often used in theatre. Created by Denis Diderot, the term fourth wall refers to the invisible wall between actors on the stage and the audience. By addressing the audience directly, the fourth wall is broken (Britannica n.d.). This type of interaction between the nameless person in the comic and the reader could also be treated as a metareference – as the comic draws “attention to its own medial and representational qualities” (Petersson 2023). This can have different types of impact on the readers – some might find it threatening, some entertaining.

Another workplace-related example featuring over-the-top behaviour can be seen in the comic strip below:



Picture 6. Mind-blowing incident at the office

Source: <https://www.hs.fi/nyt/fokit/car-2000009724584.html> (accessed: 14.08.2023).

Panel 1: “So if we have a look-“ “Wait a sec.” “Yes” “pffffffttt”

Panel 2: “What” “pppchhhkkksstt”

Panel 3: “Yeah, sorry but my mind just blew up, gotta go home” “Oh wow that sounds serious” “Just go, we will be fine” “It happens” “Alright, bye”.

In Finnish, the phrase “pää räjähtää” (lit. “head explodes”) is used when someone undergoes a huge amount of stress mixed with annoyance, the person is overwhelmed, or just “can’t take it anymore”. Here, the person claims their “consciousness” or “mind” exploded instead of their head, which could be seen as a continuum: at the one end, there is an excruciating amount of stress, and at the other end, relief, and liberation, as suggested in the comic strip. The situation and the other people’s reactions are also worth noting – “Just go, we will be fine”, “It happens” – as if something like this happens regularly. Again, Rinta-Kanto does not provide information on the workplace, but makes it sound positively utopian – who would not want to be able to leave work in such a state without consequences and with the acceptance of their co-workers?

Since such three-panel comics are usually humorous, *Fok_it*’s presentation of Arctic hysteria and its negative elements (sudden mood swings, darkness and gloominess) in a light-hearted and jokey way, offers a fresh way to handle negative emotions (such as burnout, work-related stress) and show them in a weird yet empowering way.

7. Discussion

Due to restrictions of length, only the main features of Finnish weird and Arctic hysteria in connection with the comic strip *Fok_it* were introduced in the article. Future research aims at more in-depth investigation, however, this brief analysis has revealed the potential of applying the concepts of Arctic hysteria and Finnish weird to the comic *Fok_it* to determine the extent of its carnivalization.

Fok_it presents the strange habits and tendencies of Finns in its three-panel comic strips. The behaviour of people presented could be grouped under the label “Arctic hysteria”: people scream at the top of their lungs in the workplace and it is fine for their coworkers, or a person cannot contain his excitement as he waits for the world to end.

With regard to Finnish weird, however, conclusions of whether the comic can be categorised using this concept should be made with caution, because defining “weirdness” or “strangeness” in connection with comics is a relatively challenging task: comics are known to break the rules of physics, common sense, and what is considered as ordinary. Despite comics being literary products, their conventions and those of so-called regular literature (only text – no visual elements or very few of them) are not the same. As a result, applying the same rules for two of them does not seem to be justified, as comics usually operate on both a textual and visual level.

As for the last concept introduced in the article, carnivalisation, there appear to be many more examples for future analysis. *Fok_it* presents unconventional solutions or suggestions to ordinary issues. Despite humorous comics often relying on a surprising ending (punch line), here, in contrast, the suggested solutions seem to be rather dark and brutal: hoping someone will break a hand so that their sick leave will be longer, or when a person’s mind casually blows up and he leaves the workplace and his colleagues accept the fact.

Overall, this brief analysis has revealed that Finnish weird and Arctic hysteria can be applied to comics, especially the one analysed here, but with some caution. For future research, a more comprehensive study could be carried out with more focus on the dialogue of the characters.

8. Conclusion

The aim of the article was to apply Finnish weird, Arctic hysteria, and carnivalisation to comics, in this case the humorous three-panel newspaper strip *Fok_it*. The idea for the research came from descriptions of Finnish literature by people who have read it and claimed it to be specific and odd, or *weird*. Another stimulus to do the research were comments made by students of Finnish literature about its often-present themes: among others, these include depressive behaviour and a certain dark, gloomy state of mind.

Another factor to be taken into consideration in connection with the research done is the medium: a prestigious, national newspaper publishes *Fok_it*, which reaches a large number of readers every day, while in many other countries such comics would have an underground readership and only be published online. Despite operating on weirdness or dark themes – especially when it comes to the punch line which, in many cases is coated with dark humour – *Fok_it* has established a readership connected to a prestigious newspaper. This might be because Finnish readers are accustomed to genres and themes that might not be so popular elsewhere.

The results of the research are motivation for further analysis to specify the root of the weird – its themes, the representations of the characters and their behaviours, the dialogues they engage in, as well as other factors. Since *Fok_it* has been published for many years, there is certainly plenty of material to be analysed. To conclude, this article offered a starting point for future research, which should focus on the analysed concepts and themes in more detail.

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