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Exploring Literary Analysis: Techniques for Understanding Complex Literature

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Exploring Literary Analysis: Techniques for Understanding Complex Literature

by: Lindsay Persohn

Understanding how texts fit into the world can help readers make connections with familiar and new ideas. An analysis is a critique, or a response to literature, helping readers position texts in individual, cultural, and sociological spheres. Readers see a text through an overlapping set of lenses, relating the text to their personal experiences, other texts they have read, and sociocultural systems in their worlds. Critical literary analyses can come in many forms. Analysis of a text occurs through iterative processes of identifying a comment on a text, relating the comment to a larger theory, then providing evidence from the text to substantiate the comment. But, performing an analysis or critique of literature can be a challenge. How does a reader begin? What does a reader say? Why does it matter?

In this section, I offer some framing explanation for why literature is studied critically, an introduction to some ways in which literature could be studied, and four example analyses I wrote based on one short story, ‘The Spring Tune’ by the award-winning Finnish author and illustrator Tove Jansson. This illustrated short story is published in Jansson’s *Tales from Moominvalley*, originally in Swedish in 1962, translated to English in 1964, and more recently republished by Square Fish in 2010. This book is readily available in many libraries or for purchase online through retailers like indiebound.org and amazon.com. ‘The Spring Tune’ complexity, brief length, and engaging content make it an appealing text for sample analyses.

An Introduction to Strategies for Studying Literature

Shining light on a piece of literature through a selected theoretical lens can produce questions, responses, and ideas that help readers situate literature within its field. A literary analysis could discuss how components of a literary work relate to personal experience, to other literary components (within a single work), how two literary works relate to each other, and how a literary work relates to larger sociocultural contexts. The reader's interpretation is supported by connecting the text with a critical theory. It is important for readers to understand there are many ways to interpret literature. Meyer (1999) reminds critics of all experience levels, "New voices do not drown out the past; they build on it and eventually become part of the past as newer writers take their place beside them" (p. 2025). Budding critics can find their way to meaning and significance in literature by bearing in mind there are many possible frameworks for analysis to explore, their ideas will often spring from the ideas of others, and ideas about literature can change over time as various contexts influence the lenses brought to literature.

As a starting point for thinking about literary analysis, readers might think about different perspectives through which a work could be viewed. Any of the following perspectives might be used to critically respond to a text:

- **biographical strategies** - Knowledge of an author's life can be used to serve as a gauge on an interpretation of a work. Biographical analyses can open the possibilities of interpretation and raise questions without resolving them. For example, knowledge of Lewis Carroll's (aka Charles Dodgson's) life helps a reader understand *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) as a search for personal identity.
- **gender strategies** - Ideas about masculinity and femininity are the main focus of gender strategies. Readers can work to understand how gender is socially constructed in cultures, including how men and women write and read about each other. These strategies are based on feminist theory. This approach could also include topics related to sexuality (i.e., queer theory, LGBTQ perspectives). As one example, a reader could examine how gender is constructed in variant editions of Cinderella tales.
- **historical strategies** - Readers can use history to better understand the original context of a work of literature, use literature to understand the nuances of history, or read with an eye for the stories untold by traditional history (as a new historicist). For example, a reader could investigate the ties between Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and the racial climate of Alabama in the 1930s.

- **ideological strategies** - Ideological strategies examine an ideograph (e.g., liberty, equality, family values, freedom of speech, etc.) in a work through an understanding of the social, political, and intellectual systems (e.g., realism, Marxism, religious faith, etc.) in which the author wrote it. For example, a reader might study family structure in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911) in order to contrast Victorian and modern ideas about families.
- **mythological strategies** - Myths focus on hopes, fears, and expectations of entire cultures, providing “a strategy for understanding how human beings try to account for their lives symbolically” (Meyer, 1999, p. 2037). This kind of analysis could focus on ideas about the potentially unexplainable (i.e., origins, destiny, purpose, etc.) or utilize archetypes to connect with folk tales, heroes, tricksters, spirits, etc. As an example, a reader could compare the main characters in Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* (2008) to the gladiators of ancient Rome.
- **psychological strategies** - Psychology has been greatly influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories including levels of consciousness (id, ego, superego), dreams (often said to reveal the unconscious), defense mechanisms, etc. Psychological strategies are influenced by many other psychologists throughout history, including Carl Jung's theory of the collective consciousness. In this kind of work, a reader could analyze Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) through her use of defense mechanisms.
- **reader-response strategies** - Reader-response strategies view reading as a creative act and emphasize what happens in the reader's mind (Iser, 1974; Rosenblatt, 1994/1978). A reader-response interpretation is based in the original text, so it should come after several close readings of a text. For example, a reader might examine how J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter experienced school, quoting passages and citing incidents from the book to contrast to his or her views of school.
- **structuralist strategies** - A structuralist might attend to the relationships between form and meaning in the work—its language, structure and tone through elements such as diction, irony, paradox, metaphor, and symbol as well as plot, characterization, and narrative technique. The focus of a structuralist analysis is on literary devices over content (i.e., the *way* a text is written, over *what* is written). A reader could use structuralist strategies to examine Ernest Hemingway's writing style in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

This list of strategies is not exhaustive; there are many ways scholars study literature. Each approach to making meaning in a text has limitations and advantages. Readers should select a text and an approach to meet their interests and skill levels. With the knowledge that many approaches overlap and supplement each other, readers can record observations, questions, and ideas about connections to a text during reading to begin analysis.

Approaching the Text: Logic and Process

Developing an analysis, critique, or comment is not writing a summary— analysis begins with a comment on the text, the reader relates the comment to a larger theory, then provides evidence from the text to substantiate the comment. It is important to choose a compelling text.

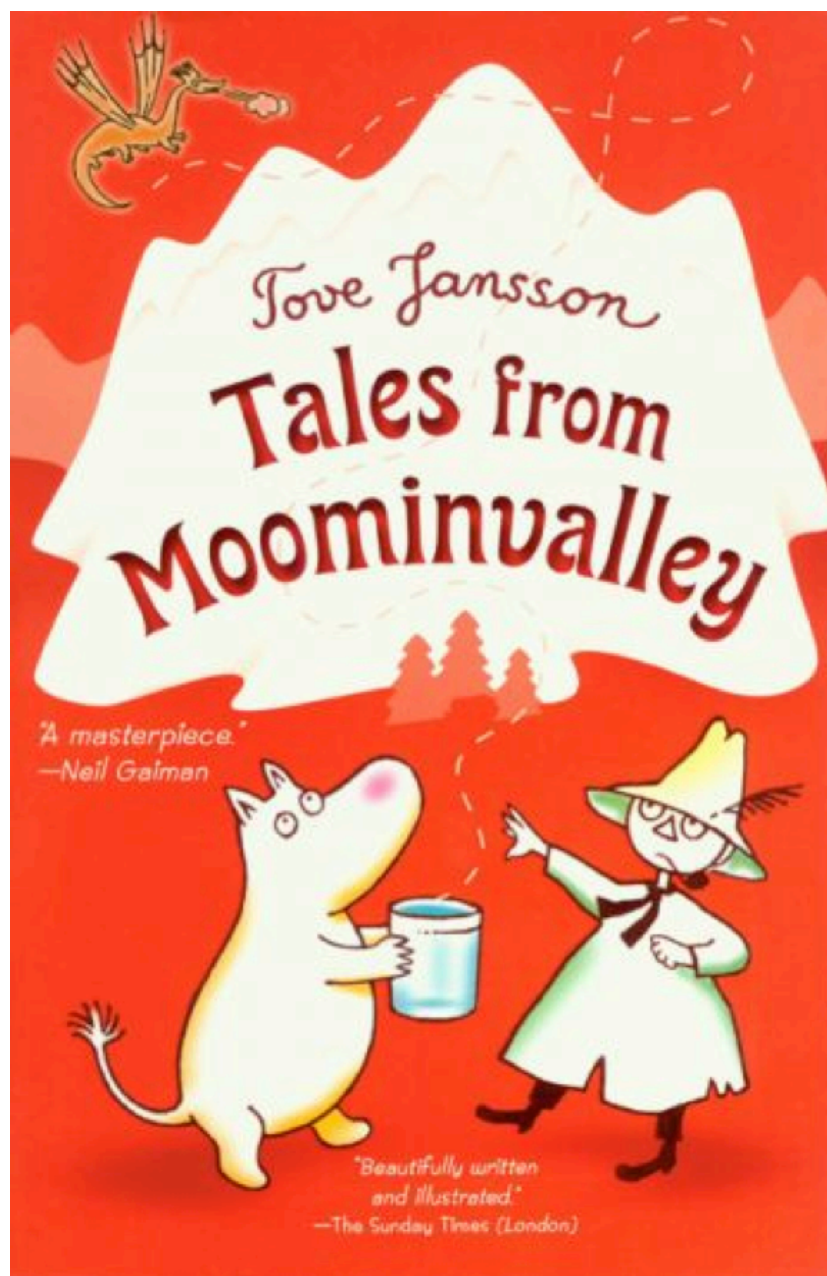


Figure 1 The Spring Tune is one story in a collection called *Tales from Moominvalley* by Tove Jansson and translated by Thomas Warburton, 1962, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

As I read Tove Jansson’s ‘The Spring Tune’ for the first time, I saw evidence of layered meanings through meticulous word choices, unusual phrase construction, and the story’s complex structure. I also chose to study this story because I enjoy it. Jansson’s expressive, sensory writing carries her distinct and Nordic viewpoint. Her Moomin characters each have distinguishable personalities, revealed over time through their stories to give readers an understanding of the many facets of each character. Tove Jansson is a key player in Finnish children’s literature and won the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1966 for her writing. The Moomin series has been translated into over 30 languages (Jansson, 1964/2010). Translated literature provides a unique opportunity for an international exchange of ideas. Complex, entertaining stories like these are a good place for novice literary critics to begin.

Step 1: Read, Note, Repeat

Rereading the text and making notes are important first steps in the analysis process. Rereading helps a reader develop an understanding of the text through an open-ended process of studying words and illustrations for their literal and figurative meanings, which may differ from understandings developed during a first reading (Eagleton, 2008). Making notes in the text encourages a reader to spend more time with each page, engage in recording in-the-moment thoughts, and document details and overarching ideas. Notes allow a reader to revisit germane ideas and questions as he or she develops a comment for formalized analysis.

- To begin my analysis, I copied ‘The Spring Tune’ in an enlarged format (11”x17”) to allow extra space for writing my notes during repeated readings.
- During the rereading process, I marked each iteration of my notes with a different color or method to distinguish my thoughts after each iteration. (See Figure 1 for a photographed example of my notes.)
- During my first rereading, I made no marks in the text; rather I read for nuanced comprehension of the story and enjoyment.
- During my second re-reading, I used a yellow highlighter, highlighting words and phrases that seemed to carry more than surface-level meanings.
- On my next re-readings, I developed a subtext in the margins, including my observations, questions, and connections as I read, attending to my own reading processes as well as the author’s writing.
- I marked my notes in purple pen during my third rereading, blue pen for the fourth, purple highlighter for the fifth, and black ink for the sixth rereading.

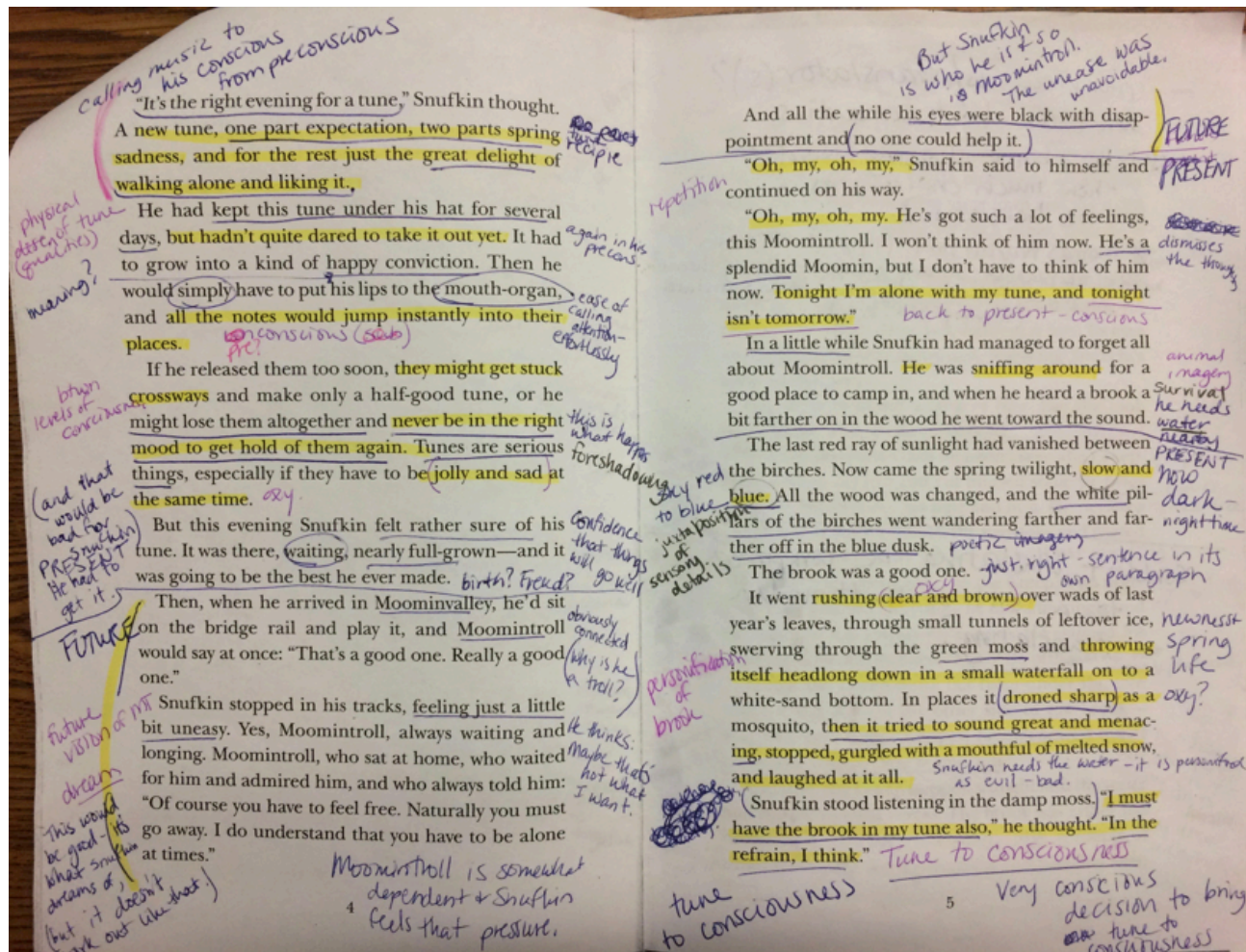


Figure 2 The analysis involves several readings using different color pens, highlighters, and note locations.

During these readings over time, my notes helped me build an understanding of particular words, phrases, and passages in the story, as well as how those words, phrases, and passages work together throughout the story in details of the plot, character development, sociocultural structures, humor, and enchantment in ‘The Spring Tune’.

Step 2: Investigate, Write, Read, Repeat

I researched my selected perspectives, revisited the text, and recorded my thoughts. I reread the short story as published (i.e., not from my notes, but from my copy of the book) to myself, then aloud I as focused on ideas at the forefront of my mind after reading and noting my ideas— form, myth, dreams, and illustrations. I made notes on a separate notepad as I read the short story again. I solidified my ideas about Snufkin’s encounter with the Creep and I wrote complete and incomplete sentences to “account for phenomena — the text— without distorting or misrepresenting what it describes” (Meyer, 1999, p. 2023). As I wrote about my ideas, I continued to go back to my annotations and notes when questions arose and clarification was needed. I consulted primary and secondary sources about the ideas I discerned from the text (literary form, myth, dreams, and descriptive illustrations in this story) to help develop my strands of thinking. The process resulted in the four analyses following the synopsis of ‘The Spring Tune’ by Tove Jansson.

Jansson's 'The Spring Tune'

Familiarity with Tove Jansson's short story 'The Spring Tune' in *Tales from Moominvalley* (1964/2010) is useful for readers of the following examples. Though I highly recommend reading the short story in its entirety, here I provide a synopsis:

In 'The Spring Tune', characters Snufkin and a small, initially unnamed wood creature (known as a Creep), engage in a complex exchange of power and subjectivity. Snufkin, the vagabond and musician, is on his way back to Moominvalley after Winter Sleep. He is irritated by the small Creep, dismissive of his attempts at conversation and his requests to hear some of Snufkin's famous mouth-organ music. Feeling his evening of solitude is ruined and the tune he had "under his hat" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 4) is gone, Snufkin engages in dialogue with the Creep and gives Teety-Woo his name before it/he scurries off. The next day, Snufkin can think of nothing but Teety-Woo and returns to the wood, wishing to find him again. When Snufkin encounters Teety-Woo for a second time, Teety-Woo is dismissive of Snufkin.

While I strive to address structural, cultural, and psychological ideas in a straightforward way, I hope my discussion evokes further investigation into the intricacies of these perspectives for readers. Following each example, I say more about how I developed the commentary from my notes into these literary comments.

Example Analysis 1: Jansson's Notable Use of Language

"The Little Creep stared at him with yellow eyes in the firelight. It thought its name over, tasted it, listened to it, crawled inside it, and finally turned its nose to the sky and softly howled its new name, so sadly and ecstatically that Snufkin felt a shiver along his back."
(Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 12)

Tove Jansson's stories bring readers' awareness to matters of psychology and sociology through diction and syntax. Her descriptions are highly sensory and her word choices often juxtapose ideas, drawing attention to not only *what* she writes, but the *way* she writes. Linguistic devices in Jansson's works emphasize feelings and thoughts.

In the opening paragraphs of 'The Spring Tune', Jansson brings readers' awareness to the present, using language resembling that of meditation:

Walking had been easy, because his knapsack was nearly empty and he had no worries on his mind. He felt happy about the wood and the weather, and himself. Tomorrow and yesterday were both at a distance, and just at present the sun was shining brightly red between the birches, and the air was cool and soft. (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 3)

Sensory language describing the sun as "shining brightly red" and the air as "cool and soft" connect the reader to Snufkin's surroundings and his contented state of mind. Commas draw attention to the description of Snufkin's personal satisfaction, found through his travels and his presence in the moment's details.

When Snufkin begins to settle into the woods for the evening, readers catch a glimpse of his pensive ways through his view on mealtimes (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 6):

Snufkin was used to cooking his own dinner. He never cooked a dinner for other people if he could avoid it, nor did he care much for other people's dinners. So many people insisted on talking when they had a meal.

Also they had a great liking for chairs and tables, and some of them used napkins. He even had heard of a Hemulen who changed his clothes everytime he was about to eat, but that was probably slander.

The fact that he cooks for himself and avoids other people's cooking isolates Snufkin from social dinners, evidencing his persona as a loner and wanderer. Snufkin's thoughts counter the ideals of a civilized meal, but when narrated through his viewpoint, these conventions of mealtime become defamiliarized and subject to scrutiny. The use of *slander* points to the relative absurdity in the old tradition of dressing for dinner. Snufkin's point of view, brought to light by a distinctive syntactic rhythm and crisp word choice, gives readers a glimpse Snufkin's innermost thoughts about himself and his relationship with society.

Jansson's diction and syntax bring readers' awareness to matters of psychology and sociology. As she wrote the Moomin stories in her native language, Swedish, one could argue many of these noteworthy word choices are selected by a translator. But books in the Moomin series have been translated by several writers, and all works maintain poetic rhythm, illustrative vocabulary, and detailed yet concise phrasing. The ideas and diction are Jansson's creations, and the translated versions would, of course, not exist without her original works. Her descriptions are highly sensory, often juxtapose ideas, and Jansson's distinctive construction of sentences draws attention to not only the content of her stories, but the way she tells them.

Reflections on Developing Example Analysis 1

My initial highlights and notes in 'The Spring Tune' became the basis for the structural analysis presented here in Example 1. Many of the phrases I highlighted provided sensory details, carried a rhythmic nature, and conveyed human emotions. Rereading the story aloud helped me identify particularly poetic, sensory, and descriptive phrases, good candidates for development in my analysis. Example 1 came to fruition as I studied the phrases I highlighted in my early readings of 'The Spring Tune', by identifying, naming, and describing the richness in Jansson's writing.

Example Analysis 2: Snufkin and Teety-Woo; or Prometheus and Io, Reimagined

"He puffed a few clouds of smoke toward the night sky and waited for the spring tune.

It didn't come. Instead he felt the Creep's eyes upon him."

(Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 7)

Myths are ancient ways of answering questions about the universe from people who had a much stronger connection to nature than today's "civilized man" (Hamilton, 1942/2011, p. 1). In 'The Spring Tune', I identify several of Snufkin's characteristics that relate to the mythological figure Prometheus. The wood Creep of 'The Spring Tune' shares some symbolism with the mythological figure Io. I suggest links between the two stories by first summarizing the pertinent points of each story, then drawing parallels between them.

Prometheus and Io. Prometheus is considered a "champion of humankind" and one of the wisest Titans (Daly, 1992/2009, p. 121). He stole the gift of fire from heaven to give to man. Prometheus was bound to a rock by Zeus as punishment for bringing fire to man, where a bird picked off his liver throughout the day. Each night, he healed so his punishment would go on forever. Prometheus had a "strange visitor" described by Hamilton (1942/2011) as a "distracted fleeing creature . . . clambering awkwardly over the cliffs and crags..." (p. 95). Prometheus recognized this visitor as Io, the beautiful woman turned into a heifer. Prometheus told Io to look to the future to cope with her plight of the gad-fly's ceaseless buzzing which forced her to wander aimlessly near the Ionian sea.

Snufkin and Teety-Woo. Snufkin is a vagabond and musician, wood-famous for his travel stories and his mouth-organ music. 'The Spring Tune' begins as Snufkin searches for dry firewood. As he sits by his fire, smoking his pipe, he feels the eyes of a small wood Creep "[watching] everything he did, admiringly" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 7). Snufkin feels uneasy. The wood Creep recognizes Snufkin and reaches him by wading across a brook, stumbling and freezing all the way. After some conversation, Snufkin names the Creep Teety-Woo, a name based on the song of a passing bird. Once Teety-Woo is named, he sees a future for himself.

Prometheus : Io :: Snufkin : Teety-Woo. The following two-column comparison of Prometheus and Io, and Snufkin and Teety-Woo evidences similarities between the two stories.

- | | |
|---|--|
| - Prometheus speaks Io's name | - Snufkin gives Teety-Woo his name |
| - a bird provides Prometheus's punishment | - a bird provides Snufkin's inspiration |
| - Io is caught between human and animal | - Teety-Woo is caught between animal and human |

When Io first comes upon Prometheus, bound to the rock at Caucasus, she says:

This that I see—
 A form storm-beaten,
 Bound to a rock.
 Do you do wrong?
 Is this your punishment?
 Where am I?
 Speak to the wretched wanderer.
 Enough— I have been tried enough—
 My wandering— my long wandering.
 Yet I have found nowhere
 To leave my misery.
 I am a girl who speak to you,
 But horns are on my head.
 (Hamilton, 1942/2011, p. 96)

In the same style, I respond through the voice of The Creep:

This that I see—
 A form weather-worn,
 Unbound from Establishment.
 Do you do song?
 Is this your freedom?
 Who am I?
 Name the curious wanderer.
 Enough— I have been ignored enough—
 My reality— my small reality.
 Yet I have found no name
 To leave my anonymity.
 I am a person who speak to you,
 But fur is on my body.
 (Persohn, 2015)

Though Jansson’s story is decidedly less morbid than the myth, similarities between the stories exist on several levels. Prometheus is considered to mean “forethought”, and Snufkin mentions the new moon, wishes, and new beginnings. According to Daly (1992/2009), Gothe saw Prometheus as a symbol of “rebellion against the restraints of society” (p. 121), a strong characteristic of Snufkin’s persona, who rejects personal property and authority figures. Io is a woman changed to a heifer, and the wood Creep, Teety-Woo in ‘The Spring Tune’ similarly wavers between animal and human. References to fire, strange visitors, real and perceived constraints, ceaseless wandering, and nods to the future run through the myth of Prometheus and Io and the tale of Snufkin and Teety-Woo.

Reflections on Developing Example Analysis 2

My comparison of ‘The Spring Tune’ to the myth of Prometheus and Io only developed after I read the story six or seven times. Example 2 came together when I realized I was familiar with a myth involving a strange visitor and references to fire. I toured Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* (1942/2011) and found the familiar tale of Prometheus and Io. After reading the myth three times, I identified and described essential elements in the Prometheus and Io myth, then returned to ‘The Spring Tune’ to write about analogous concepts. I began to see the conversation Prometheus and Io had at Caucasus could mirror the conversation Snufkin and Teety-Woo had by the campfire. I recognized words and phrasing in passages from the myth I could substitute with ideas and actions from ‘The Spring Tune’ to create a parody.

Example Analysis 3: Tove Jansson’s ‘The Spring Tune’ as ‘The Spring Dream’

The tune was quite near at hand, easy to catch by the tail. But there was time enough to wait: it was hedged in and couldn't get away. No, better to wash the dishes first, then light a pipe -- and afterwards, when the campfire was burning down and the night creatures started calling for each other, then he'd have it.

Snufkin was washing his saucepan in the brook when he caught sight of the Creep. It was sitting on the far side below a tree root, looking at him.

-- (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 6-7)

Tove Jansson’s ‘The Spring Tune’ is wrought with dream imagery, ambivalent details, and non-sequitur conversations. Jansson’s illustration on the opening page of the story supports the conception of the story as a dream with the main character, Snufkin, lying in the grass, arms folded behind his head, eyes closed (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 3). Jansson uses phrasing like “rested his eyes” (p. 6), characters talk about dreaming (p. 9), and the story closes with Snufkin again lying in the grass, looking at the “clear, dark blue straight above him...” (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 16). I selected a Freudian dream analysis (Freud, 1900) to deconstruct Snufkin’s encounter with a wood Creep in this story. Freud’s psychoanalytic dream-work enables me to explore the text as condensed, displaced, and visualized to understand the story through manifest meaning of latent content (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Freud, 1900; Eagleton, 2008).

Dream-work. According to Sigmund Freud, the first job of dream-work is *condensation*, whereby some elements of thought are omitted from representation altogether, fragments of complex thoughts manifest, and elements of thought combine into a single unit (Freud, 1916 as cited in Rice & Waugh, 2001). The second action in dream-work is *displacement*. Displacement might replace a thought with an allusion or shift an idea so it appears differently centered and strange (Freud, 1916/2001). Thirdly, a *transformation* occurs, whereby dream-work must shape condensed and displaced thoughts as sensory images, mostly visual.

Freud offers some caution in interpreting dreams: “In general one must avoid seeking to explain one part of the manifest dream by another, as though the dream had been coherently conceived and was a logically arranged narrative” (Freud, 1916 as cited in Rice & Waugh, 2001, p. 31). Sometimes the meaning of thoughts and images in dreams is distorted to the point of reversal (e.g., Climbing up a staircase can mean the same thing as coming down) (Freud, 1916/2001). Freud warns against overestimating the dream-work by attributing too much to it. I proceeded in my analysis with this in mind.

Freudian Interpretations. Snufkin, the vagabond and musician of Moominvalley, walks through the woods just before twilight, with a new song just "under his hat" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 4). The task of catching this tune can not be forced or rushed. Instead of his tune, Snufkin encounters a small admirer in the woods. He is dismissive and irritated at the interruption to his thoughts. The admirer (a shy, scared Creep) walks across the icy creek, falling several times to reach Snufkin, while Snufkin watches with an uneasy feeling, unable to move, as in a dream. Snufkin, his evening of solitude ruined, gives in to conversation with the Creep after he shares his intense interest in Snufkin's wood-famous musical talents. The Creep has never heard music before.

In his questions that follow, the Creep requests Snufkin give him a name, as he is too small to have one yet. After “someone flew across the brook on long pointed wings and gave a long, sad cry among the trees: *Yo-yooo, yo-ooo, tee-woo...*”, Snufkin dubs him 'Teety-Woo' because it has a "light beginning, sort of, and a little sadness to round it off" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 11), focusing energy on the way sounds relate to emotion and mimicking the song of the passing creature. The Creep's interest in Snufkin quickly wanes and the newly-named Teety-Woo almost immediately exits the scene.

The naming of Teety-Woo is possibly the moment when a Tune would emerge for Snufkin; instead he names the Creep. Snufkin misses the opportunity to capture his song and the Tune is forever lost to his unconscious. Though it is a lesser known topic of Freud's work, songs, like dreams, are associated with repressed thoughts (Diaz de Chumacerio, 1990).

Freudian Conclusions. At the end of the story, Teety-Woo moves to the foreground, assuming power and individual identity, while Snufkin recedes. Snufkin's eventual interest in Teety-Woo could approximate how Snufkin might react if his softhearted friend, Moomintroll, assumed the power in their relationship and forego his "waiting and longing" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 4) for Snufkin's return to Moominhouse. When they first meet, Snufkin and the Creep talk of Snufkin's best friend, Moomintroll:

'Isn't it a nice thing to know that someone's longing for you and waiting and waiting to see you again?'
'I'm coming when it suits me!' Snufkin cried violently. 'Perhaps I shan't come at all. Perhaps I will go somewhere else.'
'Oh. Then he'll be sad,' said the Creep. (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 11)

As Teety-Woo points out, the privilege of friendship comes with an obligation to satisfy someone else's needs. As Snufkin says, "'You can't ever really be free if you admire somebody too much... I know.'" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 8). Snufkin and Teety-Woo's conversation about Moomintroll could point to the strain Snufkin feels about his best friend, manifest in the dream. Snufkin rebuffs Teety-Woo's admiration, just as he thinks he might with Moomintroll. In the case of Teety-Woo, however, Snufkin finds as soon as the admiration fades, he desperately seeks it. Through Snufkin's dream-like state I see the forest as a place of dreams, and Snufkin's experience through Freud's dream-work.

Reflections on Developing Example Analysis 3

After my second rereading of this story, I wondered, "Is this Snufkin's dream?" So on my third rereading, I began to attend more heavily to what I saw as dream references, the foundation for Example 3. I worked first on formalizing the dream analysis, the most-referenced idea in my notes. I refreshed my memory about Sigmund Freud's dreamwork by reading his original works (1900) and Rice and Waugh's (2001) presentation of Freud (1916). Rand and Torok (1993) discuss Freud's interpretation of dreams as "personal free association" and, on the other hand, "a world of fixed and universal meanings" (p. 575). Eagleton, citing Freud, refers to dreams as the 'royal road' to the unconscious (Eagleton, 2008, p. 137). I worked to develop rational parallels between Freud's psychoanalytic dream interpretation and 'The Spring Tune', locate sufficient support in those texts, and record my connections in sentences.

Example Analysis 4: Jansson's Pencil Alongside Her Pen in 'The Spring Tune'

"The last red ray of sunlight had vanished between the birches. Now came the spring twilight, slow and blue. All the wood was changed, and the white pillars of the birches went wandering farther and farther off in the blue dusk."
 -- (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 5)

Tove Jansson, illustrator and author, includes many interior illustrations with her stories. Her detailed black line sketches are charged with emotion and indicative of her rich narrative writing style. The fact that her pictures illustrate her words creates a unique relationship between text and image. Jansson illustrates the short story 'The Spring Tune' with seven separate but variously linked images of Snufkin, Teety-Woo, the moon, and the landscape that helps shape the emotional influences in this story.

The image before the first page of 'The Spring Tune' shows Snufkin alone, facing a large but light and rising full moon along his wide, open path. The illustration evokes feelings of solitude, peace, and renewed wonder at the surrounding world. The illustration on the next page, just before the start of the story shows Snufkin reclined on a leafy bed, a peaceful face, arms folded behind his head, resting on his knapsack. Snufkin (a recurring character in Jansson's stories) is often pictured in other illustrations with a large, triangular nose, making him appear old, firm, and wise, but in this reclined position, viewers see his face in small, soft outline, giving Snufkin an air of child-like ease.

Several pages into the story, Jansson visually introduces "a rather thin and miserable Creep" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 8) as he crawls through the cold, deep brook to meet Snufkin on the other side. Jansson's third illustration in this short story shows a close shot of the Creep from the waist up, with wide, intense eyes and paws held out of the water that surrounds him. Jansson tells readers "the Creep stepped straight into the water and started to wade across. The brook was rather too broad for it, and the water was ice-cold. A couple of times the Creep lost its foothold and tumbled over. . ." (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 8). Finally, with chattering teeth, the Creep reaches Snufkin at the other shore. On the next page, a full-page illustration reveals a dense wood with trees so tall their tops do not enter the picture. In the bottom third of the illustration, the Creep, highlighted in the center of the image by an absence of surrounding forms, talks to a contemplative Snufkin who sits on a dark log nearby, holding his hands in his lap and his pipe in his mouth. Through his wondering expression and his outstretched arms, the Creep seems to be revealing his deepest thoughts to Snufkin. Jansson's text confirms this idea, revealing the Creep's admiration for Snufkin's worldly experiences and wisdom: "'I know you know everything,' the Little Creep prattled on, edging closer still. 'I know you've seen everything. You're right in everything you say, and I'll always try to become as free as you are . . . So now you're on your way to Moominvalley to have a rest and meet your friends . . .'" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 9-11).

As soon as the conversation turns to expectations of Snufkin's return to Moominvalley, Snufkin snaps, "I'm coming when it suits me!" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 11).

Silence follows until a night bird flies over head and inspires Snufkin to give the Little Creep a name, as he requested when they first met. Snufkin names the Creep 'Teety-Woo' and "the Little Creep stared at him with yellow eyes in the firelight. It thought its name over, tasted it, listened to it, crawled inside it, and finally turned its nose to the sky and softly howled its new name, so sadly and ecstatically that Snufkin felt a shiver along his back" (Jansson, 1964/2010, p. 12). The illustration above this description shows the newly-named Teety-Woo, void of surroundings, stretched upright, eyes cast skyward, mouth open as if howling. After this moment in the story, Teety-Woo disappears to Snufkin's surprise and chagrin. The next page shows Snufkin alone and void of surroundings except the rock he sits on. Under his distinctive wide-brimmed and crumpled hat, Snufkin's expression is forlorn and bewildered. Though Jansson presents Snufkin or Teety-Woo alone in five of the seven images in this story, only this sixth image conveys a loneliness in being alone. Snufkin's form indicates a complete posture, with his hands folded in his lap and his shapeless clothing covering all but his feet and face. His gaze is cast on the reader, as if he may be hoping for direction and reassurance from an outside source.

The closing image in this short story shows a crescent-shaped moon above pointed treetops. Perhaps this illustration is indicative of a lunar eclipse, significant in astrology and culture as a good or bad omen, depending on which traditions one follows. A lunar eclipse can only occur during a full moon, which links this closing illustration to Jansson's very first picture, before the opening of this story. The full moon depicted initially is expectant of hope and renewed energies, just as Snufkin is expectant of a new Spring Tune at the close of the story as he lays on his back, looks up at the sky, and delights in being by himself once again.

Developing Example Analysis 4

This analysis was the last I developed from Jansson's short story. Throughout my readings and re-readings, I made notes about Jansson's illustrations, but the details and connections I propose here came after careful and systematic consideration of the drawings. When looking closely at art, I begin by asking myself three questions: What do I see? What do I think? What do I feel? Principles of visual literacy (i.e., how we read images; see Bang, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) influence how I understand the parts and wholes of images in illustration. Not surprisingly, as I make observations, I develop questions and thoughts about the images I see. These questions and thoughts cause me to look more closely at what I see and respond to and interpret my questions and ideas. With

illustration (opposed to some other forms of visual art), the accompanying text provides great insights and directions for interpretation. As I make sense of my observations and questions about illustrations I see, I revisit textual accompaniments to better understand an author/illustrator's verbal/visual messages.

From Commentary to Comment

I followed similar nonlinear processes through all three analyses: developing a comment, locating support in the texts, checking my logic, then further developing the comment, adding support, and again checking my logic. I selected quotes from Jansson's (1964/2010) text to frame each of my analyses. Identifying parts of the original text related to the ideas I present in my analyses helped me solidly anchor my analyses in the original text. I drafted introductory and concluding paragraphs with the goal of tracing my thinking and following my connections. I considered potential objections to my interpretations and added comments to address some counter-interpretations. I reread my analyses for logical development, cohesion, and flow. Then, I asked other readers to read and comment on my work. I revised my writing to address their questions and concerns, then checked for coherence and corrected typographical errors.

Concluding Thoughts

Literary analysis is complex and nonlinear. These understandings of 'The Spring Tune' developed over time, with my attention vacillating between details and broader strokes of this story and supporting texts (i.e., the myth of Prometheus and Io, Freud's dream interpretation framework, texts about literary analysis, visual messages in illustration, etc. in these examples). Formalizing a literary comment, with sufficient support from both the original text and supporting sources, is a challenging undertaking that caused me to think deeply about the story, the theories, my reading processes, and the author's writing processes.

To be sure, there are may be other possible interpretations of 'The Spring Tune'. But the purpose of this book segment is to demonstrate why it is important to move beyond sentence level comprehension of a text and provide examples of how readers might accomplish this goal. Understanding how a text fits into the landscape of literature can help readers make real-world connections with texts in their broadest conceptions. Additionally, critical readings of literature can spark new investigations into various writing structures, histories, and theories.

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