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LITERATURE

“TALKING” CONTAINERS. VISUAL HETEROTOPIAS IN THE PICTURE- BOOKS ILLUSTRATED BY SVEIN NYHUS

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ABSTRACT. The article discusses picturebooks illustrated by a Norwegian artist, Svein Nyhus, to show his specific symbolic manner of depicting the child's environment. It is argued that the illustrator employs characteristic recurrent elements of home representations and elaborates an interesting interplay of outer and inner spaces, consistently focusing the child's perspective. This is demonstrated by an analysis of four picturebooks by the Norwegian artist: *Pappa!* (1998, Daddy!), *Snill* (2002, Nice), *Sinna mann* (2003, Angry Man) and *Håret till mamma* (2007, Mum's Hair). The books have been regarded as ambitious literature for children, addressing difficult issues or even sometimes breaking a taboo. To show Nyhus' visual method of thematising childhood's traumas in relation to a home space is also one of the aims of the paper. The analysis of visual content is carried out with references to the textual narratives, drawing on ideas about heterotopia by Michel Foucault (1984), self-effacement by Karen Horney (1997) and the poetics of space by Gaston Bachelard (1969).

 sciendo

PRESSto.

1. WHEN WORDS BECOME INSUFFICIENT

Picturebook scholars are generally unanimous in accentuating picturebooks' eminent capacity for depicting the idiosyncratic character and complexity of the child's perception. Maria Nikolajeva in concluding her chapter devoted to Scandinavian postmodern picturebooks wrote: "The most exciting development in postmodern picturebooks is their increasing potential for conveying complex mental states, when illustrations can

be used when words are no longer sufficient to depict characters’ inner worlds”¹ (2008), referring to her earlier research with Carol Scott (2001b). This assumption serves as a basis for, e.g., Anna-Maija Koskimies-Hellman’s analysis of mindscapes in Scandinavian picturebooks (2010) and is also a point of departure of my analysis focused on selected Norwegian picturebooks.

The remarkable amount of artistic, thought-provoking, crossover picturebooks published in Norway is in general explained economically, historically and ideologically (e.g. Nyhus 2012; Dahle 2013; Ommundsen 2015). Having a favourable background, they often tackle themes considered broadly as taboo, and explore deep and dark dimensions of the human psyche. Two representative artists who have created a number of sophisticated picturebooks in this country are Gro Dahle (author) and Svein Nyhus (illustrator). The aim of my study is to focus on how mental states have been captured predominantly in Svein Nyhus’ images related to the child’s lived environment. I will point out some recurrent elements of home visual representations employed by the artist in an interesting interplay of inner and outer spaces, stressing their strong imagery with reference to Gaston Bachelard’s, Karen Horney’s, and Michel Foucault’s observations. The corpus of picturebooks I use in the study consists of four titles published within 9 years, around the turn of the century: *Pappa!* (Daddy!², 1998) created exclusively by Nyhus, and *Snill* (Nice, 2002), *Sinna Mann* (Angry Man, 2003) and *Håret til mamma* (Mom’s Hair, 2007) by Dahle and Nyhus. My intention is to discuss the visual aesthetics of the books as a whole and continuum, responding to a need suggested by Dorte Karrebæk. This popular Danish picturebook artist pointed out that illustrators’ works – as distinct from writers – are mostly considered separately and not as an ongoing process (Oscar K., Karrebæk 2013:72).

2. SECRET CASES

The first story, *Pappa!*, introduces a little boy Tommy who misses his absent father and is thinking where he is, what he is like and how they could play together. The verbal narrative informs us through the internal focalization that the boy is wondering if his daddy could hear him if he called him loudly enough. He starts imaging him and speculates what present he could give him if he came, and if he himself loved his own father. Step by step the child builds up a picture of his fantastic dad, who for example is big, strong, has a car, and can do everything: he opens locks without keys, charms, and disappears. In the following openings Tommy’s story becomes more and more hectic: the father

¹ The fact that Nikolajeva in the meantime distanced herself from the term *postmodern picturebook* and referred to it as “rather worn-out” (Nikolajeva 2014:137) is not relevant here as the term was replaced, rather technically, with the adjective *complex*.

² The titles and quotes are in my translation [H.D.T.].

can do more and more dangerous things, and is ascribed more and more incredible qualities, listed chaotically in syndetic coordination: he roars like a lion, *and* wears black glasses, *and* has boots as big as cassette players, *and* is the strongest man in the world, *and* is taller even than the king. The last piece of text expresses the boy's hope that the dad might be right now looking at the same moon as he is, which is hopeful. The verbal is frequently interweaved with the specific "verbs of thinking", such as "Tommy wonders" or "he thinks". In this way, the intra-heterodiegetic verbal narrator introduces us to a flow of the character's thoughts which for an experienced reader is clearly his daydreaming. But this voice does not reveal any details about the protagonist's setting except a single piece of quite general information: the boy is sitting in a bed (opening 1). It serves as a basis for an amazing visual universe which in a magic interplay expands the verbal narrative.

The fact that Tommy is in bed implies he is at home, which in the pictorial representation in the first opening includes a few selected indoor emblems, typical of a little boy's room: a bed, a window, some toys and a cupboard. Among the toys which appear in the subsequent doublespreads there is: a monkey, a plane, a car, a bike, a boat, an electric train set, a globe, bricks and a single lost jigsaw puzzle (by the way, a very stereotyped gender representation). The monkey and the plane are not mentioned in the text, but there is an evident reference between e.g. the bike or the car and the boy's dreams (in Tommy's fantasies dad would like to borrow his bicycle, and daddy's car is a big version of his toy car) – presumably they enter the dream realm while the boy is looking at them.

The monkey soft toy is present in all scenes being Tommy's faithful companion and participating in a parallel pictorial story, not mentioned in the verbal text, called a "running story" (Doonan 1993) or a syllepsis (Nikolajeva, Scott 2001a). This is quite a popular visual tool which is traditionally identified with animated characters. But what I would like to demonstrate concerns an inanimate, not anthropomorphized object and thereby represents a kind of "meta-syllepsis". The domestic, superficially plain items I find of special interest and initially want to focus on are the three recurrent containers – a three-drawer cabinet, a cupboard and a mysterious chest – which in a sense constitute yet another story. Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* ascribes this category a particular imagery:

With the theme of drawers, chests, locks, and wardrobes, we shall resume contact with the unfathomable store of daydreams of intimacy. Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these "objects" and a few others in equally high favor, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy. (Bachelard 1969:78)

Looking at the interior of Tommy’s room through the prism of this observation we are supplied with a clue to a deeper interpretation of the protagonist’s situation. The prevalence of these objects in *Pappa!* is surprisingly high and presumably not accidental. The chest appears visually 12 times, the three-drawer cabinet 4, and the tall narrowing upward cupboard 2. Altogether they are depicted 17 times, whereas there is not, for example, any table, desk or chairs. Of special significance seems to be the chest which is portrayed in most of the illustrations. Already in the first opening it is standing on the window sill, half hidden behind a curtain and merging with its background. It is rather inconspicuous, and nothing anticipates its forthcoming role. Two openings later when the huge figure of the dad enters the room he is holding under his arm just the chest. In both these pictures it is closed, but later when the boy develops his imaginary story the chest is often open and embedded in numerous illustrations. It is ingeniously incorporated into the visual representation and serves multiple functions, as a container full of white rabbits (when dad is a magician), a fiery volcano (dad as a fearless adventurer) or a projector casting a beam of light (dad is playing with his son, lifting him high in his arms). When the verbal story develops, the chest is predominantly open, and, as Bachelard puts it:

[...] from the moment the casket is opened, dialectics no longer exist. The outside is effaced with one stroke, an atmosphere of novelty and surprise reigns. The outside has no more meaning. And quite paradoxically, even cubic dimensions have no more meaning, for the reason that a new dimension—the dimension of intimacy—has just opened up. (Bachelard 1969:85)

The observers have been given access to the boy’s most intimate world, his secret dreams and longings, and the chest is its symbolical meaningful token telling its own story³. Furthermore, it is employed as a tool of ambiguity: in the last opening we can see it again on the window sill, but this time its key is not inside the lock but on the floor. (In the next to last doublespread, portraying the culmination of the boy’s dreams, he is holding the key in his hand while being held up in the air, in his father’s strong arms.) It is a pregnant detail which bears a double meaning: first, the story was in some sense “true” as the scene is not an exact copy of the initial one and suggests that the fun did take place and was not only a product of Tommy’s imagination; secondly, the chest is again closed, implying that the protagonist still has secrets which can be “opened” if someone cares to encourage him to do it. Another clue confirming this line of thought is the eighth opening where the open chest includes its own, smaller copy, closed and deprived of a key – a chest in a chest as a secret inside a secret out of which

³ The role played by both the monkey and the chest – told within a syllepsis and “meta-syllepsis” – is foreshadowed on the title page, a significant paratext, showing the monkey sitting on the chest (a closed version, without a key in the lock).

only one has been revealed but the other (potentially comprising another mystery) has not.

Apart from the recurring chest inscribed for the most part in the pattern closed-open-closed, the cupboard is constantly closed while the cabinet is depicted with the lowest drawer open. These visual signals again inform about a partial opening of the boy's intimacy and – like the key motif – suggest the existence of its further covert contents.

3. RECURRENT CASES

The same symbolical elements of the home interior are also employed by Nyhus in his subsequent visual stories and seem to be signifiers of his own personal style, though their frequency is much lower than in *Pappa!* They function similarly in *Håret til mamma*⁴, which offers a portrait of a girl, Emma, who experiences her beloved mum's depression. The illness is expressed metaphorically when mum's beautiful hair gets tangled and "goes wild", symbolizing her state of mind. When Emma literally succeeds in removing the tangles, she also succeeds in combing the depression out, which makes her smiling mum return. The verbal narrative presented by an intra-heterodiegetic narrator does not include any information about the setting of the plot. To illustrate it, Svein Nyhus has again chosen a child's recognizable environment – an optimistic frame story, when mum is well, is placed outside, on a swing in a park or in a garden, whereas the period of illness is portrayed within the home walls. The depiction of a four-drawer cabinet was used three times in the story, and it is again one of the few selected elements of the interior design. In opening 4, it is employed as an element of the background in the closed version, whereas later it is portrayed open twice – in the sixth and thirteenth openings – between which the girl bravely tackles the problem by clearing up mum's hair. This most important sequence for the therapeutic meaning of the book is framed using the cabinet with an open upper drawer signalling access to Emma's intimacy. The drawer contains a pair of scissors and the shape of some serrated blade – tools necessary to achieve the aim as some of the locks have to be cut off, but simultaneously implying the gravity of the problem and the necessity of radical decisions.

The container motif recurs in *Sinna mann*, telling the most powerful and expressive story in this picturebook corpus. Its protagonist is a small boy, called Boj, whose universality is emphasized by his name. His family, introduced verbally as a happy one, turns out to be dysfunctional due to the father's violence expressed by his transformation into Angry Man. An intra-heterodiegetic

⁴ The picturebooks I discuss in this part of my analysis are not ordered chronologically but in accordance with intensity of the container motif.

narrator’s voice provides us in a metaphorical language with a picture of domestic physical violence. This story – as in *Pappa!* – seems very personal and told from the child’s perspective by exploiting an internal focalization. Boj decides to reveal his family secret first to nature, then to a dog, and finally to the king himself, and as a result of his courageous action the family gets help.

Once more the verbal narrative does not expose any details about the home space apart from a mention in the first sentence that “somebody is in the living room”. The visual setting created by Nyhus is constructed with a few selected elements: a table, a sofa, a chair and a three-drawer cabinet (opening 1) – a copy of the one from *Pappa!* but this time completely closed. Moreover, its upper drawer has a lock that is missing a key. Two doublespreads later when dad gets furious and the scared Boj is sitting in his mum’s lap, at her feet there is lying a cuboid chest – closed and with a big padlock. Another chest accompanies Boj in another illustration (opening 6) when he is hiding in his room, portrayed symbolically only with a bed and a few objects scattered around. Here the chest is a copy of Tommy’s one, but again it misses a key. All those three containers are tightly shut and, referring to Bachelard’s concepts, indicate a lack of access to Boj’s secrets. The picturebook does not show any open variant of these cases, but opening 17, which can be interpreted as a turning point of the story, encompasses many symbols evoking hope and belief in a positive future. Among them, there is a key which might be interpreted as the one which opens the closed containers and makes it possible to achieve “a dimension of intimacy”.

Another picturebook, *Snill*, tells a story of a girl, Lussi, who is so perfect that nobody needs to pay attention to her, which leads to her gradual shrinking and final disappearance in a wall. When the protagonist returns in a spectacular explosion she is absolutely transformed: dirty, hungry and ill-mannered. The intra-heterodiegetic narrator using alternately a clear-cut phatic address both to the intertextual figures (What’s going on, Lussi!) and the extratextual audience (Look at Lussi’s notebook! Look at her hands! Can you see, Lussi?) contributes to a familiar atmosphere inviting readers/observers/listeners to step into the fictitious world. As before, the verbal text does not hint about the setting, and it has been up to the illustrator to create it. The girl is predominantly portrayed inside: in her family home, at school and finally inside the wall. Among the recurrent containers there is depicted only one – a narrow cupboard, which in this story does not bear any message but is rather a neutral element of the home space. But in *Snill* there is employed another spectacular visual instrument – the interior imitates the perfect order from Lussi’s copybooks: it has patterns of lined, squared and graph paper or is covered with long and orderly rows of numbers. In this manner, there are conveyed various items from the inanimate represented world, e.g. the walls and the floor (opening 1 and 2), the sofa and the walls (opening 3), a teacher’s clothes and a blackboard (opening 4), and the dad’s shirt (opening 5). This visualization of the “neat” world recedes along with Lussi’s “explosion.” Later on, there are illustrated only scraps of the “patterned world”.

4. POWER VISUALISED

Another interesting tool demonstrating Lussi's oppressive situation is the use of proportion. The girl is conveyed visually as disproportionately small compared with the huge figures of adults. This is conspicuous in opening 3, where she is sitting between her "big" parents who – contradicting the text – are completely indifferent to their perfect daughter. A portrayal of superiority and inferiority by means of proportion and perspective in picturebooks has been pointed out before with focus on the disproportion between adults and children; for example, when analysing *Sinna Mann* both Agnes-Margarethe Bjorvand (2010) and Sandra Beckett (2012:246–247) emphasized the father silhouette towering (this a recurrent word) over Boj.

This tradition of depicting power relations has a foundation in the psychological explorations of Karen Horney. The world-famous German psychoanalyst in her seminal work *Neurosis and Human Growth* from 1950 presents an interpretation of the aetiology of neuroses and their symptoms. In its light, there are three fundamental reactions to the impossibility of normal self-realization, caused by numerous disturbances during childhood: aggression, detachment and compliance. The latter category is expressed by self-effacement and self-alienation, and is typical of children facing fear and helplessness. When characterizing people with this attitude Horney employs illustrative similes: they lose sharpness (Horney 1997:16), undergo a process of personality shrinking (Horney 1997:286), diminish their format in fear of expansive actions (Horney 1997:289) or their self-control leads to psychic shrinking, resulting in transformation into small and powerless beings (Horney 1997:291). This characterization has many parallels with the condition of the oppressed Lucy, who kept diminishing – constantly ignored by her environment – and culminated in her complete disappearance⁵, which was conveyed both verbally and visually in a literal manner.

The process of the character's mental shrinking was pictorially reflected in her blurring contours and her hyperbolically diminished figure. But Lussi's silhouette is not only – as mentioned above – juxtaposed with adults but is also contrasted with the items structuring the interior. She is unnaturally small sitting on a tall chair and doing her homework (opening 2), against a huge sofa (opening 3) or behind school desks (opening 4). Nyhus uses the same meaningful play with proportions in *Sinna Mann*, where already in the first opening Boy is standing next to a three-chest drawer which is nearly his height while a hammer lying on it is half his height. The subsequent illustrations cement this representational

⁵ This motif was used by Tove Jansson in the short story "The story of the invisible child" (1962). Jansson had read Horney's books and was apparently inspired by them (Westin, 2012:334–335). The parallel between Lussi and Ninni (Jansson's protagonist) has been pointed out by scholars and reviewers.

pattern – Boy assists his mum while serving dinner and holds two glasses as long as his legs (opening 2) and is exactly the size of the clock when hiding in a fetal position (opening 7). This way of portraying is particularly discernible on the back cover of this book, which shows a huge chair with the small scared boy crouching under it.

Both Emma and Tommy are also represented visually as disproportionately tiny against spacious rooms and sizable furniture. The third opening in *Håret til mamma*, which is the first one showing the home, depicts Emma who is going towards her mum with a pillow in her hand. The pillow is the length of her leg and she is surrounded by huge pieces of furniture – again a similar chair as in Boj’s home, which is twice her own size. Her littleness is also pinpointed in opening 4 when she is holding an enormous black umbrella protecting her metaphorically from mum’s tears and later when she starts cleaning with a broom and a dustpan (opening 5). The dustpan is two thirds Emma’s height, while the broom is longer than she is, which is stressed by its exceeding the picture’s edge.

The third opening in *Pappa!* shows Tommy sitting on a little chair in front of the unnaturally high window whose upper edge is not visible within the image. In this scene, even the monkey toy, held in the child’s arms, is unnaturally big. In the seventh opening when the boy is admiring his dad-magician’s show, he is wearing a top hat which in size covers his body’s size in a sitting position. Another piece of clothes applied for the same purpose is dad’s jacket, totally covering Tommy’s body in opening 10.

5. LOST JIGSAW PUZZLES IN DREAMLIKE LANDSCAPES

Another distinctive quality of Nyhus’ visual compositions – apart from the discussed containers – is the use of everyday objects, again employed symbolically. They can be classified in two groups regarding the functions they perform: they anticipate some danger in apparently safe or even idyllic situations, or suggest something is missing or wrong. Furthermore, they play an additional role when recurring in subsequent books by Nyhus and create a specific intervisuality.

The first category anticipates forthcoming menaces and mostly bears a message contradictory to the verbal narrative. The items are symbolical and scattered in unexpected places. They are particularly discernible in *Snill* and *Sinna Mann*, where they take the form of respectively: a grey pumice-like stone and sharp tools arranged in surprising places. The clod is present already in the first opening lying on the table at which Lussi is blamelessly doing her exercises. It is totally misplaced and contrasts with a neat, tendentiously pink interior, thereby establishing a feeling of anxiety. Soon it will turn out to be a piece of the wall Lussi breaks into pieces during a suggestive act of liberation. The lump

reappears in the lower right-hand corner of the last doublespread in the image of a boy leaning over it, which significantly suggests the existence of other “captured” children. It also constitutes an intervisual link between *Snill* and *Sinna Mann*, since it is incorporated into Boj’s story. Again, the same corner of the last doublespread depicts the same clod bearing a similar message: the danger has not been totally obviated.

Other objects used in the visual narrative of *Sinna Mann* implying approaching danger are a hammer placed next to an aquarium, a bowl on the edge of the table and a fiery pattern on the wallpapers (opening 1). Generally, tools and sharp objects are abundantly employed by Nyhus. In *Håret til mamma*, in the third and fourteenth opening, when mum’s illness starts and ends, there are two knives lying on a messy table. The serrated one is disproportionately big – about Emma’s size. Also, the drawer of the discussed cabinet hides a pair of scissors and a serrated blade. In *Pappa!*, when Tommy’s story gets hectic, some sharp objects intrude in the images: a barbed wire around dad’s foot, a spur sticking out of his shoe, a big serrated knife lying on the table, smoke and fire, and a drawing pin with its spike up. The verbal idyllic fun is conspicuously marked with pictorial signs of anxiety. Perhaps both the dad himself and playing with him would not be so perfect, and Tommy unconsciously senses it.

Other figurative items of interior spaces which reappear but are not strictly linked to some dangers are disconnected plugs, empty sockets and withered flowers, contributing to a palpable feeling of disorder. Of special interest is a single jigsaw puzzle which participates as a mute actor in many scenes: it is depicted 4 times in *Pappa!*, once in *Sinna Mann* and 7 times in *Håret til mamma*. It suggests that there is somewhere a picture which cannot be completed because of the missing, lost piece. Consequently, it is a hint that the story we receive both verbally and visually is not complete either. It seems to be a particular symbol as it stands for other discussed objects (chests, tools, plugs...) which are necessary to recognize in order to achieve the truest possible and most comprehensive picture.

6. COMPATIBLE INCOMPATIBILITY

In 1967 in the acclaimed lecture “On Other Spaces” Michel Foucault explicated relations between architecture, urbanism and theory, and introduced a popular term of heterotopia. In contrast to utopias that are intrinsically unreal, these places

do exist and are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented,

contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1984:239)

The philosopher exemplifies this paradoxical space with a mirror which shows us where we are not, in an “unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface” (Foucault 1984:184), representing a placeless place – a utopia. But, on the other hand, it is a heterotopia as it does exist in reality and, moreover, as he puts it: “it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault 1984:240) Similarly, the picturebook images indicate simultaneously the state of mind and a lived space. The inner world with an overwhelming strong emotion – which is a fact but in physical categories a placeless one (utopia) – is visualized in terms of a concrete space (heterotopia) but with numerous indicators signalling that the protagonist is not exactly over there where she or he is.

Within so-called heterotypology Foucault articulates a few types of these peculiar sites which both exhibit dual meaning and deliver mixed experiences, e.g. heterotopias of time, crisis, deviation or purification. Of special interest is their capacity of “juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1984:241) and their role “to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space” (Foucault 1984:243).

The visual representation⁶ in the analysed picturebooks juxtaposes several incompatible spaces: a physical one including elements of the home interior; the one presupposed by the verbal narrative, and a mental state of the focalized child. Another space involves spectators who are invited to join the experience of protagonists’ intimacy yet not exemplified exactly from their viewpoints since they themselves are visually portrayed. The speciality in Nyhus’ books relates to the concept of heterotopia also in locating the visual narrative both inside and outside reality. The initial doublespreads tend to exemplify the home interiors in quite a realistic manner, yet simplistically: Tommy is sitting on a bed in his room, Lussi is doing her homework at the table, Boy is waiting for his dad in the living room, while Emma is leaving a messy table placed

⁶ It is noteworthy that an important component of the visual representation is also colours, whose role, for example, Maria Laukka assesses as the most emotional element of human life (Laukka 2013:187). They certainly play a crucial role in visual narrative, and it is noteworthy that in the analysed corpus the scheme of colours is relatively confined and repetitive. The dominant ones are light blue-greyish and orange-yellowish, which intermingle in many tints and proportions, establishing a common feature of the four picturebooks. Furthermore, each of them has its own dominating colour: in *Pappa!* it is blue, in *Snill* – pink, in *Sinna Mann* – rusty red, and in *Håret til mamma* – light ginger. They constitute coloristic leitmotifs interwoven with the plot: the blue conveys the night atmosphere, pink stands for a stereotyped girlhood, rusty red symbolizes dad’s violence, and light ginger is a colour of Emma’s mum’s hair.

presumably in the kitchen and going towards mum's bedroom. In the subsequent doublespreads the setting is gradually transforming into mindscapes, pertaining to the primary lived spaces through numerous links, which implies that the child is still physically present within them.

Another noteworthy trait that distinguishes this space is its relation to time: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time." (Foucault 1984:242) Nyhus' illustrations portray a hard-to-define time: we do not know if Tommy plays with his dad an hour or the whole night, how long Lussi is inside the wall, or how long it takes to fix Emma's mom's hair. The time is unspecified and the images include references both to the future – by numerous incompatible objects of the interiors anticipating what is going to happen – and to the past. When Boj, in the first opening, is visually depicted with a rather uncertain facial expression – contradicting the verbal text that he would like to be like his dad in the future – we guess that he has experiences behind him that legitimize this restraint.

Finally, what the visualised worlds have in common with respect to heterotopia is their difference (hetero) from the dominant space (topos). The signifiers of the hetero-agent are indicated by the above-discussed objects which signal anxiety (i.e. sharp tools, a grey clod etc.) opposed to *seemingly* normal topos – the home milieu; seemingly since heterotopic sites par excellence imply a breach of the discourse of normality. The idiosyncratic topography of the picturebook narrative concurs to a large extent with Foucault's concept: both the iconotext and the heterotopic sites are multi-layered, subjective, contradictory, illusory, simultaneously rendering "here" and "there", "now" and "then". The term 'heterotopia' has gained both attention and popularity as it incisively defined the paradoxical nature of numerous sites, and sketching relations between it and the iconotext can help to explain the latter's expansion. The unique synergy of images and words constructs spaces which are not attainable exclusively via one of these modes, and are suggestive and persuasive renditions of complex mental states.

7. PICTUREBOOK-TOPIAS

The home spaces portrayed in the four picturebooks illustrated by Svein Nyhus stand generally for the oppressive environment. They themselves represent a container which is closed from the outside world and hides secrets. The milieu is hardly outlined in words but the visual narrative expands the stories and situates their openings invariably in the home space. To get out of it means to tackle a problem and to find a solution by oneself – predominantly exploiting the inner potential. This observation concurs partly with the conclusions

of Atle Krogstad, who has studied chronotopes in Dahle and Nyhus’ picturebooks⁷. The scholar points out that family houses are no longer conveyed as sheltered places and it is nature that reinforces children to change their lot (Krogstad 2016).

To exemplify the complexity of the depicted spatiality in the analysed picturebooks Nyhus has employed a motif of containers signifying, when closed, secrets, and when open a growing intimacy, which becomes transparent against the background of Bachelard’s observations. Of particular importance seems to be the recurrent chest, which reappears in three of the books: *Pappa!*, *Håret til mamma* and *Sinna Mann*, telling its own subplot within a “meta-syllepse”. Like the lost jigsaw puzzle, it constitutes clear intervisuality and establishes the artist’s individual style. The puzzle is also a vital element of the imagery since it suggestively represents other items of the inner lived space which reappear in the visual narrative. They sustain a feeling of anxiety and incompleteness, and to a certain extent contradict the artist’s overt intention to provide his books with a hopeful message (Nyhus 2012:102). In this matter, I agree with Agnes-Margerite Bjorvand, who when concluding her analysis of *Sinna Mann* states that its ending “is more open and not quite as unequivocally happy” (Bjorvand 2010:230).

Another crucial component of the images is the use of proportion which positions the child not only as a tiny figure contrasted to the towering adults but also unnaturally small against huge pieces of furniture and sizable interiors. Inanimate objects are conveyed hyperbolically, emphasizing the feeling of the protagonists’ “lostness”, and this depiction corresponds to Karen Horney’s characterization of the mental processes of self-effacement leading to self-alienation. The scheme of blurry, watery colours and foggy lines furnishes the images with an oneiric mood implying the boundary zone between reality and dreams. The specific “picturebook-topia”, by which I understand the iconographic geography in picturebooks, derives from the concept of heterotopia by Michel Foucault and expresses the multilayeredness and synthesis of apparently incompatible spaces. Constructing these sophisticated visual milieus necessitated the employment of numerous items of the child’s lived environment, showing both their inevitability and symbolical potential.

Finally, I am not stating that Svein Nyhus’ artistic style with nuanced visual imagery is necessarily a consequence of his deliberate decisions with a background knowledge of Bachelard’s, Horney’s or Foucault’s theoretical approaches. It is rather an endless human collective unconscious that generates archetypal images that may as well be construed as intuitive choices of the artist who is sensitive to the child’s vulnerable condition.

⁷ Krogstad has analysed *Den grådige ungen* (The Greedy Child, 1997), *Bak Mumme bor Moni* (Behind Mumme Lives Moni, 2000) and *Snill* (Nice, 2002).

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