

JYU DISSERTATIONS 435

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**Evgenia Amey**

# **Ideal Absence and Situated Readers**

**Experiencing Space Through Connection  
to Tove Jansson and her Works**

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

JYU DISSERTATIONS 435

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## **Experiencing Space Through Connection to Tove Jansson and her Works**

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella  
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston vanhassa juhlasalissa S212  
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## ABSTRACT

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Works of fiction have the power to draw visitors to locations associated with them and their authors. Members of the audience, however, are not simply 'absorbing' the narratives they encounter in a variety of media but are often actively (re)interpreting the texts and negotiating the meanings they attribute to spaces with ties to writers, narratives and adaptations. The present compilation dissertation examines how sites with connections to Tove Jansson (1914–2001) and her literary works, including her famous creations, the Moomins, can be experienced and (re)imagined by different readers. Looking at written descriptions of visits to such sites in Finland, including authored press articles and the researcher's autoethnographic account, the study explores how places linked to Jansson and her works are experienced by readers-visitors in light of their personal histories of engagement with the texts and in a spatial and sociocultural context. Utilizing theories of situatedness and belonging, this study examines how readers' past and present geographical and sociocultural experiences influence the interpretation of the texts and associated sites and affect the visitor experience. The findings demonstrate that both individual and collective factors shape the way media texts and spaces are envisioned: prior engagement with and personal importance of Jansson's work play crucial roles in the visitor experience; furthermore, meanings attributed to spaces are constantly (re)negotiated, reflecting changing interpretations of the texts and the author's biography. The findings also provide insights into how familiar places can be perceived through connections to literary works and writers, which is relevant considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its aftereffects. The study sheds light on how readers-visitors address and engage with numerous absences – that of the author, of fictional characters, or, in some cases, of verifiable connections to writers and texts – and how they creatively fill in the empty spaces with their own experiences and histories, based on their own situated reading. Consequently, absences at the sites with ties to writers and artists, while often seen as a hindrance, can also act as an opportunity. The study invites further inquiries on how different readerships engage with Jansson's works and how places with connections to fiction can be experienced by various audiences.

Keywords: absence, autoethnography, belonging, literary geography, literary tourism, media tourism, Moomins, situated reading, Tove Jansson

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Amey, Evgenia

Ihanteellinen poissaolo ja paikantuneet lukijat: Tove Janssonin ja hänen teostensa herättämät paikkakokemukset

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Fiktiivisillä teoksilla on voima houkutellessa yleisöään niihin maantieteellisiin paikkoihin, joihin ne kertomustensa ja tekijöidensä kautta yhdistyvät. Yleisö ei kuitenkaan yksinkertaisesti "niele" kertomuksia, joita se eri medioissa kohtaa, vaan se (uudelleen)tulkitsi tekstejä usein aktiivisesti ja neuvottelee kirjailija-, kertomus- ja adaptaatiosidonnaisten paikkojen merkityksistä. Tässä artikkeliväitöskirjassa tarkastellaan, kuinka erilaiset lukijat voivat kokea ja (uudelleen)kuvitella paikkoja, jotka kiinnittyvät Tove Janssonin (1914–2001) elämään ja teoksiin, esimerkiksi hänen kuuluisiin Muumi-tarinoihinsa. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu teksteistä, joissa kuvataan vierailuja tällaisiin paikkoihin Suomessa: kirjallisuusturismia käsittelevistä kansainvälisistä lehtiartikkeleista ja tutkijan itsensä kirjoittamista autoetnografisista vierailukokemuksista. Väitöskirjassa tutkitaan, miten Janssoniin ja hänen teoksiinsa liittyvissä paikoissa vierailevat lukijat kokevat paikat niin henkilökohtaisen lukijasuhteensa ja -historiansa valossa kuin tietyissä tilallisissa ja sosiokulttuurisissa konteksteissa. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnetään paikantumisen ja kuulumisen teorioita ja analysoidaan, miten lukijoiden aiemmat ja nykyiset paikkasidonnaiset ja sosiokulttuuriset kokemukset vaikuttavat tekstien ja niihin liittyvien paikkojen tulkintaan ja vierailijakokemukseen. Tulosten perusteella sekä henkilökohtaiset että kollektiiviset tekijät muokkaavat mediatekstien ja paikkojen kuvittelemisen tapoja: vierailijoiden aikaisemmalla sitoutumisella ja henkilökohtaisella näkemyksellä Janssonin teoksista on vierailukokemuksessa ratkaiseva rooli. Lisäksi paikkoihin liittyvistä merkityksistä neuvotellaan jatkuvasti (uudelleen), mikä kuvastaa tekstien ja kirjailijan elämäkerran muuttuvia tulkintoja. Tulosten perusteella voidaan saavuttaa syvempää ymmärrystä siitä, miten tuttuja paikkoja voidaan havainnoida fiktion ja kirjailijoihin liittyvien yhteyksien kautta uusilla tavoilla, mikä on tärkeää meneillään olevan COVID-19-pandemian ja sen jälkivaikutusten näkökulmasta. Väitöskirja osoittaa, että lukija-vierailijat ottavat osaa ja kiinnittyvät lukuisiin – niin kirjailijan, fiktiivisten henkilöhahmojen kuin joissakin tapauksissa myös kirjailijoiden ja tekstien välisten yhteyksien – poissaoloihin. He täyttävät tyhjiä tiloja luovasti omilla kokemuksillaan ja kertomuksillaan, jotka perustuvat heidän omaan paikantuneeseen lukemiseensa. Näin kirjailija- ja taiteilijasidonnaisissa paikoissa poissaolot voivatkin toimia myös mahdollisuutena, vaikka niitä pidetään usein esteenä. Tutkimus herättää jatkokeskustelua siitä, miten erilaiset lukijuudet kytkeytyvät Janssonin teoksiin ja miten erilaiset yleisöt voivat kokea paikkoja, joilla on yhteyksiä fiktion.

Asiasanat: autoetnografia, kirjallinen maantiede, kirjallisuusturismi, kuuluminen, mediaturismi, Muumit, paikantunut lukeminen, poissaolo, Tove Jansson

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Evgenia Amey

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- II Amey, E. (2019) Chasing writers' ghosts through a modern city: Augmenting urban space with literary connections during the Tove Jansson walk in Helsinki. *Akademisk kvarter/ Academic Quarter*, 18, 104–116.
- III Amey, E. (2021a) An in-between reader: Situatedness and belonging in Tove Jansson's Helsinki. *Literary Geographies* (in press).
- IV Amey, E. (2021b) The distant snowy land where rounded creatures dwell: Experiencing Moomin-related nostalgia and belonging in Finland. Submitted to *Scandinavica*.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Prologue

It started with a walk in the graveyard. Or, actually, it started with a conversation, some googling and Elina's suggestion to go exploring in Helsinki. To walk "in the footsteps" – as cliché as it may sound, echoing hundreds of tourism brochures – to trace the life and works of a famous literary or artistic persona. In our case, it was Tove Jansson, a Finnish-Swedish<sup>1</sup> artist and writer, whose ghost we went chasing.

Tove Jansson (1914–2001) is known internationally primarily as the creator of the Moomins, characters of her illustrated (what are often perceived as) children's books. Behind the fame of the hippo-like figures, however, is a remarkable woman whose life and literary and artistic works have been increasingly drawing the attention of the public as well as scholars in recent years, both in Finland, her home country, and abroad. While the recent animated adaptation, *Moominvalley* (2019–), delivers the re-imagined Moomin stories to both new audiences and those already familiar with the creatures, the recent film *Tove* (2020) sheds light on Jansson's biography, presenting a new dimension of her personal and professional life. In addition, with reinterpretations of the Moomin books and the recent appearance of her later prose in translation, Jansson's life and works are being reevaluated both in the media and academia.

There are a number of places with ties to Jansson in Helsinki, where she was born, lived for the biggest part of her life, notwithstanding her numerous travels, and where she was buried. It was those places – the apartment blocks where she lived, locations she frequented, sites that inspired her works, the graveyard where she is buried – that I went to see, on different occasions from 2017 to 2019,

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<sup>1</sup> Finnish-Swedish (also Finland's Swedish) here means belonging to Finland's Swedish-speaking minority, the group also referred to as the Swedish-speaking population of Finland, Swedish-speaking Finns, Finland Swedes or Finnish Swedes.

sometimes alone and sometimes with my friend and fellow researcher Elina Huttunen. We also co-wrote blog posts and went to other places in Finland, independently or together, to visit locations with connections to Jansson and her works – among these trips are our joint visit to the Moomin Museum in Tampere (Central Finland) and my visit to Moominworld, Naantali, on the south-western coast.

As I was doing my reading – of Jansson’s works; her biography; numerous press publications about her, which notably increased in quantity after the centenary of her birth; travel reviews and online blogs – my research project, which originally centered on fiction-inspired travel, acquired a sharper focus. Reflecting my background in cultural studies and tourism research, the present dissertation is not a study of Jansson’s works as such; instead, I look at how places with ties to her can be experienced by different members of the audience based on individual and collective reception of her works and interpretations of her biography.

The ‘ideal absence’ in the title of the dissertation is an intertextual play on the idea of *ideal presence* that I initially encountered in Paul Westover’s work on the Romantic-era phenomenon that he refers to as *necromanticism* – commemoration of dead writers by travelling to places with connections to them (2008, 2012a). Westover applies the term *ideal presence*, originally used by Henry Home, Lord Kames in 1762 *Elements of Criticism*, to describe the Romantics’ longing for writers’ ‘presence’ at the sites. During literary pilgrimages, today’s devotees, like their predecessors in the past centuries, often attempt to commune with the dead authors by means of conjuring them back to life at the sites associated with them. Visitors, myself included, try to summon writers’ ghosts into spaces they used to occupy, but the spaces have changed and the imagined phantoms might seem out of place. While readers wish to see the authors’ reality, it might not exist anymore, or one might be unable to find it, much like trying to invoke fictional characters in an actual place that does not match its own literary descriptions – it could leave one disappointed, longing unappeased.

On the other hand, some scholars skeptically observe that the lack of the author’s presence is in some sense beneficial (e.g. Robinson and Andersen 2002). As cynical as it might sound, to inspire veneration and encourage literary visits, the author needs to be absent (Watson 2013); it is the absence that allows visitors to come to the graves and past homes and project their own visions onto the space. In a similar manner, the absence of fictional characters at the sites where the narrative ‘took place’ can serve as an invitation for visitors to ‘become’ the characters through explicit or implicit roleplay (Gothie 2016), to place themselves or their fictional personae in the ‘gap’ (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2017).

Tove Jansson’s spatial connection to Helsinki is both embedded and at the same time undetectable and fleeing. Her personal narrative intertwines with the narrative of the city: appearing as a young woman in the commissioned public sculptures for which she modelled, moving with her family to a newly constructed artists’ home in a growing residential area, moving into a studio of

her own and renovating it after the war, at the same time the city was rebuilding (Westin 2014).

While writers' and artists' houses – especially where they made homes for themselves as adults – are recognized as important attractions (e.g. Herbert 1996; Robinson and Andersen 2002; Watson 2006), Jansson's former homes are, for most part, inaccessible to visitors. There is a notion of liminality with regard to some places connected to her; part of that is due to the fact that many such places are in an urban area. Her former school buildings now house the Ateneum Art Museum (part of the Finnish National Gallery) and the Design Museum. The apartments her artistic family lodged in when she was young are now in use and have other residents, although the buildings are marked with plaques recognizing well-known residents, among them the Janssons. Later in life she was able to purchase a tower studio that she had initially rented, and the place was of remarkable importance to her (Westin 2014). The plaque on the building where the studio is located features a bronze relief of Jansson's face, sculpted by her father, on which she is depicted not as an adult but as a child. The studio is not open to the public, but it can be visited by arrangement.

While the Moomin presence is explicit in Helsinki, as in other places in Finland, with commercial locations, like shops and cafes, and merchandize to be found in department stores, places with ties to Jansson used to be hard to locate until a few years ago. The situation has changed to some extent, as Jansson's legacy is nowadays widely acknowledged, with an abundance of media publications and events aimed at presenting new aspects of her works and persona. Her sexuality, made invisible in the past, and her lifelong relationship with Tuulikki Pietilä, which was not often addressed, are now receiving attention. Even though the artist-writer's presence is becoming more visible, highlighted and made prominent, there are yet numerous absences relating to her life and works, on both spatial and sociocultural levels. It is these absences that I want to draw attention to and address in this study. Even though the narrative of following in someone's footsteps implies the impossibility of ever catching up, in this research I attempt to investigate what meanings contemporary visitors attribute to the sites with connections to Jansson and her works to see how the locations can be experienced and how texts produced by and about Jansson affect these experiences.

In addition to the present introductory part, the dissertation includes four articles listed below (all articles are published in Open Access journals):

1. Amey, E. (2020) On Mirkwood, Vampires and Rhododendrons: Experiencing Familiar Places through Fiction. *Literary Geographies*, 6(2), 268–273. Available online <https://www.literarygeographies.net/index.php/LitGeogs/article/view/258>
2. Amey, E. (2019) Chasing writers' ghosts through a modern city: Augmenting urban space with literary connections during the Tove Jansson walk in Helsinki. *Academic Quarter*, 18, 104–116. Available

online

<https://somaesthetics.aau.dk/index.php/ak/article/view/3157>

3. Amey, E. (2021a) An in-between reader: situatedness and belonging in Tove Jansson's Helsinki. *Literary Geographies* (in press).
4. Amey, E. (2021b) The distant snowy land where rounded creatures dwell: Experiencing Moomin-related nostalgia and belonging in Finland. Submitted to *Scandinavica*.

In this chapter, I will describe the aims and objectives of the study and present it in the context of the previous research, briefly describe the methodological and theoretical frameworks, and outline the structure of the subsequent sections.

## 1.2 Previous research and focus and objectives of this research

My main goal in this research is to contribute to the understanding of how specific sites in Finland can be experienced through their connection to Tove Jansson and her works. This research is of an interdisciplinary nature. Falling into the cultural studies field, it draws strongly on tourism studies, borrowing from media studies, coming close to literary geography, trespassing into fan studies. The focus of this study has been affected by my own previous (Amey 2015, 2018) work on and interest in fiction-inspired travel.

Fictional narratives have the power to draw members of the audience to locations associated with them or their creators. Literature has been known to motivate people to travel, as is reflected in the long history of *literary tourism* (Watson 2006): sites are often visited for their factual connections to writers or because they appeared in or inspired works of fiction. Furthermore, fictional narratives are nowadays increasingly encountered through different media – including films, TV, comics, games and audio adaptations – some of which can have wider outreach than literary works and often result in an increased flow of visitors to associated locations such as filming sites and theme parks (e.g. Ryan et al. 2009; Reijnders 2011; Beeton 2016).

At the same time, readers are not simply passively absorbing the texts; instead, they have agency and are (re)interpreting and (re)imagining the media texts they encounter (Rosenblatt 1982; Bogdan et al. 2000; Jenkins 2006). Such spatially and socioculturally situated readers (Pearce 2002; Hones 2008, 2014; Brooks and Browne 2012) consider texts in light of their own lived experiences and introduce different views of the stories, sometimes unintended by the creators. Not only do these readers, individually and collectively, assign meanings to fictional narratives but, in addition, spaces with connections to writers, stories and adaptations are constantly (re)envisioned (Hones 2014), affected by changing interpretations of the texts.

While the Moomin stories take place in an imaginary world, although to some degree inspired by actual-world locations and events (e.g. Markkanen 2016), Jansson's later prose, including the novels *Sculptor's Daughter* (1968/2015) and *Fair Play* (1989/2011), is often set in or draws on 'real' places where she lived

or visited. Places with connections to Jansson and the Moomins present an interesting and timely research topic. While the Moomins are among the known 'children's' books' fictional characters, recognized by many readers around the world and used in nation branding in Finland, they are often associated with idealized images of childhood and the romanticized past, and the commercial Moomin-themed sites, including shops, cafes and theme parks, are popular attractions in Finland and abroad. At the same time, with the rise of public interest in Jansson's life and other works, author-centered events and Moomin-themed attractions nowadays often present details about the creator's life, and the sites with biographical connections to her in Finland can be expected to attract both domestic and international visitors.

In this dissertation, I study how situated readers experience and (re)imagine places with links to Tove Jansson and her literary works (including her famous creations, the Moomins) in light of their personal histories of engagement with Jansson's fiction and in a spatial and sociocultural context, with a more wide-reaching goal of finding out how readers experience place through fictive and biographic ties and how they address and engage with author- and text-related absences. The four articles that make up the dissertation each approach these themes from a different angle. The research questions I aim to answer are:

- How can sites in Finland be experienced through their connections to Tove Jansson and/or her literary works?
- How does personal engagement with Jansson's works a) affect the meanings individuals attribute to these places and b) influence the visitor experience?
- How do past and present geographical and sociocultural experiences a) influence the interpretation of the sites and b) allow readers/visitors to address absences?

Although the study is informed by and is aimed at contributing to existing research on media-induced travel (which will be presented in Chapter 3), I also attempt to address the phenomenon of experiencing familiar places through fiction, which is particularly relevant considering the measures and travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the tradition of visiting sites with connections to fiction received much attention in the field of tourism research, less recognition has been given to how locations known through past or present personal experiences – including places where one used to live, which one visited, or where one currently resides – can be perceived in light of their ties to works of fiction or biographical connections to authors.

Another novelty of this study is that it takes into account the position of the reader-visitor, their sociocultural and spatial situatedness and the way it affects their view of the text and locations associated with the stories and the author. Although I concentrate on the sites with connections to Jansson in Finland, my specific focus is on visitors who are not native Finns: utilizing an autoethnographic approach, I attempt to offer insights into how places with biographical connections to Jansson in Helsinki can be interpreted and



experienced by a foreign-born resident and citizen (Article 2 and 3); in Article 4, I look at how different sites, including those with biographical connections to Jansson, as well as commercial sites centered on the Moomins, are experienced by five British visitors.

Although I do not delve into literary analysis and my focus is rather on the situated reception of Jansson's texts, it is important to address how the present study relates to existing research focused on Jansson and her works. There are two notable biographies of Jansson: one by Swedish researcher Boel Westin (2014, first published in Swedish in 2007), *Tove Jansson: Life, Art, Words*, which draws on Westin's doctoral research, written in collaboration with Jansson; another is by Finnish researcher Tuula Karjalainen (2014, published in Finnish in 2013), *Tove Jansson: Work and Love*. I drew on the former as the primary source of biographical information.

A number of studies from a variety of disciplines have previously focused on Jansson's literary works, investigating, for instance, specific themes present in the texts and illustrations (e.g. Happonen 2014; Taipale 2018; Wells 2019), intergeneration appeal of the Moomin stories (e.g. Harju 2009), as well as history and peculiarities of translations of Jansson's comics and books into other languages (e.g. Berry 2014). Previous research has also considered, among other things, geographical and historical inspirations behind the Moomin books, looking at the 'actual' places behind the fictional locations, as well as the social and political context in which the works were created (Markkanen 2016). Jansson's later prose has also been the focus of research; Kasimir Sandbacka's study (2020), for example, analyzes wider social implications of the accounts of travel in the short story collections.

It is also important to mention an ongoing research project, *Explorations with Tove*, headed by Dr. Jussi Ojajärvi at the University of Oulu<sup>2</sup>. By examining Jansson's Moomin texts and adult prose from new angles, the project aims to present Jansson as a multitalented creator who utilized different forms of expression and explored a variety of themes in her works.

As with the other authors, the meanings attributed to the texts, as well as to the sites associated with Jansson and the Moomins, are closely tied to the themes found in her works. By studying the instances of visiting sites associated with Jansson and her works in the context of audience reception, the present study is expected to add a spatial aspect to existing Jansson- and Moomin-centered research. Furthermore, concentrating on the sociocultural context in which the reading happens will offer insights into how different readerships engage with her texts and experience space in light of fictive and biographic associations.

In addition to the research articles, observations at the sites with connections to Tove Jansson are documented in several blog posts<sup>3</sup> in an online blog dedicated to art, literature and culture studies, published in collaboration with Elina Huttunen (see Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> More information on the project's website: <https://explorationswithtove.wordpress.com/>

<sup>3</sup> The blog entries documenting the visits are published in an online blog called Aurora Horizon (<https://aurorahorizonscene.wixsite.com/aurorahorizon>), intended as a platform for discussion on art, literature and culture and research popularization.

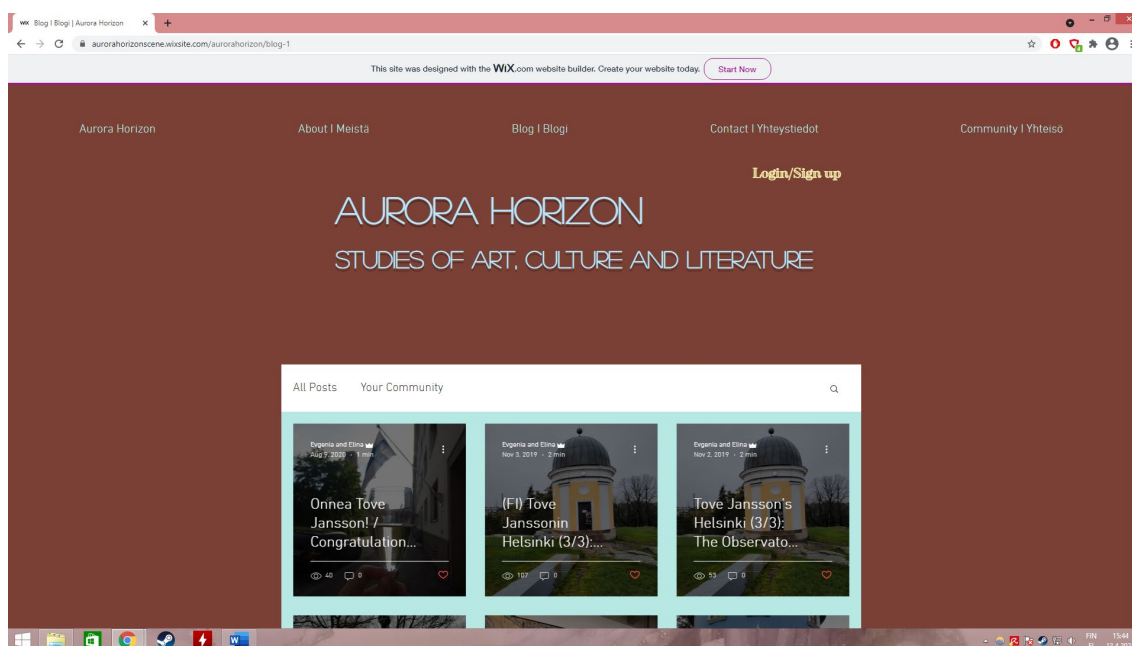


FIGURE 1 Screenshot of the Aurora Horizon blog covering observations at the sites.

### 1.3 Overview of the theoretical and methodological frameworks

The theoretical and methodological frameworks of this research reflect its focus and the research questions I pose and aim to answer in this study. As was previously mentioned, I look at how non-Finnish visitors, residing in or visiting Finland, attribute meanings to sites with ties to Jansson and her works and how individual and collective factors affect the visitor experience and the way absences are addressed.

In order to obtain material suitable for the study, I considered a variety of sources. Some of the sources I originally intended to draw on – namely, personal travel blogs and travel reviews – offered rich data, but due to ethical considerations, such as obtaining permission from the authors of the entries and reviews, protection of privacy and guaranteeing confidentiality, it would have been difficult to utilize the material fully while trying to adhere to national, institutional and self-imposed ethical guidelines. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to abandon the initial intent. Media publications about Jansson offered another source of material but often lacked the spatial aspect that I was interested in. However, five authored press publications featuring authors' accounts of visiting sites with connections to Jansson and her works in Finland were picked for analysis in one of the articles.

To obtain the data that could be utilized to its full potential and to avoid trespassing into ethically grey areas as much as possible, I turned to a source of data that could be treated with fewer reservations – myself. That was not the original intention, but when I reviewed the notes produced during the visits I

made to the sites connected to Tove Jansson, a lightbulb lit up above my head, and a daring plunge into unfamiliar methodologies convinced me that this material could indeed be utilized. The fountain of ideas I had while attempting to write blog entries now had an outlet. Everything that was deemed to be too personal, too academic, too irrelevant could be now used as data. Turning to autoethnography was not a choice lightly made. Despite the reservations I held (I still do), the allure of being self-critical, of scrutinizing my own experiences for a scientific purpose, and to have an excuse to go and visit and revisit the sites was strong. What it resulted in is three articles that utilize the autoethnographic approach, which I deem to be suitable for studying visitor experience at sites with ties to fiction.

In my analysis of spatial and sociocultural contexts, individual and collective, in which the works are read and sites are viewed and experienced, I utilize the concepts of *situatedness* (Haraway 1988) and spatial and social *belonging* (Yuval-Davis 2006; Antonsich 2010a, 2010b). The premise that the text 'happens' when it is read (Hones 2008, 2014), that readers co-create the text and that each reader is situated and reads the text from their own position acts as a foundation of this research. Sheila Hones's research in literary geographies, together with research on situated reader response (Bogdan et al. 2000; Pearce 2002; Brooks and Browne 2012), which applies Haraway's concept of situated knowledges to fiction consumption, has been influential in informing my understanding of the reading process and the direction of this research. The concept of belonging also offers a new angle from which to look at visitation of sites with fictional connections; with the entanglement of simultaneous *belongings* and *non-belongings*, places with connections to works of fiction and the authors can be experienced differently by individual visitors.

I have to admit that the choice to focus on non-Finnish visitors and to utilize the theoretical approaches presented above has been also informed, in part, by my own experience of being a foreign-born Finnish resident and citizen. That, in addition to the methodological approach, makes it a very self-centered research work.

It is important to emphasize that the topic and direction of this study have been influenced by previous research on media-induced travel, notably the studies that focused on the importance of personal histories of engagement with fiction (e.g. Kim 2010; Reijnders 2016; Jiang and Xu 2016) and those that looked at the collective gaze and values attributed to the sites (e.g. Squire 1994; Yu and Xu 2016, 2018). Combining the theories and guided by the results of previous studies, this study attempts to analyze individual experiences and disentangle the ball of yarn that is the combination of personal histories and positions that readers-visitors occupy, which affect the way they view the text and perceive space.

## 1.4 Structure of the dissertation

The text before the reader is the introductory section of the dissertation. It consists of six chapters and the reader has now almost finished the first. The subsequent parts are structured as follows: in the next chapter, I provide background with regards to Jansson’s biography and works; Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework, briefly introducing the phenomenon of media-induced travel and describing the concepts and theories applied in the present study. Chapter 4 proceeds by explaining methodological choices of this research, and Chapter 5 follows by summarizing the content and findings of the articles that are part of the dissertation. The concluding section discusses the findings and wider implications and suggests possible directions for future research.

Table 1 presents the objectives of each of the articles, describes the materials<sup>4</sup> I draw on and summarizes the methods applied.

TABLE 1 Research objectives, materials and methodological approaches of the articles.

Article	Objectives	Materials	Analytical methods
1. On Mirkwood, Vampires and Rhododendrons: Experiencing Familiar Places through Fiction	<p>Introductory piece; sets out the course for subsequent articles by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contemplating the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the study of travel inspired by fiction</li> <li>- looking at how familiar places can be envisioned and experienced through fiction and how the reading is affected by one’s spatial experiences</li> </ul> <p>Provides answers to research question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do past and present geographical and sociocultural experiences a) influence the interpretation of the sites and b) allow visitors to address absences?</li> </ul>	Written in essay style, autoethnographic data used to present an argument	

*continues*

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I chose to adopt the term ‘material’ to refer primarily to literary texts and some of the online publications; on the other hand, ‘data’, in most cases, refers to autoethnographic account and press articles. When referring to all the material/data utilized in the study, ‘material’ is the preferred option.

TABLE 1 continues

<p>2. Chasing writers' ghosts through a modern city: Augmenting urban space with literary connections during the Tove Jansson walk in Helsinki</p>	<p>Provide answers to research questions:          - How can sites in Finland be experienced through their connections to Tove Jansson and/or her literary works?          - How does personal engagement with Jansson's works a) affect the meanings individuals attribute to these places and b) influence the visitor experience?</p>	<p>Field notes documenting observations at the sites with biographical connections to Tove Jansson, written as narrative accounts of the walks, supplemented by photographs taken at the sites. Fieldwork conducted over 2 days, June and December 2017</p>	<p>Qualitative content analysis</p>
<p>3. An in-between reader: situatedness and belonging in Tove Jansson's Helsinki</p>	<p>- How do past and present geographical and sociocultural experiences a) influence the interpretation of the sites and b) allow visitors to address absences?</p>	<p>Primary data set: fieldnotes documenting observations at the sites with biographical connections to Tove Jansson (different occasions 2017–2019), retrospective accounts          Additional material: two novels by Jansson, online media publications about her</p>	
<p>4. The distant snowy land where rounded creatures dwell: Experiencing Moomin-related nostalgia and belonging in Finland</p>		<p>Primary data set: five authored press articles published in British online newspapers, featuring accounts of visits to the sites with connections to Jansson and her works          Additional material: online media publications about Jansson and her works</p>	

## 2 HIPPOPOTAMUS-LIKE CREATURES AND THE ICONIC ARTIST-WRITER

In order to elaborate more specifically on the focus of this research, a few words need to be said (or a few pages, in fact) about the person whom it is all about – Tove Jansson. This chapter gives a short overview of her life and works and briefly lists locations with connections to her and her fictional characters in Finland.

Widely known as the author of the Moomin books, Tove Jansson (1914–2001) was born in Helsinki into an artistic family. Her mother was Swedish-born graphic artist Signe “Ham” Hammarsten-Jansson, and her father Finnish-Swedish sculptor Viktor “Faffan” Jansson. Encouraged in her creative endeavors early on, Jansson was working on her own literary and artistic projects even when young and was resolute in becoming an artist; she assisted her mother in illustration jobs and had her work first published in the political magazine *Garm* when she was only 15 (Westin 2007, 2014).

She studied in Stockholm and Paris, travelling a lot over the years, but for the greater part of her life she lived in Helsinki. During her childhood, her family used to spend summers on the Finnish archipelago and winters in the city; she kept up this tradition in her adult life, dividing her time between Helsinki and the island of Klovharu off the south coast of Finland where she and her partner had a cabin (Westin 2014).

While internationally popular predominantly as the writer and illustrator of the Moomin books and comic strips, in Finland Jansson was a recognized artist of her generation. She was known to regard herself as a painter first, and only then a writer (Westin 2014). Alongside paintings, Jansson produced a number of public and commissioned works, including murals for a city hall restaurant, canteens, schools and kindergartens. She was known for her illustrations: having worked for a long time in *Garm*, she also illustrated Swedish translations of the

books by Lewis Carroll<sup>5</sup> and *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien<sup>6</sup>. Alongside Tove, who was the oldest of the three children, her brothers Lars and Per Olov also worked in creative professions. Jansson's lifelong female partner was graphic artist Tuulikki Pietilä, with whom she lived for more than forty years; the two women travelled together and sometimes worked on collaborative projects.

## 2.1 Trolls, 'but also': Tove Jansson's literary works

Despite Jansson's own emphasis on the significance of her artistic work, this research – yet again – makes her literary works, including the Moomins, the focus of inquiry. Following the first 'Moomin boom' in the 1950s (Westin 2014) and up until recently, it seems that much of what was written about Jansson can be characterized by 'but also': she was not only the creator of the Moomins, but also a painter; but also wrote 'adult' prose; but also dealt with business affairs.

It would be difficult not to address the hippopotamus-like creature in the room – the Moomins are, after all, Jansson's most famous work. The reason I decided to elaborate on the Moomins here is that, in the articles which are part of the dissertation, the Moomin characters and stories are not dissected in detail, yet it is important to get a few glimpses of what they are to understand the reception of Jansson's works and the popular impression of her as an artist and a writer.

The Moomin book series began with *The Moomins and the Great Flood*<sup>7</sup> (originally published in 1945) and comprised eight novels, a collection of short stories and five picture books (the last published in 1993). The Moomin comic strip, which originally appeared in the Finnish-Swedish newspaper *Ny Tid* in 1947–1948, turned out to be an international success when it was published in the British *Evening News* (1954–1975). The comic strip was originally written and illustrated solely by Jansson and later in collaboration with her brother Lars, who subsequently took over the work when Jansson herself needed more time free from the Moomin business (Westin 2014). A number of cinematic adaptations were produced in different countries over the years; the stories also inspired several stage productions. The Japanese-Finnish-Dutch animated adaptation *Tanoshii Mūmin Ikka* (*Delightful Moomin Family*, 1990–1992) was particularly notable in achieving popularity, and the recent *Moominvalley* (2019– ) TV series has also attracted a lot of attention internationally.

The stories depict the adventures of the protagonist Moomintroll and his family, friends and acquaintances, all of them rather fantastical creatures. The character prototype's creation by far predates his first appearance in the books.

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<sup>5</sup> Carroll, L. (1876) *The Hunting of the Snark*. Swedish title: *Snarkjakten*. Translated by Lars Forsell and Åke Runnquist, Stockholm, 1959.

Carroll, L. (1865) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Swedish title: *Alice i Underlandet*. Translated by Åke Runnquist, Stockholm, 1966.

<sup>6</sup> Tolkien J. R. R. (1937) *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*. Swedish title: *Bilbo – En hobbits äventyr*. Translated by Britt G. Hallqvist, Stockholm, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> Swedish original: *Småtrollen och den stora översvämningen* (1945), English translation appeared only in 2005.

The jolly rounded characters, as they are widely known and recognized today, were not as rounded or as jolly at their initial appearance. Gloomy, ominous, dark-colored and rather narrow-snouted creatures, in which a viewer can now vaguely recognize the Moomins' prototype, appeared in Jansson's paintings in the 1930s, and, by the 1940s, a recognizable hippopotamus-like figure often appeared – both as a character and as a signature – in her illustrations for *Garm* (Westin 2014).

As the Moomins' popularity grew, they began to loom over Jansson's other artistic work; the fame of the fictional characters was putting the stamp of a writer of books for children on her, even though it was never Jansson's intention to write children's books (Westin 2014). Neither did she mean the stories as educational, though over the years she got a lot of criticism about characters' bad behavior and the books' lack of didactic value (Westin 2014). As is often the case with the characters associated with children's literature (e.g. Squire 1991, 1994), the Moomins tend to be remembered, represented and commercialized as friendly and cute. They are viewed as child-friendly and also often fondly regarded by adults who were previously acquainted with the books or who encountered the stories in other media. Closely tied to idealized images of childhood, the 'adult' themes in children's fiction are in some cases left out of the memories. However, the Moomin stories are often remarked for having cross-generational appeal (e.g. Harju 2009): in contrast to being regarded as 'safe' and child-friendly, the books are in fact full of disasters, with the characters repeatedly facing dangerous, sometimes life-threatening events, and the themes that often appear include for example longing and loneliness. These 'disturbing' notions in the books were at times considered problematic, and publishers and critics were often unsure whether the books were suitable for children or adults, especially with regards to the later titles (Westin 2014).

Jansson's later, less fantastical prose includes novels and short stories. Because in this dissertation the focus is rather on international, specifically Anglophone, reception, it is worth mentioning that while some titles appeared in English translation soon after the initial publication, including *Sculptor's Daughter*<sup>8</sup> and *The Summer Book*<sup>9</sup>, the subsequent adult-oriented prose titles were introduced to Anglophone markets only beginning the mid-2000s (Berry 2014; see also Ant O'Neill's recent translation project<sup>10</sup>), e.g. collections of short stories *Travelling Light*<sup>11</sup> and *The Listener*<sup>12</sup>. Some of these novels and short stories can be viewed as semi-autobiographical and draw heavily on Jansson's own life experience as well as that of people close to her. Remarkably, when talking about Jansson's prose, her niece Sophia Jansson (quoted in Rix 2010) emphasizes that the stories are a mix of reality and fiction: they may be based on real-life people and events but the accounts are nevertheless fictionalized.

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<sup>8</sup> Swedish original: *Bildhuggarens dotter* (1968), first translated into English in 1969.

<sup>9</sup> Swedish original: *Sommarboken* (1972), first translated into English in 1975.

<sup>10</sup> Moomin History blog by Ant O'Neill: <http://moominhistory.antonuzzo.com/>.

<sup>11</sup> Swedish original: *Resa med lätt bagage* (1987), first translated into English in 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Swedish original: *Lyssnerskan* (1971), first translated into English in 2014.



The two titles which are the focus of Article 3 are the semi-autobiographical fix-up novels *Sculptor's Daughter* (1968/2015) and *Fair Play* (1989/2011). Both novels consist of short stories set in Helsinki and other locations. The former is a fictionalized memoir, presenting instances from the author's childhood; it is written from a child's perspective, and often features Jansson's parents and their associates (Westin 2014). The latter novel, translated into English in 2007, is about Jansson's life with her partner Tuulikki Pietilä (although she gives the characters pseudonyms, the references are quite clear) – though the relationship is not always at the center, each piece reveals something about both women and the way they interact, which gives insights into relationship dynamics (Westin 2014).

## 2.2 An absolutely remarkable woman: Jansson's life reevaluated

Commemorative events were held in Finland and abroad to honor Jansson's legacy after her death in 2001 and in the time surrounding the centenary of her birth in 2014. As was previously mentioned, in recent years, a number of popular and scientific publications have been written about her; a collection of edited correspondence was published<sup>13</sup>, and the recent biopic *Tove* (2020), produced in Finland in Swedish, presents a new dimension of her life and works.

Jansson's self-proclaimed motto 'work and love' (Karjalainen 2014; Westin 2014) often echoes in media coverage centered around her. Although Jansson's life might appear to be carefree – born into a family of artists, working on what she loved, travelling a lot – she was incredibly productive, and her life, like that of her parents, was characterized by constant work (Westin 2014). As Westin notes in her biography, "behind the trolls and the pictures lies a constant struggle between pleasure and duty, inclination and responsibility" (Westin 2014: 22).

While the title the 'mother of the Moomins,' often used to describe Jansson, seems to attribute certain maternal qualities to her, the author was, in fact, reluctant to conform to the practices of the heteronormative family, conventional at the time, and willingly avoided parenthood (Rix 2010; Westin 2014). Her same-sex relationships, including her lifelong partnership with Tuulikki Pietilä, were often concealed by publishers (see Figure 2, for example) and not mentioned in the media. However, Jansson alluded to it, often in a veiled and vague style, as her lovers, along with friends, acquaintances and family members, were depicted, most often in a fictionalized manner, in her artistic and literary works (Westin 2014). She had to be careful of censors and critics<sup>14</sup>, and yet she painted theatre director Vivica Bandler, who was her lover in the 1940s, in the center of the fresco she was commissioned to do for the Helsinki City Hall restaurant. Both her male and female lovers inspired characters in the Moomin books: Atos Wirtanen was the inspiration behind the character of Snufkin, Pietilä appeared as Too-Ticky,

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<sup>13</sup> See Jansson, T. (2014/2019) *Letters from Tove* [Swedish: *Brev från Tove Jansson*]. Edited by B. Westin and H. Svensson, translated by S. Death. London: Sort of Books.

<sup>14</sup> Homosexuality was decriminalized in Finland in 1971 but was classified as an illness until 1981.

and a reference to the relationship with Bandler also appears in *Finn Family Moomintroll*<sup>15</sup> (Westin 2014). *Fair Play*, which in a thinly veiled manner focuses on her relationship with Pietilä, as was already mentioned, was published in 1989.

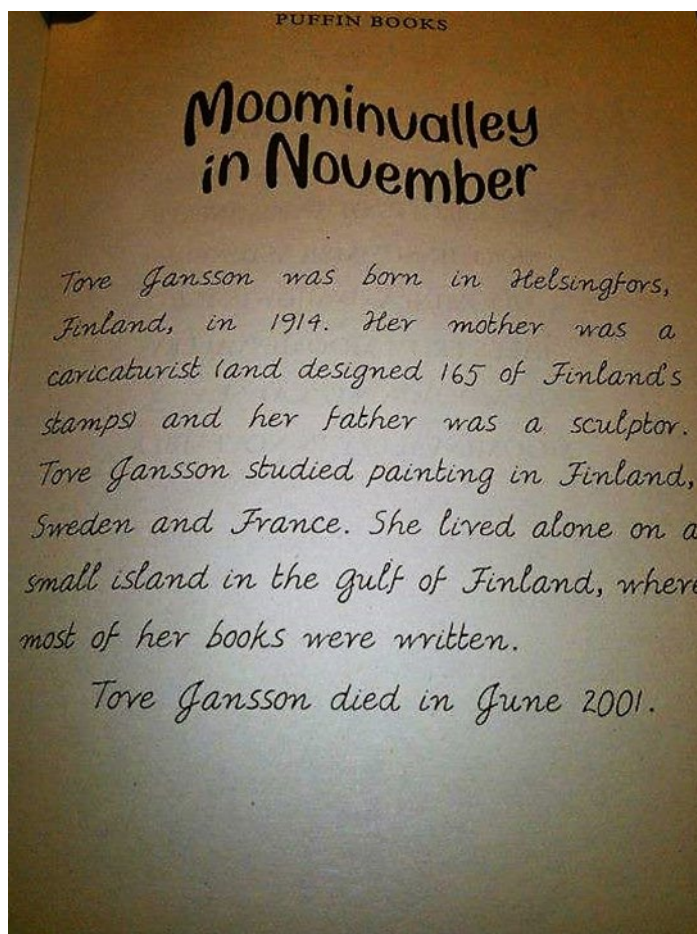


FIGURE 2 Puffin Books edition of *Moominvalley in November*, author biography page. Jansson is said to have lived alone on a small island. Tampere Art Museum Moominvalley Collection (now Moomin Museum), Tampere. Photo by Sanna Karkulehto, 2014.

In light of Jansson's progressive ideas and lifestyle, and due to growing availability of her later prose in translation, she is nowadays envisioned as a feminist role model (see e.g. Dening 2017; also an article on the Moomin Characters Ltd. website<sup>16</sup>), a liberally inclined independent woman who achieved success in her profession and fulfillment in her personal life. In addition, she can be regarded as an LGBTQ+ icon, as her relationships with women are

<sup>15</sup> Swedish original: *Trollkarlens hatt* (1948). Also known as The Magician's Hat or The Happy Moomins, published in English translation in 1950.

<sup>16</sup> Moomin Characters Ltd. 'Tove Jansson's home country Finland is a pioneer in equality.' 19 March 2019. [Online] [Accessed 14 May 2020] <https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/tove-janssons-home-country-finland-is-a-pioneer-in-equality/#eb434b88>

being acknowledged and queer themes in her work openly discussed. Others (e.g. Huse 1991; Wells 2019) have written in detail about queer references in her works, and heteronormative interpretation of the Moomin books, which used to be relatively common, has been subsequently critically reconsidered and deconstructed in both research and also in the media (e.g. Rix 2010; Denning 2017). Furthermore, Jansson's sexuality is being highlighted and celebrated on an official level: the Moomin Characters Ltd. website recently published a three-part feature<sup>17</sup> on her same-sex relationships, and Helsinki Art Museum initiatives during Pride week in Helsinki in 2020 addressed and highlighted the queer themes in her works<sup>18</sup>.

### 2.3 Demand for cuteness: Commercialization of the Moomins

The Moomins are a popular brand and are commercialized to a great degree. The characters are iconic figures often associated with Finland and appear on a line of licensed merchandise. As journalist Lisa Allardice (2019) remarks, "the Moomins are perhaps more often found on a mug or a tea towel than between the covers of a book." Finnish company Moomin Characters Ltd. supervises the Moomin copyright.

For the Finnish audience, the constant presence of the Moomins in daily life is nothing new. While the books remain popular in their homeland and are widely available in different formats, the characters also appear elsewhere. In addition to Moomin flagship stores and cafes, Moomin merchandize is available at airports, train and bus stations, and even regular department stores and supermarkets in Finland habitually feature a wide range of Moomin-themed products, from towels, kitchenware and clothes to office supplies, post stamps and furniture. While some of these products are specifically intended for children, other goods are not associated with any age group or are meant to be used by adults. The majority of Finnish households seem to have at least a few items with Moomin characters on them – most commonly the famous Moomin mugs, but also other tableware and textiles, not counting hygiene products, disposable goods and food items that feature Moomins on the packaging.

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<sup>17</sup> Moomin Characters Ltd. "I've fallen madly in love with a woman" – Queer themes in Tove Jansson's life and work, part 1. 20 June 2019. [Online] [Accessed 14 May 2020] <https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/ive-fallen-madly-in-love-with-a-woman-queer-themes-in-tove-janssons-life-and-work-part-1/>

<sup>18</sup> See Moomin Characters Ltd. 'Pride-viikko täynnä queer-teemaan pohjautuvia luentoja, työpajoja, dokumentteja & musiikkiesityksiä' ('Pride week filled with queer-themed lectures, workshops, documentaries & musical performances'). 7 September 2020. [Online] [Accessed 24 February 2021] <https://www.moomin.com/fi/blogi/pride-viikko-taynna-queer-teemaan-pohjautuvia-luentoja-tyopajoja-dokumentteja-musiikkiesityksia/#0c3edf7a>



FIGURE 3 Moomin Café in Stockmann shopping center, Helsinki. Photo by the author, 2017.



FIGURE 4 Moomin house in Moominworld, theme park created by Dennis Livson, Moomin Characters Ltd. Photo by the author, 2018.

The prevalence of the business aspect is also seen in the commercial nature of many Moomin-related attractions. In Finland, the Helsinki region has several Moomin shops and cafes (see Figure 3); Moominworld theme park (see Figure 4) is situated near Turku, on the southwest coast, with a flagship store also located in the city; in addition, Moomin-themed events are held on different occasions, for instance, a seasonal ice sculpture exhibit centered around Moomins opened near Kuopio. While the merchandise is sold in many countries, internationally, Moomin shops are found in Sweden, the UK, Hawaii and, reflecting their popularity in Asia, Moomin-themed venues are located in South Korea and Japan<sup>19</sup>.

## 2.4 Places with connections to Jansson and the Moomins

Centered around both the characters and the creator, the Moomin Museum<sup>20</sup> in Tampere, Central Finland, exhibits a collection of Jansson's Moomin-related works and also provides information about her life and other works. In the Helsinki Art Museum<sup>21</sup> Jansson's paintings and artistic works are exhibited. In recent years, a number of temporary exhibitions dedicated to Jansson and her works, including the Moomins, have been arranged on several occasions at different venues in Finland, as well as in the UK, South Korea and Japan<sup>22</sup>.

Sites with biographical connections to Jansson are located primarily in Helsinki. Commemorative plaques mark the apartment blocks where Jansson used to live with her family and, later, in the tower studio of her own. The apartments where she lived are in use and are not open for visitors, with the exception of the tower studio at Ullanlinnankatu (Swedish<sup>23</sup>: Ulrikasborgsgatan) 1, which can be visited by arrangement.

Jansson's school buildings, places she frequented, and locations that inspired her works can also be traced with the help of published online itineraries and media articles. Her grave is located in Hietaniemi (Swedish: Sandudd) cemetery. A park was renamed after her in 2014, the year of the centenary of her birth, and several statues by her father, which were modelled after young Jansson, are in parks throughout Helsinki. The cabin she shared with Pietilä on the island Klovharu on the Finnish archipelago can be visited by arrangement and is usually open for visitors for one week per year.

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<sup>19</sup> More information on Moomin Characters Ltd. official website:  
<https://www.moomin.com/en/locations/>

<sup>20</sup> The collection now exhibited in the Moomin Museum in Tampere Hall was previously part of Tampere Art Museum Moominvalley Collection. See more at:  
<https://www.muumimuseo.fi/en/moomin-museum/about-the-collection/>

<sup>21</sup> More information on the museum's website: <https://www.hamhelsinki.fi/en/exhibition/tove-jansson/>

<sup>22</sup> More information on Moomin Characters Ltd. official website:  
<https://www.moomin.com/en/articles/events/>

<sup>23</sup> In Finland, Finnish and Swedish languages have official status. In officially bilingual municipalities, cities, towns and streets carry names in both Finnish and Swedish, and street signs are provided in both languages.



FIGURE 5 Lallukka Artists' Home, where Jansson's family lived beginning in 1933.  
Photo by the author, 2017.

Places with biographical connections to Jansson have been the focus of recent scholarly and non-academic publications. Notably, researcher Sirke Happonen<sup>24</sup>, concentrated on spatial aspects in Jansson's prose and art and highlighted artist-writer's connection to Helsinki in an exhibition project. The most recent biographical research on Jansson is the book *Tove Janssonin Helsinki* (English: *Tove Jansson's Helsinki*)<sup>25</sup> by Juha Järvelä<sup>26</sup>, which has been published just as this dissertation is about to go to print.

As the interpretation of Jansson's life and works changes, and new audiences get introduced to her works, the meanings attributed to sites with connections to her might not remain the same. In this dissertation, I focus only on a small group of contemporary visitors in an attempt to discover how such sites can be experienced and how Jansson's texts and texts about her affect these experiences. I also aim to look into how different absences – that of Jansson herself, of descriptions in her texts, of indications at the sites, of traceable connections – are perceived and whether these 'gaps' pose a problem or encourage engagement.

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<sup>24</sup> Happonen, S. (2010/2012) *Tove Jansson and Helsinki*. Summary of the talk given at the exhibition project *Artist Tove Jansson, Helsinki* by Virka Gallery, shared by Happonen by email in personal communication 6 April 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Järvelä, J. (2021) *Tove Janssonin Helsinki*. Helsinki: Minerva.

<sup>26</sup> More information on Järvelä's projects here: <https://www.facebook.com/taiteilijoidenhelsingissa>

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PLACES WITH 'FICTIVE' CONNECTIONS, SITUATEDNESS AND BELONGING

At the center of this research is the practice of visiting sites with connections to works of fiction and their authors, and it draws strongly on earlier research of travel inspired by fiction. At the same time, I look at the practice through the prism of situatedness and belonging, with the main premise being that all readers – and that applies to ‘readers’ of any type of media texts – are situated, and their respective positions and individual and collective belonging and non-belonging affect the reading and shape the way they experience sites with ties to the texts. In this chapter, I will provide a selective overview of studies on travel inspired by media productions and show how researchers previously approached the topic. Following that, I will introduce the concepts and theories that I utilize in the analysis of visitor experiences in this research.

#### 3.1 Visiting places with links to fiction

Looking at the titles of this chapter and this section in particular, I think I could have picked another term, from the many that have been used to refer to the practice I am looking at. Reflecting a variety of media productions that can motivate people to travel, in earlier publications researchers called it *literary tourism/travel* (Busby and Hambly 2000; Watson 2006), *film/movie(-induced) tourism* (Busby and Klug 2001; Beeton 2006, 2016), *(on-)screen tourism* (Li et al. 2017; Lundberg et al. 2018), *media tourism* (Reijnders 2011), *mediatized tourism* (Månsson 2011, 2015), *popular media-induced tourism* (Iwashita 2006) or *pop culture tourism* (Lundberg and Lexhagen 2014). The latter definitions are more encompassing, implying that in addition to the narratives found in fiction literature and on screen, other media productions, including, for instance, comics, games, and music, can inspire visitations of sites linked to them.

Although *literary travel* or *media tourism* would have made it more concise and certainly catchier, the presence of 'tourism' or 'travel' does not exactly accurately reflect the focus of this research, as it also looks – in three out of four articles – at the instances of visiting familiar sites with connections to fiction and the author, and that does not necessarily involve travelling far from the place where one resides. Thus, I shall go with a clumsier but a more descriptive phrase and refer to these as 'visits', although in this section – and may the reader forgive me – I will also use the definitions previously used by researchers as well as *fiction-inspired travel*, which I adopted in my previous studies.

Travel motivated by literature began receiving scholarly attention earlier than other forms of travel inspired by media. Earlier Anglophone studies from the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Pocock 1987; Squire 1994) focused predominantly on literary places in Europe and North America, but in the last two decades a number of studies have looked at literary tourism in other regional contexts, focusing on examples from Latin America (e.g. Saldanha 2018), Africa (e.g. Stiebel 2004, 2007) and Asia-Pacific (e.g. Yiannakis and Davies 2012; Wang and Zhang 2017; Yu and Xu 2016, 2018).

Literary visits can be motivated by biographical interest in authors or involve seeking out places that appeared in or inspired fictional narratives. Consequently, places can enjoy popularity due to their associations with fictional texts, confirmed biographical connections to authors, or because they were used as settings for screen adaptations of literary works. When coming to the sites with biographical connections in particular, visitors may be motivated to pay tribute, seek imagined proximity or attempt to understand the authors and the inspiration behind their works. It was also observed that, when visiting locations with connections to fiction, some might even wish to experience the sites in the same way they were experienced by a certain real or imaginary figure – to observe the same surroundings and feel similar emotions (e.g. Watson 2006; Plate 2006; Hendrix 2009; Kim 2010).

As fictional narratives can be encountered not only in literature but in a variety of media, including films and TV, comics, games, and animated and audio productions, sites associated with them also tend to attract visitors. Screen tourism has been a popular research topic starting in the 2000s (e.g. Beeton 2006; Iwashita 2006), and an increasing number of studies drawing on cases in different regions have been produced throughout the years, focusing on both original screen productions and adaptations of literary works. Although I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of research on screen tourism, it is important to underline that travel inspired by screen productions has been growing in popularity in recent years, in light of successful book adaptations and original screen productions, as examples from different parts of the world demonstrate: among the notable cases in European countries in recent years, for instance, tourism to locations that served as settings for the *Game of Thrones* TV series have attracted a great number of visitors (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2017). A number of studies from South Korea (Kim et al. 2009; Kim 2010, 2012) demonstrate that popular TV dramas are resulting in high visitor numbers to



filming locations, and researchers in Japan have also looked at travel inspired by animated productions, such as cases of anime-induced travel (Yamamura 2015; Ono et al. 2020) and of fans visiting sites with connections to games (Andrews 2015). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the tourism industry, and the future of travel inspired by media, as with all forms of domestic and international travel, at the moment remains unsure.

As was mentioned earlier, researchers of media-induced travel have underlined the notion of desired presence, whether that of writers, fictional characters, or the scenery and atmosphere as it appears in works of fiction. Visiting locations with ties to fiction often involves projecting narratives and real individuals (authors, historical personas) or fictional characters at the sites, which relies on visitors' knowledge and imagination (Jiang and Yu 2020). The absences – of writers, verifiable ties, visible connections and easily perceived associations – although often viewed as an obstacle to a fulfilling experience (e.g. Ridanpää 2011; van Es and Reijnders 2016; Thurgill 2018), can, on the other hand, provide opportunities for visitors to creatively engage with the space.

A number of studies have demonstrated how readers engage with and 'fill' the empty spaces by identifying with or 'playing' the author or a character when occupying the space where they ought to be (Kim 2010; Watson 2013; Gothie 2016); by projecting narratives onto space where no confirmed connection exists (Anderson 2015; McLaughlin 2016); or drawing on an assumed link or association based on the architecture or atmosphere (Lovell 2019; Lovell and Thurgill 2021). Recent studies highlighted the active role of the reader-visitor in co-constructing not only the text but also the place, based on their own experiences and histories (Jiang and Xu 2016, 2017; see also Waysdorf and Reijnders 2017, 2018), with Jiang and Xu's research on the San Mao Teahouse particularly emphasizing how visitors creatively address multiple absences left by the author and the texts. Notions of absence have also been addressed in publications resulting from the recently concluded *Literary Geographies of Absence*<sup>27</sup> project.

### 3.2 'Fictive' places and belonging

Earlier studies indicate that individuals often have a number of favorite fictional narratives that are considered to be of personal importance; such narratives – encountered through literary texts, screen productions or other media – can lead to the formation of affective attachments to places, which subsequently can inspire people to travel to associated locations (Squire 1994; Hills 2002; Iwashita 2006; Kim 2010; Reijnders 2016). Readers' and viewers' emotional connections to fictional or fictionalized places can be conceptualized as *fiction-induced spatial belonging*.

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<sup>27</sup> Collaborative project with Prof. Sheila Hones (University of Tokyo) as a principal investigator. For more information see: <https://kaken.nii.ac.jp/en/grant/KAKENHI-PROJECT-17K02538/>

Previous studies highlighted visitors' emotional involvement with places prior to the visit, focusing on personal histories of engagement with fiction: in relation to media texts, researchers have emphasized the role of personal memories (Kim 2010, 2012; Reijnders 2016) and nostalgia (e.g. Squire 1994; Crang 2003; Kim et al. 2019), which is transferred to places with links to these texts. When studying visitors' affective response to the sites with ties to personally meaningful narratives, a number of researchers (e.g. Kim 2010; Ridanpää 2011; Kim et al. 2019; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2019) have often conceptualized the emotional attachments to places through media by applying the ideas of early humanist geographers Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph. The concepts of 'sense of place' (Tuan 1974; Relph 1976) and 'topophilia' (Tuan 1974) particularly are regarded as helpful in understanding fiction-inspired travel.

Engagement with fiction can also serve as a ground for (re)establishing social attachments and (re)negotiating self-identity (e.g. Hasebrink and Paus-Hasebrink 2016). Several studies (Squire 1994; Buchmann et al. 2010; Kim 2010; Gothie 2016) observed the importance of individually and collectively constructed meanings attributed to media productions and the sites associated with them, as well as the role of social connections formed or reaffirmed in the context of fiction consumption and fiction-inspired travel. Not only do shared fiction consumption practices relate to one's close circle of family and friends, but, on a wider scale, engagement with media productions can be a social practice, and sites associated with them are collectively meaningful to fan communities (Hills 2002; Waysdorf 2017; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2019).

Drawing on previous studies of literary tourism (Herbert 2001; Robinson and Andersen 2002; Watson 2006; Bom 2015a), literary sites linked to known literary figures or texts can be viewed as places where cultural and national belonging is manifested: claiming authors as 'our own' during commemorative events and 'tying' authors to space by renaming streets and revealing plaques are practices saturated with meanings and implications of who does and does not belong. They raise questions about the ownership of cultural heritage, of recognition, commercialization and cultural and national identity (Laing and Frost 2012). In addition, it has been observed (Squire 1994; Jiang and Xu 2016, 2017; Yu and Xu 2016, 2018) how, at the sites with ties to literary works, collective cultural, moral and class values are reaffirmed. The importance of acknowledging the political dimension of literary places has recently been emphasized (McRae Andrew 2018), and this invites examination of how belonging is constructed and negotiated, experienced and exhibited at the sites in light of their connections to media texts.

Both spatial attachments formed through fiction and social connections maintained and reaffirmed during fiction-inspired travel have been viewed through the prism of *belonging* in a number of earlier studies (Kim 2010; Reijnders 2016; van Es and Reijnders 2016; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018). Belonging is, in fact, one of the main concepts utilized by several authors in a recent edited book, *Locating Imagination in Popular Culture: Place, Tourism and Belonging*, edited by van Es et al. (2020).

While belonging remains a vaguely defined concept, the use of which varies depending on the context (Antonsich 2010a, 2010b; Lähdesmäki et al. 2016), different aspects of it – including spatial, sociocultural and political (Yuval-Davis 2006) – have been discussed in a number of studies. In their overview of earlier research dealing with belonging, Lähdesmäki et al. (2016) found that belonging is often understood in relation to space: this often relates to ‘rootedness’ and ‘feeling at home’ but also to how same spaces can have different meanings for various groups (Morley 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006). On the other hand, belonging is also found to be tied to everyday lives and spaces inhabited and frequented (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016). The spatiality of belonging is also intertwined with sociopolitical relations, which are yet another aspect of belonging that has received attention (Yuval-Davis 2006). For instance, as governments exercise control over who can enter and stay in a given country, belonging is a subject of official recognition (Schein 2009); even though individuals and groups might have a right to stay, they might not be perceived as belonging by other, more influential groups. *Belongings* are simultaneous, multiple, and constantly changing, as individuals and groups can occupy multiple social locations at once and be positioned differently on various axes of power (Yuval-Davis 2006; Lähdesmäki et al. 2016). Belonging can be thrust upon groups; sometimes it is expected, and for some denied (Schein 2009).

As was mentioned above, literature as part of cultural heritage is inevitably a subject of the politics of belonging, as are places with ties to literary texts, which are found valuable on national and regional levels. When looking at familiar places through fiction, there is a good chance that the notions of being from the place, or ‘being at home’, will play a significant role. On the other hand, locations related to fiction might act as spaces of belonging for multiple groups, uniting individuals based on similar interests and passion for media texts, as is the case with transnational fan communities. When travelling to locations associated with media texts, visitors might lack the experience of ‘rootedness’ but may have the feeling of ‘being at home’ or the notion of *search for home* can be present (e.g. Jiang and Xu 2016) since through fiction actual physical locations can become ‘familiar’ before (and if ever) the visit occurs.

For the purpose of this study, I have found the ideas of Marco Antonsich (2010a, 2010b) on belonging particularly applicable when looking at visitor experience of sites associated with fiction. Depending on the medium in which fiction is consumed, personal preferences and other factors, fiction consumption can be a shared social experience, but it is also highly personal. In a similar manner, while the social aspect can be important when experiencing locations with connections to fiction, it can at the same time be a highly individual experience and vary from one person to another.

Writing about spatial belonging, Antonsich (2010a) highlights the importance of both individual and collective dimensions when studying the relationship between the place and the Self: he goes back to the works by early humanistic geographers (Tuan 1974; Relph 1976), which concentrated on the individual aspect and which were subsequently criticized because they neglected

the collective dimension. While maintaining that social categories are important in understanding belonging, he warns again disregarding the “personal, intimate relation between place and Self” (2010a: 120). Reviewing the results of earlier studies on belonging (2010b), he emphasizes the role of personal memories, past experiences, and everyday practices, at the same time recognizing personal and social ties, language, and economic and political factors (like citizenship) as crucial in forming the relationship between an individual and a place. This line of thought was regarded as relevant to the topic and focus of this study since, while collective reading and interpretation of the texts is undoubtedly important, personal geographical experience and histories of engagement with fiction cannot be discarded, as they shape the way people engage with texts and locations, either known through fiction or familiar from earlier experience.

### **3.3 Situated readers**

Situatedness is another main concept that I employ in this study. Interconnected with belonging, it relates to the positions individuals and groups occupy, and, in this dissertation, I consider how it shapes the reading of the texts and, consequently, meanings attributed to the sites with links to fiction. Building on Donna Haraway’s idea of ‘situated knowledges’ (1988), the starting point is that all reading is situated and the text ‘happens’ when it is read (Hones 2008, 2014).

Haraway proposed that our knowledge is tied to our experience and what we see depends on the position we look from, and hence, all knowledge is situated (1988). Going from that to the situated reading, a growing consensus indicates that audiences are not just consuming media products, but they are actively interpreting, reimagining, and co-constructing the texts in light of their own situatedness (Rosenblatt 1982; Sharp 2000; Bogdan et al. 2000; Jenkins 2006; Brooks and Browne 2012) and in line with their own desires.

While Haraway emphasized the collective dimension of situated knowledge, scholars studying situated reader response similarly underlined that texts are read collectively in a cultural and sociospatial context (Bogdan et al. 2000; Brooks and Browne 2012). Multiple factors come together to influence the reading experience: “how we read is dependent upon our situatedness in both the discourse available to us and our place in the tangible world” (Bogdan et al. 2000: 485). Geographical and sociocultural situatedness shapes the reading; the role of communities like family and friends, people of the same ethnic group or socioeconomic class, or those who have the same interests also influences the way texts are read (Brooks and Browne 2012). Collective readings might result in interpretations unintended by the author (Sharp 2000), and some groups may challenge the ‘traditional’ view of the texts.

At the same time, as was mentioned earlier, individual factors like personal histories of engagement with fiction, preferences regarding genre, and choice of media and format (Brooks and Browne 2012) influence the reading and the meanings individuals attribute to the texts. Thus both the individual and

collective factors affect how the text 'happens' (Hones 2008) and the way places linked to fiction can be interpreted.

Another idea, particularly notable in light of the reader-text relationship, which is relevant to this study is the mutual influence of the text and the reader's experience. Rosenblatt (1982) uses the term 'transaction' to describe the process of reading – both the reader and the text affect each other. The text is imagined based on the reader's prior geographical and sociocultural experience, but the text in turn affects the way the reader's view of the place. The transaction is ongoing, even after the reading is finished.

Among the studies of literary travel, a study by Jiang and Xu (2016) has been particularly influential in shaping the research design of this study. In their study of literary tourism at the San Mao Teahouse in Zhouzhuang in China, researchers focused on the role of the reader from the perspective of literary geography, considering readers' situations, prior reading experience, and understanding of the works and life of San Mao and analyzing how it all informs their experience of visiting the literary site and their engagement with it. In my study, I similarly chose to look at the experiences of readers-visitors in light of their prior engagement with fiction, their situatedness, and multiple belongings and non-belongings. My particular interest is in how the visitors 'weave' the narrative (Lovell 2019) – the fictional story, the author's biography or their personal narrative – and attach it to space and how they address and engage with absences at the sites, based on their own situatedness and belonging and in light of their histories of engagement with fiction.

### **3.4 How it all comes together**

While the tradition of visiting sites with connections to fiction has received much attention in the field of tourism research, less recognition has been given to experiencing familiar sites through fiction. Furthermore, as Richards (2016) notes, many city residents become 'tourists in their own city', as parts of the city that are not habitually visited for either work or leisure might be regarded as being "off the physical and mental map – just as unknown as exotic, faraway tourism destinations" and can be visited "with the same sense of curiosity and exploration as [...] when on holiday elsewhere" (9). In light of COVID-19 restrictions, some parts of the same town or city become inaccessible and even more 'faraway'.

In the articles that comprise the dissertation, I look at examples of international travel inspired by multi/transmedial (Jenkins 2006) Moomin narratives (Article 4) as well as at how familiar places can be viewed through fictional narratives (Article 1), studying in particular how places in Helsinki can be seen through their connections to Tove Jansson and her 'adult' novels by a non-native Finnish resident (Articles 2 and 3).

Article 4 draws primarily on the concept of social and spatial belonging in the analysis, while at the same time looking at the notions of nostalgia – which

were observed in earlier studies, notably in relation to texts encountered during readers' early years (Squire 1994; Gothie 2016; Reijnders 2016; Kim et al. 2019). In Articles 2 and 3, and to some extent in Article 1, situatedness, sociocultural and spatial, comes to the front. The way I look at belonging and situatedness in this research is in line with Antonsich's ideas (2010a), taking into account both collective and individual dimensions and recognizing the importance of personal histories in relation to fiction and 'fictive' places.

While members of the audience form attachments to sites associated with media texts that are personally important, in many cases a visit to such sites is a one-time occurrence, and a longer geographical experience of the place is lacking. This is not to say that this is always the case, as studies on return visits to sites with media connections demonstrate (e.g. Waysdorf and Reijnders 2019). However, what I want to take into consideration in the articles focused on places in Helsinki is the reader's prior engagement not only with fiction but also their prior geographical and social experience of the places that have biographical ties to the author and appear in the texts. Places encountered habitually, every day or once in a while, places previously visited for reasons other than 'fictive' connections, or places familiar to the reader prior to the realization of the connections present a different context for studying the relationship between the reader, text and space.

## **4 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MATERIAL**

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this research project, although it falls into the field of cultural studies, it adopts and combines methodological approaches used – conventionally or in novel ways – in various disciplines, drawing on tourism studies, fandom and media studies, and literary geography. The four articles comprising the dissertation follow different methodological approaches; under the large umbrella of qualitative methodologies, the choice for each article is based on the suitability of the specific approaches, and methods and tools they offer, in studying the given topics and addressing the research questions. In this chapter, I will explain the methodological choices that I have made throughout this research.

The methodological approaches reflect the interpretative nature of this study, with its aim being to understand how the sites with connections to fiction – and specifically, those with connections to Tove Jansson and her works – can be experienced by visitors, in light of their prior experiences and histories of engagement with works of fiction. As my focus is on readers-visitors' situatedness – sociocultural as well as spatial – it calls for approaches that would allow in-depth insights into the experiences of media consumption and visiting the associated sites.

### **4.1 The great autoethnographic adventure, or 'Let me tell you what happened in the graveyard the other day'**

The ethnographic approach has often been utilized in tourism studies: in order to understand tourists' behavior and experiences, researchers often engage in detailed observations at the sites, at times supplemented with interviews with tourists. As in other social sciences, researchers used to be encouraged to adopt a neutral stance and distance themselves from those they studied; however, later studies acknowledged the importance of reflecting on the researcher's role and

experience and the way they affect the research (Holt 2003). Autoethnography, a personalized version of ethnography focusing on the researcher's own experience, has recently gained popularity in many disciplines. While autoethnographic methods are increasingly utilized on their own in various fields, they are also often incorporated into or used alongside other methods (Huang 2010).

Three out of four articles included in the dissertation adopt an autoethnographic approach – albeit each utilizes it for a different purpose and in a different way. Despite my own initial reluctance to turn to autoethnography and the overwhelming concern regarding the use of my own personal account in research (“too subjective, too unreliable, too personal”), the self-reflective approach proved suitable in studying how a relationship with a place and sociocultural experience affect the reading and influence the perception of sites with literary connections.

In the essay-style Article 1, which serves as an opening piece for the dissertation, COVID-19-inspired contemplations on the literary geographies of our personal past and present draw on my own earlier experience of reading fictional texts set in places distant from *where* I read them, which I nevertheless imagined exactly *in* places which I, at the time of reading, lived in or visited.

In Article 2 and Article 3, I concentrate on a specific case of situated reading by drawing on autoethnographic fieldwork in Helsinki, the city where I currently reside, and look at the place through its connection to Tove Jansson. The fieldwork, conducted partly on my own and partly in collaboration with Elina Huttunen, was carried out at the sites with biographical connections to Jansson. Article 2 is concerned with how, during a self-navigated walking tour, a biographical dimension is added to space, allowing visitors to ‘dive into’ the author’s time. The material I drew on for this article includes field notes documenting observations at the sites; the excerpts from the field notes are supplemented with photographs.

Article 3, the last to adopt an autoethnographic approach, in addition to the spatial aspect, focuses on my own sociocultural situatedness as a foreign-born resident and citizen, analyzing how my previous experience of Helsinki and my reading of Jansson’s works and biography affect the way I experience and interpret places with connections to her. Apart from autoethnographic data – including observations at the sites during fieldwork, self-reflections, and retrospective self-interrogation – I draw on texts written by and about Jansson, in particular two of her semi-autobiographical novels, *Sculptor’s Daughter* and *Fair Play*, as well as online media publications about her. The excerpts from the novels are compared to my own observations to illustrate how my prior geographical experience helps me to envision and ‘feel’ the city through the text, even though few details are given. A short overview of publications about Jansson, including English-language articles and press releases, presents an image of Jansson constructed by others who tell the story of her life, including biographers, journalists, friends and relatives. The aim of the article is to provide



insights on how a situated reader – in this case, myself – constructs their own narrative of the author’s life and, through it, interprets the associated places.

As before this study I have not utilized autoethnography and it was by no means my first choice with regards to methodology, I looked at the suitability of the approach in studying visitor experience and sites with connections to fiction. The autoethnographic approach uses the self as a study subject: it focuses on the researcher’s personal experience, analyzing it to gain understanding of wider sociocultural contexts (Chang 2008; Brown and Huang 2015). Employing oneself as the data source, this approach allows studying the experience in-depth, which might not be achieved by utilizing other research methods (Chang 2008). A researcher conducting an autoethnographic study also looks at their own situatedness and the way it shapes the research process, potentially with less probability of conjecture and assumption (Chang 2008) – such “self-reflection, reflexivity and interrogation of self” (Mkono et al. 2015: 167) may often be invisible or absent even in qualitative studies.

Looking at the disciplines which this study draws on, it can be observed that in studies by humanistic geographers, notably Yi-Fu Tuan, researchers’ own experiences are often brought forth when discussing the concepts like *space* and *place*, whether to illustrate the point or make the theories more understandable and relatable, but they are also often recognized as informing the researchers’ views. Similarly, geographer Edward Relph (n.d.) acknowledged the influence of prior geographical experience on his ideas about place. Other researchers working in the geography field have used their own experience as data (e.g. Pocock 1996) or discussed how their own sociospatial situatedness has affected their perspectives on the concepts used in the discipline (e.g. Hones 2004).

The autoethnographic approach has been successfully applied in literary geography: notably, studies by Anderson (2015) and Thurgill (2018), published in *Literary Geographies* use autoethnography to analyze how familiar places can be viewed through connection to fiction. I heavily drew on these two studies, and they have had an impact on the research design.

Furthermore, studies of literary travel have often been produced by those who engage in visiting literary places themselves (e.g. Watson 2006; Laing and Frost 2012; Brown 2016) and, as they sometimes feature autoethnographic reflections, giving an insider perspective on the practice of visiting sites with connections to literature, it can be reasonably assumed that researchers’ own curiosity with regards to the topic and their prior experience of literary travel influenced, to a certain degree, the focus of the research and guided the research process. It also needs to be mentioned that, as self-reflections often feature in research in fan studies and the researcher’s own position as an insider is generally addressed by ‘aca-fans’ (e.g. Jenkins 1992; Hellekson and Busse 2006), studies on media-induced travel that borrow a lot from fan studies (e.g. Hills 2002; Waysdorf 2017) frequently include autoethnographic perspectives.

In the field of tourism studies, it was noted (e.g. Huang 2010; Brown 2016) that autoethnography holds potential especially in research that focuses on the nature of the tourist experience. As was observed in prior research on literary

tourism and other forms of media-induced travel (e.g. Herbert 2001; Kim 2010), individual experiences of and relationships with places may differ greatly from one person to another, thus, although an autoethnographic approach might not produce generalizable findings, it still can be used successfully to gain deeper understanding of individual tourist experience, taking into account personal histories and sociocultural factors. In addition, as many tourism studies incorporate observations at the sites, it may be important to reflect on how the presence of the researcher influences the process (e.g. Waysdorf 2017), even though the study might not be of an autoethnographic nature as such.

Among notable examples of autoethnographic research in tourism studies are investigations of tourism in post-Olympic Beijing by Huang (2010) and Brown and Huang (2015); both studies feature reflections on researchers' positions and analyze the factors that affect the visitor experience. Huang (2010), in his study, looks at his own visit to Beijing as an ex-resident, reflecting on his social and cultural identity and analyzing how his past life experiences and daily routines affect the visit. He observes how, in the course of the visit, he switches between touristic and 'untouristic' modes, being both an insider and outsider, a researcher and a tourist. Despite his familiarity with Beijing, he also observes his own reaction to the changes that had happened, comparing the contemporary city to his past experience of it (Huang 2010); a similar notion, the "state of being a semi-stranger" or "of being no longer at home", appears in Stead's (2010) case study based on a visit to the city where she used to live. Both researchers (Huang 2010; Stead 2009, 2010) comment on the difference between visiting a previously unfamiliar place and making a return visit to a place where one has previously lived.

While the research I conducted in Helsinki does not carry the notions of having *once* been a resident, I made observations similar to those in the studies cited above. I reflected on my past experience of the city, of visiting parts of it – for work or leisure, noticing the changes, and, in a similar manner, I had a dual role of being a local and a visitor, a researcher and a tourist. Having lived in the north of Europe all my life, I find certain things natural and mundane, that might be strange for a visitor from other parts of the world (see e.g. Stead's (2009) experience of visiting Stockholm). My experience of visiting the sites at leisure and for the purpose of research is somewhat different from that of someone on vacation – the latter may imply a greater degree of freedom but also the pressure to see as many sites as possible in a short time. Furthermore, like Huang (2010), I have previously worked in the tourism industry, and my research is informed by tourism studies, which has undoubtedly affected the way I look at the sites.

Despite the advantages the approach offers, drawing on autoethnographic data has often been criticized for being too focused on the self and too subjective. It is often acknowledged that while the methodology provides insights into the researcher's situatedness, it can also ignore other voices and perspectives (Holt 2003; Chang 2008; Noy 2008; Allen-Collinson 2012); it does not always account for 'blind spots' – as researchers might only partially realize own position (Pearce 2002), or not acknowledging the sociocultural factors, such as beliefs and values,

as well as personal factors that might direct the gaze and affect the interpretation (Brown and Huang 2015). The researcher can also be selective – willingly choosing what to tell and in which way or unconsciously omitting the information which does not seem to be important (Pearce 2002).

Nevertheless, as Huang (2010) observes, autoethnography offers a way to question the supposed neutrality and objectivity of the researcher, critically evaluate biases, and put opinions under scrutiny. To address the drawbacks of autoethnography, Ngunjiri et al. (2010) advocate the use of collaborative autoethnography, which combines perspectives of more than a single researcher, collectively examining the narratives, questioning, challenging perspectives and making sense of the experiences (see also Chang et al. 2012). Brown and Huang's (2015) study is an example of such collaboration in tourism studies, where two researchers of different cultural backgrounds analyzed an account made by one of them, a Western researcher visiting Beijing, combining the insider (ethnic Chinese and ex-Beijing resident) and outsider perspectives. Further research on places with ties to authors and fiction can adopt similar approach to broaden the perspective or to address the limitations of the data sample.

## **4.2 Examining press articles, or 'They have read of the lovely creatures and now come to this land in search of them'**

In Article 4, I move away from the autoethnographic approach and direct my gaze towards others, looking at how visitors – tourists, in this case – experience places with connections to Tove Jansson and her fiction, in light of their personal histories of engagement with Jansson's works. The paper closely examines five authored English-language press articles published in British online newspapers. The criteria for choosing the articles for analysis were as follows: first, in the publications, the authors tell about their experiences of visiting sites with ties to Jansson and/or her works in Finland; and second, the articles feature reflections on the personal and/or societal importance of Jansson's works.

The initial plan for this article was to also look at personal tourist and lifestyle blogs, as a variety of user-generated material that was found to present valuable data for the study, detailing blog writers' prior engagement with Jansson's works and their experiences of visiting associated sites in Finland. However, due to the difficulty of obtaining authors' permissions for the use of the blogs in research, the plan was abandoned. Instead, I focus on the five press articles, including 'My family and other Moomins' by Rhianna Pratchett (published in *The Guardian* in 2018), which provide rich data for the study, corresponding to its aim. While analyses of visitor accounts, tourist blogs and reviews are common in tourism studies (see e.g. Kim 2010; Månsson 2011), the selected accounts were written by journalists or professional writers, with audiences in mind, which made them different from data generated during research but, in some aspects, similar to tourist blogs.

### 4.3 Analytical tools

While Article 1 is an essay-style piece and uses autoethnographic data to illustrate a point and put forward an argument, in other articles the textual data is analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Different approaches to and types of qualitative content analysis can be utilized depending on the aim of the research; when using this analytical method, interpreting data with the help of the coding categories is common. Hsieh and Shannon (2005), for instance, described different approaches to content analysis, including *conventional* and *directed*, also referred to as *inductive* and *deductive*, respectively, by Graneheim et al. (2017). During conventional content analysis, coding categories emerge from the data, while in directed content analysis, theories and results of previous studies guide the coding process (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). In short, the former approach is driven by the data and moves from the data to theory, while the latter is theory-driven, moving from theory to the data (Graneheim et al. 2017).

When examining my field notes and retrospective accounts for Articles 2 and 3 and the accounts of the visits in press publications in Article 4, I focus on personal histories of engagement with Jansson's works, geographically and culturally situated reading and how it affected visitor experience. I correlate the themes found in the data with the theories of situatedness and belonging and draw on the results of previous studies on situated reading and fiction-inspired travel, thus the type of analysis can be described as directed. At the same time, I keep an eye open for the themes emerging directly from the data, therefore also using conventional content analysis. The mix of the two approaches described above, referred to as *abductive* by Graneheim et al. (2017), helps in developing the coding scheme: after a round of initial observations and several rounds of detailed readings, coding categories are established drawing on the earlier studies and theories, and other distinct categories emerge from the data.

### 4.4 Concerns and reflections

To sum up, while the analysis of publications follows a more conventional approach, the initially unintended "methodological adventure" (Ngunjiri et al. 2010) demonstrated that autoethnography as a method of qualitative inquiry can be used to advantage when studying places with connections to fiction. While I do not utilize autoethnography as a foundation, I see it as a tool or technique (Hughes and Pennington 2017) incorporating which into research design provides an opportunity to study visitor experience in-depth, but also allows one to be critical of their own perspective. Considering the drawbacks of relying on autoethnographic data alone that have been emphasized by both the critics and researchers in favor of autoethnographic studies, I will be careful when and if I use the approach in the future.

The main concerns I have about the approach in this study are related to the non-representability of findings, unrecognized blind spots and biases. With my autoethnographic account, I do not claim to represent even a single foreign-born group of readers, but it may provide a foundation for future research on situated reading of children's literature in the Nordic countries and the way different readerships attribute meanings to sites with connections to fiction.

Employing the approaches described above, with particular choice of materials and analytical tools, corresponded to the aims of the study. The chosen method allowed me to examine the accounts of visits to the sites with ties to fiction, with a particular focus on places connected to Tove Jansson and her works, and attempt to provide interpretations of the situated readings and the meanings that members of the audience, including myself, attribute to their extra-textual spatial encounters. The results of the articles, summarized in the next chapter and subsequently discussed in the concluding chapter, shed light on how situatedness and belonging affect engagement with fiction and shape the encounters with sites connected to writers and works of fiction.

## 5 SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

In this chapter I will provide summaries of the publications that comprise this dissertation. The publications include an introductory essay-style piece and three peer-reviewed articles. The numbering order in which I list the articles does not entirely correspond to the chronological order in which they were published: Article 1, though published second, serves as an opening piece for the subsequent articles and thus is numbered first in the list of publications.

### **Article 1. On Mirkwood, Vampires and Rhododendrons: Experiencing Familiar Places through Fiction.**

Article 1 is a short essay, published in *Literary Geographies* in fall 2020. Written as a response to the call for the special issue *Literary Geographies in Isolation*, the article reflects on the profound effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on worldwide travel and, by extension, on tourism research and more particularly on research focusing on travel inspired by fiction.

Travelling to sites with connections to media productions and their creators had been an activity growing in popularity in the years prior to the pandemic, and, as with any tourism practices, it relied on freedom of movement. Due to the measures and restrictions aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19, such leisure activities may presently not be possible in many parts of the world, even if the said sites are in the vicinity of one's residence.

The article proceeds to reflect on alternative ways of studying connections between fiction and space, considering dynamics beyond reading-and-travelling and looking at examples when readers' geographical experience informs the way the text is imagined and vice versa – in particular, I look at instances when fiction 'spills over' the actual-world places where one finds oneself, or when stories become associated with places previously visited. I draw heavily on Sheila Hones's research (2008, 2014) and on the earlier studies published in *Literary Geographies*, particularly those by Anderson (2015) and Thurgill (2018), when considering the role of personal histories when reading texts and experiencing 'real' sites that feature in works of fiction. Directed by previous research, namely by McLaughlin (2016) and Lovell (2019), I also consider how places can become

associated with works of fiction despite the lack of verifiable connection to either the text or the author.

The article discusses possible directions for future research on literary and fictional geographies in light of current events, which sets the course for the subsequent articles compiling the dissertation. I suggest focusing on how familiar places can be experienced through fiction and looking at how readers, when isolated, turn to past and present geographical experiences when reading and imagining fictional places. A focus on domestic and local tourism which, for some, may remain the only form of travel available in the coming months is another direction, if one wishes to study visiting sites with ties to fiction.

While the essay is foregrounding the use of the concept of situatedness in the subsequent articles, it is also the first among the three publications that adopts an autoethnographic approach in studying places with connections to authors and works of fiction.

## **Article 2. Chasing writers' ghosts through a modern city: Augmenting urban space with literary connections during the Tove Jansson walk in Helsinki.**

In the next publication, the dissertation's focus on Tove Jansson and sites with connections to her and her works becomes clear. Published in *Academic Quarter* in spring 2019, Article 2 takes on the walking theme (McLaughlin 2016) and boldly (and somewhat unexpectedly, even for me as an author) employs an autoethnographic approach, looking at how encountering urban literary and artistic sites with biographical connections on foot can enable visitors to 'dive' into the authors' time.

To start, it looks at the practice of the themed urban walk, with particular focus on the tradition of the literary walk (Plate 2006; Watson 2009; Westover 2012b), while touching on the customs of commemoration of famous literary and artistic figures, such as naming streets and unveiling monuments, briefly acknowledging sociocultural and political implications of these practices. The article draws on observations at the sites during a self-navigated walk inspired by the themed itineraries published on the web pages of the Helsinki Art Museum and Moomin Characters Ltd. and in online promotional material. The so-called Tove Jansson walk follows the trail of sites with biographical connections to Jansson in Helsinki, including apartment blocks where she lived, schools where she studied, and statues for which she modelled, as well as her grave.

In order to experience how it is to walk in Helsinki, having read and thought of Jansson, I take on the role of a visitor in the city where I reside and, together with a friend, armed with knowledge and a smartphone, track the places where Jansson used to live and which she frequented. In the article, I proceed to tell about my adventure and bring receipts, in forms of excerpts from the research notes and photographs taken, to show how urban space can be augmented (Sandvik and Waade 2008) by literary associations through narrativization of the author's biography and a visitor's own knowledge and imagination.

Indeed, as the (admittedly not-so-generalizable, based on the methodological approach) findings demonstrate, unfolding the biographical

narrative across space requires active imaginative and affective work from the visitor, invoking the knowledge and evoking the presence of the author or artist who is no longer there, while trying to imagine the place as it was when they were alive while traversing the same – but no longer quite the same – space.

### **Article 3. An in-between reader: situatedness and belonging in Tove Jansson's Helsinki.**

Article 3 finds me again in Helsinki, wandering around and investigating places with ties to Jansson. It continues to, daringly, though now in a more thoughtful way, employ an autoethnographic approach and also, in addition to spatial situatedness, looks at the sociocultural situatedness and belonging of that one particular reader, myself. I analyze the way I experience places in Helsinki, not only in light of Jansson's biography, like in the previous article, but also her works, particularly two of her later novels, *Sculptor's Daughter* and *Fair Play*. Both of the above are semi-autobiographical fix-up novels and consist of short stories, some of which have Helsinki as a setting.

I consider how my own past and present experience of visiting and later living in Helsinki as well as how my being a foreign-born resident and citizen affect my situated reading and the way I envision these fictional texts, also looking at how familiar places get new meanings attached to them in light of my reading of Jansson's works. I bring receipts again – this time, comparing descriptions of Helsinki in the novels, which are not many, to my own experience, demonstrating how a small detail or comment can tell a lot to someone who is familiar with the place. Furthermore, I acknowledge how texts written *about* Jansson, including media publications, press releases and biographies, construct the story of her life and affect the reading of her works and, as a result, can influence the way people interpret and experience places with biographical connections to her and her works.

Utilizing the concepts of situatedness and belonging in the analysis, I observe how, as I re-create Jansson's narrative in the process of reading and visiting the associated sites, both the writer's and my own 'in-betweenness' emerge as a connecting motif. While the methodological approach implies that I only look in detail at my own engagement with the texts and spatial and social experience, I consider the possible implications of different readerships, in Finland and abroad, engaging with and interpreting Jansson's works in light of their own situatedness and how it can affect the meanings they assign to places associated with her.

The article has been accepted for publication in *Literary Geographies*.

### **Article 4. The distant snowy land where rounded creatures dwell: Experiencing Moomin-related nostalgia and belonging in Finland.**

Article 4, submitted to *Scandinavica*, turns from analyzing my own experience to utilizing a more conventional approach, making it similar to a study of tourist experience and allowing me to utilize, to some extent, the baggage of tourism research as my background. I continue where I left off in the previous article, looking at the way a particular readership – five British



journalists and professional writers – experiences places through their connection to Jansson and the Moomins.

I draw on five authored press articles (notably, ‘My family and other Moomins’ by Rhianna Pratchett) published in British newspapers between 2014 and 2019 in which the authors tell about their visits to chosen locations in Finland – including Helsinki, Tampere, Naantali and Klovharu – driven by their interest in Jansson’s works and/or biography and reflect on the personal and/or societal importance of Jansson’s works. I aim to explore how their experiences of visiting the sites are influenced by their prior engagement with Jansson’s works, and how their (re)interpretation of Jansson’s texts and life affects the way associated sites are perceived.

Utilizing qualitative content analysis, I examine the accounts, guided by the theories of belonging and the results of the previous studies of media-induced travel. The findings demonstrate, in line with previous research, that personal histories of engagement with fiction play a significant role in visitor experience: the Moomin stories, familiar from childhood and associated with important interpersonal relationships, carry personal significance, and visits to sites with connections to the texts, such as Moominworld theme park or the Moomin Museum, invoke strong affective responses. The values associated with works of fiction are often reaffirmed during the visits: in the accounts, not only are the themes of compassion and tolerance, found in the Moomin books, emphasized, but the authors of the articles underline the importance of these in relation to recent environmental and political events. In relation to Jansson herself, her progressive views and sexuality are often referred to, and the authors who visited places with biographical connections pointed out that the visits provided valuable information on Jansson as a person. Another interesting insight relates to the way Finland is imagined as a country through its connection to the Moomins.

## 6 DISCUSSION

### 6.1 What was it about, again?

In this dissertation I have explored the ways in which locations with connections to works of fiction and their creators can be experienced in light of the readers-visitors' positions and prior experiences. With the exception of Article 1, which served mainly to point at the path, the three subsequent articles aimed to answer the research questions posed in the Introduction chapter, focusing on the sites with ties to Tove Jansson, her fictional creations, the Moomins, and her other prose. Looking at the experiences of non-Finnish residents and visitors, I set a goal to gain understanding of how these particular readers' spatial and sociocultural situatedness and belonging, their prior engagement with the texts, and their earlier experiences affect the way they interpret and experience sites with associations to Jansson and her texts in Finland. On a wider level, I wanted to examine how various absences at the sites are addressed by visitors and to find out whether the empty spaces act as hindrance or opportunity.

The research process did not follow a straight trajectory; it took turns and made twists, went underground and resurfaced in unexpected places (see methodology chapter), slithered around some issues and slammed into others head on (COVID-19 pandemic). In this chapter, I discuss the key findings of the articles and reflect on the wider implications of this research, address the limitations and suggest directions for further inquiries.

The main premise was that all 'readers' (that is, consumers of media texts) are situated: they occupy different positions, and their past and present experiences and histories of engagement with fiction, both personal and collective, influence the meanings they attach to the texts and locations with connections to these texts and their authors. The main data set consisted of authored press articles and my own autoethnographic account, supplemented with material in form of press publications and Jansson's 'adult' novels.

Taking all this and throwing it into the pot, I proceeded by stirring in theories and analyzing the resulting mix with the help of qualitative content analysis. Grounded in the view that the text ‘happens’ when it is read (Hones 2008, 2014), I examined how the readers co-create the text and space and how they engage with absences – those of the author, of fictional characters and landscapes, of traceable links and verifiable connections. It would have been harder if not for the earlier inspirational studies mentioned before, which informed the research design and implementation and helped derive the formula for the potion. In went Haraway’s (1988) concept of situated knowledges; after that I poured in some fluid and vague substance that is belonging (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016) and added situated reader-response theories in the context of extra-textual geographies (Hones 2008, 2014). Now that the mixture has become a bit clearer, I pick up the pieces to analyze and evaluate possible wider applications of this potion.

## **6.2 What was found and why it is important**

A number of findings are, in general, consistent with those of earlier studies on literary travel and other forms of tourism inspired by media texts. Observations were made in the previous research on how personal and collective importance of texts is transferred to sites that have connections to them (e.g. Iwashita 2006; Buchmann et al. 2010; Kim 2010, 2012; Reijnders 2016); similarly, researchers wrote on the notions of nostalgia in relation to children’s literature and works encountered earlier in life and how those are experienced in relation to places (e.g. Squire 1994; Gothie 2016; Reijnders 2016; Kim et al. 2019). Scholars have also observed how countries are imagined through fictional connections (Squire 1993; Iwashita 2006; Dung and Reijnders 2013), highlighted the role that imagination plays in experiencing places associated with fiction (Reijnders 2011; Jiang and Xu 2016; Waysdorf 2017; Lovell 2019; Jiang and Yu 2020; Lovell and Thurgill 2021), and remarked how values associated with works of fiction can influence the visits (Squire 1994; Jiang and Xu 2016, 2017; Yu and Xu 2016, 2018). While all these notions were observed in the analysis in the current research, this study takes the investigation a step further by examining individual experiences in-depth to give further insights into how prior geographical and social experience allow readers to project their own narrative onto space and relate it to the story. Most notably, the study made a contribution to previous research dealing with examples of creative engagement with place, drawing on prior reading and spatial experience (Anderson 2015; Thurgill 2018) and expanded research that addressed how readers ‘fill’ the empty spaces in the lack of verifiable ties to the story (McLaughlin 2016; Lovell 2019; Lovell and Thurgill 2021).

As Article 1 suggests, looking at how familiar places can be perceived through connections to fiction might be relevant not only because of the pandemic-related restrictions but also by providing valuable insights into relationships between people and places. Perhaps, the most interesting is the

insight into how the absence of verifiable connection does not prevent the readers from tying the narratives to space and vice versa. Readers' spatial experiences play an important role in how they imagine the text, yet the text in turn also affects how the space is viewed. Anderson's (2015) earlier example of using Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory in the analysis of the components that come together in the 'event' of the text (Hones 2008, 2011, 2014) can be used to demonstrate that various positions individuals and groups occupy, their constantly shifting belonging, and their earlier experience and engagement with fiction all shape their situated reading and visitor experiences at the sites with connections to the texts. It is exactly these parts that I wanted to look at in the articles that followed.

Article 2 showed how a city can be experienced through biographical connections to authors, taking as an example a self-navigated walk centered on sites connected to Tove Jansson in Helsinki. How the life story of the author can be narrativized depends, however, on the visitor's knowledge and imagination and, in the absence of a guide, the sites alone might not provide much (see also e.g. Steiner 2016). Therefore, the act of invoking the writer's presence depends on the visitor's imaginative and affective labor. The spatial reading and co-construction of the biographical narrative is also affected by the changing city layout, and, alongside the author's absence and the difficulty of locating some places, acts as a combination of absences that the visitor must fill. The empty spaces as such do not necessarily pose a problem but instead can inspire visitors to conduct an 'investigation' - challenging them to find the locations, to refer to the texts by and about the author, to correlate what they see to textual descriptions, as well as archived drawings and photographs. Such activity, however, implies a particular mode of engagement with place (unhurried, self-navigated) and requires the use of technology for information seeking.

Article 3 took into account my own spatial and sociocultural experience to analyze how it affected my reading of Jansson's 'adult' novels. Not only did it show how personal histories and intimate relationship to place (Antonsich 2010a) influenced my engagement with fiction, but it also demonstrated that my familiarity with the city allowed me to fill the empty spaces in the text, and my knowledge of the writer's biography helped me trace connections where no visible indications exist. It showed how my belonging and non-belonging as a foreign-born resident parallel what I perceive as the 'in-betweenness' of Jansson as a persona and a literary and artistic figure, while characteristics such as gender and lifestyle have similarly contributed to her narrative being relatable. It also highlighted the role of the texts written about her, including biographies and media publications, in how her works are perceived and how places with ties to her are interpreted and experienced. The same notion appeared in Article 4, where, for some of the visitors, knowing facts about Jansson's life and public discourse around her and her works colored the experience of visiting the sites.

Article 4 performed a more detailed analysis of how readers-visitors' earlier spatial and social experience and prior histories of engagement with Jansson's works influenced their interpretation of the texts and experiences of sites in

Finland. Themes emerging from the data also showed that values the readers, individually and collectively, attribute to Jansson's works are found important in connections to recent sociopolitical and environmental events. Furthermore, interesting insights were obtained into how Finland is imagined through connection to the Moomin stories and Jansson's biography: not only did the visitors fill the space with their personal histories and their knowledge, existing or recently obtained, about Jansson's life, but unrelated narratives were also attached to space to reflect how Finland is viewed as 'fairytalique'.

It would be worthy to compare this research to the earlier research on literary tourism in San Mao Teahouse in Zhouzhuang done by Jiang and Xu (2016, 2017), as notable parallels can be observed between the two studies. Jiang and Xu found that readers who visit Zhouzhuang to search for locations previously visited by the writer San Mao actively co-construct the place, based on their reading and imagination. They engage with locations creatively, drawing on texts written by and about the writer, in light of their prior engagement with her works and their spatial experience. The researchers observed how the visitors filled in the 'blank spaces' (the absence of the author, the absence of descriptions of the town in her works, even though the place was significant to her) by their imagination: they conjure the writer's presence, trying to imagine how she experienced the place, what she would have written about it; they also write texts about Zhouzhuang in a style similar to San Mao, or write as if addressing her, underlining links between the writer (her life, her views) and themselves, reflecting on how her life and works inspired them.

In a similar way, both in autoethnographic data and in press articles, I observed how readers not only engage with texts in a creative way in light of their situatedness, earlier reading and spatial experiences, but they also do the same with regards to sites with fictional connections by projecting narratives, related and unrelated, tying in their own experience to co-construct a place and fill the empty spaces. Thus, while absences are sometimes perceived as a disadvantage, the present study demonstrates that at the same time they can be beneficial, opening up the possibilities for visitors to bring in their own experiences and fill in the space.

Apart from its empirical contribution to earlier studies, this research provided further theoretical contributions by bringing in the concept of belonging. It has been applied to fiction-inspired travel in previous studies, and in the present study I observed its manifestations in how places with ties to familiar narratives can result in the feeling of nostalgia and 'coming back' to the fictional setting, and at the same time how the reader can compare their own knowledge of 'their' city to its description in the narrative. I addressed the fluidity and vagueness of the concept (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016) and considered different approaches to it utilized in the past to choose a particular approach (Antonsich 2010a, 2010b) that helped in understanding the reader-text relationship in a spatial and sociocultural context by focusing on the importance of not only collective but also individual factors. In particular, concentrating on the experience of a foreign-born reader and Finnish resident showed how places

with links to literary works and authors may act as spaces where (non)belonging is experienced and manifested. While in my case I managed to build a parallel between myself and the author based on perceived 'in-betweenness', as well as, arguably, similarities based on gender, social class and political views, places with ties to Jansson can potentially be spaces of belonging or non-belonging for different readerships. Although her ideas, works and lifestyle can be found relatable by some groups, and themes found in her fiction can resonate with many readers, others might not be able to 'see' themselves in her works and find too many differences between their own social and spatial experience and that of the author and characters. Other aspects of belonging – particularly in relation to freedom of movement (who is allowed to come and stay, who can visit the sites) and cultural heritage (who is allowed to claim Jansson and her works as their 'own', the 'Finnishness' of the Moomins alongside their seemingly universal appeal) – which I discussed in this study, have been observed in relation to other 'children's' authors (see e.g. Squire 1994 on Beatrix Potter; Bom 2015a on Hans Christian Andersen) but might invite further investigation in relation to Jansson.

Part of the novelty of this research comes from bringing together tourism studies, cultural studies and literary geography. This interdisciplinary perspective, although being a bit of a tangle, proved helpful in making possible the combination of different theoretical approaches to gain insights into how fiction can be experienced through space and space through fiction, and is expected to facilitate further contribution if utilized in subsequent studies. The methodological approach of this study also adds to the existing research in literary geography and tourism studies employing autoethnography and may inspire subsequent studies to consider a similar or modified (e.g. collaborative) approach.

To sum up, the research results are expected to add to the body of knowledge in the fields of cultural studies, literary studies, cultural geography, media and tourism studies. While the case of locations associated with works of fiction is analyzed from a cultural studies perspective, the findings can prove valuable to site developers, heritage organizations, and tourism companies, as well as local authorities in Finland and elsewhere.

### **6.3 Belated regrets and potential shortcomings**

In a short note on what this research could have been, the following blog entries written by Finnish residents, for instance, provide curious insights into what places with connections to Jansson and the Moomins might mean to visitors: the author of the blog *Engineer on Tour* narrates in a humorous entry<sup>28</sup> how he was brought along to Moominworld, making observations about "ridiculously overexcited" visitors and admitting that he himself does not quite understand

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<sup>28</sup> Engineer on Tour (2015) Moomin for Adults? by Alexander Popkov. 20 July 2015. Available at <https://engineerontour.com/moomin-for-adults/> (Accessed 15 March 2021).

the appeal of the destination. In another blog<sup>29</sup>, the writer tells how, despite not being a Moomin fan, to celebrate the centenary of Jansson's birth, she paid a visit to the island cabin where Jansson and her partner used to spend summers. These examples, for which the permission to quote was obtained from the authors, show the availability of the rich qualitative material online that could be used to see how differently places can be experienced. As was mentioned before, however, in this study I opted out of using the blogs for reasons of research ethics, but it could be a direction for future research on sites with ties to Jansson.

I admit that by turning to Jansson and the Moomins, I approached a topic somewhat sacred to many people in Finland, as the creatures invoke nostalgic sentiments and are viewed as part of cultural heritage, not to mention being an important part of everyday life for many Finnish residents. It might be too late to hide under the table now, in fear of criticism, as I most likely could have overlooked some aspects in connections to Jansson's work. I have already addressed some of the limitations of this study in the previous chapters, but in this section I will bring to attention a few other concerns.

I would like to emphasize that, although I took it into consideration, I did not draw deeply on contemporary Finnish and Swedish language public discourse on Jansson and her works. This, however, would be important when studying the reception of works and interpretation of sites with ties to Jansson by Finnish and Swedish readers and visitors, including residents with foreign background. Furthermore, based on my discussions with Finnish-born individuals both in and outside of academia, I gathered that there are a great many commonly known 'facts' about Jansson and Moomin jokes that are part of public discourse in Finland, which would present an interesting topic of study but is unfamiliar to someone like myself who has not been part of this cultural environment for long. This, along with other topics not further covered in this study can become a focus of future research, as will be suggested in the next section.

With regards to theory, I did not delve as deep into the works of humanistic geographers who considered the role of literature (notably Yi-Fu Tuan) nor into the earlier publications in the field of literary geography as much as I would have liked to (see e.g. Ridanpää 2010 for a comprehensive overview of earlier works) and only referred to the texts most relevant to the current study. Neither did I elaborate beyond a few passages on the concepts of imagination in relation to sites with fictive connections. Delving into these concepts would go beyond the scope of the current research, and these topics were, as was mentioned earlier, covered in detail in other research. Bringing in the concept of *flâneur* (Benjamin 1997), also often applied in tourism studies, could have made for interesting comparisons between the figure of the urban stroller and my own Google Maps-relying wanderings in Article 2 and 3; however, as the concept did not make it

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<sup>29</sup> Meriharakka.net (2014) Trip to the Moomin Island (Klovharu), by Pirkko. 4 August 2014. Available at <https://meriharakka.net/2014/08/04/trip-to-the-moomin-island-klovharu/> (Accessed 15 March 2021).

into the articles due to the length restrictions, I did not consider it suitable for it to suddenly appear in the introductory part.

Apart from omissions in relation to theory, another limitation of this study, particularly Articles 2 and 3, relates to methodological approach. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, while the autoethnographic approach provides a possibility to analyze situated experience in depth, it also offers a subjective, possibly biased view, making research to some extent self-centered and allowing the researcher to omit aspects of the experience that are not found to be relevant or that the researcher does not wish to touch upon. One example is the lack of clarification on my own ethnic background; while I drew attention to the fact that I am a foreign-born Finnish resident and citizen, I did not focus further on the issue and did not claim to represent any particular foreign-born group. Although the autoethnographic approach proved suitable in this study, further studies can attempt to utilize collaborative autoethnography, as it addresses the drawbacks of the method (Chang et al. 2012).

## 6.4 And what then?

The present dissertation shed light on how places with connections to Jansson and her works can be experienced based on reader-visitor's situatedness and belonging, taking into consideration geographical and sociocultural contexts and both individual and collective components which constitute the 'event' of the text (Hones 2008, 2014). The research opened up directions for possible further inquiries.

On a broader level, one might look into how the way texts are read changes with time, even for one person. Changes in personal situation, relocation, evolving preferences, not to mention changes in fiction consumption practices and patterns with time, due to technological advancement and social change, can influence not only the reader-text relationship but also how the text is read spatially and how space is perceived through the text. On a wider scale, meanings collectively attributed to texts might change in light of a changing sociopolitical climate and due to changes in values, so it would be worthy to find out how interpretations of sites with associations to texts and authors change with time.

Some other aspects that were only briefly mentioned in this research include multi/transmediality of the Moomin narrative and the commercialization of the Moomins. Investigating which parts of the media narrative are found more influential by the readers can provide clues on how they would affect visitor experiences at the sites with connections to the Moomins, also in comparison to other 'children's' literature titles (see e.g. Squire 1994; Bom 2015b; Gothie 2016).

Taking sites linked to Jansson and her works as a focus, further research can investigate how the meanings of these places change as Jansson's life and works are reevaluated. A bigger and more diverse group of participants than analyzed in the present study should be used to find how different readerships engage



with Jansson's works and what meanings the texts have for them. To focus on what meanings sites with ties to Jansson and the Moomins have for different audiences – native Finnish- and Swedish-speaking population, residents with foreign background, visitors from outside of Finland, different generations, LGBTQ+ groups – would be a task for more than one study. Furthermore, research can be done on Moomin-related sites in other countries to analyze reader and visitor experience.

Viewing places with connections to fiction as political spaces and spaces of belonging and non-belonging presents an important perspective, especially in the context of sociopolitical, environmental and health crises. One of the most relevant questions currently would be the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. How will it affect individual and collective readings, how will people's relationships with place change, and what will it mean for places with fictive connections?

Since the beginning of this project, a great number of studies have been published in English on sites related to fiction outside Europe and North America. Although this research dealt with the sites in a European country, I drew on a number of studies produced in the Asian context, which provided vital insights and pointed at different ways to conceptualize travel inspired by fiction. To echo the other researchers, I am looking forward to reading the upcoming research in the field of media tourism and literary geographies from other parts of the world that can help reconfigure the understanding of fiction-inspired travel by analyzing it in different cultural contexts.

## SUMMARY

This compilation dissertation examines how readers experience places with connections to the Finnish-Swedish artist and writer Tove Jansson (1914-2001). While Jansson's Moomin books and comics are undoubtedly her most famous works, her other literary and artistic works are nowadays attracting increasing attention and inspire members of the audience to visit locations associated with her.

This study is of an interdisciplinary nature and draws on earlier research in the fields of tourism studies, literary geography and cultural studies. The main premise is that 'readers' – and that applies to consumers of fiction in different media – are situated; they (re)interpret and (re)imagine texts, as well as places associated with stories and writers, based on their own position, in specific spatial and sociocultural contexts.

The four articles compiling the dissertation are based on research material in form of press articles, covering authors' visits to the sites with ties to Jansson and the Moomins in Finland, as well as on the researcher's autoethnographic account. Theories of situatedness and belonging are applied to analyze how these readers-visitors are experiencing and (re)interpreting the sites based on their own experience. The research questions are as follows: 1) How can sites in Finland be experienced through their connections to Tove Jansson and/or her literary works? 2) How does personal engagement with Jansson's works a) affect the meanings individuals attribute to these places and b) influence the visitor experience? 3) How do past and present geographical and sociocultural experiences a) influence the interpretation of the sites and b) allow readers/visitors to address absences? The focus is on readers who are not native Finns: the press articles were authored by British visitors and the autoethnographic field work was affected by researcher's experience of being a foreign-born Finnish resident.

The findings show that there are a multitude of individual and collective factors that shape the visitor experience and affect the meanings attributed to the sites. The analysis of the press articles and the researcher's account demonstrates that histories of engagement with and personal importance of Jansson's works, as well as the readers' past and present geographical and sociocultural experiences, affect the way they perceive the associated places. It is also observed how texts written not only by but also about Jansson, the changing public discourse surrounding her life and works, and recent political and environmental events influence the interpretation of writer-artist's biography, works and places with connections to her. The study explores how readers can creatively engage with numerous absences at the sites by filling in the 'gaps' with their own experience, knowledge and imagination; the lack of verifiable connections to the author or the story also does not prevent the visitors from tying the places to biographical and fictional narratives. Therefore, absences can act as an opportunity rather than a hindrance.

While the dissertation provides insights into personalized experiences of reading and visiting places with ties to fiction, there are wider implications of the

use of interdisciplinary perspective, which allows combining different theoretical approaches, as well as autoethnography as a methodology. The study lays foundations for further investigations of how different readerships engage with Jansson's works and, on a wider scale, invites further inquiries on how places with connections to fiction can be experienced by various audiences, including residents of foreign background.

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## ORIGINAL PAPERS

### I

#### **ON MIRKWOOD, VAMPIRES AND RHODODENDRONS: EXPERIENCING FAMILIAR PLACES THROUGH FICTION**

by

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# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## On Mirkwood, Vampires and Rhododendrons: Experiencing Familiar Places through Fiction

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During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many have faced and are currently facing different modes of confinement and isolation, in some cases self-imposed and in other enforced. Border closures, travel restrictions, curfews, limitations on social gatherings, self-quarantine rules and similar measures have affected and continue to affect the lives of millions in different parts of the world. As someone who has been studying literary tourism and other forms of fiction-inspired travel, I am aware of the constraints the current situation presents also for researchers working in this field: in addition to the profound impact the pandemic has already had on the tourism industry, the situation surrounding COVID-19 outbreak is expected to have long-term effects on travel worldwide. At the same time, I am also considering the possibilities and new perspectives it can offer when analyzing connections between literature and space. While in the field of tourism studies the focus is oftentimes on how our reading and encounters with fiction in various media shape our view of previously unknown or rarely visited locations, I would like to focus on the question of how the places where we read affect those readings.

In response to the suggestion to contemplate how researching literary geographies (Hones 2020) could be shaped by the ongoing crisis, and, in turn, what new points of view this field of study can offer when looking at the situation, I thought about the idea that ‘all stories happen in multiple places’ (Hones 2020: 13). Being confined to the home,

neighborhood, city and country where one currently resides, not being allowed to (or choosing not to) leave one's place of residence, being forced to or making a decision to be *here* and not anywhere else, one can turn to literature as means of escape, but one can also correlate own past and current spatial experiences to stories one reads. The text 'happens' (Hones 2008) where we read it, but it also happens in the places where we have previously lived or visited, our past experiences and memories coming together to allows us to envision fictional or fictionalized locations and project narratives unto them.

In the first season of the Netflix sci-fi/horror web TV series *Stranger Things* (2016 –), a group of pre-teens habitually refer to a certain road in their hometown as *Mirkwood*, due to its perceived similarities to the Mirkwood forest in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. The forest is a dark and eerie place, with dangers lurking behind the trees. The road, similarly, gives the youngsters a deep sense of unease, 'a sort of watching and waiting feeling' (Tolkien 1937/2008: 175), which, as it turns out, is completely justified. Tolkien's forest is fictional, as is the road nicknamed after it, as is the small town Hawkins, Indiana, where the young protagonists live, and the young people themselves are, of course, fictional. Just as fictional characters often combine the traits of 'real' individuals, fictional places are also a blend of actual 'worldly' locations and imaginary aspects. If we imagine (or remember), for a moment, living in a small town in the Midwest (or, maybe, in the West Midlands, or, perhaps, in southern Finland), being in our early teens and daily having to take a road through woods which give us the creeps, wouldn't it occur to us – having just read Tolkien's books – to make a connection between the foreboding fictional place and the no less chilling site we encounter every day?

Perhaps, nothing has ever been written about the place where we live, or about that particular road. No famous writer has ever lived in our small town or been inspired by its overwhelming ordinariness or after-dusk eeriness. No cinematic adaptation has ever been filmed here either. But the way it looks and *feels* at night, on that road – with the dim atmosphere, strange sounds, the smell of rotting leaves, and that unnerving feeling as if someone, or something, is watching you from behind the trees – gives you the feeling you get when reading the passages about Mirkwood, and you feel that it must be exactly this feeling that Bilbo and the dwarves felt when they set foot in the forest.

From my teenage years, a few pieces of anecdotal evidence:

A few evenings alone in a hotel room with vampire novels, while parents played pool, and the surrounding area, with Crimean vineyards and mountain ranges, became associated with gloomy aristocrats, dressed in outdated finery and lusting for blood. I just couldn't quite figure out what rhododendrons were – they featured repeatedly in the novel. Having lived above the Arctic Circle for most of my life, I wasn't really very familiar with southern flora. I assumed they could possibly look like roses.

In a similar way, a northern city where I used to live, thousands of miles away from the Black Country, became associated with Birmingham as depicted in Joel Lane's novels, because, to me, it had the same desolated post-industrial feel. My personal evidence aside, the instances

when ‘fiction leaks into the real, and vice versa’ (Hones 2009: 1) might be facilitated by our experience of places and spatial attachments we form during our lives: while our geographical knowledge can help us imagine the spatiality of the fictional text, spatial associations can work also in reverse (Hones 2014; Anderson 2015; Thurgill 2018; Thurgill and Lovell 2019).

Literature is often considered a form of armchair tourism, a way to ‘see’ places without actually travelling there. Occasionally, stories may captivate readers to such an extent that they motivate them to visit the ‘actual’ locations which appear in or inspired fictional narratives, in order to ‘authenticate the reading experience in a more “personal” way’ (Watson 2006: 13). In the course of these visits, places which have become ‘familiar’ during the reading are often experienced through the prism of fiction and compared to their literary descriptions (Hendrix 2009). Additionally, places where authors were born, resided or were buried, as well as locations that served as sites for screen productions (e.g. Beeton 2016; Kim, Long and Robinson 2009) can all become associated with fictional narratives.

An extensive and growing body of research on literary travel and other forms of media-induced tourism examines the connections between fiction and space, looking at how stories affect individually and collectively constructed images of places and focusing on how spaces can be experienced through their connections to specific narratives. Although places with ties to fiction can attract visitors from different parts of the world, they do not necessarily need to be ‘far away’ locations: fiction-inspired travel does not always lead visitors to places far from home, as multiple examples of domestic literary tourism demonstrate (e.g. Pocock 1987; Squire 1994; Watson 2006; Wang and Zhang 2017; Yu and Xu 2018).

At the same time, the places we encounter in our daily lives can become fictionalized. Reading narratives set in familiar places can make the story feel more ‘real’, and it is easier to ‘unfold’ the narrative across the space we already know and have previously experienced (Hones 2014). The process, however, is not a one-way stream: readers’ geographical experience affects the reading, but, in a similar manner, the reading can also affect the perception of places, both during and after the encounter with the text (Thurgill and Lovell 2019). Two notable studies of an autoethnographic nature have been published in *Literary Geographies*: Jon Anderson (2015) and James Thurgill (2018) have analyzed narratives set in Cardiff and Aldeburgh respectively. Both researchers reflect on their personal experiences of living in the area (Anderson 2015) or in its proximity (Thurgill 2018) and on their spatial experience of the surroundings in light of their engagement with particular fictional narratives. Anderson (2015) describes tracing the ‘exact’ sites featured in Tessa Hadley’s *The London Train* – based on textual descriptions and his own assumptions. Although the places are not directly referred to in the novel, several specific locales in Cardiff – some of which are relatively easily identifiable, and others based on more of a guess – have become, for him as a reader, associated with the fictional narrative. Even after a conversation with the novel’s author, when one actual site that served as an inspiration was revealed, Anderson’s initial conjecture regarding the site still takes precedence for him when re-imagining the story.

Thurgill (2018), in his autoethnographic study, also locates the actual-world sites which served as a setting, in his case for M. R. James’ supernatural short story *A Warning to the Curious*. Referring to recognizable landmarks from the text, Thurgill follows in the footsteps of the

fictional characters around Aldeburgh, a town in Suffolk which was a prototype for the fictional Seaburgh of the story. While many sites are still recognizable to the reader based on the description in the text, even after close to a century since publication, in the course of this ‘spatial performance’ (241), a notable sense of absence emerges repeatedly – that of the fictional characters, of the author himself (there is no indication that he lived there), of one notable landmark in the story and, suitable to the mood of the ghost story, the general absence of other visitors at the time. Thus, the pursuit turns out to be as haunting an experience as the supernatural source text itself.

These two studies are examples of research focusing on and conducted at the locations which feature – in a direct or semi-fictionalized form – in works of fiction, and in both cases researchers draw on their own experience of places when studying connections between space and literature. It is possible, however, for visitors to encounter the ‘fictional’ dimension at sites with no existing connections to fiction, as ‘literary space spills over into the Real world’ (Doel 2018: 47) and the other way around.

In her research on tourism in English medieval historical cities, Jane Lovell (2019), for instance, found that visitors projected medieval and fantasy narratives unto spaces which did not actually have any verifiable ties to these stories, based solely on the perceived similarities of architecture and the atmospherics. Similarly, in David McLaughlin’s (2016) case study of American Sherlockians, the absence of actual connections to the famous fictional detective does not deter Holmes’ devotees from intentionally ‘spilling’ their favorite narrative onto a hill half the world away from the places where Arthur Conan Doyle set his stories.

While some of the studies I referred to (as well as majority of tourism studies, naturally) centered on encountering fictionalized spaces during touristic and visitor activities – that is, in places which are not one’s place of residence – other researchers (e.g. Hones 2014; Anderson 2015; Thurgill 2018) have looked at how familiar places are perceived in connection to stories set in those locations. Thinking back to Joel Lane’s books and the way they resonated with my spatial experience of my hometown not far from the Norwegian-Russian border, I suggest that spaces not related to fictional narratives can nevertheless be perceived as related – through similar atmospherics, climate or specific architectural features, through their *mood* and *feel*.

Indeed, in their *Thinking Space* article (2019), Jane Lovell and James Thurgill address the possibilities of studying how places with no actual connection to fiction – either via the text, biographical ties with authors or through adaptations – can nevertheless be perceived through the lens of fictional narratives.

Places we visit, or those we inhabit, can be perceived in light of known fictional texts and become ‘augmented’ (Sandvik and Waade 2008) by fiction, connected in our minds to stories and places – be they imaginary locations like Mirkwood, Lothlórien, or the Forbidden Forest, or fictionalized actual-world places like Birmingham. As seen in two autoethnographic accounts I cite above, the places – one visited during a summer holiday and another, where I used to live – had no ties whatsoever to the fictional narratives set in the Mediterranean or the Black country respectively, yet the stories I read became tied to the spaces I occupied,



seeping into the physical reality and adding a fictional layer to these places, based on perceived aesthetic and atmospheric similarities, and the *feeling* they created for me.

Readers like Anderson, reading a novel set in *their* city, might get the feeling that a certain café just ‘*had to be*’ (2015: 130, emphasis in the original) the setting for a specific scene in the novel and, through this ‘knowledge’, would envision and interpret that part of the narrative. At the same time, a reader like myself, on occasion, seeing an abandoned factory building in a desolate industrial area, or a snow-covered bench in an empty park in a city on the northernmost shore of Europe, might think, ‘*this* is exactly like in the story, this is what it must have looked like’, even though the story is set in a city on the other side of Europe. Yet, this is what I will be imagining from then on, reading the text: that bench, that building. With my geographical experience affecting the reading, I bring the ‘real world’ into the text, co-constructing the story in my mind. However, during and after the reading, the tables might turn (Hones 2014; Thurgill and Lovell 2019): the bench might become associated with the narrative, and every time I pass by it, I might think of the book; Birmingham noir ‘spills’ out of the broken windows and cracks in the walls of the industrial building whenever I go to that area again.

Drawing on the previous research published in the field, and reflecting on my own reading and geographical experiences, this short piece attempted to consider the insights offered by studying literary geographies in isolation (Hones 2020) and possibly discover new directions for further inquiries. My suggestion with regards to future research on the topic of fiction and space would be to see how looking at how familiar places – those we currently reside in, or those where we used to live – can acquire a fictional ‘layer’ through literary texts and fiction encountered in other media. In light of the tradition of exploring how familiar place can be ‘fictionalized’ by narratives, an alternative path would be to analyze also how familiar places with no known connections to fiction can be – intentionally or not – experienced through fictional narratives.

During the lockdown, even if rules are relaxed and places begin to reopen, people find themselves confined to spaces where they live or temporary reside. Looking at readers’ – as well as researchers’ own – experiences of fictionalized familiar geographies, including current and former places of residence, may provide new perspectives for studying literary geographies. The presence – or absence – of other individuals around the reader, in public and private spaces, and the changing format (e.g. ebooks, Kindle) of literature consumption resulting from the situation surrounding the pandemic are also likely to affect the way the text happens (Hones 2008) and therefore that also might be worth investigating further.

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## II

### **CHASING WRITERS' GHOSTS THROUGH A MODERN CITY: AUGMENTING URBAN SPACE WITH LITERARY CONNECTIONS DURING THE TOVE JANSSON WALK IN HELSINKI**

by

Evgenia Amey, 2019

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## Chasing writers' ghosts through a modern city

Augmenting urban space with literary connections during the Tove Jansson walk in Helsinki

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### Abstract

The article employs the theme of a literary walk (Watson 2009), a practice of encountering places with literary associations on foot. Urban areas present especially suitable settings for such themed walks, as cities can have multiple literary connections, and literary places are located within a short distance from one another. In this paper, I focus on the sites associated with Tove Jansson (1914–2001), a Finnish-Swedish artist and writer, internationally known for her books about the Moomins. The study utilises an autoethnographic approach and draws on observations at the sites with connections to Jansson in Helsinki, organised spatially into a walk around the city. I analyse how urban space can be augmented (Sandvik and Waade 2008) by literary associations through narrativization of the author's biography and a visitor's own knowledge and imagination.

**Keywords:** literary walk, literary place, literary travel, augmented space, Tove Jansson

## Introduction

Exploring urban space on foot through a themed walk is a common contemporary practice (Plate 2006; Solnit 2014). In many European cities, historic city centres feature multiple heritage landmarks, which act as popular attractions and are within a walking distance from one another (Plate 2006). A city walk is spatially organised and follows a path connecting the chosen landmarks on the basis of an underlying theme. A brief online search provides plenty of options targeted at audiences with specific interests – be it antique books, local food, or a specific architectural style. Organised walking tours or downloadable maps for independent navigation offer to guide visitors through a city, taking them to places which match their interests.

Literature, as part of cultural heritage, often plays a key role in attracting visitors to the cities, and a literary walk is a common leisure activity for urban vacationers (Plate 2006). Such walks can centre on authors' personae and include sites with biographical ties, such as homes and graves; alternatively, story-centred walks emphasize connections to fiction and often incorporate places which are important to the narratives, such as locations that act as settings for fictional events (Herbert 2001; Robinson and Andersen 2002; Watson 2006).

Recognising well-known writers as part of cultural heritage is strongly linked to the politics of national and cultural identity and belonging (Plate 2006). Acts of commemoration, such as unveiling plaques and monuments, renaming streets and buildings, and introducing themed itineraries – usually tied in with significant dates, such as birth or death anniversaries – establish tangible ties between literary figures and urban space (Robinson and Andersen 2002; Watson 2006; Bom 2015a).

In this paper I focus on one example of commemorative practice dedicated to a nationally celebrated author by analysing the so-called Tove Jansson walk in Helsinki, Finland, from an autoethnographic perspective. Tove Jansson (1914–2001), a Finnish-Swedish artist and writer who achieved international popularity as the creator of the Moomins, was born in Helsinki and lived and worked there for most of her life. Following the centenary of her birth, several private and public organisations published information on their

web pages about places with biographical connections to her and to her famous characters.

This study draws on observations at the sites with biographical ties to Tove Jansson in Helsinki, organised geographically into a walk, using itineraries published on the web pages of the Helsinki Art Museum and Moomin Characters Ltd. for reference. In recent years, the growing use of personal mobile devices and the availability of an Internet connection have made it easier for independent visitors to arrange self-guided tours in the cities, to find locations (e.g. by using mobile applications such as interactive web maps), and to consult websites for information. Using an autoethnographic approach, I analyse how urban space can be augmented (Sandvik and Waade 2008) by literary associations through adding a biographical layer to the places encountered during the walk, enabling visitors to “dive” into the author’s time.

### **Literary walk, urban space and literary icon-cities**

The practice of the urban “literary ramble” (Watson 2009) was established in Britain by the mid-nineteenth century. Westover (2012) traces one of the earliest written descriptions of the phenomenon back to the Romantic era and the writings of Leigh Hunt, one of the first to present his readers with the literary attractions of London arranged into themed “walks”. Hunt’s essays enlivened the city with literary associations, recreating it as a walkable space for literary enthusiasts and providing a “memorial and affective map” (Westover 2012, 9) of London.

In the late twentieth century, in light of the emerging public initiatives to preserve and commemorate local cultural heritage, the tradition of the literary walk enjoyed a revival, manifesting in the trend of “chasing” after authors’ ghosts in metropolises (Plate 2006). Nowadays, in many promoted walking tours and itineraries, visitors and residents alike are invited to “walk in the footsteps” of writers or follow the routes of their fictional characters (Plate 2006; van Es and Reijnders 2018). The supply of author-centred tours caters to people’s desire to experience the imagined past through biographical connection to a known literary figure. Places typically included in the itineraries based on factual ties with authors are birthplaces, homes, and burial sites. In comparison to a bus tour, the physical activity and the slower pace of a walking tour allows visi-



tors not only to observe the surroundings but to achieve an embodied experience of the places in a presumably similar manner to that of the famous writers themselves (Plate 2006).

The tradition of a literary walk has been predominantly associated with *literary cities* like London and Paris. While such cities pride themselves on having multiple famous literary connections, *literary icon-cities* (Bom 2015a, 2015b) are known for being predominantly associated with one iconic literary figure. In the Nordic context, for instance, the cities of Odense (Bom 2015a) in Denmark and Vimmerby (Bom 2015b) in Sweden have been represented primarily through their connections to literary icons, the former being the birth place of H. C. Andersen and the latter – of Astrid Lindgren. Interestingly, the capitals of Denmark, Sweden, and Finland are each associated with a famous children's writer: Copenhagen is known for its connection with Andersen (Steiner 2016), Stockholm with Lindgren, and Helsinki with Tove Jansson.

### **Diving into Tove Jansson's Helsinki**

Tove Jansson (1914–2001) was born in Helsinki and lived in the city for most of her life, although she travelled extensively, resided in other countries for periods of time and, later in life, divided her time between the city and an island home which she shared with her partner (Westin 2014). Having been born into an artistic family and having received visual arts education, Jansson worked throughout her life as a painter, an illustrator, and a cartoonist. In addition, she authored novels and short stories, and wrote and illustrated the Moomin books and comic strips. She considered herself first and foremost an artist and only then a writer (Westin 2014), though ironically today she is predominantly known as the author of the Moomin stories. In Finland she is regarded as a national literary and artistic icon, although her fictional creations – the Moomins – tend to overshadow Jansson's persona as well as her other artistic work (Westin 2014).

A number of commemorative events were held in Finland after Jansson's death in 2001. During 2014, which marked the centenary of her birth, and in subsequent years, more events followed: a park in Helsinki was renamed in her honour; itineraries were published to guide interested visitors to places which Jansson frequented during her life; exhibitions of her works were held in Finland and

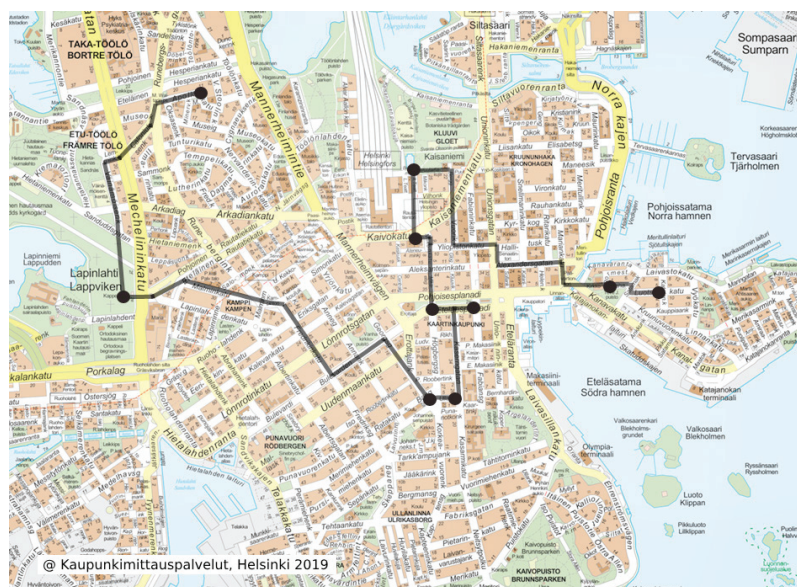


abroad; a new Moomin Museum opened in the city of Tampere in 2017. While Helsinki had been home to many known artists and writers, the international popularity of Jansson's Moomin characters makes her one of the most recognised figures, thus designating Helsinki as an icon-city.

In order to see how the city of Helsinki is experienced through its connection to Jansson and to find out the ways in which urban space can be augmented during a literary walk, it was necessary for me to take on the role of a visitor (van Es and Reijnders 2018) and to participate in a self-guided walking tour myself. For this study, I have adopted an autoethnographic approach, which draws on the researcher's own lived experience and reflections in order to provide insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Bolen 2017). While ethnography is often employed when studying visitors' / tourists' experiences (e.g. Bom 2015a; van Es and Reijnders 2018) and autoethnography has previously been used to study urban walking experiences (Stead 2009), in the current study I wanted to find out whether an autoethnographic approach would prove useful in studying the perceived spatial augmentation.

The research material is comprised of my field notes, written as narrative accounts of the walks and documenting observations

Figure 1. The walking routes in Helsinki © Kaupunkimittauspalvelut, Helsinki 2019.





made at the sites with connections to Tove Jansson in the historical centre of Helsinki. The field notes are supplemented by visual data in the form of photographs taken at the sites. Fieldwork was carried out over the course of two days – in June and December 2017 – together with a fellow researcher, Elina Huttunen, who, similarly, has a professional and personal interest in Tove Jansson. In June, the two of us embarked on a walk through the western, central and southern parts of the inner Helsinki area. The walk was recommenced in December of the same year, covering the central, and eastern parts of the city centre. The choice of the sites and their spatial organisation into a walk was prompted by itineraries provided on the web pages of the Helsinki Art Museum<sup>1</sup> and Moomin Characters Ltd<sup>2</sup>.

The itineraries feature mapped and numbered sites which include Jansson's former homes, educational institutions, and places she frequented during her life. Featured in both itineraries, as well as on another page on the Moomin Characters Ltd. website<sup>3</sup>, are also public sculptures by Tove Jansson's father – Viktor Jansson – which are known to have been modelled after her. The sites form a walkable trail starting from the eastern part of the city centre, winding through the innermost city and leading west, to Tove Jansson's final resting place in the Hietaniemi cemetery.

In connection to the research question, thematic analysis of field notes centred on the aspects of the walk which potentially enable visitors to figuratively "dive" into the writer's time. "Time travel", enabled through mapped connections between the author and the city, and narrativization of Jansson's life based on the visitor's own knowledge and imagination manifested as factors contributing to the spatial augmentation.

### **Constructing the narrative of Tove Jansson's life during the walk**

On a surprisingly sunny day, we finally went on a Tove-adventure. Before that, I'd spent days browsing through maps (old and new) of Helsinki, reading biographical material, translated letters, and excerpts from *Sculptor's Daughter* [Jansson's childhood memoir, 1968/2013]. So I was all prepared. (Field notes, June 2017)

Our self-guided walking tour was driven by a biographical interest in Jansson, rather than her fictional creations. I had already been familiar with Jansson's literary and artistic works prior to conducting fieldwork and had done my "homework" by getting acquainted with biographical sources and itineraries in advance.

In themed urban walks, sites are often arranged for convenience rather than in order corresponding chronologically to the author's life (Plate 2006). If one were to follow the numbering order of both itineraries, the trail would start from Jansson's first family home in

the eastern part of the city, followed by several sites in the centre in random chronological order, with Jansson's grave to be encountered close to the end of the walk. The walks taken in the course of the fieldwork were similarly arranged for convenience. However, the trails which we followed in the course of the two days formed a winding path going in the direction opposite to the one proposed in the itineraries – from west to east, beginning from one of the family homes and the grave. The visit to the cemetery, which is generally taken to indicate finality, nevertheless did not give the tour a pessimistic hue, serving only as a "...reminder that she is dead – plaque on the building, her grave; and then in my mind she's alive again. The walk started with a visit to a cemetery, but I managed to forget it as we walked to the next site" (June 2017). The connection between Jansson and the city, mapped in the itineraries gets confirmed by what I see – commemorative plaques; the gravestone; her teenage self, embodied in public space through her father's sculptures. The actual physical objects indicate that she indeed had been present there, or at the least – that she indeed existed.

In their analysis of crime scenes as mediated spaces, Sandvik and Waade (2008) observe that spatial augmentation – the enhancement of space through senses and emotions on the basis of media connections and through the use of media – can occur, among other means, by narrativization and fictionalisation. During our walk, it is the narrative



Figure 2. Convolvulus by Viktor Jansson (modelled after teenage Tove Jansson).  
Photo by author, 2017.



Figure 3. Tove Jansson's grave, Hietaniemi cemetery.  
Photo by author, 2017.

of Jansson's life that gets told and laid out across the city, as is reflected in the title of the Helsinki Art Museum's itinerary, "The life path of Tove".

While no augmented reality software was used during the walk to enhance the urban space (Sandvik and Waade 2008), personal mobile devices were used for consulting the itineraries, navigating, and fact-checking. Because it is not a guided tour, visitors (like my colleague and myself) act as their own guides, so much depends on one's ability to find the required information and to utilise it during the tour. Instant access to biographical information via mobile devices enabled our independent navigation through the city and allowed us to correlate the places visited with specific events in Jansson's life.

Plate (2006) points out how literary walks, by leading visitors from one place associated with an author to another, create narratives of the author's life, embedded in urban space. I cannot follow every month and year of Tove Jansson's life precisely, but only "see her in [...] pockets of time", when occupying the same space as she once did (Watson 2013) and recreating her spatial movements (Plate 2006). While physical movement through urban space turns this narration into an embodied experience, the city where we walk at the same time disrupts it

– we have to pause for traffic, occasionally get distracted, or have a sudden need to "stop by a tea shop" or "have a coffee break at a café we've deemed worthy" (June 2017).

In the course of this non-chronological walk, places encountered are connected to "different stages of Jansson's life: here she's a teenager, posing for her father's statue; here she goes to art school that she disliked; here is her as an adult walking through the city" (December 2017). Because not even twenty years have passed since her death, many places likely stayed the same as they were in her later years. However, many sites included in the walk are connected to an earlier time in her life – first as a child, then as a student and young adult, and later as a known artist and writer.



Figure 4. Tove Jansson's memorial plaque (by Viktor Jansson).  
Photo by author, 2017.

The reconstructed biographical narrative is by no means linear; it jumps back and forth in time. It consists of flashbacks – not Jansson's own, but mine, when I consult the sources and discover a new piece of information or remember a random detail from her autobiography:

Suddenly there's just us – here and now – walking through the Christmas market in 2017, sipping coffee in a café next to Senate square, and then we dive back again into Jansson's Helsinki; here's her childhood home, a block of flats for artists. Resurfacing again into the present to buy Moomin souvenirs. Then again diving into the past, following Jansson's timeline. (December 2017)

Similar to how a "crime tourist" (Sandvik and Waade 2008) might reconstruct historical and fictional crime scenes based on provided cues, placing pieces of an author's biographical narrative together might require some "detective work":

My edition [of *Sculptor's Daughter*] featured photographs and drawings from family archives, so before we resumed the walk [in December], I checked Google Maps satellite view [of the street where she lived] to see whether her drawing of a view from the window can somehow be traced – and it was there, that building, the gate (perhaps, looking different now). The angle from which she drew the street indicated where the windows were, and approximately the floor on which they lived. This little investigation of mine afforded some satisfaction, so when we actually went there, I was able to check it out "in reality", standing on the same street, somewhat 90 years later. (December 2017)

As follows from this excerpt, I compared archive pictures to web maps and to the "reality" to deduce which apartment the Janssons



Figure 5. Apartment block where Jansson lived in her tower studio. Photo by author, 2017.

used to occupy. While the cityscape had undergone rapid changes since her childhood, I assume that I am able to “see through”, or “see past”, the city as it is in 2017 and into the city that *was* – and how her life was connected to it: “The city I see is the city of today, so I project her onto the city as it is now, trying to bring out the city as it was then. Is it my attempt to make the urban space meaningful, to envision it through her life?” (December 2017).

Based on the field notes, it is not only factual knowledge – long-held or recently obtained – of the author’s biography which allows me to “activate” (Westover 2012, 7) the surroundings. The often-mentioned act of “seeing” is recurrently paired with “in my mind”: my own imagination plays a key role in creating glimpses of Jansson’s life at associated places and piecing the biographical narrative together. Plate (2006) and Bom (2015a) observe that historical facts can become less important for literary visitors, as perceived experience – for example, of going back into the past – relies more on emotions and feelings of visitors, rather than hard facts. Sandvik and Waade (2008) similarly note that spaces can be enhanced through visitors’ emotions. The narrative of Jansson’s life and the past I am immersed in at the literary sites are essentially imagined.

The deceased author becomes fictionalised, as her life story is narrativized and embedded into the urban space (Bom 2015a). Just as with elusive fictional characters (McLaughlin 2016), literary walks, centred on following in the footsteps of someone who is no longer living, make visitors pursue authors’ ghosts across the city, driven by visitors’ imaginations and an author’s perceived temporary proximity (Steiner 2016).

### Conclusion

In this article, I examined how urban space can be experienced through biographical connection to writers during thematic walks. With the help of the autoethnographic approach, drawing on observations made during a self-guided walk centred on Tove Jansson in

Helsinki, I looked at how biographical narratives of known authors can add new dimensions to the urban space. With regard to methodology, I found that utilising the autoethnographic approach in the study proved useful by allowing me to focus on my personal embodied experience of the walk and to reflect on the thoughts and emotional responses resulting from it.

Drawing on the idea of spatial augmentation by fiction proposed by Sandvik and Waade (2008), this study has shown that urban space can be augmented by narrativization of the author's life during a literary walk. Though nonlinear and easily interruptible by the city itself, the biographical narrative is constructed spatially as visitors move from one site to the other through urban space, enabling them to "dive" into the writer's time when encountering associated sites.

The results indicate that visitors are able to piece the narrative of the author's life together, placing the author into the surrounding urban space through their own factual knowledge and imagination, thus envisioning the author's personal narrative tied to the geography and history of the growing city.

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### Notes

- 1 Helsinki Art Museum: The life path of Tove. <https://www.hamhelsinki.fi/en/exhibition/tove-jansson/>
- 2 Moomin Characters Ltd.: Discover Tove Jansson's life and art through this map of Helsinki. 4 April 2014. <https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/discover-tove-janssons-life-and-art-through-this/>
- 3 Moomin Characters Ltd.: Discover Helsinki – see the beautiful sculptures of Tove Jansson. 28 July 2015. <https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/discover-helsinki-see-the-beautiful-sculptures-of-tove-jansson/>







### III

## **AN IN-BETWEEN READER: SITUATEDNESS AND BELONGING IN TOVE JANSSON'S HELSINKI**

by

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# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## An In-between Reader: Situatedness and Belonging in Tove Jansson's Helsinki

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### Abstract:

Finnish-Swedish artist and writer Tove Jansson (1914–2001), widely known as the author of the Moomin books, was born in Helsinki and resided there for the greater part of her life. The city features as a setting for her adult-oriented fiction – notably, semi-autobiographical fix-up novels *Sculptor's Daughter* (1968/2015) and *Fair Play* (1989/2011). This article adopts a situated approach to literary geography, examining the researcher's own position as a Helsinki resident and a 'situated' reader. Using autoethnography as a method, I analyze how the city and Jansson's life narrative are co-produced by the writer, her texts, texts about her (such as biographies and press articles) and myself as reader. When looking at the notions of spatial and social situatedness and belonging, both the writer's and my own 'in-betweenness' emerge as a connecting motif in my reading and in the process of experiencing the place through the texts. While reflecting on my engagement with texts and, simultaneously, on my spatial and social experience, I consider the possible implications of different readerships developing their own understanding of and modes of engagement with Jansson's works and places associated with her. Although her most famous creations, the Moomins, are often viewed as part of the heteronormative family-centered ideological framework, reading Jansson's novels, diaries and correspondence, as well as recent biographies and press articles, provides a different picture, allowing her works and the spaces she inhabited to be interpreted in a new light.

**Keywords:** autoethnography; belonging; literary geography; situated reading; spatial event; Tove Jansson.

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## Introduction

Readers of fiction rarely act as merely passive ‘receivers’ of texts: they (re)interpret, (re)imagine and co-construct narratives alongside the authors (e.g. Rosenblatt 1982; Sharp 2000). Rosenblatt (1982) described the dynamics of the reader-text relationship as a ‘transaction’ in which both the reader and the text affect each other. Readers’ socio-spatial experience and their prior history of engagement with fiction through various media shape the way they interact with the text (Bogdan, Cunningham and Davis 2000; Brooks and Browne 2012); furthermore, the reader-text relationship is not static but constantly evolving. Consider, for example, an instance of rereading a book a decade or two after first becoming acquainted with it – the reader’s situation has likely changed and engaging again with the same text will be a different experience comparing to the initial reading.

With regards to the reader-text relationship in the context of extra-textual geographies (Hones 2014), it has been observed that while the reading is often informed by the reader’s prior lived geographic experience, fictional texts can also, in turn, affect the way places are perceived in the course of the reading and after it is finished (Thurgill and Lovell 2019). In two articles previously published in *Literary Geographies*, Jon Anderson (2015) and James Thurgill (2018) have effectively used an autoethnographic approach when analyzing how their own spatial experiences intertwined with and affected their readings of fictional texts.

Analyzing the interplay of social and spatial contexts in which the reception of a literary text (or other media production) occurs presents a curious – though at times, daunting – task, taking into consideration multiple parties and elements that come into play. Socioeconomic, political and cultural factors, own lived experiences, places visited, spaces inhabited, history of engagement with fiction, preferences with regards to media channels, forms and genres, as well as ‘intentions, (re)interpretations, social contexts, physical materialities, imaginations, personal memories and collective histories’ (Anderson 2015: 126) can all affect the reception of the text for a given reader.

In this paper, I adopt a situated approach to literary geographies, focusing on both spatial and social contexts in which I, as a ‘situated’ reader, engage with literary works of Finnish-Swedish artist and writer Tove Jansson (1914–2001). While Jansson is predominantly known as the author and illustrator of the books and comic strips about the Moomins, she was also a painter and illustrator and, in addition, authored a number of adult-oriented books. In this article I focus primarily on Jansson’s later novels, *Sculptor’s Daughter* (1968/2015) and *Fair Play* (1989/2011).

I use the autoethnographic method, reflecting on my reading and drawing on fieldwork in Helsinki, Finland, the city where Jansson lived and worked and where I myself currently reside. I examine how my ‘spatial’ reading of her works and her biographical narratives is informed by my own experience of the city. Furthermore, I look at how the texts written by and about Jansson shape my view of the city and these specific locations and affect the meanings I attribute to them. I utilize the concept of belonging to analyze the way in which my situatedness influences the way the texts unravel into a ‘spatial event’ (Hones 2008, 2014).

### **Theoretical framework: Assemblage, situatedness and belonging**

The concept of ‘situated knowledges,’ introduced by Donna Haraway (1988), stems from the view that our experiences are always dependent on our position, which influences our point of view and understanding of things – and, thus, all knowledge is essentially situated. While an author’s situatedness is regarded as defining the way the text is produced, in this paper I focus on reception of the text and specifically on a situated reader. Haraway particularly emphasizes the collective dimension of situated knowledge, indicating that it is ‘about communities, not about isolated individuals’ (590); in addition, a number of scholars researching reader response similarly indicate that texts are read collectively in a cultural context (Bogdan, Cunningham and Davis 2000; Brooks and Browne 2012). At the same time, since reading can also be largely affected by personal factors, the individual dimension may likewise often be of great importance.

A multitude of factors come into play as a reader engages with and co-constructs the text: the author’s and the reader’s respective positions and the way they interrelate; the characteristics of the text itself; and the spatial, social, cultural and political contexts in which the work is created and in which it is (re)interpreted by different audiences have all been noted to have an effect on both individual and collective readings (Bogdan, Cunningham and Davis 2000; Sharp 2000; Pearce 2002; Brooks and Browne 2012). Hones (2008, 2014) also draws attention to other actors – including, for instance, translators, editors, publishers and distributors of literary works – who may affect the encounter with the text; the format and the medium through which the text is accessed also play an important role.

Considering that a given reader’s position often changes throughout their life, the same texts might be perceived differently at different times: the reader’s social and spatial situatedness, changing views and preferences, socioeconomic and political context, and the fact that the reader constantly engages with other texts in a variety of media will undoubtedly affect the meanings assigned to a given text at a given time (Bogdan, Cunningham and Davis 2000; Brooks and Browne 2012), whether or not a later rereading occurs.

In his earlier article, Anderson (2015) has utilized an assemblage approach to literary geographies when studying personal geographies of reception. Linking Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory and the relational approach utilized in social sciences to Hones’ (2008, 2014) conceptualization of the text as a ‘spatial event,’ Anderson suggests looking closely at the ‘components’ that affect the production and consumption of the text. These components, or parts, that together form the ‘event’ of the fictional text, are interconnected and everchanging (Nail 2017). Anderson focuses specifically on his own geographical situatedness as a reader, taking into account a combination of factors that affect the way he co-produces the extra-textual space (Hones 2014).

Similarly, when I look at my situatedness and the many ways in which I belong (or don’t belong) in terms of an assemblage, I consider the combination of elements that are influencing my reading of texts by and about Jansson. My current location; my relationship with Helsinki; places I used to live; my cultural background, beliefs and attitudes; languages I speak; my gender, trade, everyday practices, modes of reading, preferences with regards

to fiction, choice of texts to read; my relationship with Jansson's works; and finally my assumptions about her based on her works, diaries and correspondence, biographies, and press publications – all these components, their combination and interconnections affect my current reading, while the constant changes to these factors will affect my future perception of these texts.

In this paper I draw on theories of situatedness, also keeping in mind the usefulness of the assemblage approach when studying individual reader response. I conceptualize my situatedness and its influence on my interaction with the text in terms of socio-spatial belonging. The fluidity (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016) and, at the same time, vagueness (Antonsich 2010a) of belonging as a concept is often recognized by scholars, yet it continues to be used and provides a suitable framework for this study.

Belonging has been theorized as a combination of social categories (or groups) in which individuals are placed or place themselves; these categories include, among others, gender, ethnicity, cultural background and class (Yuval-Davis 2006). Being a part of multiple groups simultaneously means occupying different social locations, as the groups are positioned along multiple power axes (Yuval-Davis 2006). The resulting combination of these multiple and constantly changing identities and belongings can also be viewed in terms of an assemblage.

While I recognize the importance of collective dimension in the reception of texts, especially in cultural, ethnic and linguistic contexts, individual dimensions of reading and geographic experience appear prominently in my study, as well as in two earlier mentioned studies (Anderson 2015; Thurgill 2018). In this way, I consider Antonsich's work on belonging particularly applicable: he draws on early works by humanistic geographers (Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, among others) when considering the 'personal, intimate, existential' (Antonsich 2010b: 129) relationship between an individual person and a place, which is based on personal histories and memories, as much as on socioeconomic and cultural situatedness.

Although I offer my perspective – that of a foreign-born Finnish resident and a reader of Tove Jansson's works, acknowledging the socio-spatial situatedness of my reading, I do not aim at objectivity or propose that my reading is representative of the position of any single cultural or ethnic group. While, in light of the current relatively liberal political climate in Europe, the pro-equality interpretation of Jansson's works is shared by many, my perspective is subjective and affected by my personal experience of place and of the texts.

### **Materials and methods: Situated reading of Jansson's novels and locating her biographical narrative**

In the current study, I draw on my experience of reading texts written by and about Tove Jansson, while residing in Helsinki, the city she was born in and where she lived for the greater part of her life. In these 'situated encounters with literature' (McLaughlin 2016: 126) I reflect on the socio-spatial context in which I engage with the texts, focusing on my relationship with the city and the way my geographical experience affects and is affected by the reading.

The two prose titles I discuss are *Sculptor's Daughter* and *Fair Play*, semi-autobiographical fix-up novels, comprised of connected short stories which can be read as stand-alones. *Sculptor's Daughter* is a fictionalized childhood memoir, while *Fair Play*, in a similarly fictionalized and thinly veiled manner, focuses on Jansson's relationship with her lifelong female partner Tuulikki Pietilä, who was an influential graphic artist in her own right. Additional textual data, used in the analysis of the narratives constructed about Jansson by different parties, include English-language press articles, such as those published in *The Guardian* (Rix 2010; Denning 2017) and *Autostraddle* (Williams 2018) – these include examples of media coverage which are likely to affect audiences' perception of Jansson's life and works. I also look at recent online articles published on the official Moomin Characters Ltd. website (2018, 2019a, 2019b). Moomin Characters Ltd., a company currently chaired by Jansson's niece, Sophia Jansson, is the Moomin copyright owner.

With regards to Jansson's biographical information, I draw heavily on the authorized biography *Tove Jansson: Life, Art, Words* by Boel Westin (2014), which is based on Westin's doctoral dissertation research conducted in collaboration with Jansson herself. The biography features excerpts from (or refers to) Jansson's private diaries and correspondence, unpublished manuscripts and drawings which, as part of her private archive, were provided by Jansson herself as research material. Westin's work is often used as an information source with regards to Jansson's biography and is frequently referred to in press articles on Jansson.

While the two earlier-mentioned studies (Anderson 2015; Thurgill 2018) have successfully utilized the autoethnographic approach, my own previous work on spatially arranged walking practices (Amey 2019) has also been of an autoethnographic nature. In light of these examples, autoethnography can prove to be a suitable methodological approach in studying literary geographies, providing a way to critically reflect on researchers' own geographic experience, personal histories of place attachments and engagement with fiction to gain insights into geographically situated reader response. Using the approach in the current study allowed me to analyze my own situatedness, correlating the way I engage with the text to my geographical and social experience.

In the course of the autoethnographic fieldwork, I visited places with biographical connections to Jansson in the Helsinki inner-city area – including apartment buildings where she lived at different times of her life, places she frequented, sites that inspired or were featured in her works, as well as her grave. While a number of Jansson-related visits – in June and December 2017, and January and October 2019 – have been done in the company of Elina Huttunen, a friend and a fellow literary enthusiast, on other occasions I conducted the visits on my own.

## Results

### *The story and the storyteller*

Jansson 'never consciously sat down herself to write the story of her life, but there are many lesser texts and presentations' (Westin 2014: 22): she told her own life story in the

semi-autobiographical novels and by collaborating with researcher Boel Westin on an authorized biography (2014); her diaries and, in particular, her correspondence – originally unintended for wider audiences, but referred to in the biography and published in part (Jansson 2014/2019) – also give her own account of her life and work. In addition, there are multiple parties who tell and retell her life narrative: media, relatives and acquaintances, researchers, publishers, editors, site developers, museum curators, authorities, businesses – including Moomin Characters Ltd. – and, of course, the readers. Depending on who tells her story and in which context, the narrative may differ quite a lot: whether she lived alone on an island (as was indicated in the author introduction of the Puffin edition of the Moomin books), lived a bohemian life and constantly threw parties instead (e.g. Happonen 2014), valued solitude, exhibited a degree of workaholicism (Westin 2014), or, being ahead of her times, was an example of an independent female artist and a feminist (e.g. Dening 2017; Moomin Characters Ltd. 2018) – all these versions of her have been constructed at different times and for different purposes, and some are more accurate than others.

While Jansson was a known figure in Finland and Sweden, details about her life and other artistic works generally remained somewhat unknown to international audiences until the 2000s. Close to the centenary of her birth in 2014 and in subsequent years, a number of press publications in Finnish, Swedish and English have shed light on different aspects of her life and works.

As a result of the liberal changes in the socio-cultural and political environment in Western countries, a different side of Jansson's life and persona is now being recognized and often represented in research (Westin 2014; Wells 2019) and, lately, also in the media. Her career as a female artist and a writer, her social and political views, her queer lifestyle and corresponding themes in her works (including the Moomin books) have attracted substantial attention in recent years, in light of growing recognition of LGBTQ+ issues in many countries. For instance, the articles published on Moomin Characters Ltd. website (2018, 2019a, 2019b) are remarkable in that they challenge heteronormative view of Jansson's works, shed light on her political views and openly tell about her sexuality – especially in the three part entry on her same-sex relationships published in June 2019. One of the articles specifically underlines that Jansson and Pietilä were 'the first couple in Finland representing the same gender at the Independence Day reception at Presidential Palace' (Moomin Characters Ltd. 2018), and further draws attention to the fact that she 'represented the first generation of women in Finland who had the right to vote' and presents her as a proponent of equality. It is worth mentioning that Jansson's same-sex relationships, especially her lifelong partnership with Pietilä, used to be habitually omitted until recently – after all, she wrote children's books and 'gayness is coded as dangerous for children' (Williams 2018).

The two articles published in *The Guardian* (Rix 2010; Dening 2017), drawing on interviews with Sophia Jansson, similarly refer to Jansson's career and life choices, unconventional at the time, same-sex relationships and her 'feminist legacy'. Being referred to as a feminist icon (Dening 2017), Jansson is described as a 'lesbian icon' by Williams (2018) in her article: she refers to Jansson's biographical facts and works in context, describing how queer sexualities were hidden and coded, how the topic was not often addressed in public as well as in private. With regards to *Fair Play*, Williams writes:

But it's everyday-ness is precisely what makes it so calmly radical. It is a portrait of a lifelong lesbian couple, allowing us to see into their daily lives, the minutiae of how they live [...] No longer forced to be secretive, no longer codified or veiled, *Fair Play* remains a testament to the impact of Jansson and Pietilä's love, an open celebration of everyday queerness. (Williams 2018)

Through such continuous re-evaluation of Jansson's life and works in different cultural contexts and renegotiation of meanings attributed to them, she thus becomes an icon in a new way (Harju 2009; Bom 2015). She can be considered one of the iconic literary and artistic figures who 'are repeatedly found valuable enough to be integrated in new cultural contexts' (Bom 2015: 36). The process of constructing a cultural icon is closely tied to (re)negotiating social belonging. Apart from becoming an iconic figure with regards to gender and sexual equality and queer identities, the notions of nationhood often appear in both Finnish, as well as international, press publications covering Jansson's life and work: while the Moomin characters are used in Finland's national branding, the author's connection to Finland is also emphasized (e.g. Moomin Characters Ltd. 2018). At the same time, one has to remember that, during Jansson's life, her close ties to Sweden remained strong: she studied in Stockholm for a time and had familial connections in the country through her Swedish-born mother, graphic artist Signe 'Ham' Hammarsten-Jansson; as Jansson was a member of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority, her books were originally written and first published in Swedish (with some titles, Finnish translations followed only a few years after); she was also involved in several Swedish Moomin-related productions (Westin 2014).

In light of the research and media representations described above, my reading of Jansson's texts becomes geographically as well as socio-culturally and politically informed: I know of the biographical connections of the places mentioned in the texts; I am aware of the facts about her life and can place her works in the context. This knowledge acts as a background for my reading, allowing me to refer to the past while placing the narrative spatially unto the present and the city that I experience and am familiar with.

### ***Spatial connections: Locating the novels***

Both *Sculptor's Daughter* (*SD*) and *Fair Play* (*FP*) include short stories set in different locations which Jansson visited or lived in. A family tradition of spending summers on the Finnish archipelago, which Jansson continued in her adult life, also finds reflection in the texts. The childhood memoir features stories set in different places in Finland and Sweden, where the young protagonist is often accompanied by her family members; in *Fair Play*, Jansson's companion is her partner, Tuulikki Pietilä – whether in Helsinki, in their cabin on an island in the Gulf of Finland, or on their travels.

A number of stories from both books take place in Helsinki, in what were Jansson's homes during the respective periods of time. The narrator specifically indicates the street address of her childhood home, Luotsikatu (Swedish: Lotsgatan)<sup>1</sup> 4, in *Sculptor's Daughter*,



the apartment, her father's studio, and the surrounding area, including the harbor and the Uspenski Cathedral, appear in the stories:

As soon as twilight comes, a great big creature creeps over the harbour. It has no face but has got very distinct hands which cover one island after another as it creeps forward. When there are no more islands left it stretches its arm out over the water, a very long arm that trembles a little and begins to grope its way towards Skatudden. Its fingers reach the Russian Church and touch the rock... (*SD, The Dark*: 9-10)

When you go down onto the ice, the skating-rink looks like a little bracelet of light far out in the darkness. The harbour is an ocean of blue snow and loneliness and nasty fresh air. (*SD, The Dark*: 11)

'The harbour is lovely in the fog.' [...] The harbour really was lovely. Black channels cut through the ice all the way to the distant quays where the big ships lay barely visible. (*FP, Fireworks*: 76)

Jansson's later home, a tower studio on Ullanlinnankatu (Swedish: Ulrikasborgsgatan) where she resided for almost sixty years during the latter part of her life, often features as a background in *Fair Play*. Jansson and her partner had separate apartments in the same house, which used to be interconnected by an attic passageway, until renovations in the later years (Westin 2014):

They lived at opposite ends of a large apartment building near the harbour, and between their studios lay the attic, an impersonal no-man's-land of tall corridors with locked plank doors on either side. Mari liked wandering across the attic; it drew a necessary, neutral interval between their domains. (*FP, Videomania*: 20)

Jansson's presence in Helsinki is commemorated by several plaques – the one on the wall of the apartment building where she had her tower studio (described in *Fair Play*) specifically indicates that she lived there, and two more at the artistic residences where she lived in her younger years have her name listed along with those of other famous lodgers. In 2014, to celebrate the centenary of her birth, a park not far from her childhood home (described in *Sculptor's Daughter*) was renamed after her. Apart from that, Jansson's publicly commissioned artistic works appear – or used to appear – in several locations in Finland, and the Helsinki Art Museum exhibits a collection of her works.

As a means of paying homage and marking notable events, commemoration of famous literary and artistic figures through, for example, monuments and plaques or naming of streets, buildings and parks is a relatively common occurrence (Watson 2006; Laing and Frost 2012). Such commemorative practices can also act to (re)establish spatial ties, confirming writers' and artists' connection to space and, often, to the local community and the nation (Bom 2015). The political dimension of literary spaces (McRae Andrew 2018) is clearly manifested in such practices: social and spatial belonging is established by

‘tying’ authors to space and constructing them as ‘one of us’ collectively by media, decision-makers, businesses and local populations (Bom 2015).

***Necessary self-insert: Foreign reader, local tourist***

Although when visiting the sites in the course of the fieldwork I have exhibited some degree of touristic behavior – for example, by adopting the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 2002) and searching for locations with connection to an iconic literary and artistic figure with a purpose of ‘following in their footsteps’ – I use the term ‘visitor’ rather than ‘tourist’ to describe the activity. This implies that a visitor can also be a local, since the Helsinki area is the place where I live and, though I might not visit all of these locations regularly, the inner city area where Jansson used to live presents a familiar sight.

The stories do not specifically feature detailed descriptions of the city, but it is always present in the background. The location and the climate are familiar to me: wind, rain and fog; cold winter months with occasional snowfall, frost and blizzard; nights that are light in summer and long and dark in winter; the times when you can see far out to sea, or the other times when you hardly distinguish the end of the street – all these are familiar, and a passing reference can tell me a lot about what the actual physical experience of it might be like:

The spring evenings had grown long, and it was hard to darken the room. (*FP, Videomania*: 21)

The snow had come early, a blizzard at the end of November. (*FP, Wladyslaw*: 69)

The early morning darkness is full of freezing bundles hunting for trees and the snow is scattered with fir twigs. (*SD, Christmas*: 153)

These are mere glimpses, but to someone who lives at this latitude it is known that nights are incredibly light in summer. Just a reference in passing, about seeing the harbor or going to the railway station, allows me to trace the movements because I know the layout of the city and, based on the material previously read about Jansson, I know the respective locations of her homes at that time.

Visiting literary sites may be a social experience, if done with a companion, in a group or as a part of larger ‘official’ social gathering. When I did not walk alone, the experience was to a high degree co-constructed by my co-walker (Elina) and myself, by means of observations, remarks, exclamations, thoughts expressed aloud, snippets of conversations we engaged in, random remarks, consulting maps and checking information from websites and, later, when co-creating notes for the blog entries<sup>2</sup> about the walk.

Although in the course of visiting the sites with biographical ties to Tove Jansson I experience Helsinki through its connection to her and her works (Bom 2015), it is still closely tied to my own geographic experience of the city – something I cannot (and, probably, do not want to) ignore. Jansson died in 2001, some years before I first arrived in

Helsinki. Although I was familiar with her other artistic and literary work, I had not read her ‘adult’ novels prior to 2015 and was not aware of the spatial connections.

Still, as inappropriate or anachronistic as it may sound, in my spatial reading I temporarily ‘invade’ the literary space, placing myself there alongside the author. My personal memories and histories are attached to the spaces I visit, they intertwine with the narrative, or rather, *narratives*, of Jansson’s life – the ones told by *narrators* in her semi-autobiographical novels, *by herself* in her letters and diaries, and the ones told *about* her, in biographies and press articles. I recreate her story, based on these texts, and in this story I, perhaps unintentionally but unavoidably, include myself.

The building that I passed many times on my way to work is the building that used to house her art school, and the park through which I often took shortcuts has a statue (by her father Viktor Jansson) that was modeled after her. The apartment block where Jansson resided as a child is located in a relatively quiet neighborhood in the eastern part of the inner city where I sometimes went to check out the unique small cafés. While I had visited several sites with ties to Jansson before, with or without acknowledging the connection, during the fieldwork the places were chosen and visited purposely. Although some locations featured in the novels are not directly identified, they can be deduced by reading the author’s biography and correlating it with her works.

Keeping the city layout in mind and referring to biographical facts as well as instances from Jansson’s semi-autobiographical stories help in ‘placing’ and piecing the biographical narrative together. I construct the narrative, putting the pieces of the puzzle on the Helsinki map, and the final result is comprised of facts, excerpts of texts, fictionalized accounts and my own conjectures. Standing on the sidewalk next to the apartment block where she used to live and peeking into the inner courtyard, I try to imagine the author as a child, based on the black and white photographs I have seen and on her accounts from *Sculptor’s Daughter* (1968/2015). On the staircase leading to the upper floor where her tower studio was located, I try to figure out how her and her partner’s apartments used to be connected. At other locations, I try to guess, drawing on historical and biographical records, on which floor her family had lived, or how the neighborhood had looked in her time.

### ***Locating the reader: Inside, outside, in-between?***

The way I co-construct and tie Jansson’s biographical narrative to spaces in Helsinki is affected by my own social and spatial experience of living in the city as a foreign-born resident. The process also operates in reverse: places connected to her, both those I have encountered before and those that I have not previously visited, acquire an additional layer of meaning.

Meanings that people attribute to places with connections to writers and artists often reflect the values associated with their works (Squire 1994; Herbert 1996). In addition, Squire (1994) notes that visiting literary and artistic sites and paying homage to known figures often involves ‘confirming’ one’s personal values. For some readers, places with links to Tove Jansson will undoubtedly have nostalgic associations – she is primarily celebrated as a children’s book author, and the small details, like the Moomin figurines left at her grave in Hietaniemi (Swedish: Sandudd) cemetery, seem to demonstrate as much.

While associations with childhood memories and a romanticized past might be common for visitors to the sites with connections to Jansson, for Finnish, as well as for Swedish-speaking visitors, it might also be about national or linguistic cultural heritage. There is also another side to her work and persona, which might imply values currently shared by a large proportion of the general population and governments (as well as academia) in Nordic countries: those of female independence, self-reliance and creative freedom. In my case, the values ‘confirmed’ during the visits are those I discovered from Jansson’s biography, diaries, correspondence, and later prose: I can relate to her as a self-reliant woman for whom artistic freedom and fulfillment, and meaningful personal and professional relationships were important; thus she can be viewed as my ideological predecessor from the twentieth century.

At the same time, for me, the nostalgic connection to Jansson’s children’s literature is weak – I only vaguely remember being read the Moomin books when I was a child. The national and linguistic connection is basically non-existent – I cannot view Jansson’s works as part of my cultural heritage, since I was not born in Finland. Despite remembering Moomin characters’ names in Swedish, I have virtually no knowledge of the Swedish language. I cannot read Jansson’s works and correspondence in the original, and I must rely on the English translation when reading her biography by Boel Westin (2014). But then again, the majority of Finnish-speakers will read her works in translation, despite viewing them as their cultural heritage; and the English names of the characters known to the international audience are not the original ones either. Does it matter, after all, in which language the works were originally written, if the readers in different parts of the world ‘share’ these stories, familiar from their childhood or discovered during adulthood, and find her books highly relevant and personally meaningful?

As I traverse through urban space that Jansson used to occupy and where her novels were (at least partly) imagined and written, I not only metaphorically ask to ‘share’ Jansson with me, I also, quite literally, have come to share the space (Hones 2004). As a resident of foreign background, but at the same time a reader and researcher, who has the freedom, leisure time and resources not only to read, but also to visit the related sites, I am ‘privileged and marginalised, at the same time’ (551) – not quite a tourist, but not truly a local (Stead 2010). Although Jansson and her characters can be regarded as national icons, she could, at the same time, be potentially viewed as an outsider – as she was a member of a linguistic minority, a female artist with views liberal for the time, and in addition, because of her sexuality, lifestyle and alternative living arrangements. This point of view, on some level, parallels my own ‘in-betweenness.’ Does she, as a Swedish-speaking writer, ‘belong’ to Finnish people? Does she belong in the artists’ or in the writers’ camp? Do Moomins ‘belong’ to children, or to a variety of audiences all over the world? Does she ‘belong’ to me as a reader?

### **Conclusion: To whom do authors and texts ‘belong’?**

In this article, I have looked at personal geographies of reception, examining my own spatial reading of the two novels by Tove Jansson, *Sculptor’s Daughter* and *Fair Play*, as well as texts written about her, such as biographies, online articles and press publications. I

looked at my socio-spatial position as a ‘situated’ reader, to analyze how this situatedness influences the way I read the texts by and about Jansson. In addition to my own experience of the city and the interplay of my belongings (and non-belongings), previously constructed narratives of Jansson’s life – told by researchers, media, site managers and businesses in different ways – influenced the reading.

I have used autoethnography as a method, which allowed me to consider my personal response in the course of engagement with the texts and during the fieldwork in Helsinki. As I currently reside in the city, places I encountered with biographical connections to Jansson also have personal memories and meanings attached to them. While my previous geographical experience affected the way I interpret, imagine and ‘locate’ the texts, the process also happened in reverse: the text I read also affected my perception of familiar spaces, adding a new dimension to them.

I concentrated on the notions of belonging and non-belonging as they appear in my reading of the texts and in the course of the fieldwork. Jansson’s (non)belonging as an author seemed to echo my own in-betweenness as a reader, researcher and a foreign-born Finnish resident. In my spatial reading we both appear to be ‘in-between’: not quite belonging, but not really outsiders.

As was previously mentioned, based on the reader’s situatedness, the work will not have the same meaning for everyone (Brooks and Browne 2012), and possible interpretations of the text by different audiences and in different contexts need to be taken into consideration when analyzing audience response. I acknowledge that my reading and the meanings I assign to Jansson’s works and places with connections to her are influenced by my own rather privileged position – that of a white European scholar, with enough time on my hands to engage with fiction and wander around the city in search of sites with literary connections. I recognize that for other readers, social dimension and collectively attributed meanings can be of great importance. However, in my spatial reading, the individual dimension (Antonsich 2010b) also appears prominently: while I share liberal views and values with a large proportion of my generation within the population, I am more likely to see ‘myself’ in the novels also due to my beliefs, research interests, career choices, and preferences with regards to literature; my spatial experience is also highly personal – the memories and experience of Helsinki are my own and have meanings which are not collectively shared.

Literary works are always situated, written in specific context with certain intentions, by authors whose position and experience affected the way they produced the text. Even widely known and appreciated texts might not appeal to all in a similar way: readers’ positions with regards to, for example, socioeconomic class, gender, cultural and ethnic groups, and the context in which the text is read may result in different interpretations (Sharp 2000; Crang 2003). Readers’ individual and collective interpretations can go against commonly accepted or intended interpretations of the texts (Sharp 2000). Such ‘not-ideal’ or ‘resistant readers’ (Hones 2013) create their own readings and assign different meanings to the texts. In time, widely shared collective interpretation of the texts might change in response to a changing sociopolitical climate. The meanings attributed to the texts are likely to find reflections in the way places with connections to the texts and their authors are perceived and experienced (Squire 1994; Herbert 1996).

To conclude, I will briefly consider the possible implications of different readerships developing their own understanding of and modes of engagement with Jansson's work and places associated with her. Although her most famous creations, the Moomins, are often viewed as part of the heteronormative family-centered ideological framework, reading Jansson's novels, diaries and correspondence, as well as recent biographies and press articles provides a different picture, allowing for her works and the spaces she inhabited to be interpreted in a new light. At the same time, as her works are found valuable in new contexts, not all readers might find them understandable and relatable.

While for international readers Jansson's works can undoubtedly be significant and visiting places associated with her can be of personal importance, I would like to consider also non-native Finnish residents as potential readers of her works. Officially determined belonging often means that people are legally allowed to come and stay (Yuval-Davis 2006). But even if they are seen as 'belonging' to the country, do foreign-born residents and citizens have any claim on cultural productions of their new home? Even if they 'belong,' do the writers and their work 'belong' to them? Is Jansson's Helsinki their Helsinki? Are they 'allowed' to participate in the spatial event of the text (McRae Andrew 2018)? How will their views and experiences (re)shape the understanding of Jansson's works and in which ways could it affect the way places connected to her are perceived? While I have only touched on the subject of different readerships with my personal and very subjective account in this study, future research can further investigate how various situated readerships – including foreign-born residents of Nordic countries as well as citizens with immigrant backgrounds – engage with the works of Tove Jansson and other Scandinavian authors. It would be especially useful to look at a variety of existing individual and collective readings and interpretations of the works of children's literature as well as LGBTQ+ literature in the Nordic countries.

The recent Finnish biopic film *Tove* (2020), produced in Swedish language, opens up the details about Jansson's life which might not have previously been widely known, especially to audiences outside of Finland and Sweden. As her story is being presented to wider viewership, places with connections to Jansson, and also her works, might acquire new meanings.

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and measures and restrictions associated with it, 'exploring' cities (and, where possible, regions) where one resides might become a trend; one of the ways to 'augment' (Sandvik and Waade 2008) the familiar spaces may be through tracing connections to fiction and authors' biographies.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Finland, both Finnish and Swedish languages have official status. Helsinki is one of Finland's officially bilingual municipalities where cities, towns and streets carry names in both Finnish and Swedish, and street signs are provided in both languages. In this article, I have used the Finnish name for Helsinki, as it is more widely known, while the names of the streets and neighborhoods are given in Finnish and Swedish (the latter in brackets).

<sup>2</sup> Observations at the sites related to Tove Jansson are documented in several blog entries in an online blog dedicated to art and literary studies (<https://aurorahorizonscene.wixsite.com/aurorahorizon>), published in collaboration with Elina Huttunen.

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## IV

# THE DISTANT SNOWY LAND WHERE ROUNDED CREATURES DWELL: EXPERIENCING MOOMIN-RELATED NOSTALGIA AND BELONGING IN FINLAND

by

Evgenia Amey, 2021

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# The distant snowy land where rounded creatures dwell: Experiencing Moomin-related nostalgia and belonging in Finland

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## Abstract

With the release of the *Moominvalley* (2019–) animated TV series, the Moomin characters again appear on screens across the world. Whether this newest adaptation of Tove Jansson’s Moomin books and comic strips will initiate a new ‘Moomin boom’ remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the re-appearance of the Moomins in international media has sparked a resurgence of nostalgia among audiences already familiar with the characters. This article draws on authored English-language press articles (notably, ‘My family and other Moomins’ by Rhianna Pratchett, published in *The Guardian* in 2018) featuring authors’ reflections on their visits to places with connections to the Moomins and Tove Jansson in Finland, in light of their personal histories of engagement with the Moomin stories through books and other media. The personal importance of Jansson’s works for these members of the audience is revealed through analysing the notions of belonging and nostalgia in their accounts. On a wider sociocultural level, the findings demonstrate how values associated with Jansson’s texts are renegotiated in new contexts and how her works are found relevant in times of contemporary crises. In addition, the data show how Finland is imagined as a fairytal-esque land, both the home of the writer and even of the Moomins themselves.

Keywords: belonging; Finland; media-induced tourism; Moomin; Tove Jansson

## Introduction

The new Finnish-British animated TV series *Moominvalley* (2019–) is, to date, the latest adaptation of the Moomin books and comic strips, originally written and illustrated by Finnish-Swedish artist and writer Tove Jansson (1914–2001). Initially an artistic and literary side project, intended by the creator as a sort of escapist activity for herself during the years of World War II (Westin 2014), the first book in the series, *The Moomins and the Great Flood*, was first published in Swedish in 1945. In subsequent years, the scope of the project grew, with the characters achieving international popularity in the 1950s. *The Hobgoblin’s Hat* (originally published in Swedish in 1948), the third book in the series and the first to be translated into English in 1950 (also known in translation as *Finn Family Moomintroll*), introduced the Moomins to Anglophone audiences. The

Moomin comic strip, published in the British *Evening News* (1954–1975) and subsequently in a number of international newspapers, helped further popularise the characters. In the years that followed, the Moomins became a hit in Europe and North America, appearing in a number of country-specific screen productions, on theatre stages and on a line of merchandise. The characters were thrust into the spotlight once again in the 1990s, following a Japanese-Finnish-Dutch animated adaptation which resulted in another so-called ‘Moomin boom’ and made the fictional creatures famous in several Asian countries (Westin 2014).

As the *Moominvalley* adaptation, which so far includes two seasons, once again (re)introduces the characters to viewers worldwide, it remains to be seen whether it can inspire a similar popularity spike for the Moomins and make the stories popular among new and younger audiences. Nevertheless, the production has resulted in a resurgence of nostalgia among the audiences already familiar with the characters, either from the books and comics or earlier screen adaptations.

This paper draws on authored press articles from British online newspapers (notably, ‘My family and other Moomins’ by Rhianna Pratchett, published in *The Guardian* in 2018), which feature authors’ reflections on their visits to places with connections to the Moomins and Tove Jansson in Finland. Using qualitative content analysis, I examine how the visitors experience these places, in light of their personal histories of engagement with the Moomin stories through books and other media, and how notions of belonging appear in these accounts considering the personal importance of the narratives to these members of the audience. In addition, I look at how, in these press publications, Finland is imagined and represented as a country in relation to Jansson’s biography and works.

The focus on tourists’ personal experiences has been relatively common in recent studies on popular media-induced travel (see e.g. van Es and Reijnders 2016; Yu and Xu 2018). A qualitative approach is currently often used in contemporary studies when researching the phenomenon; studies draw extensively on material generated during research (e.g. during participant observation, interviews and focus groups), but also, increasingly, on online user-generated material such as reviews and blogs (e.g. Månsson 2011; Watson 2013), focusing on textual as well as visual and audio-visual material like tourist photographs (e.g. Kim 2010) and videos (e.g. Månsson 2011). In the current study, the choice to use authored press articles – written by professional journalists and writers and published in major British newspapers – gives an opportunity not only to look at how the reporters describe their visitor experiences but also to examine how they are presented to the intended audience, as these accounts can potentially influence wider press readership.

### **(Re)introducing the Moomins: rounded creatures from a faraway snowy land**

The Moomin book series notably appears among the most known 20th century European children's literature titles. Despite the stories being labelled 'for children', Jansson did not have a specific intention to write for younger audiences (Westin 2014). The books are recognized for their cross-generational appeal (Harju 2009), often featuring 'adult' themes like danger, death, loneliness and longing; the stories were inspired, among other things, by global events and Jansson's private life and feature fictionalized versions of her family members, friends and acquaintances (Westin 2014).

In addition to the book series, written and illustrated by Jansson, and the comic strip, the production of which Jansson's brother Lars took over in later years, the characters appeared in a number of screen adaptations and stage productions, especially in European countries and in Japan. Some productions were made with the involvement of the author; others were more independent and, at times, less faithful to the source text. Of all the screen productions, perhaps the most influential internationally were the 1990–1992 Japanese-Finnish-Dutch animated adaptations *Tanoshii Mūmin Ikka (Delightful Moomin Family)* which included anime series and a feature film. The partially crowdfunded *Moominvalley* (2019–), produced by Finnish studio Gutsy Animations and directed by Steve Box, is the latest adaptation to date.

The Moomins are almost ever-present in contemporary public and private life in Finland, habitually used in branding and featured on a variety of products. However, the Moomins' (re)appearance through the new animated adaptation might bring back memories for international audiences, who are not commonly surrounded by the characters in everyday life, of their first encounters with the stories, either through books or earlier adaptations. The instances of reacquaintance and re-engagement with the stories and the author through visits to related sites in Finland are at the centre of this research.

There are a number of sites with biographical connections to Tove Jansson in Finland – primarily in Helsinki, where she lived for the greater part of her life, and on the Finnish archipelago, where she used to spend summers. Her works are exhibited in the Helsinki Art Museum; the Moomin Museum (2020) in Tampere, in Central Finland, mainly features exhibitions dedicated to Jansson's famous characters, but also sheds light on her life and other work. In addition, there are a number of Moomin-centred places in Finland, popular with both local and international visitors. Apart from commercial Moomin-themed cafes and shops, Moominworld (2020) theme park is located on the southwest coast of Finland.

### **Theoretical framework: Media-induced travel and belonging**

The chosen instances of visiting locations with connections to works of fiction and their author fall under the wider category of travel induced by media productions; in this paper I primarily use the terms *media-induced* and *fiction-*

*inspired travel*. The phenomenon encompasses an older established practice of *literary tourism* (Herbert 2001; Watson 2006), as well as more recent forms of popular leisure activity, such as travelling to sites with connections to screen productions (e.g. Kim 2010). Broader terms like *media tourism* (Reijnders 2011a) and *pop culture tourism* (Lundberg and Lexhagen 2014) have been used to reflect a variety of productions that can inspire travel, including music, comics and games. While the current study centres on visits inspired by literary/artistic works (the Moomin books and comics), their creator's biography as well as adaptations, for theoretical purposes I draw on earlier studies which focus on a variety of different media productions.

Representations found in the media affect the way people imagine locations they have never visited. Fiction, whether in the form of literary works, cinematic productions or other media, has the potential to make members of the audience feel 'familiar' with locations they have never visited through engagement with the narratives (Iwashita 2006; Reijnders 2016). Such spatial attachments formed through fiction have been conceptualized by several researchers in terms of *belonging* (Kim 2010; Reijnders 2016; van Es and Reijnders 2016; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018). Similarly, notions of belonging have been observed in the context of the social experience surrounding fiction consumption and fiction-inspired travel (e.g. Kim 2010; Reijnders 2016). While belonging remains a vaguely defined concept, the use of which varies depending on the context (Antonsich 2010a, 2010b; Lähdesmäki et al. 2016), different aspects of it – including spatial, sociocultural and political (e.g. Yuval-Davis 2006) – have drawn researchers' attention, and it can present a useful conceptual tool for media tourism scholars.

Looking at spatial belonging – affective attachment to space – beyond the context of familiarity, 'home', and rootedness (Morley 2001), opens up opportunities to analyse how attachments can be formed in relation to spaces encountered via media and specifically via fiction. Although in the earlier studies on literary tourism, belonging as a concept was not generally used, the sociocultural and political dimensions of literary sites have often been highlighted (e.g. Herbert 2001; Robinson and Andersen 2002; Watson 2006), with an emphasis on collectively constructed meanings attributed to known literary works, authors and places with connections to them. Furthermore, the social aspect of belonging in the context of media-induced travel has been examined in more recent studies in relation to personal networks, including family and friends (Lee 2012) as well as interest groups and fan communities (e.g. Buchmann, Moore and Fisher 2010; Reijnders 2011b; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018).

Members of the audience are often drawn to places with connections to stories which are meaningful to them. Reijnders (2016), in his study drawing on semi-structured interviews, establishes that each individual has a so-called 'treasure trove' of favourite stories – encountered through a variety of media, including literature, film and TV – which are likely to affect individual travel choices: he observes that many of these personally significant narratives are

those that respondents “read or saw in their youth and which they strongly associate with their youth and the time period associated with it” (678). Other studies on travel related to children’s and young adult fiction similarly demonstrate that narratives encountered during the formative years which created a lasting impression can remain important later in a person’s life, affecting the choice of travel destinations (Gothie 2016; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018) and being integrated into personal worldview and value systems (Squire 1994, 1996; Reijnders 2016; also Hasebrink and Paus-Hasebrink 2016). Several researchers have also pointed out how, when visiting locations with connections to known authors, the visits served to reaffirm one’s individual and also collective cultural values (Squire 1994, 1996; Herbert 2001; Yu and Xu 2016), which echoes Yuval-Davis’s (2006) observation on the importance of shared values for communal belonging and on collective attachment to material space. Nostalgic sentiments – such as longing for a romanticized and idealized past, both collective and personal (Holbrook 1993) – often appear in relation to narratives that have been familiar since the earlier years, and similar notions have been observed by researchers who focused on adult visitors travelling to sites related to children’s and young adult fiction (e.g. Squire 1994, 1996; Lee 2012; Gothie 2016).

## Materials and Methods

The data chosen for the study consist of five authored press articles published online in the British newspapers *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *Metro* between 2014 and 2019. The underlying theme of these pieces, on the basis on which they were selected, is their focus on the works of Tove Jansson. The first article that was chosen for analysis, ‘My family and other Moomins’ (published in *The Guardian* in 2018) by Rhianna Pratchett, an English game and comic book writer, features her personal reflections on the importance of the Moomin books and describes her experience of visiting Moominworld theme park in Finland. This article has helped establish the criteria for choosing the other four publications: first, the authors have visited sites in Finland with connections to either Jansson or her works and second, in their respective pieces they reflect on the personal and/or societal importance of Jansson’s works. The search for publications was conducted on several English-language newspaper websites which provide free online access to publications, using the search terms ‘Tove Jansson’, ‘Moomin’ and ‘Finland’ in different combinations and with modifications. The sample found through the search was further narrowed down by applying the criteria described above.

While there are many more press publications and much more user-generated material focusing on Jansson and her artistic and literary works in English-language media which are worthy of being studied, to ensure consistency and limit the amount of textual data for analysis, I decided to concentrate on the articles published in the British newspapers mentioned above. For ethical reasons and due to the difficulty of obtaining permission for

the use of data, I chose to use only authored press articles and exclude, for example, personal blogs and discussions on social media.

Even though the chosen press articles are personal accounts of visiting places with connections to Jansson and the Moomins in Finland – sometimes focusing on only one location, and in other cases on several – they are also press publications, produced by professional writers and journalists with audiences in mind. The focus of each article is connected to the choice of the sites visited and the type of visit, although to clearly categorise them might be difficult based on the information provided in these publications. For Rhianna Pratchett as well as for English writer, actress and journalist Tracy-Ann Oberman (article published in *The Independent* in 2015), their travels were primarily family trips; Lisa Allardice's visit (*The Guardian*, 2019) was most certainly part of a work assignment, while with regards to the other two articles – by journalists Kate Simon (*The Independent*, 2014) and Yvette Caster (*Metro*, 2019) – the same can be assumed. The authors' personal and, in most cases, professional interest in Jansson's works can be observed in all chosen publications, and all of the writers were already familiar with the Moomin characters.

While, due to the defined criteria, the selected sample is rather small, the data selection method nevertheless corresponds to the focus of the study, and the textual data found in the five articles provide rich material for analysis. The five articles were closely examined using qualitative content analysis, a method suitable for “the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1278). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify different approaches to content analysis: when using *conventional content analysis*, the coding categories emerge from the data; on the other hand, in *directed content analysis*, the coding process is guided by a theory or results of previous studies. The choice of the approach depends on the aim of the research, and the current study uses a mix of conventional and directed approaches. A directed approach is utilized as I apply the theories of belonging in studying fiction-inspired travel, as well as referring to previous studies on the topic and using corresponding codes to analyse the data; simultaneously, I kept the option of using a conventional approach for codes derived from the themes that emerge directly from the data.

After reading through the data several times, initial observations were made on the coding categories. During subsequent detailed readings, the coding scheme was developed: the themes found in the data were correlated to chosen theories of belonging and findings of earlier studies of fiction-inspired travel. Furthermore, another wider theme relating to how Finland is envisioned in connection with the stories emerged from the data and was coded accordingly. The codes were grouped into wider categories reflecting the major themes that appeared in the data.



## Results

Before presenting the results in the following subsections, I will provide brief observations on the style and content of the chosen publications. The writing style differs among the articles; although all pieces feature authors' reflections and observations, some disclose a more personal dimension (Oberman 2014; Pratchett 2018; Caster 2019), while others tend towards a more fact-based approach (Simon 2014; Allardice 2019). The two visits covered in the articles published in *The Independent* (Simon 2014; Oberman 2015) were sponsored by *Visit Finland* ([visitfinland.com](http://visitfinland.com)). While Simon's article features a list of sights to see in the vicinity in the endnote, the touristic aspect is especially notable in Oberman's account, as well as in Caster's piece in *Metro* (2019) – these two extensively feature travel advice in the texts of the articles, making them similar in style to popular tourist blogs.

It is also important to note the time of publication. The earliest published article, by Kate Simon (2014), was connected to the centenary of Jansson's birth, and the sites she visited had biographical ties to the author, as well as to her later prose and artistic works. The article by Oberman (2015) acknowledged the connection to *Moomins on the Riviera* (2015), the film adaptation in which Oberman voiced Moominmamma in the English version, while the various attractions visited in the course of the trip included both those with ties to Jansson as well as to the Moomins. The three pieces published later – one in 2018 (Pratchett) and two in 2019 (Allardice, Caster) – all refer to the then-upcoming *Moominvalley* series. Lisa Allardice, who attended the premiere of the series in Finland, in her piece centres fully on the new series, going into production details and referring to interviews and discussions with the scriptwriters.

While my focus is on instances of travel inspired by Tove Jansson's works and biography, it is impossible to analyse the visits to sites with connections to the author and the Moomins without looking at them in the context of prior engagement with Jansson's works. The importance of the pre-visit stage, including personal histories of engagement with stories and meanings associated with them, has been emphasized in a number of earlier studies on media-induced travel (e.g. Dung and Reijnders 2013; Reijnders 2016). Thus, the first theme I concentrate on is familiarity with the stories. I will then proceed to look at the meanings and values associated with the narratives, both in personal and wider social contexts. Next, the descriptions of visitor experience will be analysed and a perceived connection between Jansson, the Moomins and Finland will be examined.

### *Histories of engagement with the Moomin stories and personal importance of the narratives*

"I don't remember the precise moment I was introduced to the Moomins. They were always just there; a cosy, comforting and slightly weird presence in my

childhood that has stayed with me”, writes Rhianna Pratchett in her 2018 piece in *The Guardian*. Reflecting on her own prior acquaintance with the stories and the reasons they became important to her, she compares her earlier life experience, in terms of the environment and family structure and dynamics, to that of the fictional characters, presenting a parallel between herself and protagonist Moomintroll:

Undoubtedly, part of the appeal of the books was that my early life was quite Moominish. I lived in a little pink cottage on the edge of a valley in deepest, darkest rural Somerset.

My parents were quite Moominish themselves. I identified with young Moomintroll, being an only child and having a writer for a father and a mother who loved her garden. (Pratchett, *The Guardian*, 2018)

In relation to Pratchett’s observation on similarities between the fictional surroundings of Moominvalley and her own geographical experience, Reijnders (2016) has found that stories are often found attractive if the places depicted in them remind readers and viewers of places familiar from childhood and adolescence. Thus, the affective attachments to places can be ‘transferred’ to works of fiction and in this way spatial belonging can appear in relation to locations described in books and depicted in cinematic productions (Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018). For example, Squire (1994, 1996) observed how nostalgia for rural environments and ‘simple pleasures’ of the earlier years can also be associated with works of fiction.

Rhianna Pratchett further notes the connection of the Moomin books to family history:

Moomin-related vocabulary entered the Pratchett lexicon and we would often remind each other to “throw the woolly trousers to the crocodile” when travelling abroad. This will make sense if you’ve read the fantastic *Comet in Moominland*. (Pratchett 2018)

The article marked the third anniversary of the death of her father, popular fantasy writer Terry Pratchett. She writes about him building her a model of Moominvalley during her childhood and teaching her “to make waterwheels out of leaves and sticks, the way Moominpappa does in *The Exploits of Moominpappa*”.

In her article in *Metro*, Yvette Caster (2019) similarly remembers her own earlier engagement with and attachment to the Moomin stories, referring to herself as a Moomin ‘fan’:

Moomins have had a place in my heart since childhood – I even named my hamster Little My – and it was fascinating revisiting the characters and books as an adult.

Animated series Moominvalley, set to air in spring, will introduce Tove Jansson to a new generation, although grown up fans like me will be watching too. (Yvette Caster, *Metro*, 2019)

As these glimpses of personal histories demonstrate, early encounters with the stories are fondly remembered. In addition to observations on the important role of fictional narratives in people's lives (Felski 2008) and the personal importance of specific texts (Hones 2008), it has been previously indicated that stories encountered during the formative years often hold lasting significance for members of the audience (Squire 1994; Reijnders 2016) and can be associated with important interpersonal relationships (Hasebrink and Paus-Hasebrink 2016) – particularly with family members, as in Rhianna Pratchett's case, and friends. As the Moomins have been present in Pratchett's and Caster's lives for a long time, they became connected to childhood memories and bound to personal histories.

The authors of the chosen articles indicate different media channels through which they encountered the Moomins: for Rhianna Pratchett, it was the books; Yvette Caster (2019) refers to the cinematic adaptation (*The Moomins*) which was screened in the UK in the 1980s and the same reference appears in Lisa Allardice's account (2019) of interviewing *Moominvalley* scriptwriters Mark Huckerby and Nick Ostler: "Like so many Brits who grew up in the 80s, Huckerby and Ostler were only familiar with the Moomins from the cult cartoon".

It is worth noting how, in line with previous research, the 'darker side' of children's fiction is often ignored, underplayed or forgotten in the course of time: Squire (1994, 1996) observed this trend among visitors to Hill Top Farm in connection to Beatrix Potter's books, and this seems to be the case also with Tove Jansson's Moomin books (Harju 2009). For Tracy-Ann Oberman (2015), for example, the Moomins are naturally recalled as round and jolly, enjoying the "beautiful simplicity of life under the stars in The Valley":

Remember the Moomins – those carefree, white, hippo-shaped characters who live in Moomin- valley? If you do, chances are your immediate reaction will be, 'awwww!'

There is something other-worldly and rather spiritual about the stories and drawings of the Moomin family. (Oberman, *The Independent*, 2015)

This commonly shared view of the characters and idealized versions of the fictional events tend to disregard the 'adult' themes (which, in truth, continuously feature in the Moomin books – those of fear, danger and loneliness) in favour of the idyllic landscape and carefree existence. At the same time, in Lisa Allardice's (2019) account, the 'adult' themes are repeatedly acknowledged: "It is striking how much fear shadows the novels: for all the sunshine and picnics, menace lurks behind every bush". Referring to the discussions with the new TV series creators, she writes:

As Huckerby observes, the novels 'go to some very dark places' and they have tried to reflect this in their adaptation. 'It is being billed as prime time drama for all the family,' Ostler says. 'It's not a kids' show.' (Allardice, *The Guardian*, 2019)

On a side note, the same is echoed in the recent article by Tom Holland (*The Guardian*, 2020), who not only emphasizes the darker themes in Jansson's books, specifically *Moominland Midwinter*, such as death, isolation and loneliness, but also underlines the books' relevance to the current situation surrounding the spread of COVID-19.

### *Perceived societal importance of Jansson's works*

To continue on the relevance and societal importance of the Moomins, Rhianna Pratchett's account features further notions on why Jansson's works were valued in her family:

Continuing my Moomin education, my parents taught me the importance of the natural world; of community, compassion and understanding. (Pratchett 2018)

She describes lasting emotional ties to the Moomin books which remained important to her and her family, especially during the difficult times surrounding the illness and death of her father.

When my father was lost in the murky depths of his Alzheimer's disease and couldn't sleep at night, I would read the Moomin books to him. As ever, it was comfort in a time of darkness. To us the Moomins meant love. (Pratchett 2018)

Both Rhianna Pratchett and Lisa Allardice refer to Terry Pratchett calling Tove Jansson "one of the greatest children's writers there has ever been" and contemplate the contemporary relevance of her works. From her own family history of engagement with Jansson's works, Pratchett connects it to a wider societal context, underlining their relevance in light of recent events – in all likelihood, Brexit and the rise of populism:

I delighted in the world Jansson created, one built upon themes such as friendship, love, tolerance and empathy. (Values my own country could do with embracing a little more at the moment – in fact, the Moomins should be required reading for anyone seeking to enter western politics.) (Pratchett 2018)

It has previously been indicated that individuals tend to connect their favourite narratives to ongoing events and reassess the meanings of the stories in new contexts (Hasebrink and Paus-Hasebrink 2016; Bolderman and Reijnders 2017). While nostalgia for the 'good old days' has often been connected to the exclusion of 'outsiders' – those with different sociocultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds (Morley 2001), Pratchett's warm remembrance of the rural setting and the days when children like herself were "relatively free to run around in nature, getting bruised, stung and muddy with little parental supervision" by no means implies turning away the 'Other' or trying to preserve the 'old ways' – which are inherently meant to exclude some groups.

Allardice also emphasizes that the books “resonate all too strongly with current conflicts, the plight of refugees and, with uncanny presentiment, today’s ecological crisis” and further observes:

This loving, lavishly produced adaptation couldn’t be more timely: never has there been a better moment to introduce the Moomins, with all their optimism, openness and hospitality, their deep connection with nature and anti-consumerist ethos (without ever being pompous – with the exception, perhaps, of Moominpappa), to a new audience, and hopefully readership. (Allardice 2019)

Briefly reminiscing about what the books mean for those already familiar with them, she ponders the reaction of the younger audiences to the new adaptation: “But whether Jansson speaks to generation Peppa Pig [...] is another matter” (Allardice 2019).

Although Jansson herself emphasized that the Moomin books were not intended as educational (Westin 2014), ideas she held naturally found a way into her works. Even though writers might not have didactic intentions, certain values, sometimes even conflicting with their views, might become associated with their works (Squire 1993, 1994, 1996), as texts are considered not only in a personal but also a wider sociocultural context. This is especially the case with ‘children’s’ fiction. While the Moomin books have remained popular since the 1950s, they have been criticized in the past for various reasons: their lack of didactic value; depicting a bourgeois lifestyle; presenting ‘traditional’ gender roles and reaffirming heterocentric norms (Westin 2014). In recent years Jansson’s life and works have been analysed in a new light both in research (e.g. Taipale 2018) and media (e.g. Dening 2017), often in relation to feminism and LGBTQ+ issues. In contrast to earlier presentations of the author as a motherly figure or, alternatively, keeping quiet about her sexuality, since the centenary of her birth in 2014, a number of media publications – including the official Moomin website, Moomin Characters Ltd. (2019) – shed light on Jansson’s same-sex relationships.

Simon, Oberman, Caster and Allardice all refer to Jansson’s sexuality and liberal political views. Oberman writes that Jansson was “brought up by free-thinking parents, and was later openly bisexual and by all accounts a pretty fantastic woman”. Allardice, in her detailed overview of Jansson’s works, refers to the fact that Jansson’s female lovers inspired characters in the Moomin books, and also recognizes that the Moomin family, even though they appeared to conform to heteronormative standards, were not meant to be a representation of an ideal family.

### *During the visit: Connecting to the stories, getting closer to the author*

In light of the shared family engagement with the Moomin stories and their lasting significance, Pratchett and her mother’s joint visit to Moominworld theme park was a profound experience for them both:

I recently got the opportunity to take my mother to Moominworld in Naantali, Finland, the beautiful, island-based theme park designed hand-in-hand with Jansson. My mother said that exploring a life-sized Moominhouse, and singing and dancing with Little My, made her feel like a child again. My heart soared. (Pratchett 2018)

A number of earlier studies (Buchmann, Moore and Fisher 2010; Kim 2010; Reijnders 2011a, 2016) underlined the centrality of the emotional connection to the story to understanding the experiences of tourists who travel to sites with connections to fiction. The above example also coincides with the results of several studies on theme park visits: even purposely created environments, 'genuine fakes' (Bom 2015) like theme parks, can enable meaningful experiences by allowing visitors to experience the sense of being 'at home' and to immerse themselves in familiar fictional narratives (Lee 2012; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018). Feeling like a child or allowing oneself to 'play' at the sites with connections to children's fiction was similarly observed by Gothie (2016) in her study on *Anne of Green Gables* tourism on Prince Edward Island.

Oberman's family trip to Finland involved visits to both author- and Moomin-related sites:

in a bid to get to know her [Moominmamma, the character Oberman voiced in *Moomins on the Riviera*] and Jansson's homeland, I took my eight-year old daughter and my husband off to explore Helsinki. (Oberman 2015)

The visits proved to be informational, as Caster and Simon, driven by their interest in the stories and the author, discovered previously unknown facts about Jansson and her works during their respective visits. Caster visited the Moomin Museum in Tampere as a "refresher course" on the Moomins, to renew her acquaintance with the characters before the new adaptation. During the visit she "discovered that their creator [...] was groundbreaking in her personal life as well as in her creative capacities".

Simon, during her author-centred trip to the Finnish archipelago, visited the island Klovharu where Jansson used to spend summers together with her partner, Tuulikki Pietilä. She refers to biographical facts and Jansson's later works, as well as to the information provided by her guide, a local sea captain who knew Jansson, her partner and her family. Referring to the visit as a 'pilgrimage' – a term often used to describe literary travellers who wish to get 'closer' to their favourite authors (Herbert 2001; Watson 2006), she writes about her visit to the island:

The tiny, remote retreat was a place where Tove could commune with nature, the life force of her work. I'm making my pilgrimage in the centenary year of her birth. (Simon, *The Independent*, 2014)

She provides detailed descriptions, drawing readers' attention to the tiniest details. The fact that the cabin where the two women lived remains almost unchanged invites projecting the author's (and her partner's) past presence onto lived space:

The small wooden house, which has been preserved just as it was left when the two women turned the key for the final time. [...]

The dining table, covered by a bright yellow oilskin with blue, green and orange flower-shaped splodges, was where Tove likely wrote her last melancholic Moomin stories, *Moominpappa at Sea* and *Moominvalley in November*. (Simon 2014)

She also makes connections to the Moomin stories:

We pass by Glosholm island, where once stood a lighthouse on which Tove modelled the Moomins' home. (Simon 2014)

As the examples above demonstrate, the visits described in the chosen publications have centred on the stories, the author, or both. While for Rhianna Pratchett, the instance she describes highlights the importance of reconnecting with or stepping into the narrative, others tell about their aim to understand the inspiration behind the works, learn more about Jansson and 'pay homage' to her by visiting her homeland.

### *Finland imagined through the lens of the Moomin stories and in connection to Jansson*

Connection to Finland already appears in the titles of three articles – those by Simon, Oberman and Caster. The country, known for its cold climate and often advertised for its natural beauty and connection with Santa Claus, can be perceived, to some extent, as exotic by overseas tourists and even for visitors from other parts of Europe. Similarly to how specific sites can be envisioned by non-residents based on media representations, countries can also be imagined through the lens of fiction: earlier studies have focused, for instance, on how fictional connections have inspired travel to England (Squire 1994; Iwashita 2006), Romania (Light 2009) and New Zealand (Buchmann, Moore and Fisher 2010; Peaslee 2011).

Worth mentioning is that while different versions of the Moomin origin story exist (one involving a drawing of a hideous creature on a wall of an outhouse), Jansson once notably revised the narrative of how the Moomins came to be when planning to enter the US market: she cited a snow-covered tree stump as the inspiration behind the Moomins' shape and colour (Westin 2014). Such a conscious marketing move supported the view that the cold and serene Nordic landscape of the author's home country inspired the characters' creation, at the same time exoticizing Finland and the Nordic countries for foreign audiences.

In a manner reminiscent of how Beatrix Potter set her anthropomorphic animal stories in places familiar to her (Squire 1994, 1996), Jansson got the geographical inspiration for her fictional locations from 'real' places in Finland, which can be traced (Markkanen 2016), as Simon does during her trip. As was indicated above, an opportunity to get to know the inspiration behind the

Moomin stories was explicitly stated as a reason for travelling to Finland in three of the chosen publications. Viewed in connection to the Moomin stories, Finland becomes constructed as an exotic, cold and somewhat fairytalesque place (Lovell 2019). The subtitle of Simon's article mentions a "fairy tale archipelago", and the reported 'magical' atmosphere is especially apparent in Oberman's account:

[...] the Hogwarts-esque house in which Tove Jansson grew up, at 4 Luotsikatu. Suomenlinna Fortress [...] the place has a *Game of Thrones* vibe  
Moominvalley-style setting of the train journey - vistas full of pine trees, lakes and rivers. (Oberman 2015)

She repeatedly makes connections to other literary and cinematic productions in the fantasy genre, including *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*, when describing Finnish cityscapes and "Moomin-esque landscapes". For her, the Art Nouveau and Art Deco architecture in Helsinki, the city name of which "sounds exciting and hip" contributes to the fairytalesque feeling. At the same time, Finland is considered 'trendy', as she describes the Design District with its "cobbled streets that are chock-full of creative cafés, art shops, and fashion".

While Oberman has a pre-existing image of Finland as magical, and what she finds during her visit seems to conform to her expectations, she also admits that "March is arguably not a great time to visit Finland. It's after the snowy, Northern Lights season, and before the long days of summer," describing the battle with the cold and the wind.

Similar to how New Zealand came to be perceived as the 'real' Middle-earth as a result of being used as a setting for the 2001–2003 *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Buchmann, Moore and Fisher 2010), Finland, as a country where Jansson lived and where the characters were conceived, becomes fictionalized. While Moominvalley can be considered one of the fantastical worlds that "cannot exist and they cannot be travelled to" (Laing and Frost 2012, 156), Finland, for visitors, becomes a representation of this fictional place.

## Conclusion

This study explored how the notions of belonging appear in five press articles centred around the authors' visits to sites with connections to Tove Jansson and her works in Finland. Published in major British newspapers – *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *Metro* – and authored by known reporters and writers like Rhianna Pratchett and Tracy-Ann Oberman, the coverage of the visits presented in these pieces is likely to reach wider audiences in the UK and abroad.

Earlier studies on media-induced travel (Kim 2010; Reijnders 2016; Waysdorf and Reijnders 2018) have emphasized the importance of prior engagement with and dedication to the narratives when analysing the experiences of visitors to sites with connections to fiction. In line with the previous research, the analysis of selected authored press articles shows that the



Moomin stories – intertwined with personal histories and associated with social attachments – remain important in adulthood and can affect individual travel choices.

Conceptualized in terms of social and cultural belonging, re-engagement with the Moomin stories, which were long familiar to these members of the audience, brings up associations with childhood and is sometimes connected with important interpersonal relationships. The authors of the articles also reflect on the themes which appear in the stories and values associated with Jansson's works – emphasizing inclusivity, hospitality and empathy. They reconsider the relevance of the Moomin texts in light of recent events, such as the rise of populism, the refugee crisis and climate change. While the selected articles were published before the COVID-19 pandemic, more recent media publications (Holland 2020) make the connection between the themes in the Moomin books and the current global health crisis.

Focusing on the spatial aspect of belonging in the analysis of fiction consumption and media-induced travel opened up possibilities of looking at how the stories can continue to be perceived as individually and collectively meaningful and how places with connections to them can be experienced through the lens of fiction and the author's biography. Visiting sites with ties to the fictional characters, even commercialized spaces like theme parks, invoked nostalgic sentiment and allowed a prompt 'return to childhood'. In addition, the material shows that Finland is imagined as a distant, alluring land and experienced by the authors of the articles as somewhat exotic and fairytal-esque as the model for the Moomin tales.

As the *Moominvalley* series introduces Tove Jansson's stories to new and younger audiences, the recently released Swedish-language biographical film *Tove* (2020), produced in Finland, aims to provide an account of her life, details of which have not been widely discussed in public until recently. The study provided insights on how spaces with biographical connections to Jansson as well as her works, including notably the Moomins, are imagined and experienced by visitors from the UK. As a result of the latest adaptation and the biographical film, these sites might acquire different meanings for both Finnish residents and international visitors, which invites further investigation.

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