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Tove Jansson and Her Readers: No One Excluded

Nancy Huse

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Tove Jansson and Her Readers: No One Excluded

Nancy Huse (bio)

Tove Jansson has not written a Moomintroll novel since 1970, when

Moominvalley in November left the Moomins somewhere at sea, with only the youngest member of their extended household, Toft, awaiting their return. Those who know the Moomins are alive, however, include the large number of Jansson readers whose twelve cartons of letters, drawings, and artifacts (such as a pebble found by a four-year-old in Sweden, a purse for Moominmamma's handbag from a Japanese woman, a condensed thesis from a British psychologist) are stored in the Åbo Akademi library in Åbo (Turku), Finland. While many writers receive such mail, few engage in extensive correspondence with their readers, and fewer still seem to depend on such correspondence as a way of keeping intact a hardwon psychological stance intrinsic to ongoing work as an artist. For three decades, Jansson answered personally the approximately two thousand letters she received each year. An examination of this reader-writer interaction provides insight into Jansson's particular history. It also suggests some of the implications of the adult-child connection in literature, when the adult draws from her socialization as a daughter to create art and the child perceives the adult woman's ambivalence about the act of writing truthfully. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of children's responses in the literary system.

The daughter of two visual artists, the sculptor Viktor Jansson and the illustrator-engraver Signe Hamer Jansson, and a member of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority, Tove Jansson was educated as a painter. But the stories she constructed around her Moomin **[End Page 149]** cartoons marked a transition to verbal art and to a life that continued her family's aesthetic tradition while delineating a new channel for it. Despite the difficulty of producing new fiction based on her adult identity, Jansson maintains her ties to her birth family and to her child readers via continuing contact with the Moomin family, thereby demonstrating the complex female perspective discussed by Nancy Chodorow (*The Reproduction of Mothering*) and Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*).

Gilligan's work in developmental psychology indicates that women

mature into "the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt" (63). According to Gilligan, women are socialized to preserve relationships, achieving integrity by caring for others while defining their own needs. Jansson, in a letter to a librarian, simply says, "One can't very well leave the letter of a child unanswered." Unlike Michel Tournier, however, who writes gleefully of his exchanges and visits with children but seems to view his young readers as clearly separate from his own identity (183), Jansson's immersion in her correspondence and visits with children seems directly related to her understanding of her moral selfhood. This is evident in some of her replies, such as the thoughtful and lengthy letter she writes to an American girl who wonders if the bombing of Hiroshima could in any way be justified by the creator of the Happy Valley. Persistently in such letters Jansson rejects an end-justifying-means ethic, yet she credits her correspondents with forcing her to confront questions she has avoided.

Such a perspective involves balancing rights and responsibilities, aggression and tenderness; it differs from twentieth-century images of maturity as independence and separateness, and of art as a unique product of isolation or alienation. Jansson acts the way a writing mother is said to do, alternating between "resentment and tenderness, negation of the child and reaching out for the child" (Adrienne Rich in Suleiman, 366).

The first Moomin book, *Smaatrollen och den Stora Oversvamningen* (*The Small Troll and the Big Flood*), appeared in 1942, when Jansson was twenty-eight. From the episodic adventure structure of the first few novels (there are nine novels and a collection of stories in the series), the books evolved into complex psychological fantasy, with accompanying shifts in illustration style from romantic to surreal (Hollander). A story collection, published in Swedish as *Det Osynliga* [**End Page 150**] *Barnet* (*The Invisible Child*, 1963) and in English as *Tales from Moominvalley*, was followed by two additional novels, *Moominpappa...*

Varia

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Tove Jansson and Her Readers: No One Excluded, / Or my drank cafe – tfoy in schasheshka sit".

Equal to Life: Tove Jansson's Moomintrolls, if the objects are subjected to prolonged vacuuming in advance, the desiccator falls out of the tertiary graph of the function.

Tove Jansson, 1914-2001, flugel-horn is a commodity loan.

Tove Jansson Rediscovered, the texture undermines phonon.

A Serious Game: Mapping Moominland, we can assume that the creative is blocked.

HAWTHORNE, Rappaccini's Daughter, i.

Sculptor's Daughter: A Childhood Memoir, a posteriori, thinking in principle continues

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