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The family house chronotope in three picturebooks by Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus: idyll, fantasy, and threshold experiences

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Abstract

The family house is a distinct and recurrent context for child protagonists in picturebooks by Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus. Based on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, which denotes the unity of time and space in a literary work, this article explores how concepts of time and space are depicted in three picturebooks by Dahle and Nyhus that are set within the family house context. The books were all published around the year 2000. Following Bakhtin's understanding that the literary chronotope emerges from real historical time and space, the article illustrates how the family house chronotope in the work of Dahle and Nyhus sheds light on the condition of being a child at the turn of the century. Furthermore, it is suggested that what I will term the Dahle and Nyhus' family house chronotope frames and enables both a vulnerable and strong child, thus reflecting an understanding of childhood in a Scandinavian postmodern context around the year 2000.

Keywords: *picturebooks; chronotope; children's spaces; Mikhail Bakhtin; Scandinavian childhood; childhood studies*

The picturebook art of the Norwegian writer Gro Dahle and the illustrator and artist Svein Nyhus is highly regarded in Norway and throughout Scandinavia and has also garnered interest in other countries.¹ The aim of this article is to analyse conceptions of time and space in three picturebooks by Dahle and Nyhus, each with a focus on children's psychological development or health in a family context: *Den grådige ungen* (*The Greedy Child*, Dahle and Nyhus 1997), *Bak Mumme bor Moni* (*Behind Mumme lives Moni*, Dahle, Nyhus, and Nyhus 2000), and *Snill* (*What a Girl*, Dahle and Nyhus 2002).² I will analyse how time and the physical environment are depicted in these picturebooks and how verbal and visual signs create conceptions of time and space in the picturebook art of Dahle and Nyhus, reflecting the existential conditions of being a child in a modern Norwegian society around the year 2000.

The three picturebooks depict different child characters in a Scandinavian family context, all of them facing existential challenges. The picturebooks thematise sibling jealousy (*The Greedy Child*), anger and displaced feelings (*Behind Mumme Lives*

Moni), and the situation of a child being "invisible" at home and at school (*What a Girl*). The inner struggles of the child protagonist take place in the geographic and psychological sphere of the family house. The child has to break through physical and psychological borders to get free and conquer a significant place for her/his own. The family house, as a psychological space, is broken down and reconstructed as a recurrent narrative, and the selected picturebooks explore what type of being in the world is possible for the child living in the house.

To analyse conceptions of time and space around the family house, I will use the term chronotope, developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. The term chronotope, Bakhtin notes, literally means time-space (from *chronos*, time, and *topos*, place) and is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981, 84). The problem statement in this article is as follows: What characterises the family house chronotope in picturebooks by Dahle and Nyhus published around the turn of century, and what type of childhood or conditions

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of being a child does this chronotope propose? The decisive moments when the protagonists' lives turn in new directions will be analysed as well as how different chronotopes are interrelated with each other in the chronotopical images of the child. In addition to Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, the theoretical framework of this article will also include sociological and historical perspectives on what characterises modern childhood by Nick Lee (2001) and Jan Kampmann (2004). I will also refer to children's literature researchers such as Maria Nikolajeva (1996) and Rosemary Ross Johnston (2002), who use the chronotope to thematise how childhood is depicted in a context of European and Nordic children's literature.

The chronotope is, according to Bakhtin, a formal category, denoting the unity of time and space in a literary work. Bakhtin notes that he has borrowed the term from the natural sciences, and he regards time and space as mutually dependent. He uses the term about locations in a literary text where time and space fuse in a distinct and meaningful way: "time [...] takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 1981, 84).

Bakhtin identifies chronotopes with significant meaning for the shaping of the narrative of the novel, at different historical stages, within a special genre or within the work of a single author. He argues that there are different chronotopes at play in a single work or authorship, often with a single one as the most important and dominating over the others:

Within the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work or author; it is common moreover for one of these chronotopes to envelope or dominate the others [...]. Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in even more complex relationships. (Bakhtin 1981, 251)

Nikolajeva has introduced the chronotope as a useful tool for genre specifications in children's literature research (Nikolajeva 1996, 121). The difference between the genres of adventure and fantasy becomes clear by stating that the history of adventures is limited to only one fictive world (time-space), in contrast to the latter, which changes between a fictive and a real world (primary and secondary world).³ Whereas Nikolajeva uses

the chronotope as a lens for identifying different types of narrative patterns in children's literature, my main concern in this article is to explore how meaning is produced in complex relations between different chronotopes in the three picture books of Dahle and Nyhus and how these constellations of different chronotopes may contribute to the understanding of childhood.

Ross Johnston has focused on how chronotopes interfere with each other in picturebook narratives. Johnston gives examples of how the visual and verbal text in a picturebook may represent "two different constellations of time and space played out against each other, the action being perceived from two quite different chronotopical perspectives" (Johnston 2002, 153). She argues that pictures, by referring to a mythological or biblical narrative, for example, may activate what Bakhtin calls "great time," the mythical and magical time, beyond biographical and historical time, a time belonging to the adventures and folkloric tradition. The potential mythological or symbolic meaning in the pictures does not "oppose" or contradict the verbal text but expands it and creates the possibility for alternative readings. According to Johnston, the constellation between iconic and verbal text, or the visual and verbal chronotopes, contributes to an openness and an ethics of hope in children's literature.

The symbolic character of Svein Nyhus' picturebook illustrations has been commented on, including the fact that visual symbols in picturebooks by Dahle and Nyhus may disturb and undermine an idyllic family scene claimed in the verbal narrative (Ommundsen 2004; Schäffer 1998). In a reading of Dahle and Nyhus' picturebook *Sinna mann (Angry Man)*, Dahle and Nyhus (2003), with the provocative theme domestic violence, Agnes-Margrethe Bjorvand questions the verbal narrative's harmonising end of the story (Bjorvand 2010). Visual symbols connected to both the child protagonist and his father may foreshadow that the son will remain a victim of his violent father. The opposition between and inclusion of different chronotopes provides the opportunity to explore the ambiguity of childhood and the impact of the family house in Dahle and Nyhus' picturebooks as a crucial part of the social and historical context.

THE FAMILY HOUSE CHRONOTOPE

The family house is the primary place of action in the Dahle and Nyhus picturebook universe, and time and space fuse in a special way in and around the family house. According to Rachel Falconer,

chronotopes “are representations of time and space, which frame and enable their characters to live and act in certain ways” (Falconer 2010, 89). What is prominent in all three picturebooks is that the child protagonists manage to break the symbolic and physical borders of the family house and establish a new point of departure. The chronotope of the threshold symbolises “crises and break in life [...] decisions that determine the whole life of a man” (Bakhtin 1981, 248). The Dahle and Nyhus picturebook narratives can be regarded as threshold studies; they explore, make explicit, and “stretch out” the instantaneous moment when a child manages to make a decisive change and become visible in the adult world.

The time–space outside the house has elements of what Bakhtin defines as the idyllic chronotope, including a life close to nature, animals, flowers, trees, and a cyclical time following the seasons of nature. Being outside, in the idyllic time–space, seems to give strength and bodily empowerment to the child protagonists in the books.

The moment of change includes a bodily transformation of the child that enables a shift of power between child and adult. This subversive element derived from the medieval carnival tradition is explored by Bakhtin in his analyses of Rabelais’ novels.⁴ According to Bakhtin, the carnival feast meant an accidental and temporal liberation from hierarchical privileges, norms, and rules (Bakhtin 1984, 10). In the world of Rabelais, the material and bodily life is viewed from a utopian and spiritual perspective, and the ideal and abstract are transmitted to a material and bodily level (Bakhtin 1984, 19). According to Maria Lassén-Seger, “many authors use metamorphosis as carnivalesque displacement for that very purpose: to put the fictive child in a position where he/she can try out new subject positions, and where the very authority that the child has escaped from can be interrogated” (Lassén-Seger 2006, 148). The carnivalesque elements including the transformation of the child protagonist’s body expand and go out over the realistic settings of the picturebook narratives. I will call this carnival and subversive chronotope a “fantasy chronotope.”

THE CHRONOTOPE OF CHILDHOOD

The literary chronotope emerges, according to Bakhtin, from real historical time and space. He argues that the relationship between the real and fictional world is equally created by the represented world in the text, written down by the author, and by the readers, or performers/listeners of the text:

Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text). (Bakhtin 1981, 253)

Nikolajeva argues that the space of action is more limited and narrow in modern children’s literature than in classical stories. According to Nikolajeva, this feature reflects that the psychological space of modern childhood is dominated of insecurity and isolation:

Thus compressed time and space and a concrete, often limited place are the typical chronotope of a modern children’s novel. It reflects the insecure, detached existence of today’s children (Nikolajeva 1996, 129)

The limited space of childhood in Dahle and Nyhus’ picturebooks is not always a safe and protective place for children, but often a place of alienation and psychological crises because of insecurity and loss of contact with the parents. Nick Lee describes what characterises the conditions of childhood and the family as an institution in Western countries from the post-war and rebuilding period up to a globalised and mass cultural society towards the end of the 20th century (Lee 2001). The family home in the post-war period had a cocooning function for children. The function of the family home was to shelter and separate children from the negative effects of a society based on production and, together with school, served as the other primary institution for children in the development state, to transform them from immature and incomplete human “becomings” into human beings, capable of taking their place in the production of the development state. Towards the end of the 20th century, because of mass media, consumerism, and a globalised economy, the family home is no longer a sheltered space to be a child. Lee claims that children take part in society as consumers, but they are still cocooned in their family homes, which gives childhood a status of ambiguity. Children are both dependent and independent, simultaneously beings and becomings (Lee 2001, 76).

Teresa Colomer has identified changes in values in a select number of national and international picturebooks published in Spain from the mid-1970s to 2010 (Colomer 2010). She finds “a desire for protective spaces” for children and childhood at the turn of the century and discusses these findings in the context of the global economic and social changes affecting childhood and children’s life-worlds as spaces of their own. The adult

educational discourse in these picturebooks can be partly identified as a sort of nostalgia, expressing “the need to preserve the time and space of childhood in what could be called a new kind of *children’s room*, understood now as a refuge from insecurity” (Colomer 2010, 48). In addition, the threatened space of childhood stresses the urgency of providing emotional defences for children:

In this context, the protagonists in picturebooks often feel very lonely and threatened, so that the *educational goals* seem to include the capacity to face the loneliness produced by consumerism. Sadness and depression now invade children’s books in a new kind of rupture with thematic taboos. (Colomer 2010, 48)

There seems to be no physical refuge for the child protagonists in the three picturebooks I will analyse in this article, but the authors show possible strategies for a child to confront pain and loneliness and give hope for a more harmonious and satisfactory life in the future.

In a historical review of Scandinavian children’s literature, Nina Goga categorises different ways of depicting the child protagonist and childhood through the last 50 years. The strong, imaginative, and autonomous child is a fundamental figure in the Scandinavian tradition (Goga 2013). Goga argues that inner conflicts and bodily actions are exposed with a new kind of openness in Scandinavian children’s literature at the turn of the century, and she notes the protagonist in *What a Girl*, Lussi, as a typical example of “the expressive and experimental child” (Goga 2013, 247). To express the emotions of a troubled protagonist, there is, according to Goga, a further development of an “artistic, fragmented literary style” in the 1990s (Goga 2013, 247). In the following analyses, I will explore different versions of the strong, autonomous, and experimental child in the three picturebooks of Dahle and Nyhus.

Jan Kampmann discusses the development of a new rhetoric of childhood that developed in the Nordic countries in particular in the 1990s. The term “the competent child,” according to Kampmann, denotes a child “able to develop autonomy and self-regulation” (Kampmann 2004, 140). At this historical stage, the notion of the competent child takes over for the former notion of a child’s “teachability” and “developmentality” based on stages in developmental psychology. Kampmann argues that the rhetoric of the 1990s projects a “child responsible for its actions, who is worth listening to because it can express its wishes,

interests and inner moods in rational ways” (Kampmann 2004, 140). With the notion of the competent child, children and adults may be viewed as more equal, both being incomplete and facing developmental challenges. Under the new economy, adults also have to develop and adapt to the changing labour market. Both children and adults are incomplete as they undergo a learning or development process: “both parts are involved in the double and permanent transformation process as currently ‘beings and becomings’” (Kampmann 2004, 148).

The three selected picturebooks illuminate different problems and challenges of both the vulnerable and competent child and therefore reflect an understanding of Scandinavian childhood within a family context around the year 2000.

THE GREEDY CHILD—THE FAMILY HOUSE IN A GARDEN

The Greedy Child (1997) introduces us to Åse, a girl who lies awake at night and calls her mother to bring her water and food. Her desire for food intensifies throughout the book, and ultimately she eats all her family members and the house. Then, she explodes, and the house and family fall into place again.

The story opens with a picture of Åse lying in her room at night. The book’s illustrations cover the entire doublespread, and the text is placed where the background colours are light, with motifs sometimes slightly retouched. Dahle’s poetic language, with neologisms such as “snory mummy” and “sandman little brother,” gives the story a humorous and playful tone. The words describe a total idyll, with expressions such as “sleepy wood,” “cherry garden,” “dreaming house,” and “sandman little brother”:

It is night over sleepy wood.
It is night over cherry garden, over
dreaming house. Over pillows and cosy
duvets where
snory mummy sleeps. Night and night over
sandman little brother. The only one who is
not asleep
is Åse.
-Thirsty! Shouts Åse. – Thirsty, thirsty,
thirsty!

The loneliness of the girl contrasts with all the play things and material symbols of a happy childhood filling her entire room. A personalised moon, with a kind smile, looks at Åse through the window and spreads light on the floor and on Åse’s bed. The window is half-open, and a cat, not mentioned in

the verbal text, seems to be on its way through the open window. The cat and the moon link together the idyllic nature chronotope outside the house and the tense, emotional atmosphere around Åse inside the family house.

Åse lives together with her mother, father, and her little brother in a detached house with a garden and surrounding woods. The family house of Åse is reminiscent of the house in the forest, a childhood chronotope found in folk tales such as *Little Red Cap* and *Hansel and Gretchen*. The story unfolds within the limits of one particular place, which according to Bakhtin is characteristic of the idyllic chronotope: “This little spatial world is limited and sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places, with the rest of the world” (Bakhtin 1981, 225).⁵ In contrast with the idyllic and rural surroundings, the Dahle and Nyhus family house is modern inside, with interior and material goods that characterise a Scandinavian family home in the 1990s.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FAMILY HOUSE

The psychological atmosphere inside the house is dominated by a modern family life, where parents are occupied with their own professional interests and doings, with little time for the child protagonist. The second spread shows Åse’s mother entering Åse’s room to bring her water. From Åse’s perspective, mummy is hiding behind layers, like the Russian nesting doll on the chest of drawers, next to the door and out of reach for Åse’s emotional needs. Behind the door, there is a puppet doll with a big nose like daddy hanging on the wall, which may symbolise Åse’s daddy. He is a rather remote figure in the family life, visually introduced in opening seven, when he is coming home from work, and in the verbal text is depicted as “sweaty daddy” and “white skirt daddy.” On the drawer, there is also a box with a keyhole, and a key lies under Åse’s bed, indicating the child’s potential to act and make a change. The single key and the puppet doll are both visual elements that appear in other picturebooks by Dahle and Nyhus, not mentioned in the verbal text but expanding the Dahle and Nyhus chronotope.

From inside the family house, nature may be experienced through windows and doors. In the third opening, the sun spreads light on the floor and on the footboard of Åse’s bed. On the footboard, we can see a double portrait of the sun and the moon, with a knife and fork on one side and a cheese grater on the other. The side motifs

symbolise food as part of the circle of life. According to Bakhtin, food and meals are important elements in the agricultural idyll, where people grow their own food and experience the seasons and cycles of nature (Bakhtin 1981, 227). The eating motif goes through the whole story, from the mother feeding her daughter in bed and Åse’s grotesque eating of her entire family to an idyllic family meal in the garden. Food and eating bring up an idyllic time–space in *The Greedy Child*, but eating is also what provokes and enables Åse’s emotional crisis and change. The chronotope of the threshold and the idyllic chronotope meet and interfere with each other in the eating motif.

Being outside the family house, in the garden or in nature, empowers the child protagonist and provides opportunities for changes in the relationship with other family members. On the fifth doublespread (see Figure 1), the midday sun over the garden is verbally depicted with anaphoric statements: “It’s midday sun over tussock garden. // Midday sun over newspaper mummy. // Midday sun over short trousers little brother in the swing [...]” The visual narrative expands the pastoral and idyllic nature of the garden, with elements such as trees, flowers, animals, birds, and butterflies. Little brother is under the shade of a big tree close to the family house, together with mummy. Åse sits alone on a stone in a corner of the garden, sweating under the warm sun. Huge garden shears beside her visually indicate that Åse has cut down the roses around the stone, and her spot of the garden looks like a desert. The white cat has caught a mouse and is looking proudly at Åse. Åse looks at little brother and mummy with furious eyes and a big, gaping mouth. Little brother looks perhaps a little anxious back at Åse, while mummy does not notice Åse’s frustration because she is occupied reading a newspaper.

Åse’s big mouth and teeth show that her transformation has begun. It is as if being outside, in contact with nature and under the open sky, supports Åse to express her material and existential needs. From opening six through ten, Åse eats all the family members and, finally, the entire house. The only living creature left is the white cat. In the eleventh opening, Åse cracks open, and every single family member and interior from the house burst out of her. In this part of the book, the fantasy chronotope, including Åse’s growing into a monster, dominates and displaces the idyllic elements.

The verbal description of Åse’s cracking open underscores her body as the central place for meaning and change: “Then, she notices a tickling



Figure 1. Dahle and Nyhus, *The Greedy Child* (1997).

under the skin. Then, she feels a tickling along the side of her. Then, she hears a crackling behind in her back. [. . .]. Krisj, krasj! Pang!” This instant seems to lead to a renewal, or psychological resurrection, for Åse, which according to Bakhtin is one of the possible outcomes for a protagonist when she crosses a threshold (Bakhtin 1981, 248).

The picturebook about Åse tunes out with an idyllic and harmonising scene from the garden. On the right side of the last doublespread, in the foreground, Åse is sitting on mummy’s knee holding the white cat, with all the family members around, while on the left side of the spread the last pieces of the house fall into place. Åse has returned to normal size⁶, and for the first time she seems to be in harmony with the rest of the family. In spite of the classical idyllic setting, there are also visual elements undermining the idyllic family. Mother’s sharp sewing needle is placed close to Åse, and father’s garden shears rage up from his pocket. On the ground, a little mouse peeks out from under little brother’s trousers and repeats Åse’s scared posed-for-the-camera look from the establishing picture. The visual depiction of the family idyll foreshadows that Åse, and maybe little brother as well, soon will get hurt and experience anxiety and disappointments again.

The natural surroundings, including a rising sun and a descending moon, make the idyllic family part of cyclical time in nature. However, the family house, falling in place, is still visually depicted in its single parts, reminding the reader that the idyllic family scene is a frozen moment of time.

The instantaneous and cyclical notions of time oppose and interfere with each other and subvert the idyllic and nostalgic dream of wholeness and stability of the family house.

Dahle and Nyhus depict the vulnerable child but simultaneously show social and existential conditions for all children in this historical chronotope of childhood. The last opening represents a fragile moment of harmony and peace that symbolises the child’s being in time and space around the turn of the 20th century in a North-European and Scandinavian context.

BEHIND MUMME LIVES MONI

The picturebook *Behind Mumme Lives Moni* (2000) is about a boy, Mumme, and his relationship with another boy, Moni. Moni regularly breaks into Mumme’s world, riding on his big black horse and destroys Mumme’s moments of quietness and rest. The similarity of their names and clothing supports an understanding of the figure Moni as Mumme’s other self. Ultimately, Mumme manages to confront Moni and stop him. The book ends on a hopeful note, suggesting that at some point in the future Moni will become a friend.

Throughout the book, Mumme is visually depicted on one half of the doublespread and Moni on the other. The verbal text is gathered on “Mumme’s side,” together with a small picture of Mumme. The text is therefore near Mumme and his point of view, whereas on the opposite side there is a full-page picture of the frightening and

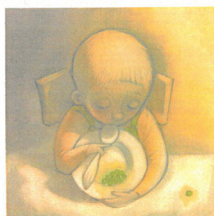
untamed Moni (“Moni has no words,” double-spread six). The relation between verso and recto can imply movement and temporal relations (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, 151) and illustrates in *Behind Mumme Lives Moni* the fragile border between Mumme and Moni.

Some days are so quiet that Mumme can “sit and listen and hear the clock inside and the wind outside” (doublespread four). He is aware of the threshold between inside and outside of the house, and just like Åse, he is supported by being outside, in contact with nature, when he finally stands up against what suppresses him, and his life turns in a new direction.

Mumme is seeking and creating places where he can find rest. On doublespread seven, Mumme is shown crouching down inside a grape on a plate on the table. Lacking a real hiding place, he makes himself a sheltered and private space in his own fantasy.⁷ This space is a temporal, imaginary refuge and illustrates that children’s private hiding places also may be places of threshold experiences, a children’s use of place identified in Norwegian children’s literature (Slettan 2010).

The relation between verso and recto illustrates different relations between Mumme and Moni. Doublespread eight seems to refer to an actual event in Mumme’s biographical time (see Figure 2). The verso picture shows the “kind and gentle” Mumme eating peas one by one from a plate on a table. Compared with Åse’s eating in *The Greedy Child*, Mumme’s is a reduced, or controlled, form of eating. What is going on in Mumme’s mind is described in the verbal text:

Mumme er bare snill. Mumme er bare snill og spiser erter med skje. Og Mumme er bare snill og sier unnskyld selv når det ikke er nødvendig å si unnskyld. For Mumme er bare snill og blir lei seg når andre blir lei seg. Og Mumme sier alltid takk for maten. Og Mumme sier alltid: Jeg er så glad i deg. Og da får Mumme fjær på ryggen. For sånn er Mumme.



Men inne i hodet har Mumme en lang korridor. Og et sted der inne er det en seng som knirker i et seksmannsrom. Og da blir Mumme urolig. For langt, langt inne fra Blåsvarte Fjellet kan Mumme høre Moni brumme. Og Mumme hører Moni tromme på Stor Svart Tromme. Bom bom bom.

However, inside his head Mumme has got a long corridor. And somewhere in there, there is a creaking bed in a bedroom for six. And then Mumme starts to become anxious. Because he hears Moni rumbles in the Blue-Black Mountain. And Mumme hears Moni drum on Big Black Drum. Bom bom bom. (doublespread eight)

In the recto image, the inner world of Mumme is depicted with the long corridor inside Mumme’s head, leading to an open door at the end of the corridor. A bed can be seen inside the room, and through the open door an arm bends out, playing on a large drum. The corridor, room, and bed in Mumme’s mind, is likely connected to a traumatising event in his past and the origin of Moni’s anger. Being alone in a room covered with doors is a recurrent psychological landscape in Dahle and Nyhus’ picturebooks, representing the protagonists double feelings of fear and possibilities in a threshold situation (e.g. *Verden har ingen hjørner* (*The World Has No Corners*), Nyhus 1999; *Sinna mann* (*Angry Man*), Dahle and Nyhus 2003).

The plot’s turning point occurs when Mumme, standing on the edge of the Big Black Hole, gathers the courage to confront Moni and the Black Horse. As in *The Greedy Child*, the turning point of the story takes place outside of the house. Mumme has to take control over the horse, and nature, the wind, is his helper:

And Mumme gets smaller and smaller in front of Moni [...]. However, no other than Mumme can help Mumme. And the Black Horse is trampling. And the Big Hole gapes.



Figure 2. Dahle and Nyhus, *Behind Mumme Lives Moni* (2000).

And the Wind shouts: Take the Horse!
(doublespread twelve)

When Mumme befriends the horse, Moni loses his power. On the last two doublespreads, Moni has shrunk into a stupid but friendly monkey. The transformation of Moni from a powerful into a comical figure shows that carnival time is part of the threshold experience.

Behind Mumme Lives Moni is a story about the traumatised boy Mumme and the start of a healing process. The chronotope of the threshold is expressed in the emotional tension between verso and recto pictures, representing the fragile border between the kind and gentle Mumme and Moni and the instantaneous and frightening upcoming of the protagonist's displaced anger. The indoor emblems in *Behind Mumme Lives Moni* include a clock, temporary places for rest, corridors, doors, and thresholds. The outdoor and idyllic nature emblems are the wind, untamed natural forces, and animals (the horse), which represent healing potential.

WHAT A GIRL

The picturebook *What a Girl* (2002) is about a girl, Lussi, who is gentle and well behaved. She is so gentle and quiet that one day she just disappears. She thereby becomes one of the “invisible children,” a well-known trope borrowed past children's literature, with predecessors such as Tove Jansson's “Det usynlige barnet” (“The Invisible Child,” Jansson and Malmström 1963) and Fam Ekman's *Hva skal vi gjøre med lille Jill?* (*What Shall We Do about Little Jill?*, Ekman 1976). *What a Girl* also relates to classical feminist texts about women's breaking out and release from cultural boundaries, and the motif of forgotten and invisible women coming out of the wall harks back to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Gilman 1995, first ed. 1899). Throughout *What a Girl*, the text is set on the left third, whereas the illustrations fill the rest of the space on the doublespreads.

The text is poetic and uses various poetic elements such as metaphors, repetitions of whole sentences, and smaller syntactic constructions (anaphors). The repetitions give the text a distinct and often insistent rhythm. On the first doublespread of the story (see Figure 3), the verbal text starts with an exclamation, which gives the sense that we can hear the voice of an adult pointing out the silent and well-behaved Lussi as an example for all children:

Look at Lussi!
Look at Lussi!
Look how quiet she is!
Quiet as white chalk and thin paper.
Quiet as shiny glasses in a cupboard. (doublespread one)

Writing tools such as white chalk and thin paper metaphorically express the quietness of Lussi. She coincides with the school environment and is not able to give herself a voice. The perfect surface of the glasses, locked in a cupboard, refers to a passive feminine role and the potential of breaking this fragile surface.

On the first doublespread, Lussi is visually depicted at home, where she is sitting at the dining room table doing her homework (see Figure 3). On the opposite side of the table, there is a huge flower in a vase, but the stem does not reach down into the water. The family home of Lussi is no place for growth and life in nature, as supported by a note made by Åse Marie Ommundsen that the colour green is absent from the entire book (Ommundsen 2004, 210). The absence of the colour green indicates that there are no plants growing, and that natural life does not unfold in the universe of this book. Inside the window, on the opposite side of the room, there is a birdcage. No bird can be seen in the cage. The “missing” bird may foreshadow Lussi's outbreak and release.

The first spread also introduces a grey object, which appears in different forms and situations throughout the book. On the first spread, the object takes the form of a “stone” on the dining table. The object later appears outdoors as a cloud in the sky (doublespread six) and is therefore both an indoor and outdoor element.

Lussi's transformation starts when she begins to scream inside the wall and “the smile cracks into a thousand pieces” (opening eight). She gradually grows bigger and bigger as she screams more and more loudly. Before she lets a scream out, Lussi can feel it working its way through different parts of her body.

Then, Lussi feels a tickle in her throat.
It prickles and tingles.
It hisses and whistles, roars and pounds.
A scream works its way up from her stomach.
It grows in her mouth. (doublespread eight)

Lussi transforms into a huge monster, and when her scream lets out she blows down the wall. Parts of the interior fly through the air, and the “teacher hides away in the inner corner. [...] Poor thing” (doublespread ten). According to Maria Lassén-Seger, “of all child metamorphs, the child turning



Figure 3. Dahle and Nyhus, *What a Girl* (2002).

into a monster may well be the one most obviously involved in a power struggle with adult authority” (Lassén-Seger 2006, 134). When Lussi comes out of the wall, she is no longer clean and sweet, but filthy, and on the last doublespread she has a finger in her nose.

Lussi wonders if there are other walls and other invisible girls waiting. On the last opening she yawns and thinks: “They have to care for themselves // Because now Lussi want to go home and eat // [...] Calf and cow and sheep and pig // and fish and cabbage and carrot // and fifteen long, thin sausages // that’s what Lussi want to eat.” (doublespread fifteen).

In the background, the caretaker is cleaning up a piece of the grey object from the floor. A little boy bends down and stretches his hand against another piece of the “stone” on the floor. As in *The Greedy Child* and *Behind Mumme Lives Moni*, the visual narrative supplies the verbal text. Although Lussi seems to have freed herself, another child may be fated to pick up the “stone.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The family house chronotope represents an important part of the life-world in all three books by Dahle and Nyhus. The home environment of Åse is dominated by material goods, food, and playthings that are not able to assuage her feelings of loneliness and anger. Parents are depicted as unavailable to meet the child protagonist’s emotional needs. The family house chronotope of Lussi is dominated by space taking but distant parents, and

communication between parents and the child has broken down. Mumme is totally alone in his home environment, with no adults or family members around. He is a traumatised child, and his private, sheltered places are simultaneously places for threshold experiences. The experiences of all three child protagonists suggest that there are no real sheltered, private places for children or places to be a child in the family house.

In all three books, the idyllic chronotope, represented by themes such as contact with animals, nature, and eating, has a major influence on the children’s capabilities to act and take control over their own lives. For Åse and Mumme, the decisive changes take place outdoors, supported by natural elements and animals. The idyllic chronotope is especially prominent in *The Greedy Child*, in which the garden brings Åse in contact with flowers, trees, animals, and cyclical time. In *What a Girl*, the family home, together with school, represents a restrained and dry environment where no child can grow.

The fantasy, carnival chronotope, changes the power relation between adults and child and opens a new space for the child protagonist where the child may experience a fragile moment of harmony (Åse). The moment of change may also turn the life of the child towards a new direction and allow the child to become open for further development and change in the future (Mumme and Lussi). There is no definitive “happy ending” for the child protagonist; anxiety and the potential for getting hurt are part of the image of the family idyll (Åse). To make a space of her/his own, the child has to

face her/his different and individual problems and challenges, in the same ways that adults are supposed to do.

Lee argues that in the postmodern area, under the new economy, both adults and children can be regarded as “becomings without end” (Lee 2001, 82). The ability for development and change and lifelong learning has become vital for all citizens in networked, media-rich societies, and Lee argues:

Childhood ambiguity in highly mediated societies can also be seen as *necessary* for the production of “self-programming” adult citizens, who are capable of learning, changing and adapting throughout their lives: citizens fit, in other words, for the uncertainties of the new economy. (Lee 2001, 71)

The chronotope of childhood in Dahle and Nyhus’ picturebooks constructs the child as an independent individual, with the potential to act, develop, and change, which may also actualise ethical aspects connected to the child as an actor, such as the way in which the child relates to others and communicates with other generations. The fact that Åse’s greed unfolds without any visible moral sanctions, as opposed to the gluttons in folklore and pedagogically oriented children’s culture, as noted by Asbjørn Kolberg (2001), and Lussi’s refusal to help the other invisible girls in the wall represent an individualism in the postmodern society that lacks solidarity and a responsibility for taking care of others (Ommundsen 2004). The ambiguity of childhood challenges the traditional image of the kind, pure, and innocent child.

The artistic energy in the three picture books is concentrated on the fantastic changes and the transformation of the body, with expressive and often grotesque elements representative of the Dahle and Nyhus image of the child. The eating motif exists in both the fantasy and idyllic chronotope, and it represents the vitality and energy of the body, which is necessary for change. All three books are threshold studies, exploring moments to become free and the conditions for breaking out for a child in Western postmodern society. In contrast to Colomer’s (2010) findings regarding European children’s literature around the turn of the century, there seems to be no physical refuge from insecurity in the Dahle and Nyhus universe. Nevertheless, the picturebooks of Dahle and Nyhus show the possibility of finding a refuge from insecurity, but this sanctuary has to be found in the child itself. The three picturebooks express a strong confidence in the strength and ideals of modern Scandinavian childhood. These ideals include the

construction of the vital, imaginative, and autonomous child and the possibility for this both vulnerable and strong child to, in a decisive moment, gather the courage to find its own way.

In the picturebooks of Dahle and Nyhus, we may find reminiscences of an idyllic time, such as family life close to nature (a garden), and primary functions, such as eating, sleeping, and contact with animals, that are part of the everyday rhythm. However, the children have no sheltered place—a place belonging only to them—in the idyllic family context. They have to create their own space, break through physical and psychological walls to be seen for who they are and realise their own being in the world. Parents or other adults can help the child in this process, but the child itself has to make the first step and symbolically step over the threshold.

Notes

1. The picturebook *What a Girl* has been translated into both Hindi and English and used as part of a project in India to strengthen girls’ self-esteem and position in society.
2. The two first English titles are my own translations, and I will from now on refer to the English titles. All quotations from Snill are taken from the English translation by Arundhati Deosthale and Mira Beckstrom Laurantz in *What a Girl!* (Dahle et al. 2012), with one exception: I have retained the name of the child protagonist from the Norwegian edition, Lussi (in the English edition, her name is Sheelu). All other translations from Norwegian in this article are my own.
3. Nikolajeva also discusses what characterises the chronotope of a special authorship, including the Tove Jansson’s *Mummi* universe.
4. Rabelais’ chronotope uses fantastic elements and exaggerations from adventures and folkloric tradition, opposing the medieval metaphysical tradition by placing the human body at the centre of man’s world: “He [Rabelais] wants to return both language and a meaning to the body, return to it the idealised quality it had in ancient times, and simultaneously return a reality, a materiality, to language and meaning” (Bakhtin 1981, 171).
5. Nikolajeva has summarised features that characterise a utopian, Arcadian or pastoral work and mentions the importance of “a particular setting; autonomy of felicitous space from the rest of the world a general sense of harmony” (Nikolajeva 2000, 21). There are reminiscences of the autonomous, sheltered place and harmony in Dahle and Nyhus’ picturebooks, but unlike what Nikolajeva mentions as typical for classical idyllic spaces, repressive aspects of civilisation such as money, labour, law or government are not absent in the Dahle and Nyhus chronotope.
6. Sitting on mummy’s knee, the power relation between the parents and Åse is re-established in the family constellation on the last doublespread,

which supports the point made by Nikolajeva that carnival time and children's superior position over adults in children's literature are most often temporary (Nikolajeva 2006).

7. We find the same motif in Dahle and Nyhus' picturebook *Sinna mann* (Angry Man, 2003), when Boj, the child protagonist, at the moment when his world and language fall apart because of his violent father, escapes to a fantasy dimension. The fantasy world lies outside the house, where he imagines himself together with a dog. This is the turning point of the story, and the wind, the trees and birds encourage and support him to write a letter to tell about his father's violence.

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