

**SENSITIVE TOPICS IN CHILDREN'S GRAPHIC LITERATURE:
HOW NORWEGIAN AUTHOR GRO DAHLE DEPICTS PARENTAL
CONFLICT, DEPRESSION, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE
CONTEMPORARY FAMILY**

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Abstract: *Sensitive topics such as depression, anxiety and violence are boldly addressed in contemporary children's picture books. Based on Sophie van der Linden's picture book theory, this article explores how depression, divorce and violence are depicted in Gro Dahle, Svein Nyhus and Kaia Dahle Nyhus' picture books and which rhetorical, literal or graphic strategies are used to explain to a young, uninitiated audience a subject as complex as mental health and parental unavailability in contemporary families. The article proposes a theoretical introduction to graphic literature for children, emphasizing the styles, forms and diversity of this literature as exemplified in an analysis of the portrayal of the modern child within Dahle's literary universe, with particular attention to how this child perceives and internalizes familial trauma. It also addresses the new direction of taking out of taboo these "sensitive" subjects, which are even more relevant and present in contemporary society and emphasizes their legitimacy in literary studies and beyond.*

Keywords: Graphic Literature; Picture books; Scandinavian Childhood; Sensitive Topics; Children's literature; Gro Dahle

A brief examination of the definition of "children's literature" reveals that it is commonly described as being intended for "young people"¹. This first inquiry highlights the fluidity of the categories and the challenges inherent in defining the target audience of children's literature. While this literature may, at first glance, give the impression of being aimed at a restricted audience – a narrowly defined readership – it caters for a wide range of ages, the boundary remaining always ambiguous. This is primarily because the period between early childhood and adolescence encompasses several pivotal events and experiences that contribute to the reader's cognitive and emotional development. Moreover, these stages are formative in shaping one's understanding of the world, with notable differences in thought processes and perception emerging between pre-adolescence and adolescence². While children's literature in Romania has yet to gain significant support or recognition from literary critics and state institutions, as Romanian

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica online*, "children's literature" entry, online, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/art/childrens-literature>, last accessed the 21st of June 2025.

² Eveline Crone, Ronald Dahl, "Understanding adolescence as a period of social-affective engagement and goal flexibility", in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, no. 13, 2012, online, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3313>, last accessed the 22nd of June 2025.

writer Alina Purcaru explains in an article published in 2024, in *Suplimentul de cultură*: “It’s already a truism to marvel at the boom in local children’s literature in the last ten years. Each publishing house has developed its own colors dedicated to children’s books written by Romanian authors, illustrators and authors have established a specific ecosystem [...], however, the reception is the one that suffers from a delay. With very few exceptions [...] children’s books do not get much critical acclaim, dedicated prizes or constant events at major literary fairs and festivals” (My translation)³. However, in Western Europe, this field benefits from the active engagement of numerous authors, illustrators, literary critics, and publishers who contribute to its continuous development. A notable example can be found in the Scandinavian countries, where there is a strong tradition of Nordic scholarship for researching children’s literature alongside a strong Nordic tradition for writing children’s literature about complex and serious topics.

It is important to note that literature specifically intended for children did not emerge until the second half of the 18th century⁴. Early children’s literature, aimed at educating predominantly male, privileged youth on moral and religious subjects, evolved significantly with industrial and technical developments. The emergence of printing techniques and color illustrations, while retaining its educational purpose, ultimately gave rise to the distinct direction of picture books by the late 19th century, which we will detail below.

As the 20th century represents a century of major upheavals and radical changes, this aspect is also visible in the evolution and reception of children’s literature. In this period, there is a special interest in the field of education and child psychology. Consequently, publishing houses consider the preferences and needs of young readers. In other words, the proposed perspective is to speak not only *with* children/youth, but also *for* them. There is a convergence of interests in words and art, which will ultimately work together to create a new, highly complex type of literature.

Although the first thing that comes to mind when we first hear “children’s literature” are childhood fairy tales (especially in Romania, where fairy tales are the main early reading experiences), it is important to recognize that this literature encompasses a diverse array of forms that have developed their own rules, principles, and characteristics over time, such as picture books, graphic novels, etc. It manifests to the public in various forms with substantial distinctions, but which have in common the integration of both image and text. The difference resides, however, in the relationship between image and text. Illustrated books are generally

³ Alina Purcaru, “Literatura pentru copii – un fenomen pe care statul nu-l sprijină, iar criticii îl ocolesc”, in *Suplimentul de cultură*, no. 850, 2024, online, <https://suplimentuldecultura.ro/43521/literatura-pentru-copii-un-fenomen-pe-care-statul-nu-l-sprajina-iar-criticii-il-ocolesc/>, last accessed the 28th of June 2025. Este deja un truism să ne minunăm de avântul pe care l-a luat literatura autohtonă pentru copii în ultimii zece ani. Fiecare editură și-a dezvoltat propriile culoare dedicate cărții pentru copii scrise de autoare și autori români, ilustratorii și autorii și-au stabilit un ecosistem specific, cu repere și cote, cititorii există și, cu toate astea, receptarea e cea care suferă de un retard. (In text my translation).

⁴ Francis Marcoin, Christian Chelebourg, *La littérature de jeunesse*, Armand Colin, 2009, p. 8.

seen as a subcategory where text is predominant, and where images are occasionally used. On the other hand, in picture books and graphic novels both image and text are important, images performing an essential function than simply illustrating. To facilitate the understanding, the umbrella concept “graphic literature”⁵ will be used, as it encompasses both graphic novels and picture books.

An important aspect to consider in relation to graphic literature is its evolving thematic approaches. This literature has moved away from traditional ideas of “morality tales”. Nowadays, children’s literature can be both entertainment and literature that addresses difficult and complex topics such as gender and identity, the exploration of the body, class disparities, psychological and social issues and even sensitive topics or philosophical questions, with language tailored to its specific audience. This idea of a tailored language refers both to the responsibility of the authors and illustrators in crafting and representing these texts, as well as to the works’ capacity to convey stories without explicit narration, an idea French researcher Anne-Claire Marpeau explains in an article on representations of incest in picture books: “I propose the hypothesis that this poetics of ‘telling’ without ‘revealing’ is nevertheless the object of a progressive clarification of incest, with the most contemporary album proposing to ‘qualify’ the thing by the word. The expected reception of these works is based not only on an emotional identification with the child, but also on an ethical injunction to accompany the child victim for the mediating adult” (My translation)⁶.

In the Norwegian literary landscape, one name that addresses such “sensitive” topics is Gro Dahle, a prolific author whose works tackle complex and challenging themes such as mental health, domestic violence, and personal trauma. Her works remain close to the Romanian audience through their relevant themes and become even more significant for Scandinavian studies in our country. Thus, this paper aims to answer the question of how depression and domestic violence are represented in children’s graphic literature, and what graphic and rhetoric strategies the Norwegian author Gro Dahle employs to initiate such a sensitive discussion with a young audience, with focus on children’s development and understanding of family health. Additionally, it will examine whether her works could contribute to the Romanian literary scene. This analysis examines three picture books written by Gro Dahle and illustrated by Svein Nyhus and Kaia Dahle Nyhus, all depicting family challenges from a child’s perspective. The selected

⁵ Jeremy J. Llorence, “Exploring Graphic Literature as a Genre and its Place in Academic Curricula”, *McNair Scholars Journal*, no. 1, vol. 15, 2011, p. 31, online, <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair/vol15/iss1/6>, last accessed the 28th of June 2025.

⁶ Anne-Claire Marpeau, “Raconter l’inceste dans quatre albums de jeunesse francophones : enjeux poétiques et éthiques”, in *Cultural Express*, no. 10, 2023, online, <https://cultx-revue.com/article/raconter-linceste-dans-quatre-albums-de-jeunesse-francophones-enjeux-poetiques-et-ethiques>, last accessed the 28th of June 2024. J’émet l’hypothèse que cette poétique du « raconter » sans « dire » fait toutefois l’objet d’une explicitation progressive de l’inceste, l’album le plus contemporain proposant ainsi de « qualifier » la chose par le mot. La réception programmée de ces ouvrages n’est alors pas seulement basée sur une identification affective à l’enfant mais sur une injonction éthique à accompagner l’enfant victime pour l’adulte médiateur. (In text my translation).

works for analysis are *Krigen*⁷ (*The War*), *Håret til Mamma*⁸ (*Mama's Hair*), and *Sinna Mann*⁹ (*Angry Man*)¹⁰.

1. Understanding picture books

Before diving into the actual analysis, it is essential to establish a brief theoretical framework regarding the functioning of picture books and the relationship between text and imagery in conveying meaning. Although the combination of text and images is not at all a new concept, the picture book as a distinct format is a rather modern practice. However, its underlying mechanisms remain relatively unknown to the general public, and the limits between different formats remain *assez flous*. In this regard, it is important to note that the picture book is not a genre but a format that foregrounds both text and illustrations, which work together to convey meaning. Sophie Van der Linden, writer and literary critic, provides a satisfying definition in her work, *Lire l'album*, that is both relevant and essential to this discussion: "Picture book brings together two forms of language: text and image. The illustrations offer a meaning that is intertwined with that of the text, requiring a joint understanding of what is written and what is shown. Illustrations have a universal reach. They demand attention, an awareness of their codes, and a genuine act of interpretation" (My translation)¹¹. Thus, as Van der Linden explains, picture books are defined by the relationship between graphics and text. Additionally, a crucial feature in terms of how this format works is the doublespread layout, a narrative space where image and text are inseparable. This doublespread characteristic is a primary element in differentiating picture books from other graphic forms, such as comics. The picture book is characterized as a space where visual messages are primary, while linguistic messages adapt to the visual representations. In this way, the text may be absent, with the image taking on the sole responsibility of conveying the message. This is often seen in doublespread, where the visual elements may continue the narrative independently. Moreover, the picture book is the only publishing format that is uniquely specific to children's literature. The layout of the text further defines its category, with possibilities including the illustrated picture books (where text and image remain separate), the narrative picture books (where text is integrated into the image), as well as the graphic and documentary picture books¹². As Van der Linden explains:

⁷ Gro Dahle, Kaia Dahle Nyhus, *Krigen*, Cappelen Damm, 2013.

⁸ Gro Dahle, Svein Nyhus, *Håret Til Mamma*, Cappelen Damm, 2007.

⁹ Gro Dahle, Svein Nyhus, *Angry Man*, translated by Tara Chace, NorthSouth Books, 2019.

¹⁰ All primary texts by Gro Dahle are cited in the original language Norwegian. An exception is made for *Sinna Man*, which is cited in its official English translation by Tara Chace.

¹¹ Sophie Van Der Linden, *Lire l'album*, Poisson Soluble, 2006, p. 8. L'album convoque deux langages : le texte et l'image. Les images proposent une signification articulée à celle du texte, l'appréhension conjointe de ce qui est écrit et de ce qui est montré. Les images ont une portée universelle. Les images réclament une attention, une connaissance de ses codes et une réelle interprétation. (In text my translation).

¹² Sophie Van Der Linden, "L'album, Entre Texte, Image et Support," in *La Revue des Livres pour Enfants*, no. 214, 2003, p. 63, online,

“The structure is always worked out by the illustrator and not by the publishers alone, as is often the case with novels, for example. Formats, covers, endpapers, title pages and inner pages are usually considered as a coherent whole” (My translation)¹³. Unlike comics, picture books have no identifiable regular, “standard” layout.

A key word to better understand how the relationship between image and text works in picture books is association. As there is no fixed standard of how the two work together to convey the message, the association is both plastic and semantic. If in comics, the evolution of events is given by the sequence of frames, in the picture book the text (associated with the images) provides the fixation in time, the illustrations providing details about the frame. This is also emphasized by the fact that the albums avoid description (an approach that facilitates reading for younger audiences). In *American picture books from Noah's ark to the Beast within* Barbara Bader calls this dynamic as one of interdependence¹⁴, meaning the text cannot exist independently, separate from the image.

Another noteworthy aspect of picture books is the dual readership: children and adults. Even though the main addressee is the child, picture books are designed to be read out loud by an adult. As a consequence, they are carefully structured into what we call “breath units”¹⁵, ensuring a natural and engaging rhythm for oral storytelling.

Gro Dahle's works are extremely offering in this respect for several reasons in addition to their nature. On the one hand, the sensitive (even taboo) themes the author approaches, and on the other, the widespread popularity of these works in the Scandinavian literary sphere, a level of recognition that warrants further discussion within our Romanian context.

Gro Dahle is a renowned Norwegian author and poet, widely recognized as an iconic figure in Scandinavian children's literature. Her significance as a writer stems from her distinctive literary style, which blends burlesque and naive elements with remarkable depth. However, it is particularly the themes the author explores, psychological issues and the complexities of interpersonal relationships, that have solidified her reputation. In the three works selected for this analysis, Gro Dahle presents three child protagonists in three different family contexts, where each child undergoes deeply sensitive and existential family experiences. Within this framework, the author examines themes such as depression, parental burnout, divorce, displaced feelings, and domestic violence through the eyes of children.

https://cnlj.bnf.fr/sites/default/files/revues_document_joint/PUBLICATION_5005.pdf, last accessed the 28th June 2025.

¹³ Sophie Van Der Linden, *op.cit.*, p. 50. La structure est toujours travaillée par l'illustrateur et pas par les éditeurs seuls comme est souvent le cas pour les romans, par exemple. Les formats, couvertures, gardes, pages de titre et pages internes sont le plus souvent à considérer comme un ensemble cohérent. (In text my translation).

¹⁴ Barbara Bader, *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*, London, Macmillan Pub Co, 1976, p. 1.

¹⁵ Sophie Van Der Linden, *Lire l'album*, Poisson Soluble, 2006, p. 48.

2. Krigen (The War)

Krigen introduces Inga, a young girl who lives with her parents (Mamma and Pappa) and her siblings, Ola and Lars. While the illustrations and color palette evoke a serene and luminous atmosphere right from the beginning, the narrative itself commences abruptly and concisely. From the opening spreads, a direct connection to the title is established, foreshadowing the narrative's thematic complexity: at a young age, Inga witnesses the dissolution of her family as she knows it, as tensions between her parents escalate, culminating in their impending separation. One important aspect to mention here is the perspective as the conflict and its evolution are both decoded from the Inga's perspective. From a structural perspective, the text adopts a verse-like form, which facilitates readability and enhances the rhythmic flow of the narrative. However, the author's poetic style is interrupted by short, yet poignant lines that resonate like an echo throughout the story. Notably, the text opens with extreme conciseness: "War exists. / Inga knows it."¹⁶ The illustrations cover the entire doublespreads, as the white areas are rarely there for no reason in picture books. These striking lines alternate in a humorous manner with rhymes and repetitions, which serve to soften the initially serious tone of the narrative. This idyllic atmosphere and the portrayal of a happy childhood are abruptly disrupted when "war" intrudes upon the household. With its arrival, the narrative undergoes a significant shift, altering the portrayal of Inga and marking a turning point in her experience. In this sense, there is a conscious choice of the author in the way she chooses to represent the child protagonist. Atle Krogstad, in an article on Dahle, asserts that the author deviates from the classical model of character representation, instead introducing a new prototype of protagonist: an autonomous, strong and experimental child¹⁷. This remains true for *Krigen* where Inga is forced to overcome her status as the "victim" of her parents' conflicts and instead adopt a protective role for her younger siblings. The illustrations reinforce this transition, with perhaps the most striking example found on the sixth doublespread (Figure 1): shattered glasses, broken plates, the parents' faces depicted in black, and sharp, jagged coughs. Inga herself is portrayed as a stylized, minimalist figure, her large, terror-stricken eyes conveying the weight of the moment as she holds her siblings in a corner. Dahle does not confine the narrative to a binary perspective in which the parents are portrayed as the sole culprits. Instead, the illustrations provide a more nuanced depiction, showing them in tears in the aftermath of the conflict (Figure 2). This visual representation is reinforced by Inga's observations, which further emphasize the complexity of the situation and invite reflection on the emotional turmoil: "If it wasn't for me/they wouldn't have shouted like that, Inga thinks/ If it wasn't for me, they wouldn't have argued/ It's my fault/ only my fault that they're doing this/ that they're at odds/ that they're

¹⁶ Gro Dahle, Kaia Dahle Nyhus, *Krigen*, Cappelen Damm, 2013, p. 1. *Krigen* fins. Inga vet det, at krigen fins. (In text my translation).

¹⁷ Atle Krogstad, "The family house chronotope in three picturebooks by Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus: idyll, fantasy, and threshold experiences", in *Nordic Journal of ChildLit Aesthetics*, vol. 7, 2016, p. 4, online, <https://www.scup.com/doi/10.3402/blft.v7.26040>, last accessed the 28th of June 2025.

shouting”¹⁸. Another significant scene for this analysis is the dinner scene (Figure 3), which marks the protagonist’s emotional decline. The family dinner, typically a moment of warmth and security, becomes a space of emotional detachment and tension. Inga’s refusal to eat symbolizes her rejection of the autonomy and strength she has been forced to embody, highlighting the emotional exhaustion and vulnerability. The dinner motif evoking memories of a harmonious past is now turned into a breaking point for the child protagonist, the breakdown of familial stability. The otherwise idyllic scene is distorted by the color palette, the whole page being darkened, only Inga and the plates being clearly identifiable.

The concept of war, as indicated in the title, serves as a potent metaphor for the parental conflict. War involves choices and sides, with Inga facing an internal struggle as she grapples with the dilemma of choosing between her parents. While Dahle does not depict the parents as entirely absent, they remain figures who are emotionally distant and incapable of effectively communicating with their children. Thus, they are unable to address the children’s emotional needs, and Dahle does not attempt to downplay the impact of these events. Inga and her brothers are not offered the promise of a happy ending, and while the atmosphere becomes more relaxed and a sense of calm is established, the author does not suggest that a promised shelter awaits the protagonist. The ending emphasizes that a place of security may exist, but it must be actively sought and found.

3. *Håret til Mamma (Mama’s Hair)*

In *Håret til Mamma* the action presents a child protagonist, Emma. In this picture book the author explores the psychological and emotional development of a child raised by a parent affected by depression. The theme of parental presence (or rather absence) is to be noted, portraying parents who are physically there yet disconnected from the child’s inner world. Beyond this thematic correspondence, structural similarities can also be observed. However, a worthwhile graphical aspect that reinforces the story is the choice of lines. A recurring graphic motif – harsh black cough-like forms – pervades the illustrations, serving as a visual manifestation, are easily noticeable in the facial expressions (Figure 3). To underline the importance of this aspect, in “Picturebooks and Emotional Literacy”, Maria Nikolajeva affirms the following regarding graphic representations of facial expressions: “recognizable external tokens of emotions, because this is how we use theory of mind in real life. Cognitive studies claim that the most important features that reflect human emotions are eyes and mouth and that these features are universal”¹⁹. This is particularly noticeable in *Håret til Mamma* and remains the definitory, most striking feature of the two characters.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7. Hadde det ikke vært for meg, ville de ikke ropt slik, tenker Inga. Hadde det ikke vært for meg, ville de ikke kranglet. Hadde ikke jeg vært til, ville det ikke blitt slik, ikke sånn som dette. Det er min skyld, bare min skyld at de holder på sånn, at de er uvenner, at de roper [...]. (In text my translation).

¹⁹ Maria Nikolajeva, “Picturebooks and Emotional Literacy”, in *International Literacy Association and Wiley*, no. 4, vol. 67, 2013, p. 251, online, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24573569>, last accessed the 10th of May 2025.

The title emphasizes the theme of the picture book and is a *de facto* metaphor that the author chooses to use to reveal the emotional challenge. This symbol carries a dual significance: on one level, it represents the challenges faced by a parent experiencing depression; on another, it reflects Emma's emotional struggle as she attempts to support and connect with her mother. The mother's hair is described as vivid, golden-bright and beautiful. Its initial beauty is underscored through textual emphasis: "Mamma comes to Emma/ Mamma has sun in her hair/ Smile in her hair/ Loving hair/ Gentle hair"²⁰. A key moment occurs when the depiction of the mother's hair shifts, marking a visual turning point that parallels a transformation in her relationship with depression. The illustrator uses the visual medium to express things that don't exist textually. In this instance, the imagery constructs the figure of the responsible, strong, and autonomous child. Emma's readiness is shown through her holding a broom and dustpan. Her act of gathering her mother's hair serves as a poignant visual metaphor for assuming responsibility for her mother's emotional well-being. This loyalty makes Emma a savior-child, especially as she explores the symbolic space of the hair, which transcends the physical home.

The concept of the "helper character" is often discussed²¹, an auxiliary figure who supports the protagonist in navigating challenges. In this new symbolic space Emma arrives in, represented by her mother's hair, she meets an unidentified man with a rake who reveals that he is there to help with her mother thoughts. This is the character who reassures Emma that she doesn't belong there, suggesting a relief from the responsibility of her mother's depression and their household.

4. Sinna Man (Angry Man)

Sinna Mann (2003) is about Boj and his relationship with his parents, particularly his dad who exhibits violent behavior. Dahle addresses the complexity of domestic violence by using another symbolic character called "Angryman". The nuanced perception of the father's shifting attitudes and behaviors is underscored through onomastic differentiation that goes along the story: he is referred to both as "Daddy" and "Angryman" reflecting the child's attempt of understanding the brutal familial context. Dahle uses subtle irony by giving a villainous character a name that echoes conventions of superhero names. This approach creates a contrast between the traditional associations of such characters with protection and salvation and the reality in which Boj lives, a reality of fear, vulnerability and confusion.

Dahle uses this metamorphosis to signal the domestic violence that both Boj and his mother experience. At a textual level, trauma is explained through a series of questions that Boj asks himself and underline the way in which children

²⁰ Gro Dahle, Svein Nyhus, *Håret Til Mamma*, Cappelen Damm, 2007, p. 2. Mamma kommer til Emma. Mamma har sol i håret. Smil i håret. Det snille håret. Det blide håret. (In text my translation).

²¹ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, translated by Laurence Scott, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1968, p. 79.

internalize this violence: “Why is Daddy so mad? [...] Maybe it’s my fault [...] I have to be better. Behave better. Do whatever it takes”²². These types of reactions are explained by J. Young and called “coping styles”²³. Although the mother is also involved in the dynamics of domestic violence, she remains as inaccessible as the violent father. Both Boj and Mama are victims and their inability to respond to the domestic violence is underscored by the mother’s words: “Boj mustn’t talk about it. Mustn’t see, mustn’t talk, mustn’t hear. Because it’s a secret, and we’re doing it so well, so well. [...] Because who else would deal with the computer? And who else would fix the car or screw the lightbulbs? Where else would we live? How would we manage without Daddy?”²⁴. Dahle makes appeals to these rhetorical questions that emphasize her characters’ emotions. The lyricism is enhanced by illustrations, such as Daddy’s figure growing enormously (Figure 5), while Mama or Boj are often found on the periphery of the doublespread (Figure 6). There is also a difference between the way Daddy is represented compared to Angryman, who is depicted in red, orange and yellow, in the middle of the page (Figure 7). The author also uses physical manifestations to emphasize the effects of this trauma. When Daddy becomes violent, Boj’s fear is not only emotional but also somatic, highlighting the profound embodiment of trauma: “There is something in the house. It’s Daddy. Boj feels something thigten. Boj’s hands hurt. And Boj’s heart starts to race. The race inside Boj is catching up with him [...] Boj is trembling”²⁵.

Atle Krogstad mentions in an article about the chronotope of the family and the home: “Being alone in a room covered with doors is a recurrent psychological landscape in Dahle and Nyhus’ picture books, representing the protagonist’s double feelings of fear and possibilities in a threshold situation”²⁶. Boj takes refuge in a fantasy space, outside of the house, where he receives support from a female character who remains deliberately undefined. He is guided to write a letter in which he talks about his father’s violence. This establishes a parallel between the mother’s advice to remain silent about the abuse, so the act becomes a means of liberation. The ending adopts a hopeful tone, but it does not present a definitive solution, suggesting a positive change in the family life rather than an ultimate remedy.

5. Concluding Remarks

Defenders of culture, under the pretext of rejecting contemporary practices, would go so far as to dismiss children’s literature as pejorative, bearing witness to the interest it arouses among the public, as well as the complexity of its forms and content. This aspect could explain why it remains a rather neglected literature in Romanian literary studies. Contemporary graphic literature for children has

²² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²³ Jeffrey E. Young, Janet S. Klosko, Marjorie E. Weishaar, *Schema Therapy: A Practitioner’s Guide*, The Guilford Press, 2003, p. 11.

²⁴ Gro Dahle, Svein Nyhus, *Angry Man*, translated by Tara Chace, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶ Atle Krogstad, “The family house chronotope in three picturebooks by Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus: idyll, fantasy, and threshold experiences”, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

increasingly shifted toward direct engagement with its young audience by moving away from didactic prose.

When it comes to sensitive topics, this is a direction Gro Dahle approaches confidently, especially when it comes to the family framework which is a common element in all the selected picture books. It becomes evident that the author employs a diverse range of representational strategies, including rhetorical questions, recurring both textual and graphic motifs. In terms of representation, certain recurring elements emerge in Dahle's narrative approach such as the depiction of the home environment. Dahle brings out the dynamic tension between enclosed and open spaces: characters such as Emma, Boj, and Inga are portrayed as children compelled to leave the home environment in order to escape familial trauma. Whether the alternative space is physical and compensatory (real) or imaginary and fantastical (as in Emma's story) the domestic environment is consistently rendered as a site of degradation and emotional abuse.

Another central aspect of Dahle's representational strategy is the dynamic between absent or emotionally unavailable parents and self-reliant, autonomous children. In this context, a clear role reversal is proposed as Dahle constructs a narrative universe in which children are the primary agents of action. Through their responses and behaviors, readers gain insight into how these young protagonists understand and navigate experiences of trauma or conflict. Thus, in the case of Inga and Boj similar mechanisms can be observed, namely isolation and certain compensatory spaces turned into safe spaces. Emma, on the other hand, initially experiences a phase of anger, which reveals the child's emotional ambivalence toward the mother she simultaneously loves and resents. Guilt is a recurring element, often expressed through unanswerable questions within unsupportive homes where parents are emotionally unavailable. The metamorphosis further underscores the child-reader's paramountcy, notably in *Angry Man* where aggression is distanced from the father. Furthermore, Dahle defies conventional gender expectations by portraying Inga, Emma, and Boj as courageous and capable, a significant contribution to gender representation studies.

Contemporary picture books are shifting towards social issues, with our chosen *corpus* demonstrating how children's graphic literature engages sensitive subjects poetically, directly reflecting societal needs. Gro Dahle exemplifies how Scandinavian graphic literature supports new generations by embracing societal complexity, serving as a powerful model for re-thinking literature in other literary contexts, and it could represent a model on how we can re-think this "sensitive" literature in our own literary sphere.

6. Annexes



Figure 1.
Krigen, Gro
Dahle and
Kaia Dahle
Nyhus,
2013, p. 6.

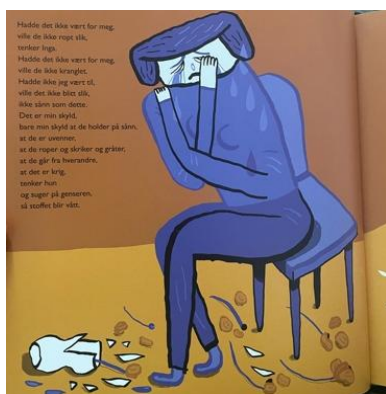


Figure 2.
Krigen, Gro
Dahle and
Kaia Dahle
Nyhus,
2013, p. 8



Figure 3.
*Håret til
Mamma*,
Gro Dahle
and Svein
Nyhus,
2007, p. 6.

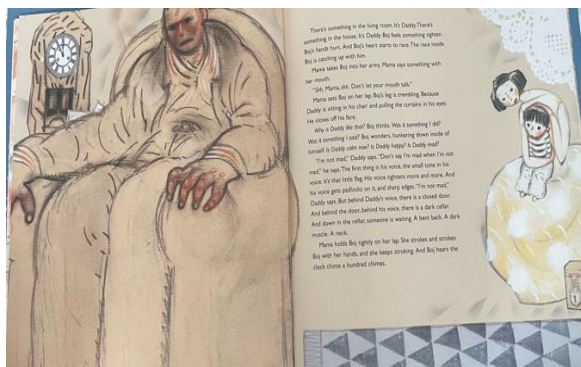


Figure 4.
Angry Man,
Gro Dahle
and Svein
Nyhus, 2019,
p. 3.



Figure 5.
Angry Man,
Gro Dahle
and Svein
Nyhus, 2019,
p. 6.



Figure 6.
Angry Man,
Gro Dahle
and Svein
Nyhus, 2019,
p. 7.

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