https://doi.org/10.26881/ss.2024.28.12

Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska, *Philosophical and Translatological Wanderings in Moominvalley*. Translated by Patrycja Poniatowska, Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2023

1. Introduction

In the Introduction to her work on Tove Jansson's nine-volume Moomin saga (1945–1970) Professor Dymel-Trzebiatowska states that a major inspiration for the guiding concept behind her book was *Pippi og Sokrates. Filosofiske vandringer i Astrid Lindgrens verden* by the Norwegian philosophers Jørgen Gaare and Øystein Sjaastad. The result of the inspiration is an impressive tour through Tove Jansson's world during which the author and the reader discover the philosophies implicitly present in Moominvalley: the thoughts of Oswald Spenger, José Ortega y Gasset, Socrates, Henri Bergson, Parmenides, C.G. Jung, Sigmund Freud, Edvard Westermarck, and others. Applying the ideas of these ground-breaking thinkers to the lovable characters inhabiting Moominvalley, Dymel-Trzebiatowska proceeds to unfold an intertextual reading of Jansson's ingenious texts and drawings, a reading that is amplified by a substantiation of the subtle literary and psychological effect of the double-address. Through this reading it becomes clear that Jansson's magnificent *opus* will be fully understood only when seen through the eyes of children and adults, Jansson evokes a dual but not split consciousness.

2. Apocalypse dispelled

Referring to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918) and Ortega y Gasset's *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925) in connection with the second volume of the Moomin saga, *Comet in Moominland,* Dymel-Trzebiatowska states that the bleak vision of the two philosophers "is symbolised by the titular comet and the theory itself is trumpeted by the Muskrat, who repeatedly emphasises his 'philosophical' mindset" (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2023 : 13). Other characters, e.g. the professors at the Observatory, react cynically to the comet as they calculate the time of the impact, whereas Moominmamma and Moominpappa carry on with their daily lives centered around the hearth.

The comet passes by the Earth without hitting it. Is this Tove Jansson crafting good children's literature, that is, a text that does not unduly upset the minds of innocent, trusting young ones?

Far from it. The comet passes by the Earth because *it is diverted*. How? By engaging the adult mind and the minds of children with creative pursuits, endowed with and spurred on by Henri Bergson's concept of vital impetus, *élan*

vital, developed in his work *Creative Evolution* (1907), the essence of which is, as Dymel-Trzebiatowska points out, that intuitive knowledge, as opposed to rational knowledge, is conducive to a "temporary condition that can occur if we disentangle ourselves from abstractions and engage with real nature" (19). Following this precept the Moomin family counterbalances the fatalism of the Muskrat. The character Joxter embodies the vital impetus; in his case it serves as a basic impulse towards freedom that leads him to trespass when he comes across a NO ADMITTANCE sign. A healthy impulse serving as advice, not only to children but also to adults.

The perception and appreciation of beauty betoken yet another mindset capable of diverting the comet from the Earth. The third chapter of *Finn Family Moomintroll* describes a storm during which miscellaneous objects are washed on shore, among them a wooden figure of a 'beautiful lady', named a 'queen' by the Snork Maiden. The Maiden's response to the wooden figurehead is exposed as egotistical: she soon lapses into comparing herself to the beautiful lady. The spell the Snork Maiden is under is lifted when Moomintroll exclaims that the queen looks stupid. Nature wins over art as the Maiden recovers. In the opinion of this reviewer, Jansson is clearly indicating and elaborating on the diffuse borderline between art and artifact. Casting aside scholarly disputes on the matter, Jansson goes on to describe yet another art object, a ruby. Moomintroll's aesthetic response to the jewel is a contemplative response. He seems to maintain a healthy distance to the ruby, yet is obviously affected by it. The judgment that art objects may contain a dangerous allure is punctuated by Jansson's subtle depictions of Moominmamma as a painter and Moominpappa as a writer. Commenting on reality and the imagination, Dymel-Trzebiatowska writes:

> Rather than being a representation and *mimesis*, all this *is* for real. Moominmamma's artistic activity appears to be informed by Jansson's own painting experiences; when Moominmamma is painting, light and solitude matter a lot, along with the fact that she can follow her own desires. Once again, the power of the imagination eclipses reality. It is of no consequence that Moominmamma's painting is not perfect. (33)

The perceptive comment on reality and the imagination can be corroborated by Wallace Stevens' essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1942) where Stevens declares that the artistic imagination in the modern world is "a violence from within that protects us from a violence without" (Stevens 1942: 36). A radical statement but credible and relevant in the context Jansson found herself in: the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Cold War and the palpable threat of nuclear war. The comet must be diverted and Moominpappa contributes to the diversion by being a writer. His writing activity turns into a subtle interplay between his own conception of what it means to be a writer, the aesthetic value of writing, and Jansson's comic exposure of the literary discourse. The comedy does not embrace Moominpappa alone; it becomes a self-reflexive method designed to undermine

the authorial ego. The elimination of the ego diverts the comet. Tove Jansson's clever use of comedy and Dymel-Trzebiatowska's equally clever discussion of art reflect Søren Kierkegaard's pivotal work *Either-Or*, (1843) the first part of which is a novel entitled *Diary of a Seducer* featuring the aesthete Johannes whose obsession with the beautiful object, the young woman Cordelia, throws aesthetic judgment into doubt as Johannes' relation to beauty is infected and deflected by a desire to possess.

3. Double-address, dual narrative voice

Chapters Four to Nine of Professor Dymel-Trzebiatowska's book make for a profound as well as comprehensive analysis of justice, dreams, life and death, invisibility, fear, and crisis. It is the opinion of this reviewer that these chapters adhere to the common theme of the double-address as the motifs indicated by the chapter headlines are a manifestation of Jansson's ideas about the cognitive difference between the mind of the child and the adult mind. This difference is central to her work as a writer and drawer.

Referring to Edvard Westermarck's work *Ethical Relativity* (1932), Dymel-Trzebiatowska notes the following:

> He contested the idea that moral principles expressed objective values, and he championed ethical relativity, which he used as the title of his major work and for which he made the case by arguing that there were no empirical grounds whatsoever for objectifying norms and standards within ethical theories. (39)

Further, moral feelings are altruistic, according to Westermarck, and do not lead to subjectivism. Kierkegaard's analysis of the ethical as developed in *Either-Or* is slightly more subtle and complex, as it is precisely the *subjective* grasp of the ethical that leads to a moral judgment and practice transcending objective universal norms. The choice between right and wrong is only possible through the active involvement of an individualized conscience.

In *Finn Family Moomintroll* Jansson creates a parody of the legal system as Thingumy and Bob are put to trial over the theft of the Groke's ruby. Aesthetic experience and appreciation is essential here. This means that the ethical and the aesthetical are intertwined so as to be almost indistinguishable. It seems to be impossible to determine who is right, Thingumy and Bob or the Groke. The parody highlights, in the simple language of children and through the vehicle of comedy, the exceedingly complex problematic of a decisive issue unresolved in the adult world, going back, even, to classical Greek philosophy: the cognitive relation to beauty, and by extension to truth and to right. The profound question residing at the core of Jansson's parodic trial is this: is the very act of conceiving beauty and truth an act of possession? Jansson's subtle yet simple language in the episode

on the trial exhibits the dual narrative voice that is indispensable for the efficacy of the double-address. At the trial counsel Hemulen observes: "The question is not who is the *owner* of the Contents, but who has the greatest *right* to the contents!" (Jansson 1990b: 135; quoted by Dymel-Trzebiatowska). The second voice, that of the author/narrator 'Tove Jansson' is present in this brief statement by Hemulen as a parodic expression of mankind's perennial quest to identify rightful ownership and to determine whether ownership of any kind is fair. The parody is a rhetorical masterstroke as Jansson manages to undermine or deconstruct the millenia-old philosophy of Beauty, Truth, and Right.

Throughout the nine volumes of the Moomin saga Jansson's narrative voice is immanently present as form. The adult mind of the narrator and drawer calls forth a world consisting of a structuring of dialogue blended with description. The mind of the child cannot be directly represented by the adult artist. That is a chronological and psychological impossibility. As William Wordsworth says in his poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807), "Shades of the prison-house begin to close/Upon the growing Boy" – that prison-house being the limited capacity of language to give voice to perception and cognition. Hence the second voice resorts to the rhetorical stratagem of representing the mind of the child through form and structure, a structure invaded by the unstructured. The child senses, thinks and speaks in images that are often chaotic and reminiscent of dreams. The spontaneous senses and imagination of the child are rendered in the following dialogue from *Moominpappa at Sea* (quoted by Dymel-Trzebiatowska):

> 'Mamma, just try and imagine a perfectly marvellous spot that you've found and made your very own, only to discover that there are crowds of other people there who don't want to move away. Have they the right to stay put, although they don't understand how beautiful the place is?'
> 'Yes, of course they have,' said Moominmamma, sitting down in the seaweed. (Jansson 1993: 71)

But do they in fact have that right? The 'marvellous spot', resembling Wordsworth's 'splendour in the grass' and 'glory in the flower' from the poem cited above, is the mental province of the child. The adult is excluded from this province and is present only as Moominmamma's attempt to enforce adult logic ('of course') where it is out of place.

In his memoirs Moominpappa records his childhood and early youth at the Foundlings' Home and describes a dream he had:

> One night I dreamed that I was holding my tail at a wrong angle, namely, seventy degrees when I said good morning to the Hemulen. I described this nice dream to her and asked if it made her angry.
> 'Dreams are trash,' said the Hemulen.

> 'How does one know?' I objected. 'Perhaps the Moomin in my dream is the real one and the Moomin who stands here is only something you are dreaming?'
> (Jansson 1994: 7; quoted by Dymel-Trzebiatowska)

Dymel-Trzebiatowska comments that "Moomin follows in the footsteps of Parmenides to question the epistemological tradition" (44). Moomin's records encapsulate and reflect the rhetorical maneuver of Jansson's text: the adult re-capturing, repeating the mental universe of the child. Narrative repetition is yet another way for the second voice to express itself.

Tove Jansson is preceded by three 19th century masters of the double-address, Charles Dickens whose portrait of the child coming of age in *Oliver Twist* (1838) maps the twisted path of a young orphan into adulthood; Lewis Carroll whose work *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is mentioned by Dymel-Trzebiatowska; and the Danish author of the fairy tale, Hans Christian Andersen. Andersen's ominous tale *Skyggen* (*The Shadow*, 1847) describes, in the form of the fantastic, or, Freud's the uncanny, a contest to the death between a learned gentleman and his shadow. The learned gentleman embodies the Romantic ideal of harmony in Truth and Beauty, and the story shows the fatal consequences of the separation of Truth from Right. The deflection of Truth entails a deviation into secrecy, lying and authoritarianism. Jansson dismantles authoritarianism in *Moominpappa's Memoirs* where the Autocrat celebrates his 100th birthday in a Bahktin-style carnivalesque party. Dymel-Trzebiatowska writes that the monarch "strips himself of royal majesty" and "appears to mock his elevated position by addressing his people as: 'My dear people! Dear muddle-headed, fuzzy, and thoughtless subjects!'" (53; Jansson 1994: 96). The inversion taking place in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) appears at the birthday party fully unfolded as a social and cultural inversion of the power structure. It is the vanquishing of Thanatos by Eros. The victory of Eros is predicated upon the revival of the childlike mind whose natural playfulness conquers death. In Sigmund Freud's later work, *Civilization and Its Discontents (Das Unbehagen der Kultur*, 1928) the forces of the life drive and the death drive are locked in a predetermined battle. Jansson's works aim to show a way out of predeterminism by evoking the innate playfulness of the child, the play that informs aesthetic pursuits.

Becoming playful involves leaving one's invisibility behind. This is the lesson taught to the child character Ninny in "The Invisible Child". Her teacher is My who advises Ninny to become angry, thereby asserting herself. Interestingly, Dymel-Trzebiatowska comments that "My herself defies a certain recurrent descriptive and narrative pattern since, despite her miniscule physique, she repeatedly proves that being a midget in size does not necessarily reflect being 'a mental midget'" (61); the preordained order of size, proportion, and with it logic and *ratio* gives way to an inverse perspective on the world. This inverse perspective may cause anxiety, as depicted in Jansson's *Sculptor's Daughter* which, in Dymel-Trzebiatowska's

felicitous phrase, "balances between fact and fable in a generically hybrid combination of fiction and non-fiction" (75). But anxiety, spurred by an active imagination and activated by a journey into the unconscious, may bring about a transformation, as it does in the case of the character Toft who, as Dymel-Trzebiatowska notes, "is strong, without being fully aware of the transformation he has undergone" (79). The crisis one should expect in connection with a descent into the unconscious is absent in the case of Moominmamma. Obstacles are overcome and the scenery turns beautiful:

> The sea had turned violet, and the line of the forest along shore looked soft and dark. She was very sleepy and suddenly felt everything was a little unreal: a slow, fantastically lit dream in which one walks through heavy, heavy sand without getting anywhere. […] 'It's so beautiful,' said Moominmammy to herself. 'Beautiful and just a little strange.' (Jansson 1993: 24; quoted by Dymel-Trzebiatowska)

The unconscious may contain fuel for utopia. As Dymel-Trzebiatowska points out, Normand Holland's *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1989) proposes that the gratification of readers' basic fantasies is the goal of the literary enterprise. Following that, one might interpret Moominvalley as "a dream come true, a utopia, a land of eternal felicity, where everybody flocks, fleeing their flawed life" (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 95). However, the use of comedy, irony and inversion is so manifestly present in the nine volumes of Moominvalley that spotting signs of a utopia becomes a problematic exercise. The last volume, *Moominvalley in November,* written in 1969, pictures Toft/Tove walking through the forest "thinking of nothing at all and became as empty as a crystal ball" (Jansson 1974: 156; quoted by Dymel-Trzebiatowska). Dymel-Trzebiatowska notes that: "The last illustration pictures Toft alone on the jetty. The Moomins have not returned" (98). The drawing contradicts the text which says that a boat with the Moominfamily is about to dock at the jetty. The second voice now becomes split into two: a doubling of the dual narrative voice. The textual mode is now that of self-reflexive modernism.

4. Wandering in modernity

Professor Dymel-Trzebiatowska's discussion of the character Snufmumriken in Part II of her book, Translatological Wanderings, is inspiring. One of the translatological methods used in the Polish version of the Moomin saga is substitution, a method which in this case allows for an extension of the symbolic meaning of the name. Commenting on the Polish name Włóczykij for the Swedish name Snufkin, Dymel-Trzebiatowska writes:

> His translated name is a common noun in the Polish lexicon and denotes a type of a person: a tramp/a drifter. This choice mirrors the personality of the protagonist, who is the incarnation of freedom in the Moomin saga, and his cherished liberty is demonstrated in his habit

> of leaving Moominvalley in the autumn, when the Moomin family fall asleep for the winter, and of living in his own tent rather than with others in the house. In the source text, the protagonist is called *Snusmumriken*, an archaic word that meant an old bore in Swedish. This compound consists of two lexemes: *snus* (ground tobacco) and *mumrik* (an oddball, a bore). The noun is still part of the Swedish lexicon but it is barely used. The first component of this *compositum* can be regarded as referencing the pipe, which is Snufkin's inseparable attribute, and the second as hinting at his taciturn manner, otherness and unconventional conduct. (134)

Dymel-Trzbiatowska adds that "the anthroponym does not explicitly herald the protagonist's personality in the source text" (loc. cit.); he is not elderly and not particularly weird, and he takes part in children's expeditions. As Dymel-Trzbiatowska notes, the name denotes introversion and detachment. He is singular and unique, despite the fact that he is a member of a species. Dymel-Trzebiatowska describes the wordplay relating to the word *mumrik*:

> When it is used for the first time, the word is an indefinite noun written in lowercase and forming part of a phrase (*en mumrik*); when used for the second and third time, it is a definite noun still written with a small letter (*mumriken*); finally, when the character introduces himself, an expanded form is used, whose proprial role is underscored by capitalisation, definiteness and the additional component *Snus-* (*Snusmumriken*). In the first case, the text talks of 'a snufkin', in the second of 'the snufkin', and finally of 'Snufkin'. (134–135)

Snufkin has another atribute, a mouth-organ, on which he plays cheerful music. Dymel-Trzebiatowska refers to him as "a hybrid and indeterminate figure" and notes that Jansson was intent upon mining "the deep deposits of language, which sets the bar high for readers and requires advanced linguistic competence" (136). In the Polish translation, which apparently catered to a less experienced readership, the subtlety of the name Snusmumriken does not fully emerge.

Who is Snusmumriken? He is a wanderer in modernity, emerging from anonymity, acquiring an increasingly definite form and, in the end, a name that is his and his only. He lives in a state of in-betweenness, leaving the Moomin family in autumn and pitching a tent at a convenient distance from Moominvalley. He is closely related to the modern anti-hero, the emigrant/immigrant, internally displaced peoples, the Inuit, the Native American, and many others. Snufkin also embodies and exemplifies classical outcasts, Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew, Homer's Odysseus, *outis*, meaning no one, the pseudonym used by Odysseus in order to facilitate his escape from the cave of the Cyclops. It is noteworthy that Snufmumriken is joyful and plays cheerful music on his mouth-organ. His in-betweenness is not a tragic state of solitude and isolation. It is a transcendence of identity, a transformation of Self into Other which entails liberation from unanimity and conformity. It is a state of symbiosis called *survivance* by the distinguished Native American scholar and poet Gerald Vizenor. The word survivance is a composite of 'survival'

and 'resistance', containing a sense of presence. The concept survivance is applicable, for example, to the character Susquesus, a character appearing in James Fenimor Cooper's novel *The Chain Bearer* (1846). He is a Native American living out in the open apart from his tribe and also apart from the White Man's settlement. Susquesus has retained some of his tribal attributes and works intermittently for the white settlers. This new in-between identity, or non-identity is Snusmumriken's real being: a hybrid, a symbiosis.

The hybrid, indeterminate character also appears in the androgynous couple Tofslan and Vifslan, who, according to Dymel-Trzebiatowska, are partly biographical persons, based on Tove Jansson's relationship to the theatre director Vivica Bandler. Dymel-Trzebiatowska comments that "Tofslan and Vifslan are designations that have a secret meaning encoded in them and are charged with allusions" (146); the Swedish names are indicative of the feminine gender. This is not conveyed in the Polish translation which uses the names Topik and Topcia, boy and girl. It is obvious and significant that the relationship between Tofslan and Vifslan is a case of fluid gender. Like Snufkin, the couple achieves liberation from convention and attain an in-betweenness transcending ego-identity. They walk hand in hand, and like Snufmumriken they are at home in modernity: the modern world conceived as a new, open world.

5. Not lost in translation

The sheer magnitude of Professor Dymel-Trzebiatowska's research for the book on the Moomins is impressive. The research comprised a total of eighteen volumes, nine volumes of the Swedish source text and nine volumes of the Polish target text. In the sections making up Translatological Wanderings, the author deals with the complex methodology used in literary translation, in the first chapter: literal translations, transfers and their hybrids; transcriptions; substitutions. A second chapter is devoted to translating the comic, and the third chapter focuses on culinary customs. Detailed tables listing the Swedish anthroponyms and the Polish equivalents are provided.

The difficulty involved in translating Tove Jannson's subtle texts, which often contain wordplay and ironic undertones, can be illustrated with one example, the word *Myrlejon*, Ant-lion, reproduced in Polish as Mrówkolew, an exact translation. Dymel-Trzebiatowska comments that the Ant-lion does not resemble the fragile insect in Jansson's text and that "Its visual and verbal depictions are an instance of linguistic meta-play with readers" (110). The anthroponym is used to ironically highlight the semantic absurdity of some common words […] (loc. cit). Translators are obviously faced with a challenge when confronted with Jansson's linguistic profundities; they are there for the purpose of achieving the effect of alienation, *ostranenie* in the phrase of the Russian formalists, a technique used by Bertolt Brecht in his political dramas. Brecht developed his own concept, *Verfremdungseffekt*,

the alienation effect, based precisely on the formalist concept ostranenie which means the opposite of Karl Marx's concept of Verfremdung. In Marx's dialectical analysis of capitalist society, alienation refers to a state of unawareness of the mechanisms of repression. Brecht's concept of alienation implies a sudden *recognition, an insight* into the forces of repression, spurred by a dramatic technique which departs from traditional plot structure and that employes a combination of media, language and illustrations, as does Jansson.

A translation problem occurs in connection with the Swedish anthroponym *hattifnatt* which, according to the scholar Yvonne Bertills, is a composite of 'hatti' meaning 'hat' and which is also associated with mushrooms; the word carries a further association, *hatta*, to hesitate. *Fnatt* may carry at least two associations, *fnatta* meaning to run about, and *fnatt*, to get excited. These multiple associations were lost in the Polish translation.

Well-conceived and well-executed Polish translations abound, however. An example of an anthroponym that comes fairly close to the source in the Polish translation, is *klippdassen, Gryzilepki* in the Polish version. The word evokes biting and stickiness, features that are accurately reproduced. However, even in this case the translation loses a lot of the wordplay designed by Jansson, as described in detail by Dymel-Trzebiatowska. The following comments on translations using substitution concludes Chapter One of Translatological Wanderings: "The original names in this set abound with opulent lexical connotations" (153); Jansson most likely intended the text for adult readers who were able to decipher these names. In contrast, "The Polish counterparts of these names are often funny and ingenious, but fifteen of them were clearly invented to appeal primarily to young readers" (loc. cit.).

The detailed table concluding Chapter Two on translating the comic lists a number of over-all successful Polish translations of the comic, varying in the author's estimate from 'preserved', 'partly preserved', 'neutralised', 'loss of meanings'. Dymel-Trzebiatowska comments: " The translators' choices give the impression, so to speak, of wavering on the edge of double address: sometimes they attempted to facilitate reading to children, and sometimes they retained a considerable semantic load intended for adults" (181).

Literal translation is used when dealing with culinary articles, as in the following scene portraying a feast:

Source text: "Muminpappa stod framför trappan och lagade till röd bål i några tunnar".

Polish text: "Tatuś muminka zajęty był na werandzie robieniem kruszonu w wielkiej wazie".

English version: "Moominpappa was busy making the cruchon in a huge tureen on the veranda".

Dymel-Trzebiatowska comments that "most of the ingredients used by Moominpappa have their exact equivalents in the Polish lexicon. However, those less

typical were naturalised" (204). Pickled lotus was substituted with lotus juice, a decision Dymel-Trzebiatowska attributes to "an urge to 'super-translate', typical of the translation process" (204–205). In her concluding remarks on chapter three, Dymel-Trzbiatowska calls for "a more advanced coherence competency" (208), since in some cases various Polish lexemes were used in translating the same Swedish lexeme.

Dymel-Trzbiatowska's final assessment of the quality of Polish translations of the Moomin saga reads:

> As objectively as possible and taking readers' expectations into account, I conclude from my studies that the Polish translations of the nine Moomin volumes are successful. For the most part they convey the stylistic qualities of the series and preserve a range of elements that were potentially vulnerable to purification. However, as Jansson's texts are uniquely valuable and 'multi-layered', some of my observations, especially those concerning what I have described as translation errors, appear quite pertinent". (215)

Conclusion

Professor Dymel-Trzebiatowska has written a book that deserves international attention, which this reviewer sincerely hopes it will get. The literary and philosophical interpretations of the Moomin saga are perceptive, profound and often brilliant. Tove Jansson's Moomin world comes to light in an entirely new fashion, stimulated by a consistently cogent commentary. The beauty and subtlety of Jansson's text and drawings appeal to children and adults alike and this appeal is now enhanced by a scholarly examination on the highest academic level.

The present edition of the book is an English version of the Polish original. The translator, Ms. Patrycja Poniatowska, deserves credit and congratulations for a translation exceedingly well done. The text is eminently readable and will undoubtedly attract a large readership.

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