ABSTRACT. The article analyzes Tove Jansson’s Moomin novels in terms of the representations of pipe smoking. The analysis focuses on three characters from the novels: Moominpappa, Snufkin, and the Joxter. The theoretic framework of the analysis is called “the semiotics of tobacco”. In this context, tobacco is regarded as a sign of the cultural sign-system, and thus what is exactly analyzed are the cultural meanings of tobacco in the Moomin novels.

1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone who has ever read Tove Jansson’s Moomin novels is familiar with the fact that all of the main characters of the novels seem to have a special relationship to some given everyday object. Actually, the inhabitants of the Moomin world often show and communicate their individuality and subjectivity through these particular objects, which are associated with their own distinctive ways of living and being in the world. This means that – in addition to all the non-material issues, thoughts and gestures defining the identities of the characters – many kinds of different material objects are the sort of symbols, which refer to the identities and personalities of the characters living in Moominvalley. These symbols include the clothes such as Moominmamma’s apron and Moominpappa’s top hat as well as many other everyday items such as mamma’s handbag, the Snork Maiden’s anklet, and Snufkin’s harmonica. All these objects imply something essential about their bearer. Furthermore and more importantly, they effect on that how a reader feels about the character; they give us the perspective to the character’s idea of the world.
The main topic of this article is such kinds of everyday objects that are the very symbols referring to the characters’ identities and world-views: the pipes. In what follows, I will analyze the representations of pipe smoking and pipe smokers in the Moomin novels (one of them, Tales from Moominvalley, being actually the short story collection). The works I will analyze are Finn Family Moomintroll (1948; FFM), The Exploits of Moominpappa (1950; EoM), Moominsummer Madness (1954; MM), Tales from Moominvalley (1962; TfM), Moominpappa at a Sea (1965; MaS), and Moominvalley in November (1970; MiN).\(^1\) In the analysis, I consider the questions of who, how, and why smokes the pipe in Moominvalley or in the world of the Moomins in general. I will bring forward how the pipe as an object defines the selfhoods of the characters, but, as the matter of fact, the main aim of the analysis is to show how pipe smoking in the novels at the same time gives meanings to both the smoker’s identity and to tobacco use itself. Thus, the focus is on the cultural meanings of tobacco.

The purpose is to analyze those characters of the Moomin novels who smoke pipes: especially the analysis focuses on Moominpappa and Snufkin but also amongst these two major characters there is one other fascinating minor character, the Joxter, who is Snufkin’s father and one of Moominpappa’s friends of youth. The questions concerning these three characters and their smoking are twofold: firstly, I am asking the function of pipe smoking in constructing their identities and, secondly, I am considering the question of what kind of meanings and interpretations tobacco and tobacco use get in the novels when those are represented in them. The questions of the analysis are such as: Why are these characters of the Moomin novels smoking the pipes? What smoking tells about the character, and what the character tells about itself to others when smoking the pipe? What can the readers of the Moomin novels interpret from the description of smoking and smokers in the novels? What are the meanings given to tobacco in the Moomin novels?\(^2\)

2. THE CULTURAL RESEARCH OF TOBACCO

As already said, the analysis here has two objectives: on the one hand, I analyze how smoking the pipe effects on the character’s identity and personality, and, on the other hand, I analyze how the representations of pipe smoking

\(^1\) All analysed works are e-books (Puffin Books Amazon Kindle versions) which explains the missing page numbers. Otherwise, the quotes from the different books are marked with the mentioned abbreviations.

\(^2\) One interesting question might also be the interrelationship between the representations of smoking in the Moomin novels and the role(s) of smoking and smokers in Tove Jansson’s real life disclosed in her biographies. Unfortunately, this theme has to be excluded here. The focus of the analysis is on the fictitious smokers regardless of whether or not there can be found some connections to the real life of the author.
smoking in the Moomin novels effect on the cultural meanings of tobacco. The theory “behind” the analysis is something that might be called “the semiotics of tobacco” (cf. Derrida, 1992; Hallila, 2011; Klein, 1993). Within this undefined and intentionally “blurry” theoretical framework, tobacco and different forms of tobacco use are considered as the signs in the cultural sign-system. According to the approach, tobacco as a sign has two aspects, which must take into account. First, the “tobacco-sign” can have various different meanings all of which can change depending on the contexts (see Derrida, 1992). Secondly, at the same time the tobacco-sign carries conventionalized meanings recognizable and understandable for the receivers and interpreters of the sign in their everyday life (see Klein, 1993).

Before the proper analysis, it is necessary – in order to conceptualize the themes of the research – to outline more the theoretical and research contexts and to take a better look on the background of the cultural meanings of tobacco and their research. Nevertheless, since it is not indispensable or even possible to have a broad theoretical overview in this context, this can be done with the four quite light theoretical statements about the cultural research of tobacco in order to have enough theoretical understanding of the aims of the analysis.

First of all, one of the main features of tobacco as a substance is its non-necessary nature. Although being close to vitally important foodstuff such as water and eating, tobacco surpasses ordinary life routines. It is for the enjoyment above the normal weekday. What follows below is a quote from Jacques Derrida (who has, among all the other things, written quite a lot about tobacco) according to which tobacco is essentially a purposeless and thus a luxurious pleasure for the smoking subject:

What is tobacco? Apparently it is the object of a pure and luxurious consumption. It appears that this consumption does not meet any natural need of the organism. It is a pure and luxurious consumption, gratuitous and therefore costly, an expenditure at a loss that produces a pleasure, a pleasure one gives oneself through the ingestive channel that is closest to auto-affection: the voice or orality. A pleasure of which nothing remains, a pleasure even the external signs of which are dissipated without leaving a trace: in smoke. (Derrida, 1992:107)

Hence, a great part of the enjoyment tobacco gives is based on the fact, that smoking does not have any purpose or meaning without which one could not live. As Derrida argues, part of the pleasure of using tobacco would be the fact that “nothing remains” of this pleasure: the smoke disappears to invisibility, it does not leave any (Derridean or other) “traces”. These statements offer the perspective to tobacco as a gesture of great individuality: “I” or “the one” smokes only for and because of her-/himself without any purpose or any remains. Thus tobacco is a pleasure that one gives oneself.
The second of my statements here says that tobacco always has a sign-character. Tobacco is a continuously changing sign in the cultural sign system; and it can produce or be used to producing multiple meanings that can be interpreted within this sign system. The idea of tobacco as a sign is explicated in different manners in some former tobacco researches. In terms of literary studies, here is a quote from Richard Klein’s research on cigarettes similar to the idea of the sign-character of tobacco:

[S]moking cigarettes is not only a physical act but a discursive one—a wordless but eloquent form of expression. It is a fully coded, rhetorically complex, narratively articulated discourse with a vast repertoire of well understood conventions that are implicated, intertextually, in the whole literary, philosophical, cultural history of smoking. (Klein, 1993:182)

Klein is speaking only about cigarettes but it is clear that this idea is applicable for any form of tobacco use. In the same manner as the meanings of cigarette smoking, also the meanings of tobacco use in general are multiple and rich, and people have a cultural competence to interpret them. Tobacco’s sign-character is a well-known fact and anyone of us living in the global culture has a competence to interpret these signs, albeit the interpreter does not necessarily even have any conscious intention to make any interpretation of smoking or the smoker in question. In every case, tobacco is a sign which needs to be interpreted. In our context with Moomins, it is important to have this sign-perspective of tobacco in respect to behaviors and the selfhoods of the characters whose smoking habits shall be analyzed below.

Thirdly, tobacco as a sign is always multiple and complex since its meanings are and have historically been ambiguous and contradictory. Linda and Michael Hutcheon emphasize this aspect of tobacco’s meaning in history and in the present world when they analyze the meaning of smoking in operas:

[T]he act of smoking has always been given contradictory meanings in Western culture. As both a relaxant and a stimulant, tobacco has been associated with both the medicinal and the deadly with both sensual pleasure and sexual danger; with both the companionship of society and the alienation of the rebel. (Hutcheon and Hutcheon, 2004:230)

The main statement here is that the meanings of tobacco are always contradictory. During its whole European and global history in the modern times, there has been going on the discursive struggle concerning the meaning of tobacco. Until our time’s strong consciousness of the real dangers of smoking due to the final medical proves of the poisonous nature of the substance, this very contradiactoriness defined tobacco. In order to analyze the cultural meanings of tobacco, one should be conscious of the ambivalence of these
meanings since tobacco is recently most often seen merely as a source of nicotine addiction. Nevertheless, the problem might be that in this very reduction of the meaning of tobacco may hide an erroneous thought in terms of the fact that it is leaving various cultural meanings of tobacco out of it self. This is why the cultural research of tobacco and the research of the cultural meaning of tobacco should pursue to dialogue with medical science and health education. It is not possible, for instance, to censor the Moomin novels because they represent smoking. Rather, the ways of looking, reading, and interpreting these representations should be changed, and in this it is helpful to understand the multiple contradictions of the cultural meanings of tobacco.

Furthermore, tobacco is interrelated to the ideas of identity. Different forms of smoking and using tobacco are signs, labels, or symbols of social, cultural and personal identities. In order to understand the pipe smokers of Moomin-valley, it should be considered what Eric Burns states in his study of social history of tobacco when discussing on different ways of tobacco use, and, especially, on the rituality of smoking the pipe:

> You could tell a lot about a man from the way he took his tobacco. You could tell what he thought about himself, what he wanted others to think about him, and how far he was willing to go to be so identified. You could tell about his personality, his standards, his style.

> [--]

> That pipe was more trouble than a cigar might also have been a reason for its appeal. It made smoking ritual rather than just an offhand activity, and rituals are sign of advanced–or at least advancing-civilization. (Burns, 1997:103)

The argument that I can now regenerate from these excerpts from Burn’s research is: as a sign of subject’s personality and identity pipe smoking is especially an advanced ritual of a civilized man. Thus, pipe can be seen as a sign of the culture and civilization – the thought having a great relevance in terms of the smoking Moomin characters to which it is now time to take an analytic look. Below, there is an analytical scrutiny of the three pipe smokers of the Moomin novels. I will analyze the characters in the following order: first the analysis focuses on Moominpappa and then on Snufkin, and as an additional third entrant, the Joxter will be present in the both analyses.

3. MOOMINPAPPA AND THE STRANGE AMBIVALENCES OF THE PIPE

Moominpappa is a pipe smoker who grows his own tobacco plants by himself in Moominvalley. He has the tobacco patch of which he takes care with quite devotedly. In the Moomin novels, there are many references to pappa’s habit of smoking the pipe and growing his tobaccos by himself. For instance, the following quotes demonstrate how tobacco grows in Moominpappa’s patch:
“Oh dear”, said Moominpappa who was watering his tobacco plants. (FFM)

Moominpappa was working on his tobacco patch. (TfM)

Undoubtedly, Moominpappa smokes his pipe daily, and smoking is an essential part of his lifestyle, and thus it belongs to his everyday life. There are the following kinds of expressions here and there in the novels, via which it is told to a reader that Moominpappa is a pipe smoker: “Moominpappa felt a sleepy feeling in his paws. He shook himself and lit his pipe.” (MaS) Nonetheless, it is almost surprising that the fact still is, that pappa’s smoking is represented relatively rarely in the novels, or, at least it is only rarely presented in a very detailed manner. Regardless of this fact, many things about his smoking is still said, and also often enough in order to let the reader all the way through the stories know that Moominpappa smokes the pipe a lot. The importance of pappa’s pipe as a part and parcel of his personality and of his life is clearly a self-evident truth amongst the members of the Moomin family. The following episode tells us something about the importance of pappa’s pipe:

Moominmamma hurried off to pack. She collected blankets, saucepans, birch-bark, a coffeepot, masses of food, suntan-oil, matches, and everything you can eat out of, on, or with. She packed it all with an umbrella, warm clothes, tummy-ache medicine, an egg-whisk, cushions, a mosquito-net, bathing-drawers and a table cloth in her bag. She bustled to and from racking her brain for anything she had forgotten, and at last she said: “Now, it’s ready! Oh, how lovely it will be to have a rest by the sea!”

Moominpappa packed his pipe and his fishing-rod. “Well, are you all ready?” he asked, “and are you sure you haven’t forgotten anything? All right, let’s start.” (FFM)

This quote from the novel Finn Family Moomintroll reveals certain features that are characteristic for the two family heads of the Moomin family. While preparing the family’s trip to the beach Moominmamma looks after everything and concerns herself with everyone’s wellbeing whereas Moominpappa takes care of that what has a great importance for himself: his fishing-rod—and his pipe. In here, as in other episodes where Moominpappa’s tobacco use is mentioned in the novels, the pipe forms an essential part of Moominpappa’s life, belonging, and personality. It is a symbol by which he can be recognized as himself. The pipe is thus, especially, part of Moominpappa’s selfhood and identity. It should be noted that, no one else in the family does smoke, and, actually, smoking seems to be allowed only for Moominpappa, since he is the male head of the family. The pipe of pappa can be interpreted representing the constant family life and Moominpappa’s role in it as the male head, or at least as the wannabe head of the family.
Smoking the pipe is a pleasure what pappa gives himself in the middle of the social – and stressful! – family life. From this point of view, Moominpappa’s smoking seems quite a middle class and middle-aged habit. The meaning of tobacco would in this case, and at first glance, be in pipe smoking’s civilized aspect and ritual nature without any ambiguity. Nonetheless, there is a certain, very interesting factor that confuses the simplicity of this issue: here is where the Joxter comes to the picture.

As is well known, in Moominpappa’s youth he had very eccentric friends with their individual oddities. One of his friends of youth, the Joxter, who is Snufkin’s father, is a rebellious pipe smoker who does not like any prohibitions or bans. The young Joxter is a very passionate pipe smoker. In his memoir Moominpappa even tells that the Joxter used to go to sleep with his pipe: “‘My tobacco’s a single horrible, smeary mess,’ exploded the Joxter, who loved to smoke a last pipe in bed.” (EoM)

The Joxter is a character to whom smoking is an important act, and it forms an essential part of his personality and identity. But contradictory to Moominpappa’s tobacco use his pipe smoking is represented as a rebellious act, and the Joxter himself is represented as a transgressive person. Also, in Moominpappa’s past there is to be found rebel acts in due to a complex relationship to one female person, The Hemulen Aunt. She is the one who tried to raise little orphan boy, Moominpappa, as a child, far too severely. The Hemulen Aunt has also given her contribution to the smokers’ lives in Moominland. Here is what she once said to the young Joxter:

Shut up, you, please. You’re much too small to smoke. You ought to drink milk, that’s healthy, and it would save you from shaky paws, a yellow nose, and a bald tail. That’s what smokers get. You’re lucky to have me aboard. We’re going to keep things in order from now on! (EoM)

In The Exploits of Moominpappa, pappa is reminiscing about this episode, and he tells it to his young listeners Moomintroll, Snufkin, and Sniff. Here is one debate with Moominpappa, Moominmamma and Sniff after telling this to them:

“Do you want your pipe?” [Moominmamma to Moominpappa] “Don’t let him smoke!” shouted Sniff. “The Hemulen Aunt says all smokers get shake paws, yellow nose and bald tail.” “I’m not sure”, said Moominmamma. “He’s smoked all his life, and he’s neither shaky, yellow or bald. All nice things are good for you.” (EoM)

All and all, tobacco clearly gives two-folded meanings to Moomin family life: the father of the family is at the same moment both a little bourgeois and a rebel. Although in the Moomin novels there are not so many descriptions of
Moominpappa really smoking his pipe, it is evident that pipe smoking is a significant part of pappa’s personality and identity. By all appearances, he smokes mainly because of his role as a family man but also because of the bad reputation of tobacco. To smoke is both to live harmlessly and to live dangerously at the same time. Pipe smoking tells that Moominpappa is both the civilized man and the rebellious personality. As mamma says, he should smoke because “all nice things are good for him” and in this sense smoking is a “nice” thing to do.

4. SNUFKIN: THE SMOKER OF ALL SMOKERS

In *The Exploits of Moominpappa* Snufkin is told to admire his father and especially his father’s courage not to accept all the useless bans and prohibitions. Furthermore, both the father and the son also dislike the park keepers, those being the nasty persons who symbolize prohibitions: “‘He didn’t like park keepers either,’ mumbled Snufkin. ‘Just think of that…’” (EoM) Snufkin has inherited his father’s rebellious nature, also in the sense of continuous tobacco use. Also Snufkin’s name refers to tobacco, and, naturally, this is not a coincidence at all since Snufkin is the real smoker of all smokers in the Moomin novels. The great part of Snufkin’s personality and identity is made up of the fact that he really smokes a lot. Several episodes of the different novels emphasize the great significance of Snufkin’s pipe smoking, as, for instance, these quotes reveal:

“By my hat, if it isn’t a small Mymble”, he said and took the pipe from his mouth. [-] Snufkin pointed with his pipe-stem [-] (MM)

Snufkin grunted in agreement without taking his pipe from his mouth. They [Snufkin and Moomintroll] sat silent for a while, in male and friendly solidarity. [-] And Snufkin started his story, sucking at his pipe and now and then splashing with his toes in the dark river water. [-] Snufkin bit hard at his pipe and raised his eyebrows. (TfM)

Snufkin chewed his old pipe and murmured: ’Farewell Old Pal.’ (MaS)

In *Moominsummer Madness* Snufkin knocks over the prohibition signs in the park. This is one of his gestures showing that he absolutely dislikes and hates the park keepers and that he really despises all those who try to deny people to do what they want to do. First prohibition sign that he chops down is a smoking prohibition:
All his life Snufkin had longed to pull down notices that asked him not to do things he liked to do, and he was fairly trembling with excitement and expectation. He started off with NO SMOKING. (MM)

To start off with the notice of “No smoking” is of course a very natural gesture for you – if you are Snufkin. In this episode, there certainly is also a reference to Snufkin’s father’s life when the Hemulen Aunt was trying to forbid him to smoke. Trying to prevent Snufkin to smoke and, hence, trying to prevent him to be free, is as bad idea as it was with his father. Snufkin’s tobacco use represents his aim to be free and independent.

There are certain contexts and situations in which the meaning of smoking is especially emphasized in the novels. In two different times the context is music: Snufkin smokes his pipe when he is composing his songs. Sometimes Snufkin has some problems with the tunes or bars and this is when there still is one “friend” which help him to carry on: the pipe. In the first example below, the pipe smoking helps him to compose. In the second quote, he just considers to smoke his pipe yet he knows that it wouldn’t help him:

He took out his pipe and lit it. He puffed a few clouds of smoke towards the night sky and waited for the spring tune. (TfM)

The five bars didn’t come. Snufkin took out his pipe but put it away again. He knew that the five bars must be somewhere in Moominvalley and that he wouldn’t find them until he went back again. (MiN)

Smoking the pipe defines Snufkin’s personality in both internal and external senses. One interesting example of this is the story about Snufkin and the little woodies in the novel *Moominsummer Madness*. The woodies are children who Snufkin is forced to take care of for a short period of time. Snufkin thinks that they mean nothing else but problems for him, and one of the reasons for thinking in that manner is the fact that the woodies do not even smoke: “I simply can’t invent anything new to amuse them. They don’t smoke. My stories scare them. And I can’t stand on my head all day, because then I won’t get to the Moomin Valley until summer’s over.” (MM) Also the good and helpful things of the woodies are connected to tobacco use: “Light my pipe someone!” All the woodies rushed to light his pipe.” (MM)

The story of the gift that the woodies give to Snufkin tells about the gaze of the others; it tells about that how other people and creatures in Moominland perceive Snufkin. It tells who he is and what is important to him: the woodies give Snufkin a tobacco pouch as a gift. The pouch is filled with raspberry leaves as that is the woodies’ idea of tobacco smoking. Due to getting such a nice gift, Snufkin promises to the woodies to smoke these not so good leaves on Sundays. Here is a dialogue with Moomintroll concerning this issue:
Smoking in Moominvalley – or, Why Moominpappa and Snufkin Have Pipes

Snufkin was having a quiet smoke by the river. “Everything all right?” asked Moomintroll. Snufkin nodded.


To smoke raspberry leaves even if they are not good probably tells, for instance, about that how Snufkin appreciate the gift of the woodies. At least in a one day of a week, he will suffer for the bad taste of the Raspberry leaves for the sake of friendliness he got from the little woodies. Regardless of the bad taste and of the fact the raspberry leaves are not even real tobacco, the tobacco pouch is such an apt gift, and a very happy gift for the smoker. It thus would be so that the woodies have been really acknowledged that this is what Snufkin deep down is: the real smoker – regardless of that if it would be some leaves, tobacco or something else in his pipe.

Many features of Snufkin’s identity really depend on and are defined by his pipe smoking. The meaning of tobacco as a sign is in Snufkin’s case loaded with a rebellious significance since Snufkin’s character absolutely is the one representing a real individualism. This rebel and free pipe smoker will not make any compromises, and neither does he respect any authorities as such. In terms of this, he might also be a very admirable person for those in the Moomin world who themselves do not have the same kind of courage. In fact, this is just how it goes with the little Toft in the novel Moominvalley in November where this tiny, shy and modest creature wonders why people admire Snufkin:

Everything Snufkin said sounded so good, so right, and when you were alone again you didn’t understand what he meant and felt too shy to go back and ask. Or sometimes he didn’t answer your questions at all but talked about tea or the weather and chewed his pipe and made that awful vague noise, making you feel you’d asked something quite dreadful. [–] I wonder why they admire him, Toft thought seriously. Of course, it’s stylish to smoke a pipe. (MiN)

In the contexts of the analysis done in this article, it is easy to understand that the last line of the quote has a deeper meaning than might seem at first glance. In fact, it is not meaningful that Toft regards pipe smoking as “stylish”. Rather, the point is that the pipe and the admirable personality traits of Snufkin are connected with each other in Toft’s inner monologue; the pipe carries the particular cultural meanings that can make Snufkin particularly distinctive.
5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the smokers of Moominvalley shows how the particular cultural meanings of tobacco are both performed and produced through the representations of smoking in the Moomin novels. Especially, the analysis points out the significance of tobacco use for the analyzed characters: Moominpappa and Snufkin have their pipes in order to define who they are. The pipe is an inseparable part of these characters and it is substantially related to their selfhoods. In spite of that whether it is referred to the character’s sense of inner sameness or to some external thoughts or perceptions of the character’s distinctiveness, the representations of smoking are used in constructing their identities.

The pipe of Moominpappa is an ambivalent object with which it is possible to hold on the ideas of the rebel youth which he spend with the Joxter and other eccentric friends—and, nevertheless, at the same time, the pipe legitimize acting like a decent family man. Also for Snufkin, the pipe represents the heritage of the Joxter, who is his father. Smoking stands for a resistance against everything that is prohibited and against all those who are trying to restrain Snufkin’s individuality. As a sign of the cultural sign system, tobacco carries meanings with which the characters of the Moomin novels are constructing their very identities. The lack of the pipe would be the lack of this identity. Hence, maybe regardless the state of affairs with tobacco in the present world and in the (possible) non-smoking future, it might be advisable let the smokers of Moominvalley still have their pipes.

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