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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; Dening 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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