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The Moomins, quest and pilgrimage — elements of medieval chivalric romance and Old English elegiac poetry as motives in *Moominpappa at Sea*

Muminki, wyprawa i pielgrzymka — elementy średniowiecznego romansu rycerskiego i staroangielskiej poezji elegijnej jako motywy w książce *Tatuś Muminka i morze*

Abstract

Whilst the Moomin family sails away the a deserted island, Tove Jansson transforms their sea voyage into a metaphorical journey from the safe space of Moominvalley into the mercy of the sea, transcending the bodily experience of moving away into metaphysical changes in them. The motives of the transitional processes resemble themes and settings of a medieval chivalric romance and Old English elegiac poetry. The paper aims to present and analyze how Moominpappa, Moominmamma and Moomintroll, as depicted in the novel *Moominpappa at Sea*, 1965, assume the roles characteristic of the literary tradition of the medieval and Anglo-Saxon ancient narratives so that the perspective on the text may go beyond its usual scope and facilitate new reading. Thus, the readers follows questing

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knights, sometimes knights-errant, pious pilgrims and ancient heroic warriors transferred into the twenty-century Finnish novel where the characters strive to better themselves.

Keywords:

Moominpappa at sea, chivalric romances, Old-English poetry, lighthouse, deserted island, family

Abstrakt

Kiedy Tatuś Muminka wraz z rodziną wyrusza w morską podróż, ich przygoda przekształca się w metaforyczną przeprawę z bezpiecznej Doliny Muminków na bezludną wyspę, gdzie dotychczasowe życie rodziny ulega zmianie. Latarnia morska staje się tymczasowym domem dla małych trolli, które w żaden sposób nie mogą odnaleźć się pośród wszechobecnego morza, dzięki przyrodzie i czyhających niebezpieczeństw. Jest to też pretekst do pokazania, jak poszczególni bohaterowie rodziny Muminków przechodzą transformacje przypominające te ze średniowiecznych romansów rycerskich oraz elegii staroangielskich. Przedostania powieść Tove Jansson z 1965 roku, *Tatuś Muminka i morze*, jest kontynuacją książek przeznaczonych dla dzieci, ale tym razem adresowana jest dla dorosłych: dzięki analogiom do poprzednich epok, Muminki przyjmują role antycznych wędrowców, niestrudzonych żeglarzy, dzielnych, a czasem błędnych, rycerzy oraz pielgrzymów pełnych czci. Te literackie odwołania pomagają w zrozumieniu powagi ich przemiany w nowe, lepsze stworzenia. Artykuł podejmuje próbę pokazania podstaw przeprowadzenia proponowanych analogii, a także otwiera na nowe możliwości odczytywania tekstu.

Słowa kluczowe:

Tatuś Muminka i morze, romanse średniowieczne, poezja staroangielska, latarnia morska, bezludna wyspa, rodzina

Introduction, the aim of the paper

When the Moomins leave the safe seclusion of Moominvalley, as presented in *Moominpappa at Sea*, they unknowingly start a peculiar journey during which they undergo a sea voyage, a quest and a pilgrimage, which yield their transformations fashioned on the literary motives from the Anglo-Saxon elegiac poetry and medieval chivalric romances. The choices the trolls make, new circumstances they embrace, and changes they undergo in consequence liken their conduct to ancient warriors, medieval knights, knights-errant and pilgrims likewise, who are subjected to very often unfavourable conditions of the world around and thus forced to act, fight, wander, ponder and set off on voyages to alleviate from the fated environment of loneliness and misery depicted in the old English and medieval literature.

The unprecedented correspondence between the medieval chivalric romance, the Old English poems and the twenty-century Moomins novel is not straightforward until the events and experiences displayed in these genres allow for such a proposal. I believe that the

comparative analysis of the three distinct literary types will reveal the underlying patterns governing the behaviour of analogous characters. Therefore, the article aims to present necessary evidence of the plausibility of my premises towards the acknowledged similitude.

Tove Jansson, *Moominpappa at Sea*

The Finnish and Swedish-speaking author of novels, both for children and adults, Tove Jansson, was more than a Moominmamma: she also created short stories, illustrations, graphics, paintings and comic strips, among others. Tove was brought up in the artistic house of the sculptor Victor Jansson and his wife, an illustrator and graphic designer, Signe Hammarsten-Jansson, who gave up her career to provide for the household. Ham (the mother) became the breadwinner, whereas Victor Jansson did not earn money regularly. He was an artist and a war veteran whose war experiences marked the life of the family¹. According to her biographer, Tove cherished a strong relationship with Victor, who influenced her notably with his political views, patriotism², and maybe even her aversion to men³. In the biography, Westin notes that the father admired storms, during which he took the family on sails to skerries or islets where they could feel the weather⁴: the danger, artistic inspirations or sheer appreciation of wild, untamed nature, attracted Victor and left a strong imprint in Tove's imagination; the two quarreled but loved each other. Therefore, as an artist herself, Tove was shaped by the natural world and the sea, working around the themes of love, courage, fears, doom or family matters. After personally witnessing WWII and living through her father's experiences of WWI, she diverted her emotions into an idyllic and nebulous world of fluffy trolls, which brought her consolation during and after the Russian bombing of Finland⁵.

Moominpappa at Sea is the eighth book by Jansson, dedicated to "some father", published in 1965. It is part of the series of novels intended for children but deals with more mature content of the troublesome state and adventurous nature of Moominpappa, whose lost masculinity sets him off on a sea journey to a desolate island, a symbolic sign of fight⁶ where the lighthouse does not work. Tove, who was fascinated with the occupation of a lighthouse keeper, supplied

¹ B. Westin, *Tove Jansson: Mama Muminków: Biografia*, transl. by B. Ratajczak, Warszawa 2020, p. 357.

² Ibidem, p. 126.

³ Ibidem, p. 117.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 168.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 171.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 357.

her library with books about lighthouses and storms⁷, and she dreamt of a place of her own somewhere in the wilderness of the sea: she fulfilled her ambition in 1964 when she purchased the island of Klovharun, Finland, as her private property, and built a summerhouse there. The landscape and memories of Victor as the father figure inspired the novel. The author placed Moominpappa and his wife, Moominmamma, in the focal point, with Moomintroll in the background. Since the youth is not the main character there anymore, and the narrative is set within the sinister atmosphere of the unwelcoming island, the story seems “de-moominized” (“odmuminkowany”)⁸.

Chivalrous knights and ancient heroes

The genre of medieval romance embraces a considerable body of literature spanning a couple of centuries, during which the stories were being modified and shaped into the likings of their audiences, who, due to the orality of the tales, had a substantial impact on its forms, topics, and character. However, some invariable elements of each medieval chivalric romance do not change: knights, challenges, magic, loyalty, and bravery are stable motives in each. Importantly, these stories convey circumstances of departing for adventures to prove one’s worth, facing unexpected events in the course of the action⁹ to test the prowess, very often accompanied by magical objects, marvellous creatures, and supernatural occurrences, thus transferring the plot into the unearthly realms. Such romances are antonyms of the word ‘realism’¹⁰, and indeed, the world of Moomins is likewise associated with the imaginary place where ordinary laws of nature could easily be suspended so that facilitation of the journey where the heroes would develop into “prodigies of courage and endurance”¹¹ should not be rejected.

Exhibiting the aforementioned characteristics, the Middle English chivalric romances focused predominantly on the topics of the Matter of Britain, famously renowned for developing the Arthurian myths, where knights are or strive to attain the highest levels of literary knighthood, following the chivalric code and searching for the Holy Grail, while exploring and in the end glorifying the insular circumstances which would found the mythical past of Britain’s history.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 356–357.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 349.

⁹ R. Radulescu, *Malory and Fifteenth-Century Political Ideas*, “Arthuriana” 2003, vol. 13, no. 3, p. 39.

¹⁰ H. Cooper, *When Romance Comes True*, [in:] *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. by N. Cartledge, Woodbridge 2008, p. 13.

¹¹ J. Finlayson, *The Marvellous in Middle English Romance*, “The Chaucer Review” 1999, vol. 33, no. 4, p. 353.

Cooper highlighted how the Middle English romances differed from the traditional French stories in their distinct “social and ethical priorities”, which meant adventures, devotional duties or ideals to be more practical¹² for people to achieve. The genre was largely popular in different social circles as its themes matched various tastes. It also fulfilled the sometimes desperate need for an idealized vision of the world, a consolation for medieval people exposed to suffering from the disastrous circumstances of the era, e.g. plagues, wars, skirmishes, deadly diseases, poor living conditions or natural calamities, among others. The authors of the romances, with the means of their oratory skills, could not only facilitate common entertaining pastimes or notify about the attainments of the bravest heroes but also encourage to take a particular course of actions, educate on the righteous conduct, or relieve people from their everyday concerns.

This paper’s analysis would benefit from introducing yet another literary group of characters that stem from the Old English tradition: heroes who wandered and roamed the desolate lands and seas, heroic warriors tried by suffering depicted in the poems of *the Seafarer* and *the Wanderer*. The poetry and prose written in the period between the 7th and 11th centuries in Britain recount brave champions of the realm who, after fighting fiercely and slaying the enemies, could cherish their companions and lords’ appreciation and enjoy the conquered riches. Simultaneously, the suffering from failures and losses was equally intense when the champions in the past, left at the mercy of the new circumstances, could only turn into tragic ponderings about the misery of life. Lengthy descriptions, elaborate metaphors, elegiac tone or epic language of the Old English heroic poems preserve the conduct of the brave figures to encourage endurance since only the chosen “comes to everlasting joy among the angels if one performs brave deeds against the devil here on earth”¹³.

The Wanderer and Moominpappa

In an idyllic picture of undisturbed peace at the beginning of the story, the Moomins live according to their usual routine: Moominmamma enjoys her chores, Moomintroll strolls through the valley pondering on the world around him, Little My minds her murky affairs and so the days pass by untroubled. However, when the focus shifts to the main protagonist, the mood changes: Moominpappa shades the atmosphere with his darksome

¹² H. Cooper, *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle in England: Malory and His Predecessors*, [in:] *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. by C. Dover, Woodbridge 2003, p. 148.

¹³ F.S. Holton, *Old English Sea Imagery and the Interpretation of ‘The Seafarer’*, “The Yearbook of English Studies” 1982, vol. 12, p. 217.

thoughts, surrounded by the aura of resignation, stagnation, frustration, and futility since, as the experienced, accomplished head of the family, he only strolls around the household where there is no particular work for him to take up. What for others might be a relief from responsibilities turns into a personal misery for Moominpappa. Even the smallest tasks are deliberately done by others, so he stubbornly insists on completing nonsignificant chores, “Moominpappa went on, sulkily digging in the moss. ‘I shall stand guard over it. I’ll stay here all night if necessary’”¹⁴. Feeling worthless and ignored by the family, in his specific attitude of exaggeration and propensity to overthinking, Moominpappa reminiscences his adventurous past, longing for memories to enliven anew: the nostalgia for his plentiful youth mixed with the sense of neglect in the present, puts him off the stride from the peaceful everyday life and further disqualifies from decision-making processes in the household, “In some families, it’s the father who decides when it’s time to light the lamp”¹⁵, he complains.

His emotional state leads him to conclude that he fails like a man because the position established earlier is irrelevant at present, and threatened by the plateau, he does not know how to stop it from proceeding. The father’s masculinity is wounded likewise. Trapped in the tranquil but enclosed territory of the Moomin house, he is “feeling at a loss. He had no idea what to do with himself because it seemed everything there was to be done had already been done or was being done by somebody else”¹⁶. This current state symbolizes the transitional moment of a literary relocation from Moominpappa back into the experience of an Old English hero, *the Wanderer*, as the father indeed embraces what a man abandoned by his companions, wandering alone bears; “That’s the way it goes, the Shaper mills middle-earth to waste until they stand empty, the giants’ work and ancient, drained of the dreams and joys of its dwellers”¹⁷.

The former warrior, accustomed to glory and rewards in exchange for his efforts, is currently suffering from a capricious outcome of fate, which is misery, doom, and no prospects of alteration. Once a brave fighter, faithfully defending his beloved lord with fellow warriors who shared vicissitudes of fortune, is left alone; everybody is gone now. A sole survivor of the battle, the Wanderer longs for his deceased friends and exploits, lamenting the present lot over the joyful past, desolate and forgotten.

¹⁴ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, transl. by K. Hart, London 2009, p. 6.

¹⁵ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 1.

¹⁷ A. K. Hostetter, *The Wanderer*, <https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/the-wanderer/> [access: 28 June 2023].

Moominpappa, who also experienced distant sea voyages in his youth, was always accompanied by loyal comrades, and together, they encountered unforgettable adventures, discovered unknown places, travelled with Hattifatteners, and were lucky enough to escape from dangerous creatures. His past was filled with pictures of greatness, vibrancy, and stimulation. In the natural course of events after reaching adulthood, he has to abandon his exploits and settle down in the peaceful existence in the Moomin Valley. The place brims with the natural riches of its soil. However, Moominpappa starts to despise the veranda porch where he would rather bitterly reminisce about his younger self that is his epitome of freedom, happiness, and most importantly, the sense of affiliation, control and passion, instead of appreciating the current state. Like the Wanderer, the pappa bemoans the lost times, absent friends and great treasures as the rewards for their service; “All gone, the mailed warrior! Lost for good, the pride of princes!”¹⁸.

Neither of the two can reconcile with how the glorious days turned into the present woe. Moominpappa and the *Wanderer* suffer solitary separations caused by either physical, metaphorical or mental barriers; they express pain through “the interrelated powers of memory”¹⁹, which fuel their minds. Even though Moominpappa is surrounded by the closest family living in the safety haven of the Moominhouse, exceeding in everything they need, the urgency for appreciation and acknowledgement, as well as the drive to further discoveries, are strong enough to create the image of isolation from tangible happiness that he decides to break. His crisis, combined with nostalgia and overthinking, turns his perspective into aimlessness, ignorance, and sadness, as if he was lonely and exiled. Since “they took no notice of him, and got on with what they were doing”²⁰ around the household, he feels bitter for not being treated seriously enough. Whereas “the mind thinking intensely of distant things is a powerful motif (...) in *the Wanderer*”²¹, it also corresponds to what haunts Moominpappa, they are both “in the grip of painful memories”²².

Finally, when the circumstances become unbearable, the main protagonist decides to take up the challenge to better his life, deeply confident that he is destined to do more than repaint the veranda steps,

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ P. Clemoes, *Mens absentia cogitans in The Seafarer and The Wanderer, Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G.N. Gramonsway* [in:] D.A. Pearsall, R.A. Waldron (eds.), Great Britain 1969, p. 72.

²⁰ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 2.

²¹ P. Clemoes, *Mens absentia cogitans in The Seafarer and The Wanderer, Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G.N. Gramonsway*, op. cit., p. 62.

²² Ibidem, p. 62

“I’d love to be out sailing. Sailing right out to sea, as far as I can go”²³. The moment of the decision turns out to be transformative for the father, and the whole family as well: he becomes the initiator and wielder of the transfer to his beloved desert island, he steers the boat “Adventure” and sails away at night with “his family [that] looked just (...) tiny and helpless (...); he was guiding them safely across the vast (...) silent, blue ocean”²⁴. Because no one objects, stunned by Pappa’s prompt decision, they silently consent to follow his vision. In that process, he regains his deposits of confidence, purpose and energy on which he focuses, deriving strength from the vibrant marine life, as formerly his Old English predecessor.

The knight, the Quest and Moominpappa

Chivalric knights are pride and joy depicted in medieval chivalric romances, roaming around the lands, bringing peace, fighting for the king or executing justice. They follow their code of arms, display impeccable manners, protect women, help those in need, and face battle and tournaments; “The life of the knight, (...) alternated between violence and peace, blood and God, pillage and the protection of the poor”²⁵. To be a knight, one must go through necessary tests, prove oneself in the battle and fulfil tasks of the initiating practices before the proper advancement into knighthood. An exceptionally renowned knight should bear how crucial “the chivalric aspiration for adventures in distant lands- and *amors de terra lonhdana*”²⁶ was. Lack of future perspectives, neither for tournaments nor for adventures in the Moomin Valley, provokes Moominpappa to commit himself to embark instantly: he establishes a desire to get back to the sea and rushes to move out onto the island. As a responsible father and husband, a derivative of a knight in shining armour, he ensures the family safely accompanies him in the quest to start a new life so that their existence will be upgraded as “anyone organizing a trip sought to assure the continuation of social ties, thus people set off in the company of relatives, friends or servants”²⁷. He makes the decision and transforms into a leader- the journey is supposed to bring his glory anew, and thus an adventure in the *Adventure* boat commences.

²³ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 27.

²⁵ J. Le Goff, *Introduction: medieval man*, [in:] *The medieval world*, ed. by J. Le Goff, trans. by L.G. Cochrane, London 1997, p. 12.

²⁶ F. Cardini, *The warrior and the knight*, [in:] *The medieval world*, ed. by J. Le Goff, trans. by L.G. Cochrane, London 1997, p. 93.

²⁷ B. Geremek, *The marginal man*, [in:] *The medieval world*, ed. by J. Le Goff, trans. by L.G. Cochrane, London 1997, p. 349.

Moominpappa's audacious action not only stops the crippling stagnation but also initiates the process of knightly advancement; "That's Pappa's island. Pappa is going to look after us there. We're going to move there and live there all our lives, and start everything afresh, right from the beginning"²⁸, upon which his relatives consent. He thus enables the whole family to have the opportunity to transfer physically to learn more intensely from the fate-changing circumstances, likewise, the medieval warriors whose experiences encompassed "hunting scenes and encounters that resembled duels more than battles, (...) [which aimed] at self-affirmation"²⁹. Cardini claims that knights remain heroes, but above all, they are humans in search of identity and self-awareness that better them. Thereby, they set off for adventures and quests: "restless, solitary, constrained to journey from one initiatory trial to another through a dreamlike landscape of forest and heath"³⁰.

The encounter with the deserted island and the lighthouse means disillusionment, shock and disenchantment for the fluffy trolls that find the place nothing like the safe valley back home. Its new landscape is frightening and more likely to fulfil the role of the hostile adversary and danger from the traditional medieval dichotomy of the good and the evil: Pappa's beloved sea proves to be an unfriendly, mythical depth of unidentified beasts on the one hand, and deadly silence on the other, so travelling by night is not a pleasant cruise. "This sea [and island] of his is unkind"³¹, and their new home is similarly far from hospitable. Instead of the thrill of discovering and conquering novel lands and contemplating marvellous views, Moomins encounter an ominous skeleton of a bird, barren soil, harsh weather, a locked lighthouse with no and no visible signs of life, apart from the taciturn fisherman, who refuses to get in touch with them; there is none to ask for help.

The adventure turns into a demanding challenge for all, and yet, it is Moominpappa who puts on his shining armour and faces the adversities, "Now the proper thing to do was that they should begin an entirely new life and that Moominpappa should provide everything they needed, look after them and protect them"³². In his case, though, instead of an open fight, physical skirmishes or participation in the tournament, he attempts to explore and control the area in his own psychologically-bound manner. By trying to take up the role of a cou-

²⁸ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., pp. 15–16.

²⁹ F. Cardini, *The warrior and the knight*, op. cit., p. 91.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 91.

³¹ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 114.

³² Ibidem, p. 23.

rageous knight, Moominpappa resumes his masculine position of the head of the family, like his younger self, to which Moominmamma meekly withdraws her influence and remains a faithful supporter of his endeavours, surrendering to enliven the medieval standards of a family character under male overlordship in the household, and preserving traditional gender roles within the family³³. The new submissive, passive but still gentle and helpful position causes her to retreat to the imaginary world she left in the Moomin Valley so that her symbolic maternal power becomes subdued for some time, “She had even left her handbag behind her on the sand. It was a little bit frightening in a way, but at the same time cheering; this meant that all this was a real change, and not just an adventure”³⁴.

Still, the father needs her around the island as an indispensable element of their household because although he is striving to enliven his ideals, the attempts keep failing: his usually infantile and skewed perception of life in the lighthouse complicates the tasks, inhibiting any progress. Such ironic discrepancies between what he thinks is accurate and what the reality bears sometimes turn the father into a knight-errant. When his initially proclaimed idea does not work, he has no emergency plan, naively believing it will solve itself, so he either rushes to new challenges or lets the conflict continue, “I’m going to sleep for a while. Problems often solve themselves while one sleeps”³⁵. On top of other challenges, Moominpappa is unable to switch on the light on the lighthouse, so it does not fulfil its core task of marking the border between land and sea. It further symbolises lost masculinity: the beacon does not work just like Moominpappa cannot charge the batteries³⁶ and thus the non-effective effort and engagement weary his spirits. Furthermore, the nature surrounding the island is too burdensome to research as it defies the law Moominpappa expects: the soil is bare so that not familiar, edible plants cannot grow there, and instead of soothing waves, the sea is dangerous, winds suffocating. Likewise, the lighthouse is too big for the trolls because it is murky, dark, and unfriendly. When the Groke seeks the family and haunts the island, the terrified ground starts creeping further from the coastline, forcing any creatures to run. All in all, the island seems impossible to conquer.

During the numerous disappointments, clumsiness and inadequacy of his struggles, the father fails but does not give up, which showcases

³³ A. Meerboer, *Moominpappa and Vibrant Matter: Tove Jansson’s “Moominpappa at Sea” as an addition to “Vibrant Matter” by Jane Bennet*, https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/180011/meereboer_arwen.pdf?sequence=2/ [access: 11 June 2023].

³⁴ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 37.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 44.

³⁶ B. Westin, *Tove Jansson: Mama Muminków: Biografia*, op. cit., p. 357.

how he successfully maintains knightly features of perseverance and a strong belief in the purposefulness of his mission. He proves that “adventure becomes more than simply a chance to encounter or a daring feat; it becomes something destined for the particular hero”³⁷. His moving towards the lighthouse is a call to establish himself as a father and a man³⁸ anew, so striving to transform weaknesses into assets, he ponders, wanders and wonders about the natural laws. He also builds, fishes, constructs and plans, believing that “it was a very satisfying feeling putting a net out. It was a man’s job, something one did for the whole family”³⁹. The setbacks that the father approaches confirm his determination and bravery because even if none of his solutions succeeds, in the end, “wounds do not mark failures in the effort to be knightly”⁴⁰. The success of finding the key to the lighthouse is the first, major breakthrough in the series of his sacrifices to the conquering of the rocky island as it demonstrates his prowess in perseverance through hardship, “With great ceremony and the help of magic forces, Moominpappa had been chosen as the owner of the lighthouse and its keeper”⁴¹. This substitute of the Holy Grail for the father presents his conviction “above all, in the tournament”⁴².

The healing power of pilgrimages and travels

In the course of the narrative, the chivalric code requires a perfect knight to sustain spiritual values, perform a pilgrimage or turn the focus on the inner self by means of praying, repenting, as well as giving up oneself and supporting others in order to gain non-material, incorporeal riches, better and prove oneself;

“The viator in this earthly life, an element of alienation, or at least the risk of alienation, was inherent in the concept of the voyage. Travellers who abandoned their natural milieu and exposed themselves to the perils of the road were sure to have relations with unknown persons and to encounter the insidious perils of nature”⁴³.

The sea voyage is the right opportunity for the trolls to visit the sacred place of nature, unavailable during everyday existence, and verify their foregoing background because traditionally, pilgrimages are moments of reflection, conscience examinations, and renewals to

³⁷ J. Finlayson, *Definitions of Middle English Romance*, op. cit., p. 56.

³⁸ B. Westin, *Tove Jansson...*, op. cit., p. 357.

³⁹ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa...*, op. cit., p. 90.

⁴⁰ K. Hodges, *Wounded Masculinity: Injury and Gender in Sir Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur*, “*Studies in Philology*” 2009, vol. 106, no. 1, p. 15.

⁴¹ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa...*, op. cit., p. 55.

⁴² J. Le Goff, *Introduction: medieval man*, op. cit., p. 13.

⁴³ B. Geremek, *The marginal man*, op. cit., p. 348.

gain far-reaching consequences of potential rebirth experiences. In that sense, Moomins set off and undergo a peculiar crusade and pilgrimage against their weaknesses.

The healing power of pilgrimages and travels: Moominpappa

At the moment of the crisis, Moominpappa returns to the well-known sanctuary of his beloved sea, which he remembers from the past, but now he encounters its obscure, rebellious, cruel character instead. Such a portrayal of hostile nature might have reflected Jansson's personal experiences and memories from the world at war when human tragedy reached inconceivable extent, and no reasonable laws could apply; "the turbulent events of the first two decades of the 20th century made many people perceive history as a series of catastrophes similar to natural ones (...) The world is experiencing annoying, pre-apocalyptic changes, and it is noteworthy how the characters react to them"⁴⁴. By the token of analogy, the difficulties posed in front of the Moomin family are likewise unexplainable: they suffer equivalently to pilgrims or knight-crusaders constantly exposed to danger, hardships and hostilities, the basis for their further development.

For a pilgrimage to be effective, proper focus and diligence are necessary. The father executes his position of a devout traveler by frequent withdrawals into the places of seclusion where he can think in peace and consider the current issues as if he were a pious pilgrim, dedicated to necessary mental exertion, "You can't be too careful with the sea, you know! I wonder why the sea rises and falls like this. There must be an explanation"⁴⁵. When he discovers a black pool in the middle, almost the heart of the island, it transforms into his sacred spot, a hermitage to take refuge from the noisy family; indeed, the marine landscape of the unfathomable depths of the lake allows Moominpappa to worship in peace. Also, it inspires his inquiring character to research its impenetrable but also murky and dangerous character: whereas the family is afraid of the pool, the father almost religiously investigates its secrets. It acts as the medieval otherworld which "can harm or heal, bestow or withdraw wealth"⁴⁶, the source of dangerous fascination but also satisfaction and thus fulfilment, enlightenment. The peculiar relationship between the pilgrimage site and Moominpappa is very demanding because, for the majority of the time, the sea remains hos-

⁴⁴ H. Dymel-Trzebiatowska, *Secrets of Universal Reading. The Moomin Books by Tove Jansson from the Perspective of Implied Reader and Literary Response*, [in:] Jousten / Svanen 2016, p. 61.

⁴⁵ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 106.

⁴⁶ C. Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, Woodbridge 2010, p. 188.

tile and unpredictable. Again, his spirits retain the engagement, and he patiently pursues his explorations, “Sometimes I’m quite fascinated when I think of the way the sea behaves in such a mysterious way”⁴⁷. During their stay on the island, Pappa measures and researches the land, observes sea currents, and notes about the waves that give him “profound thoughts and speculations”⁴⁸, which he treats thoughtfully even though the results are minute. Nevertheless, he strives to persist, to be on the road, constantly in via⁴⁹ with his scribbles, notes, calculations, “strolling round the island, brooding helplessly over currents and winds, the origin of the rain and storms, and deep holes in the bottom of the sea that no one could fathom”⁵⁰.

However naïve and clumsy in his actions, Moominpappa earns a regained sense of masculinity, which not only can be noticed in the relentless attempts to conquer the land but also in the humble pursuit of his ambitions; “the search for a divine homeland by a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, willingness to face martyrdom, but also loyalty to companions in arms and noble admiration even for enemy warriors worthy of praise and honour (...) were the basic ingredients of crusade-oriented chivalry”⁵¹. It is the lighthouse and an island of his own that fuel the voyage, strengthening the commitment, which convinces the whole family to follow it with him uncomplainingly. They all adjust to the long-time belief in the mission of a homo viator, which Le Goff describes as “choices (...) made moved (...) toward eternal life or eternal death”⁵².

The healing power of pilgrimages and travels: Moomintroll

The call of the road⁵³ at some point attracts Moomintroll as well. He is not the main protagonist any more but uses the opportunity of his father’s quest and pilgrimage to undergo changes of his own, staying away from home and familiar circumstances. Whereas *Moominpappa at Sea* deals mainly with the father and the mother’s pressured relationship⁵⁴, their offspring experiences the process of maturation in preparation for a symbolic knighting into adulthood.

Throughout the novel, the young troll is the insecure, fearful and overly sensitive character secretly envious of Little My’s bold attitude, “How she carries on! (...) She does exactly what she feels like doing,

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 147.

⁴⁹ J. Le Goff, *Introduction: medieval man* op. cit., p. 7.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 151.

⁵¹ F. Cardini, *The warrior and the knight*, op. cit., p.93.

⁵² J. Le Goff, *Introduction: medieval man*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁵⁴ B. Westin, *Tove Jansson...*, op. cit. p. 352.

and no one opposes her. She just does it”⁵⁵, because he overthinks every action. Prior to the family’s arrival on the island, Moomin enjoys the company of his friends in the secured enclosure of the Moomin house, privileged by the social circumstances ensured by the loving parents. In the case of emergency or the cruelty in the world, he retreats quickly, not bearing any consequences. However, the new scenery forces him into a more independent decision-making existence, which overwhelms him but simultaneously intrigues him with fresh possibilities. When he has no choice, he seeks a place of refuge, a spot of his own: “To have a safe hiding place had always been one of his most serious ambitions, he had always been looking for one”⁵⁶, where he would be able to process current, unfamiliar circumstances. The newly discovered pleasures from loneliness on the island stimulate his imagination to create scenarios in his head, which are supposed to help him better cope with the real dangers whenever he is ready to stand up for himself. The mental game of Rescue he invents imitates an experimental tournament where he could freely prove his courage, expecting great awe and admiration; “nobody dared to go out”⁵⁷, only Moomintroll jumps to rescue the Seahorse in distress from a raging storm, “With great Determination, he ran up to one of the boats (..) Little My was shouting something on the beach: ‘I didn’t know he was so Brave! Oh, how sorry I am for everything. But it’s Too Late!’”⁵⁸. The infantile, make-believe images, characteristic of childish plays, boost his future accountability and readiness to react amid dangerous circumstances.

He needs a new identity fitting for life so much different from the Moomin Valley, which he realizes, just like his father in moments of solitude. His place of refuge becomes a safe spot in the bushes, and he accommodates it to his liking; “They knew nothing about the thicket or the glade, they were unaware that every night after the moon had risen Moomintroll went down to the beach with the hurricane lamp”⁵⁹. Enjoying isolation has decidedly a positive outcome on “the cleansing of a soul”⁶⁰ of the young knight-to-be, whose validation seeking in the new place, is of particular difficulty. There are not many characters he can display his skills in front of, and those occupying the island are not interested in him but their private advancements. Still, he does not

⁵⁵ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa...*, op. cit. p. 82.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 159.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 160.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 127.

⁶⁰ L. Sikorska, *Margery Kempe’s Roman (Purgatorial) Holiday, or on Penance and Pleasure in Medieval Journeys*, [in:] R. Boryslawski, A. Czarnowus, Ł. Neubauer (eds.), *Marvels of Reading. Essays in Honour of Professor Andrzej Wicher*, Katowice: 2015, p. 24.

cease trying, and the attempt to release himself from the mothering of Moominmamma turns out to be quite a successful effort, though compensated with embarrassment, mockery and self-doubt, typical pains of growing up. Moomintroll is used to reciprocation from his unproblematic, friendly and good-natured attitude towards others as he expects everybody to mirror his welcoming demeanour. That is why the hostile environment of the island, the Fisherman, ants, Seahorses and the Groke are peculiar forms of the adversary to him. The company of Little My is of no use to him either. The girl is already highly independent and penetrates his childish secrets with ease. In the search for bettering himself, Little My inadvertently becomes his mentor, prompting him into outbursts of rebellious behaviour towards his own fearful reactions; “‘Of course, there’s nobody there’ thought Moomintroll angrily. ‘She [Little My] just made it up. I know she’s always making things up and getting me to believe them. Next time she does it I’ll say: ‘Huh! Don’t be silly!’ A bit superciliously, and in passing, of course”⁶¹, so even though her bravery intimidates the little troll, she remains a model to strive for.

An encounter with beautiful yet cruel Seahorses crashes his youthful perception of the world and breaks his heart and spirits. The creatures do not belong to the island, only visiting its shores, but their attitude matches the unfriendly atmosphere. In his affection for the beauty of the Seahorses, Moomintroll confronts his fear of rejection and exclusion from the community; “He was thinking about the seahorses. Something had happened to him. He had become quite a different troll, with quite different thoughts. He liked being all by himself”⁶². He forms an idealized picture of the animals, but when facing them in reality, he is mocked and humiliated by the creatures. In a humbling failure, Moomintroll experiences edifying lessons on the values of the character, which should overpower physical beauty. The discernible difference in perception pushes him to discover how earthly deceptions cover common sense. He stops sacrificing his time and gift-giving ceremony to the vain animals and turns his attention to the Groke. In that way, the youth learns the importance of compassion and changes his attitude towards the monster everybody else sees. The Groke follows the family longing for companionship, a momentary rest from the loneliness and the symbolic sign of light from the hurricane lamp. Her craving and neglect of the world allow Moomintroll to show compassion and help; “Moomintroll lay on his back looking at the hurricane lamp, but he was thinking about the Groke”⁶³. When

⁶¹ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 141.

⁶³ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa at the Sea*, op. cit., p. 26.

Moomintroll tries to communicate with her, he establishes a new type of relationship with loneliness, which is supposed to heal the whole family. He himself becomes restful after these attempts⁶⁴.

His new, clearer consciousness, opinion-forming skills and reflection on the existing orders refine the troll's mind, which gradually frees him from the paternal sensitivity, separating into his fuller personality and embodying the loss and gain process. Moominmamma comments that "it's growing pains. (...) You never seem to realize that he's growing up. You seem to think he's still a little boy"⁶⁵.

The healing power of pilgrimages and travels: Moominmamma

Last but not least, the protagonist undertaking a journey of medieval pilgrimage is Moominmamma, who does not step into the *Adventure* by choice. During the sea voyage and the stay on the island, it is she who becomes the embodiment of the Old English *Seafarer*, roaming the vast waters "in the grip of painful memories"⁶⁶ of the happier times; "There I heard nothing except the thrumming sea, the ice-cold waves"⁶⁷.

In the poem, the nameless sailor is the victim of the sea voyage, who longs for the land he lost, a piece of earth where he would settle down to steer away from the lone and unfavourable variables of the sea. There are no social interactions in his life anymore, the benevolent kings, "the gold-givers such as there were, when they performed the greatest glories among them and dwelt in the most sovereign reputation"⁶⁸.

Left alone on the mercy of cruel seas, experiencing the loneliness and helplessness of the lot, he is anxious and melancholic, only consoling himself in the promised afterlife.

Having left a "small and exclusive community" behind in the valley⁶⁹, Moominmamma feels alone on the sea likewise, sacrificing her beloved environment for the pappa's revival. Her usual indispensability in the Moominhouse changes into an accompanying role on the

⁶⁴ Kone Foundation, *What can the Moomins teach us about loneliness?* Sanna Tirkkonen, winner of the Vuoden Tiedekynä Academic Writing Award, explores loneliness within a family idyll, <https://koneensaatio.fi/en/news/what-can-the-moomins-teach-us-about-loneliness-sanna-tirkkonen-winner-of-the-vuoden-tiedekyna-academic-writing-award-explores-loneliness-within-a-family-idyll/> [accessed: 10 June 2023].

⁶⁵ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa...*, op. cit., p. 244.

⁶⁶ P. Clemons, *Mens absentia cogitans in The Seafarer and The Wanderer, Medieval Literature and Civilization: Studies in Memory of G.N. Gramonsway*, op. cit., p. 62.

⁶⁷ A.K. Hostetter, *The Seafarer*, Old English Poetry Project. <https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/the-seafarer/> [access: 28 June 2023].

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ J. Le Goff, *Introduction...*, op. cit., p. 5.

island where she feels sad, worried, and even scared of the place, “And she didn’t want to do the puzzle because it reminded her that she was so much alone”⁷⁰. She also becomes a pilgrim. Even though forced to step out of her comfort zone and exposed to the hardships during the journey, she gradually yields under new secluding elements of the peregrination; she “felt very small as she lay there”⁷¹. After a numbing transfer from the Moomin Valley into the barren lighthouse, she retreats into the memories of her previous household, repainting the landscape she knows, “no one was more surprised than Moominmamma herself. She had no idea she could paint so well”⁷². Finally, the transcendence into a new dimension of the island and craftsmanship in utilizing the scarce resources ease her anxiety. She does not perceive herself as diminished in her feminine role of a housewife any more, and she goes beyond her order of things, letting the island spirit lead her through. When Moominmamma gets lost contemplating the mural with nature she created, the family senses the change, “you mustn’t frighten us like that (...) You must remember that we’re used to your being here when we come home in the evening (...) ‘That’s just it. But one needs a change sometimes. We take everything too much for granted, including each other’”⁷³. Sikorska informs that medieval pilgrims agreed to the suffering of pilgrimages, shortening their time in Purgatory⁷⁴. It can analogically refer to Moominmamma’s commitment of releasing one fraction of her old self to relieve the husband from his toil, and the second to allow Moomintroll to grow up, as all of them use the time of the pilgrimage to seek some “sacred space”⁷⁵ of their own.

An additional representative of the literary tradition in the novel is the figure inherently connected to the island, the taciturn, isolated and off-putting fisherman, who, in fact, is a burnt-out, lonely lighthouse keeper. Initially, he ignores the curious family and does not want to interact. Not only is he mysterious but also downright rude and disrespectful until Moominmamma finds him as the outlet for her repressed maternal feelings. In his façade, he represents both the Seafarer and the Wanderer, even though there are no visible signs of his true self. Only when the family discovers the diaries that the former lightkeeper left in the building can the reader finally pity the harassed soul who would rather drown in the hut than keep in contact

⁷⁰ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa...*, op. cit., p. 142.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 166.

⁷² Ibidem, p. 176.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 192.

⁷⁴ L. Sikorska, *Margery Kempe’s Roman (Purgatorial) Holiday, or on Penance and Pleasure in Medieval Journeys*, op. cit., p. 25.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 23.

with anyone. He wrote in the notebook: “out there on the empty sea, Where only the moon appears, No sail has been seen to pass In four long and dreary years”⁷⁶. Therefore, whether it is the numbing pain of loneliness or any other distress that torments him, the fisherman rediscovers his calling, identifying his role anew during the birthday party celebration; “When (...) [they] turned to look at the island (...) [they] saw a beam of light shining on the sea, moving out towards the horizon and then coming back towards the shore in long, even waves. The lighthouse was working”⁷⁷.

The healing power of pilgrimages and travels: Moomin family

Approaching the novel from the perspective of medieval pilgrimage facilitates a better understanding of how the island changes the trolls towards the end of the series. The pilgrimage brings results to a studying squire, Moomintroll, a raging knight, Moominpappa, and a docile pilgrim, Moominmamma, who peak in their strivings with the great battle, a final tournament against the sea. It is obvious how hostile nature is towards the Moomins, who try to observe the island’s rules respectfully, but when the conditions become unbearable, Moominpappa and his son set off to shield the family against the roaring waves. They unite in the eternal struggle to conquer the unknown, “It’s high time you learned to defend yourself!”⁷⁸, trespassing borders between the relationships of the family members, subduing contracted ways of life into new unlimited horizons. Moominpappa’s chivalrous responsibilities are fulfilled the moment he fights instead of only pondering, at which circumstance Moomintroll gets an opportunity to complete his apprentice and grant himself the honorary title of a young knight; “Moomintroll looked at Moominpappa and they started to laugh. They had fooled the sea”⁷⁹. Finally, the father admits that he has “learned to understand you [the sea], and that’s what you don’t like, do you? (...) I’m only saying all this because- well- because I like you”⁸⁰, which shows the humbling transition into a redeemed worshipper that gets reward for the effort put in the process: he has learned the appreciation of the past, present and possibly future. The sea turns out to be benevolent, almost divine in its unexplainable nature of force and authority over the creatures that compensate the efforts of the family with a crate

⁷⁶ T. Jansson, *Moominpappa...*, op. cit., p. 103.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 259.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 216.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 219.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, pp. 236-237.

of whisky, Tove and Victor's favourite, and a plank of wood; it becomes the supernatural "gift of divine providence"⁸¹, the sign that they are accepted.

The lighting of the lighthouse ends triumphantly the quest, pilgrimage and adventure in the last part of the novel. The main protagonist is endowed with "a significant degree of power [over the sea] (...) as available to individuals through learning"⁸². Moominpappa might not have fulfilled his aim to conquer the dream island entirely, but the level of development likens him to the outcome of the traditional chivalric romances where "a victorious knight (...) proves his commitment to (...) a claim to a given piece of land"⁸³. It is not the ultimate victory, but rather a reaching the balance of life in a place where it has seemed impossible to acquire any level of security, not such as each of them wished for. They are all pilgrims in a sense when "just like in John Lydgate's the pilgrimage of the life of man (1426), (...) doomed to everlasting peregrination until they reach a safe haven in the celestial city"⁸⁴.

Summary and conclusion

To summarize, the plot of *Moominpappa at Sea* inhibits the quest for Moominpappa, who does not yield positive results at the beginning, compared to what he remembers from his youth. Sometimes, he would resemble a knight-errant instead in his clumsy endeavours, but persistence and commitment to the cause prompt him to shed sweat, even blood, to fulfil the tasks⁸⁵, ultimately rejuvenating his spirits and placing him in the position of a victorious knight. Moominmamma, for whom the new home on the island brings nothing more than disappointment and hardships, with her attitude of the Wanderer's whisper, "*Where are the joys of the hall?*", gives in and undergoes through the transformative powers of the pilgrimage that aids her to handle the circumstances, preserving the family peace. The parents portray what Westin describes as enthusiasm that fades away but comes back⁸⁶. The island and the lighthouse mark Moomintröll's initiation likewise: he completes the training fit for a squire and is formally admitted into the symbolic brotherhood of adult knights. All in all, by abandoning everything the Moomin family has been accustomed to, they experience the adventure through losses and gains. As a "farewell

⁸¹ C. Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, op. cit., p. 135.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 179.

⁸³ K. Hodges, *Wounded Masculinity: Injury and Gender in Sir Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur'*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁸⁴ L. Sikorska, *Margery Kempe's Roman (Purgatorial) Holiday, or on Penance and Pleasure in Medieval Journeys*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁸⁵ K. Hodges, *Wounded Masculinity...*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁸⁶ B. Westin, *Tove Jansson...*, op. cit., p. 359.

to children's literature"⁸⁷, the novel teaches valuable lessons that would convince not only children but particularly adults to strive until the goal is attained, deriving from the rich literary tradition of ancient and medieval heroes who enliven our spirits in the moments of trials, tribulations, and world's disasters.

All in all, the story of a well-known family of trolls, *Moominpappa at Sea*, is the peculiar conclusion, being the last but one *Moomin* novel to the series of fantastic yet relatable narratives. Its features are diverse from the preceding books, which gives the freedom to depart from the traditional modes of interpretation fit for juvenile literature. By extending readers' horizons into dimensions far exceeding its usual literary criticism, they can enter the remote realms of the Middle Ages and Old English periods, where heroes progressed to try their mettle. The didactic mode of such works helps facilitate the teaching derived from Tove's imagination that cherished closeness to nature and analogously, the true self even amid unfavourable circumstances. It is worth considering the role of chivalric romances and heroic poetry in rereading the book about Moomin trolls who, on the whole, may become valuable role models for adolescents and a stepping stone to adults.

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⁸⁷ H. Dymel-Trzebiatowska, *Secrets of Universal Reading. The Moomin Books by Tove Jansson from the Perspective of Implied Reader and Literary Response*, op. cit., p. 60.

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