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“Hell, what a chance to have a go at the classics”:

Tove Jansson’s take on *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Hunting of the Snark*, and *The Hobbit*

Abstract: Tove Jansson is above all known as the creator of the Moomin world which includes novels, short stories, picturebooks and comic strips. Between 1958 and 1966, however, she produced over a hundred illustrations offering a novel and idiosyncratic take on three English classics. With one exception, for over four decades these editions were not reprinted outside of Sweden and Finland. This article examines selected aspects of Jansson’s visual translations with references to the original illustrations and her own works. It proposes to consider these commissions as following some of the ideas expressed in her 1961 essay “Den lömska barnboksförfattaren” (“The Deceitful Children’s Author”), especially with regard to elements of “horror” and “the disguised”. Furthermore, by treating these illustrations as one consistently developed project, this article traces the strategies the artist used for her declared dissociation from the Moomin style.

Keywords: Tove Jansson, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Hunting of the Snark*, *The Hobbit*, illustrations, classics, nonsense literature, fantasy, visual translations

In the second half of the 1950s, the Moomins were at the peak of their fame. Unexpectedly, in 1958 Tove Jansson took on a commission. She agreed to illustrate the Swedish translation of Lewis Carroll’s 1876 nonsense poem *The Hunting of the Snark: An Agony in Eight Fits* (*Snarkjakten*, 1959). In 1966 Swedish readers would see her take on

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865, *Alice i Underlandet*), while in between the nonsense classics Jansson, encouraged by Astrid Lindgren, illustrated J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again*, 1937 (*Bilbo, en hobbits äventyr*, 1962). The choice of depicted subjects and the overall aesthetic of these secondary worlds as re-envisioned by Jansson, represent a unique juxtaposition of her own preoccupations and idiosyncratic style with a very English tradition – both literary and visual. Importantly, she worked on these commissions in the period during which some of the key books in the Moomin series appeared as well as her influential essay “Den lömska barnboksförfattaren” (“The Deceitful Children’s Author”, 1961). This artistic journey gave Jansson an opportunity to “have a go at the classics” (qtd. in Westin, *Tove Jansson* 327) and explore new techniques but it also marked a declared attempt to distance herself from the familiar style of the Moomin world.¹

Tove Jansson’s authorized biography by Boel Westin includes an essential discussion of all three commissions within a wider context of her life and work (325–51). References to single titles can be found in studies focusing on various Moomin books, for instance, in a compelling comparison between *Moominpappa at Sea* (1965) and Carroll’s *Snark* (Druker 114–25) which looks at maps as meta-artistic devices. The Swedish version is also briefly discussed among other illustrated editions of the poem (Goodacre 35). Unsurprisingly perhaps, *Alice* has drawn most critical attention in terms of an innovative portrayal of the main protagonist (Chimori 155–64), interesting discrepancies between images and translated text in the Finnish edition (Oittinen 96,142–46), and in comprehensive analyses of parallels between Carroll’s heroine and Susanna from Jansson’s 1977 picturebook entitled *The Dangerous Journey* (Kåreland and Werkmäster 116–18; Kåreland 11–21; Westin, “Resan till mumindalen” 237–240; cf Nikolajeva and Scott 98–101). Finally, a long overdue discussion of the response to Jansson’s illustrations to *The Hobbit* (Sundmark 1–17) provides a good pretext for reassessing this substantial body of artwork which, with one exception, was not reprinted outside of Sweden and Finland for over forty years.

This article examines only selected aspects of Tove Jansson’s take on the classics with a twofold purpose in view. Firstly, by analysing the works in order of their appearance, I discuss the main features of these new visual translations as well as recurrent (or reworked) motifs, also with reference to the original, “benchmark” illustrations. While doing so, I attempt to determine to what extent the artist’s creative work implements her aesthetic principles laid out in the afore-

mentioned essay. This has been discussed in relation to the Moomin books (Westin, "Stenarnas berättelser" 9-18) but not the three classics. Secondly, by proposing to treat these commissioned works as a consistent project developed in three stages, I look at the strategies Jansson used for her declared motivation to move away from the Moomin world. The latter issue essentially touches upon the concern she herself voiced: "They don't really look like Moomins, do they?" (qtd. in Westin, *Tove Jansson* 349).

Worlds imbued with horror: Tove Jansson's artistic approach

In May 1958 Tove Jansson was approached by Åke Runnquist (1919-1991) of the publishing firm Bonniers. Together with Lars Forssell (1928-2007) he translated *The Hunting of the Snark* and believed the quest of rendering in images Carroll's nonsense epic might appeal to Jansson's creative sensibility (Westin, *Tove Jansson* 327). Although she had illustrated other authors' books before, these predated the years of Moomins' popularity. Boel Westin portrays the period of Jansson's life from the late 1950s as one of intense artistic activity tying together an ambition to combine her career as a painter with the pursuit of writing non-Moomin books - something alluded to in "Den lömska barnboksförfattaren" ("Stenarnas berättelser" 11). Arguably, the commissions gave her some room for creative freedom, although less than she had hoped. According to Westin's account, Jansson experienced a palpable and growing discrepancy between her original artistic approach to each classic and the final outcome. In short, her dream of exploring "horror" and "macabre" (*Tove Jansson* 328-9, 346 and 348), seems to have been considerably curbed by the publisher, especially in the case of *Alice* (329).

The idea of children's "delight in the gruesome and macabre" (Jansson 9, my transl.) and giving the readers glimpses into the incomprehensible and strange, is also expressed in aforementioned essay which explores the "deceitful" or "trickster" children's author's need for escapism.² There Jansson talks, among other things, about the necessary presence of "intense horror sensation [...] in every honest children's book" (9, my transl.). It is not just the horror. She finds young readers to be "spellbound by what's unspoken and disguised" (Jansson 9, qtd. in Westin, *Tove Jansson* 338). This essay, first a talk to students, appeared shortly after the publication of *The Snark*. As I will argue, the idea of "the disguised" developed within it, is carried out in all three commissions, with Jansson simultaneously deploying various strategies in order to imbue these worlds with

horror, even though not to the extent of “a pathological nightmare worthy of Hieronymus Bosch” as she had originally intended (329). It should be stressed, however, that in her illustrations the horror element tends to be balanced with humour.

Illustrating Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*

Glimpses of humour emerge on the first pages of Jansson's *Snark* – under the title we find a big-eyed hunting crew armed with forks and, trailing behind them, the Beaver armed with curiosity. He reappears solo, under the table of contents, pushing a bottle of ink on a wheelbarrow. This allusion to a scene in *Fit the Fifth*, here becomes a meta-artistic device introducing her black and white pictures. Remarkably, *Snarkjakten* with Jansson's images has so far been the only edition of Carroll's nonsense epic in Sweden. First published in 1876, with illustrations by Henry Holiday (1839–1927), the poem has been most aptly summarized as describing “with infinite humour the impossible voyage of an improbable crew to find an inconceivable creature” (Williams and Madan 115). The degree of conceivability has been tested in numerous visual renderings of the poem for over a century. Although it is commonly reproduced with Holiday's images, prior to 1959 *The Hunting of the Snark* had been illustrated by a number of prominent artists including Peter Newell, Edward A. Wilson, Carl Cobblestick, Mervyn Peake and Max Ernst.³ Jansson's correspondence suggests that she was not familiar with any of these editions, not even the first one (Westin, *Tove Jansson* 327).

The poem, originally accompanied by nine images, consists of eight parts (or “fits”). Jansson's illustrations are detailed, mostly dark but clear. She introduces a very lucid visual structure: each fit is framed by one full-page scene and a small vignette at the end, which tends to feature one protagonist and encapsulate the final verses. Simple yet effective, these vignettes provide a comic-relief effect – a stripe of tiny squares at the end of *Fit the First*, for instance, turns out to be the Baker's forty-two boxes (together with his umbrella) left on the beach. In fact, other relevant objects like clues for the readers to find, pop up in unexpected places, among them cups, presumably left by the Snark. A touch of humour also marks her take on the poem's protagonists.

Depicting Carroll's extraordinary assemblage of characters is Jansson's most radical departure from the original imagery. With the exception of the Beaver, Holiday draws realistic human figures with touches of the grotesque and caricature (e.g. over-sized heads).

The Bellman or his bell serve as a linking element between the frames (cf Goodacre 12–13). In Jansson's version the Snark hunters resemble some of the secondary characters from Moominvalley, in particular the hobby-loving Hemulens. This is not, however, to the book's disadvantage; rather, it immediately places the quest within the realm of the fantastic, creates a plausible secondary world, albeit with familiar features, and perhaps makes it more immediately accessible to a younger audience. And while Hemulens tend to look alike, here each of the ten quest participants is individualized by relevant attributes, clothes, headpieces and, not least, a distinctive nose. Interestingly, although the Bellman appears in four illustrations, the Baker – with his hair always raised up as if in anticipation of the final scene – and the Beaver – whose appearance is changed with an odd looking net of laces on his head – seem to be equally, if not more, prominent. The former is always terrified, the latter is mostly curious. With only one exception, the portrayed episodes appear crowded with the chief protagonists and other side creatures, usually placed against the backdrop of the night sky.

Apart from the resemblance to the Moominvalley inhabitants, there are themes in the poem immediately reminiscent of Jansson's own work: a quest, a boat trip, a scary creature lurking in the background and, above all, a catastrophe. While the main heroes are portrayed as somewhat comic (or tragicomic), the horror Jansson had aimed to explore, is evoked through her depiction of the scenery and the nonsense monsters. She uses the whole spectrum – from showing them, through disguising, to leaving them completely hidden. The artist chooses, for instance, to capture the scene in which the Banker is attacked by Bandersnatch – its claws, wings and teeth – all drawn with straight lines – seem equally sharp and dangerous. The creature appears out of the dark and dominates the whole frame while the Banker is duly terrified. None of the images, however, reveal the Snark. We see him neither in the court scene (just his wig and monocle) nor in "The Vanishing", the final fit in which the Baker disappears upon encountering a Snark that turns out to be a Boojum. This pivotal moment seems to be the one favoured by all illustrators (Goodacre 10). Holiday had produced a drawing of the elusive creature but to his disappointment Carroll rejected it preferring to leave "the unimaginable" unimagined (Cohen and Wakeling 33). Jansson follows the author's intention in her own way – with an even stronger emphasis on the close presence of "the unimaginable". Her interpretation of the final part is much more dynamic than Holiday's (Figure 1) and additionally captures the recurrent mixture of awe

and curiosity. We see the astounded and terrified Baker in mid-air, paling against the backdrop of the full moon while awed and curious spectators (the Bellman and the Banker) look down in the direction of something that is disguised or, rather, framed out of the picture. This is a successful execution of what should be hidden and in her essay Jansson does indeed mention this particular scene: “[w]ouldn’t it almost be a crime to depict the Snark’s terrible and ineffable face whose sight causes immediate dissolution into nothingness?” (Jansson 9, my transl.).

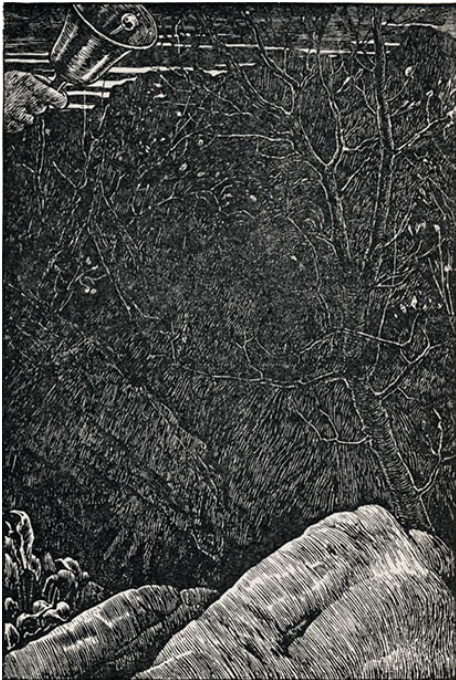


Figure 1 (left). Carroll, Lewis. *The Hunting of the Snark*. Ill. Henry Holiday (1876), p. 82. Figure 2 (right). Carroll, Lewis. *Snarkjakten*. Ill. Tove Jansson. Helsingfors: Schildt, 1959 © Oy Moomin Characters Ltd, p. 18 in the English edition.

The third strategy Jansson uses to evoke horror is not through exposition (Bandersnatch) or omission (Snark/Boojum) but by letting various unnamed monsters merge with the natural surroundings. The best example in this respect is “The Bellman’s Speech” (Figure 2), accompanied by one of the most intriguing illustrations of the book and one that stands out in the whole set. In the original edition this fit features the full-page iconic nonsense map (“a perfect an absolute blank”) which is like a negative of the Vanishing scene (predom-

inantly dark, yet with a gaping face looming out of the background). Although in Carroll's poem the emptiness of the map may represent the "ultimate threat" (Druker 114), Jansson, herself interested in using cartographic artefacts in the Moomin books, here opts for a less abstract but equally effective way of illustrating Fit the Second. She omits the map⁴ and the only blank is the beach where the crew lands – its whiteness contrasts neatly with the blackness of the sea. We do not see the hunters' alleged disappointment with the view, as this is the first frame which zooms out of their faces to reveal the grotesque and otherworldly surroundings. Here a nightmarish atmosphere is created through an exaggerated scale and further intensified by dark looming faces with the massive rock in the centre of the picture, coincidentally reminiscent of Holiday's final scene (Figure 1) as well as bringing to mind the figure of the Groke from *Who Will Comfort Toffle?* (1960). Out of Carroll's laconic "chasms and crags" Jansson conjures up a fantastic landscape in which the hunters become tiny specs watched by ominous troll- and spectre-like rocks, their gaze ranging from the almost comic (bat-like creatures in the left-hand top corner) to the spooky (the rock on the left). This is an ironic role reversal – a circle of at least ten unnamed beings follows the movements of the Snark hunters. Even the two white rocks sticking out of the black sea look as if they might be horns belonging to an unimaginable monster as does the black crescent behind the rock in the middle. Interestingly, a very harmless-looking creature indeed emerges from the sea in a variant of this setting reworked by Jansson in colour (*Källskärstavlän*, 1960). With faceless rocks the landscape possesses a completely different, almost idyllic quality.

It can be argued that this scene is a half-horrific and half-humorous realization of Jansson's idea of "the disguised". Another interesting example of danger lurking in the landscape is the illustration accompanying "The Beaver's Lesson". From among the branches of the trees seven pairs of eyes closely follow the Beaver and the Butcher. There are no creatures visible, only faintly darker shadows and faces formed by tree branches. The eyes, just like the forks wielded by the Snark hunters and horns sticking out in various places, are the main linking element in the visual landscape of the book. When represented in colour, the Hemulens' eyes are big and blue. The eyes of the hunting crew are equally big, but the fact that they are black makes their gaze much more intense – showing curiosity and awe in equal measures. And the eyes are omnipresent – from the first scene to the last. In the first fit showing the crew on a small boat, departing from a large ship, each of the crew members

looks in a different direction. There is a sizable party of spectators observing them from the ship, a tiny creature sticking its wide-eyed head and pointy ears from the water, a similarly bewildered or overjoyed figurehead at the prow of the ship and even the ropes around the arms of the anchor form a pair of eyes.

As noted, *The Snark* is not a complete departure from the Moomin style, not least in the depiction of the characters. We also find a number of familiar attributes and artefacts that could have a self-ironic undertone: in the earlier discussed illustration to the first fit, showing the boat departing from the big ship, one of the hunting crew members holds a bag and the other wears a garland of flowers – two attributes familiar from the Moomin world. But it is exactly these references to Jansson's Moomin oeuvre which may be held responsible for the novel visual interpretation of Carroll's poem. The fact that she uses faces of fantastic creatures rather than human ones removes the imagery from the caricatural realism of the Victorian edition, gives it an otherworldly quality and makes it more of a children's poem. Jansson wanted to explore "horror" and her vision of the nonsense quest is not devoid of it. An intense atmosphere of lurking danger is evoked through her depiction of the scenery, in particular, an exaggerated scale – an approach further developed in her illustrations to Tolkien's book.

Illustrating J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

An opportunity to create horror-infused landscapes was Jansson's key motivation behind taking on the Tolkien commission. She found the scenery "seductive in its macabre ferocity" (Westin, *Tove Jansson* 348). In Jansson's view *The Snark* and *The Hobbit* were "horror stories" (346). Her ambition to emphasize this aspect of Bilbo's and the dwarves' quest through the vast landscape of Middle-Earth as well as the catastrophic elements of the story, can be considered in terms of a novel take on Tolkien's work and a fuller development of the key strategies deployed in the first commission. Judging by the number of reprints, this is the least popular visual translation of the three classics although, as Björn Sundmark argues, the somewhat equivocal reception of Jansson's artwork may have been caused by the fact that the expressive mode of her illustrations did not fit into a realistic presentation of the fantastic which was emerging at the time of the book's publication (13–15).

Hompen (1947), the first Swedish translation of the novel, was published with fairly gruesome images by Torbjörn Zetterholm and with

Charles Sjöblom's maps,⁵ not Tolkien's original artwork. As was the case with Carroll, Tolkien's books were to some extent visualised by their author and his own illustrations, designs, calligraphy and maps have become an integral element of the world he created. His drawings and watercolours have accompanied *The Hobbit* (albeit in various configurations) since its first editions in English, though Jansson was probably not familiar with them. Her project was undoubtedly much bigger in scale but it actually shares certain features with Tolkien's line drawings, many of which never made it to the original edition of the book (see Hammond and Scull). Even though their motivations differed, both Tolkien and Jansson focused on the scenery (Sundmark 5) in their full-page illustrations, paying less attention to the characters, whom Jansson found "commonplace" (qtd. in Westin, *Tove Jansson* 348) and, with few exceptions, chose to relegate to smaller vignettes.

Although the range of illustrations differs from the relatively simple set of *The Snark*, here Jansson again uses a dual approach whereby the dynamic and often comical little vignettes counterbalance dark, dense and dramatic depictions of scenery. The characters, however, lack the individualization of the Snark hunters. Indeed, the sketchiness of the images is related to a radical reinvention of the artist's technique, which in turn marks a progressive departure from the style of the Moomin suite. In *The Hobbit* Jansson deliberately abandoned her usual technique or even went against it as "part of the purification of her artistic repertoire" (348). Uncharacteristically, she used poor quality paper and redrew each figure many times "till it looked fairly free" (349). This studious spontaneity is best seen in the introductory vignettes, the majority of which show plump figures of the dwarves in action: crossing the river, jumping on the stones, sailing in barrels, sneaking into Smaug's lair. In one or two close-ups, the dwarves are Viking-like figures wearing familiar helmets, armed with round shields and sturdy swords. Otherwise, the characterisation is minimal – we do not really see much of the dwarves' faces, just the general outlines. Importantly, placed among twelve large expositions of the landscape and other key scenes in the book, these little images capturing movement and action set pace to the story.

While there is a certain lightness and humour in the introductory vignettes and other small images throughout the book, "a whole world of catastrophe" (348), which Jansson was after, is created in the full-page illustrations through the predominant use of dark-toned palette, density of detail, closely cropped frames and the placement of minute characters within ominous landscapes. Not as tiny as the

crew in *The Snark*, the dwarves and Bilbo are nevertheless significantly scaled down and they never appear in the centre of the frame. They become almost spectators rather than participants in their quest. In all images, the framing of which usually conveys confinement, we find the dwarves and Bilbo hidden among the branches way above the dancing goblins and wargs,⁶ wandering among the overwhelming trees of Mirkwood and equally small on the bridge to Rivendell. They are literally on the edge of the picture in the scene showing their approach to the Lonely Mountain (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Tolkien, J. R. R. *Bilbo – en hobbits äventyr*. III. Tove Jansson. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1962 © Oy Moomin Characters Ltd, p. 209.

This scene is particularly interesting with respect to Jansson's choice of the episodes she illustrated as well as the way she inscribed lurking danger or "intense sensation of horror", as she put it, in the landscape. One of the most iconic of Tolkien's images, "Conversation with Smaug", reveals the interior of the cave and a grand dragon on

a pile of treasure. Jansson chooses to depict an earlier scene. In her illustration of the Lonely Mountain we do not see the dragon but we are made aware of his “disguised” presence. The atmosphere of impending danger is heightened by the horizontal lines of the flames and a cloud of steam coming from the cave over the waterfall. This alignment disrupts the otherwise vertically designed scene (steep rocks, a waterfall, tall mountains). And while the four tiny figures are marginal observers, one can imagine the whole landscape as being one enormous monster – the cave forming a giant gaping mouth, with a waterfall tongue lolling over sharp, rocky teeth.⁷ Significantly, the dragon is never portrayed in his cave. In Jansson’s version we only see Bilbo exploring the dragon’s lair. Six-legged Smaug appears, however, in two scenes in which he embodies a powerful, destructive force. In the first one he chases the horses, in the other he destroys the Lake Town. The latter illustration is also a good example of the way Jansson contrasts order with chaos. The Lake town is first shown as a gloomy but serene place while fifty pages later a similar frame is used to show only half of it as the other half belongs to the dragon (in a Bandersnatch pose) and his flames.

Smaug, represented in colour on the cover of the Finnish edition of the book, is among the least controversial interpretations of Tolkien’s characters.⁸ In some of the Swedish reviews Jansson was criticised for her inattention to Tolkien’s descriptions (Vilén 85; Stenström 90; cf Sundmark 11–12) while some of the Finnish critics found the resemblance to the Moominvalley characters a positive feature (Virta). Some of the choices, such as plump elves with horns or Bilbo’s resemblance to Snufkin, may be debatable. It could be argued, however, that large Groke-like Gollum, mountain-tall trolls, impish goblins and tribal wargs dancing against the backdrop of white snaky flames – all of the scary creatures which unlike the dwarves are placed in the centre of the frames – resonate with the rest of the illustrations that aim to evoke a sense of terror. The creation of this intense atmosphere seems to be the most successful feature of Jansson’s take on *The Hobbit*, also appreciated by the reviewers (Sundmark 8–9, 13) and just like the new, “sketchy” technique, it reverberates in her own books, especially *Tales from Moominvalley* published at the same time.

Illustrating Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

The final stage in Tove Jansson’s journey through other writers’ secondary worlds was *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Out of the three classics discussed here, *Alice* is perhaps the one most closely associated with widely reproduced original illustrations.⁹ As noted earlier,

Carroll like Tolkien had a strong influence on the visual interpretation of his books. One should bear in mind that behind some of the key images (also in Jansson's *Alice*) are Carroll's arrangements from *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (1886). The frequently turbulent and well documented collaboration between Carroll and Tenniel (Cohen and Wakeling 1–22) resulted in what has been considered the benchmark of the Wonderland. Jansson was reluctant to accept this commission considering Tenniel's to be the definitive edition (Westin, *Tove Jansson* 329) and she found working on Carroll's books "great fun but very difficult" (qtd. in Jones 9). Her version of *Alice* contains the most lavish and diverse set of illustrations (only three spreads contain no images) in comparison with the other two titles discussed here. An interesting new addition to the artist's repertoire are large colour plates, particularly ones with monochrome backgrounds which give the landscape a minimalist feel along with an element of indefinability. However, as will be shown later, their austerity may evoke similar emotions to that of the overwhelming and dark scenery in *The Hobbit*.

Alice is also the first commission in which Jansson offers a novel take on the classic while knowingly referencing the original pictures. Therefore it is not only possible to analyse various ways in which she reconfigures and reinterprets the original arrangements, but one can consider these to be proper reinventions. It is worth noting that John Tenniel is ranked among the chief inspirations in Jansson's artistic development (Westin, *Tove Jansson* 127). Already in *The Moomins and the Great Flood* (1945) we can trace a humorous appropriation of one of his famous images in which a tree frames the text on the page. There the grinning Cheshire Cat is replaced by Moominpappa waving an SOS flag. Interestingly, this scene does not appear in Jansson's *Alice* but she playfully references it in another illustration in the same chapter. In Tenniel's depiction of the kitchen scene in "Chapter IV. Pig and Pepper", the cat sits on the floor by the stove, looking up. Jansson captures a much more dynamic moment of chaos, with pots scattered on the floor and the cook just about to throw a frying-pan at the Duchess. While in Tenniel's picture we only see Alice's profile, in the new version she peeps from behind the hands covering her eyes – half-fascinated and half-terrified (Chimori 155). The cat presides over chaos: sitting on a high hearth above them, looking down and grinning, just like it does from a bough of a tree a page later. In addition, we are presented with a whole range of emotions if we look at the faces following a neat, slightly curved line leading our eyes from the animal's head to the crying baby. Alice remains an observer.

Another illustration – that of Alice attacked by a pack of flying cards just before she wakes up – is first reworked in *The Snark* (the Banker and the Banderdash), and later in Jansson’s short-story “Fillyjonk Who Believed in Disasters” where it captures Fillyjonk’s “horror and ecstasy” (Happonen, “The Fillyjonk at the Window” 58).¹⁰ Each of these illustrations explores different approaches to fear – the Banker covers his face, Fillyjonk’s eyes are wide-open and Alice looks away. Again, Jansson’s version of this scene even though sharing many elements with Tenniel’s, is much more crowded, chaotic and dynamic (e.g. through the movement in Alice’s hair and dress). A nightmarish quality is enhanced by changed proportions – the faces of the King and Queen on the cards are the same size as Alice’s.

Jansson creates a rich and dynamic Wonderland and with this commission, the focus shifts again from scenery to characters, and more specifically, to a gallery of various animals and a human protagonist. One may argue that it was easier to abandon characterisations pertinent to Moominvalley (although this book is not devoid of references to it) because this set of individuals is unusual for Jansson’s secondary world. Importantly, she introduces a refreshing take on the main protagonist, who, over the years, had undergone an overwhelming number of creative transformations,¹¹ especially after Carroll’s death (Ovenden and Davis 10–11) and after the Second World War – in line with the then developing concept of the adolescent (Chimori 163–64). In short, the figure of Alice has been a barometer of changing times and fashions. Mikiko Chimori, who analyses three different portrayals of Alice, considers Jansson’s version to be the most successful in the post-war context and one which paved the way for more recent interpretations such as the ones by Lisbeth Zwerger or Helen Oxenbury (Chimori 164). It can be considered a reinvention: “faithful in spirit to the text, but innovative in terms of appearance, gesture and behaviour” (155). Importantly, instead of a little girl, Jansson introduces a pre-adolescent Alice, and Wonderland tends to be shown from her perspective (155, 163). Alice is also “adventurous and positive” (156) and emphatic (157). Lena Kåreland notes that unlike Tenniel’s, Jansson’s Alice lacks detailed characterization – her hair is fair but plain, her dress is simple and white (Kåreland 14). It may further be argued, that this new portrayal endows her with a timeless quality.

Giving the protagonist a prominent role in his illustrations, Tenniel depicts Alice in almost every scene. Jansson, however, gives a lot of room and attention to a variety of animals and other creatures (just like she does in *Who Will Comfort Toffle?*) who are usually on the go.

There is a lot of movement, play and excitement, and with very few framed images, Jansson's Wonderland seems lighter and more care-free than Tenniel's. It is not, however, entirely idyllic and her desire to explore "the horror" does not subside although she uses different devices to evoke it. Jansson wanted to recreate Wonderland as the realm of nightmare but was asked by the publisher to "emphasise reality more than the macabre" (qtd. in Westin, *Tove Jansson* 329). She did so but while the reality is not free from horror, the latter seems, however, more disguised than in the cases of *The Snark* and *The Hobbit*, and often channelled through Alice's emotions. As Lena Kåreland points out, Jansson portrays emotional landscapes of the main protagonist, emphasising her amazement, anxiety and fear (14), as has been shown in some of the examples above. The most dramatic scene in this respect is the one capturing Alice in a pool of her own tears. In Carroll's and Tenniel's version Alice seems to be swimming rather than drowning. In Jansson's, we only see her terrified face in the middle of a whirlpool, her hair undistinguishable from the swirls. Effective in its simplicity the image perfectly conveys the horror of the situation. In fact, Alice becomes the fear itself.

A similar sense of disquiet can be traced in Jansson's illustration to a Long Tale (chapter 3). Here again the artist's scene selection is crucial. In Tenniel's version there are two images: Alice surrounded by the animals listening to the tale and her encounter with Dodo. Rather than showing Alice in the friendly company of animals, Jansson opts for chaos and depicts the moment when all of them run away from the girl. We see Alice looking towards what seems to be the white sun placed within monochrome blank space (Figure 4). It is the opposite of scenery prevalent in *The Hobbit* – the horror does not lurk in the landscape but is evoked by the indefinability of the world in which Alice finds herself. This ochre-coloured vastness conveys a sense of loneliness and entrapment. If we look at the image from a different angle, Alice could in fact be held captive in this empty space, the white circle marking a hole, a passage to the inaccessible outside world. The presence of huge bats and birds – the most recurrent motifs in all three books discussed here – enhances the atmosphere of horror. Bats also appear in one of the most often discussed illustrations which is absent from the original set. This symbolic scene (Chimori 163; Westin, *Tove Jansson* 329) shows Alice walking with her cat in high grass. It is one of relatively few images showing the surrounding world. What we see of it, is very organic – oversized plants, flowers, trees. After the dark and dramatic landscapes of *The Hobbit*, Wonderland appears almost undefined but like the other two worlds the artist re-envisioned, it is fantastically

animated. Interestingly, some of the key motifs and scenery return in Jansson's reworking of the Alice theme in *The Dangerous Journey* – a book interpreted as reflecting Jansson's own creative rites of passage (Kåreland 20).



Figure 4. Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Ill. Tove Jansson. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1966 © Oy Moomin Characters Ltd, p. 28 in the English edition.

The creative journey

The premise of this article was to show why Tove Jansson's illustrations offer a novel and idiosyncratic take on three English classics, and what strategies she deployed to infuse them with elements of horror or even "intense horror sensation" discussed in her essay. As has been argued, one of the ways of creating a world of catastrophe is through expressively rendered landscapes. Although a sense of disquiet is brilliantly evoked through dark, even ominous images of the scenery, in which the characters are often minute or marginal (*The Snark*, *The Hobbit*), the undefined, monochrome blankness

of Wonderland achieves a similar effect. The intense atmosphere is furthermore emphasised by all that remains undefined, unseen or “disguised” (Alice’s surroundings, Boojum, Smaug in the Lonely Mountain). In her selection of scenes, Jansson tends to focus on those that give her an opportunity to explore chaos and nightmarish qualities of the stories. In comparison with the original images (especially Holiday’s and Tenniel’s), her scenes appear as more dynamic (the Vanishing, Alice with cards) and she manages to evoke horror with effective simplicity (Alice in the pool of her own tears). Now, while illustrations to Carroll’s works may be considered in terms of reinvention of the original cast (the Snark hunters as creatures, adventurous pre-adolescent Alice), this is not the case in *The Hobbit*. There the focus is clearly on the environment of Tolkien’s secondary world. This expressionist rendition of nature follows the principles laid out in “Den lömska barnboksförfattaren”. While changes in fashion may account for the relative unpopularity (vis-à-vis her Moomin creations) of the artwork discussed here, Jansson’s novel and idiosyncratic take on the classics significantly expands the canon of illustrated *Snark*, *Hobbit* and *Alice*, and is equally important within the context of her own works.

We can trace a clear line of development together with a creative journey in Jansson’s visual translations of the classics, which directly corresponds to her gradual detachment from the world of the Moomin books. *The Snark*, the least complex of the trio, remains the closest to the Moomins with regard to style, particularly in Jansson’s portrayal of the characters. A more radical change in the artist’s technique takes place in *The Hobbit*, a project much bigger in scale and thus allowing her to present a significantly wider variety of illustrations. Although the characters’ resemblance to the inhabitants of Moominvalley is unarguable, the much more dominant images of the scenery take this artwork towards new heights of “horror” and “catastrophe” and move it a big step away from Jansson’s earlier works. Importantly, she uses the labour-intensive freestyle developed for this commission in her own books, not least in *Tales from Moominvalley*. Finally, *Alice* and the most richly rendered world, marks the clearest departure from the Moomin suite and, as a number of scholars have pointed out, the book had a palpable influence on Jansson’s own works both in terms of story and style. The sheer size of the project allowed the artist to offer a novel and convincing interpretation of the classic while her unmistakable touch is evident throughout. She also managed to pay homage to Tenniel’s work in a very unobtrusive way. All in all, the declared departure from the

Moomins was not complete but this ended up benefitting both the commissioned and her own work. Significantly, her artwork from that time highlights a fascinating creative process, one in which various self-referencing and recurrent motifs, appear reconfigured in new contexts. Throughout the whole period of Jansson's work on the classics, we find a number of ideas resurfacing in her own books published around the same time. The entire process of re-envisioning the classics may thus be seen as inverse artistic cross-pollination, culminating in *The Dangerous Journey*.

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Notes

1 I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Monika Vajda for hunting down a rare edition of *The Hobbit*, to Sirke Happonen, Björn Sundmark, Paweł Zabczyk and Phil Nel for valuable discussions, Björn Sundmark and Åsa Warnqvist for their help with the Swedish material and translations and Sonja Virta for research on the Finnish reception of *The Hobbit*. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Tove Jansson come from the English edition of Boel Westin's *Tove Jansson: Ord, bild, liv* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2007).

2 Excerpts from the essay in English can be found in Jansson's biography (Westin 338). References to Jansson's essay can also be found in Agneta Rehal-Johansson's article (2007), which is based on her study of the Moomin series entitled *Den lömska barnboksförfattaren* (2006). The Swedish adjective "lömsk" is either translated as "deceitful" (Westin) or "trickster" (Rehal-Johansson).

3 To date, there have been close to 50 international editions of *The Hunting of the Snark* with different illustrations, many of which are discussed in Selwyn Goodacre's *All the Snarks* (2006).

4 It is possible that the paper in the Banker's hands in the illustration to "The Hunting" is the map.

5 There are no maps of Middle-Earth in the 1962 edition of *The Hobbit*. There is only one small drawing of a rolled up parchment and a key.

6 This scene is reminiscent of the ancestors' dance in *Moominland Midwinter* (1957) and can be further examined in relation to Jansson's use of light and movement (see esp. Happonen, "Parties as Heterotopias"). Another scene shows dancing bears. Dance is one of the recurrent themes in Jansson's works (see esp. Happonen, *Vilijonkka ikkunassa*).

7 This approach brings to mind the rocks from *The Snark* (Figure 2), a variant of which appears in the shape of the oversized trolls towering over the forest in *The Hobbit*.

8 It is very instructive to compare Jansson's characters with Tolkien's early sketches of the dwarves, trolls and Bilbo (Hammond and Scull 38, 107 and 141).

9 The most frequently reproduced illustrations in the Swedish translations of *Alice* have been the ones by Tenniel. In 1949 Robert Högföldt's illustrations were included in an English edition of the book and they are also discussed by Ovenden (16) while Tove Jansson is not even mentioned.

10 Sirke Happonen points out that this pose is one of the most recurrent motifs in Jansson's artwork and can be traced back to the artist's earliest drawings inspired by e.g. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' painting *La Source*, 1856. A variant of the pose can be also found in the troll scene in *The Hobbit* (*Vilijonkka ikkunassa* 172–77).

11 The *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature* mentions close to 150 different illustrators of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (O'Sullivan 61).

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