Literatura infantil y emociones: las relaciones madre-hijo[*]

Children's Literature and Emotions: mother-child relationship

Ângela Balça
Universidade de Évora/CIEC-Centro de Investigação em Estudos da Criança
apb@uevora.pt
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4159-7718

Moisés Selfa Sastre
Universidad de Lleida, España
mselfa@didesp.udl.cat
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5394-6471

Fernando Azevedo
Universidade do Minho/CIEC-Centro de Investigação em Estudos da Criança
fraga@ie.uminho.pt
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7373-705X

Resumen: La literatura infantil permite acercarnos a obras en donde la relación madre-hijo no está exenta de problemas que hacen aflorar emociones de todo tipo. En este sentido, los objetivos del estudio son comprender cómo la literatura infantil problematiza la relación madre-hijo; investigar cómo la literatura infantil analiza el tema de las emociones dentro de esta relación; y discutir cómo la literatura infantil contribuye al desarrollo social y emocional de los niños. Para ello consideramos obras de autores e ilustradores de diversas nacionalidades: *El día en que a mamá se le puso cara de tetera* (2008), de Raquel Saiz y João Vaz de Carvalho; *Quiero una mama robot* (2007), de Davide Cali y Anna Laura Cantone; *La mama de Tesla no quiere* (2010), de Åsa Mendel-Hartvig y Caroline Röstlunf. Como metodología, privilegiamos el análisis hermenéutico de textos escritos e ilustraciones, realizando una exégesis de los mismos, a través de una lectura crítica y reflexiva. De este análisis, llegamos a la conclusión de que la literatura infantil muestra una relación madre e hijo que no está libre de conflictos y emociones negativas, que, sin embargo, están reguladas y controladas, lo que genera estados emocionales positivos de afecto y amor entre ellos.

Keywords: literatura infantil; emociones; relaciones; madre; hijo/a.

Abstract: Children's literature allows us to consider texts where the mother-child relationship is not exempt from problems that bring out emotions of all kinds. In this sense, the objectives of the study are to understand how Children's Literature problematizes the mother-child relationship; how Children's Literature addresses the issue of emotions within the scope of this relationship; and discuss how Children's Literature contributes to the social and emotional development of children. In order to achieve these goals, we have considered the works of authors and illustrators of several nationalities: The day mother had a face like a teapot (2008), by Raquel Saiz and João Vaz de Carvalho; Mama Robot (2007), by Davide Cali and Anna Laura Cantone; Tesla's mom doesn't want to (2010), by Åsa Mendel-Hartvig and Caroline Röstlunf. Our methodology privileges the hermeneutical analysis of written texts and illustrations, making an exegesis thereof, through a critical and reflexive reading. From this analysis, we conclude that Children's Literature depicts a mother-child relationship that is not free from conflict and negative emotions, but which are regulated and controlled, resulting in positive emotional states of affection and love between them.

Palabras clave: children's literature; emotions; relations; mother; child.

Introduction:

Children's Literature, family and single-parent families in 21ST century Europe: some important considerations

Children's literature, whilst maintaining an indirect relationship with the semiosphere, may encourage the social-emotional development of its readers (Sánchez and Romero, 2018). Indeed, it is not a copy or a mirror of the empirical and historical-factual world where readers are situated. The texts do, however, have the capacity to model that world by presenting certain states and events with reflections on the cognitive environment of their readers (Martín-Macho and Neira, 2018). This is, deep down, one of the most relevant reading protocols: children's stories are constructed as near-assertions or as indirect acts of language. The texts are read in light of the fictional protocol, which doesn't negate the possibility of the stories achieving perlocutionary effects on their readers.

If children's literature lacks forms of expression and forms of content that are exclusive or specific to it, there is, however, a set of

traits that makes it distinct: the proposal of possible worlds where the victory of good values over bad values, of values of justice over injustice, of love-values over hate-values is clearly and explicitly emphasized in an environment with a high affective and emotional load.

One of the dominant topics in children's literature has been the representations of family. Its textual representations have shown it as a social construction that is simultaneously problematic and ideal: problematic in the sense that it is never presented as a single entity and definitively determined; ideal in the sense that families carry the essence of the utopian promises of a better future (Bradford, Mallan, Stephens and McCallum, 2008). In a text dedicated to the study of the family in English children's literature, Alston (2008) points out that it is usually associated with a rhetoric according to which true happiness seems impossible to achieve without the love and support of a devoted family nucleus or group. Deep down, family is presented as the stronghold of protection and care, the warmth that assures continuity and safety, in contrast to the inhospitable places of the world where insecurity and suffering reigns (Wojcik-Andrews, 1990).

The emotions and the emotional development of the subjects, especially the younger ones, is one of the main themes of psychology, since it is a key element to the explanation of human behaviour. A child is not born from nothing, but from a family context with a set of ideas, points of view and ways to solve problems. Consequently, family is the crucible where the subject learns a large amount of conscious and unconscious behaviours with which he faces his existence for better or worse. In that context, not only are behaviours assimilated, but children also learn how to emotionally react in the face of different situations (Meyer, Raies, Virmani, Waters and Thompson, 2014). Within families, there are group forces with which the subject identifies himself (Larson and Almeida, 1999). Similarly, there are individual forces in which the individual has his own way of thinking, his own projects and goals.

It is clear that a home is defined by the coexistence that, in the vast majority of cases, is the reflection of the bond between the different members of the family. In this way a home is characterized by the

presence or absence of relationships in the midst of family relationships, specifically by the existence of couples or filial ties. The simplest type of home is formed by a single person (single-member home), followed by the one in which people live together despite not having any type of relationship or filiation (multi-person household without a nucleus). If there is a filial relation but not a romantic one, the home will be defined as a single-parent home: father or mother (but not both) with at least one child. If there is a romantic relationship, but with no children from that relationship, the home will be characterized as a solo couple. The presence of a couple with any children of their own will define the home as a couple and children. Finally if a couple and children live with the father or mother of any of the members of the main couple, this will be defined as a three-generation home.

This mix of families is reflected in current-day Children's Literature. This allows young readers to enhance their capacity to see themselves and their families mirrored in the stories they read, with which they identify even more extensively, given the family diversity present in European Children's Literature of the 21st century.

The children's stories considered in this study to carry out hermeneutic analysis present a single-parent type of family structure in which a mother – always a mother and never a father – lives with her child. This type of coexistence implies cooperative relationships between both members of the household and the development of a positive affection, even though we have to discuss relationships that are occasionally tense, that are not free of conflict, but rather situations that are always solved positively for both the mother and the child (Kochanska, 1997).

Even if during the course of the story different social and family situations that led to single-parenting were produced, the key concept of referring to them is fairly recent (Avilés Hernandéz, 2013), since in 21st century Europe the single-parent family has established itself as a predominant type of family unit from which a well-characterized problem derives: the relationship of the parent with her child is not always the best one, mainly due to two issues. On the one

hand, the parent's need to work long hours away from home to support the family unit financially. This is the case in one of the children's stories that we consider in this paper: *Mama Robot* (2007), by Davide Cali and Anna Laura Cantone, in which the mother leaves her son home alone as she needs to go to work to provide for the family. On the other, the child's need to spend time with his parent and the demand for that time which, occasionally, the parent does not have (Tseng and Hsu, 2018). This is the case of another of the texts considered: *Tesla's mom doesn't want to* (2010), by Åsa Mendel-Hartvig and Caroline Röstlunf, in which the roles are reversed: the mother takes the role of the daughter and does not want to obey. Here the disobedience supposes and calls for attention that the mother gives her daughter when she implicitly claims to spend the most time possible with her mother.

Just as Di Nella (2006) and Almeda, Di Nella and Obiol (2007) point out, scientifically analysing single-parenthood as a field of study, developing different meanings for it, has enabled significant progress that allows the explanation of particular social and family phenomena, which substantially transformed the coexistence relationships between its members (Fernandéz Riquelme, 2013).

From this point of view, the mother, one of the core elements of the family, is an absolute figure in literature. In the popular narratives, the mother, as opposed to the stepmother, is someone who is markedly positive and euphoric. It is the mother that unconditionally loves her son; it is she who sacrifices herself for the children, who educates them with love, patience and good will, whether she is a queen, a peasant or of any other social status. For Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2005), the mother is "the security of shelter, warmth, tenderness and nutrition" (p. 431).

Thus the goals of this study are to understand how children's literature presents and problematizes the mother-child relationship; to understand how children's literature presents and addresses the issue of emotions within the framework of these relationships; and to discuss how children's literature can contribute to the social and emotional development of children. In this study we will analyse children's

literature books by authors and illustrators of different nationalities: *The day mother had a face like a teapot*, by Raquel Saiz and João Vaz de Carvalho; *Mama Robot*, by David Cali and Anna Laura Cantone; *Tesla's mom doesn't want to* by Åsa Mendel-Hartvig and Caroline Röstlunf. We chose these works for several reasons: they are an example of a very common type of family in the 21st century, the single parent family; they represent an eventual emotional relationship between single working mothers and children; and, because they are written and illustrated by authors and illustrators of different nationalities, they are an example of global realities, at least in the Western world. With respect to the analysis methodology, we have adopted hermeneutic analysis. Hermeneutic analysis focuses on the interpretative process of literary texts, among others. According to Sidi & Conte (2017), hermeneutic analysis implies interpretation, based on a direct relationship with our experience of the world. An eminently hermeneutic approach to texts employs dialogue in the interpretation of culture and in opening to the other. So, we performed a critical and reflexive reading of the verbal and plastic texts, in a hermeneutic work that allowed us to make an exegesis thereof.

In general, and in both verbal and plastic texts, we found a mother-child relationship where conflict and disagreement are present. However, these antagonisms are temporary and the mother-child relationship is characterized by positive emotional situations of love and affection between them.

1.- Family and mother-child relationships: different mother types in Children's Literature

In general and in reality, the concept of *family* refers to a group of people formed by individuals that are united through affective relationships or filiation (Lamanna, Riedmans and Stewart, 2014). In this group, there is a kinship, something in which the concepts of living together and, occasionally, adoption are implicit. According to Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2008), family has the right to protection from society and from the State.

There are two main types of ties that define a family: affinity bonds, as the result of establishing a socially recognized bond, such as marriage - which in some societies is only allowed between two people, while in others polygamy is possible – and kinship ties, such as the filiation between parents and their children, or ties that are established between siblings that share the same father (Galvin, Braithwaite, Bylund and Braithwaite, 2015).

There is no consensus concerning a universal definition of family. Traditionally, we can say that, in general, a family is formed by the union of a man and a woman. This is the main model of family as it is, although family lifestyles are very diverse, depending on social, cultural, economic and affective factors (Bunkers, 1992).

Throughout the history of human thought, different theories about the evolution of familial structures and their affective and social roles have been developed by anthropologists and sociologists (Chambers, 2012). Well into the 19th century, the family model presented was the 'traditional' model, anchored in a synchronized relationship between a man and a woman and, in case of offspring, in being a father and a mother, who would be role models for their children, although as we well know, this was not always the case (King, 2011).

Even though family has not always answered to the organizational model that the social imaginary has imposed as paradigmatic (father, mother, children), in its pages children's literature of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century tend to present that canon of harmony and domestic happiness, of a balance capable of overriding all types of difficulties, no matter their type (Alston, 2008). Let us recall a few classic children's stories from this period. In *The Blue Bird* (1909), by Maurice Mäeterlinck, Tyltyl and Myltyl escape from home one night to search for the blue bird of happiness. At the end of the book, they return to their home to find that their big adventure was only to find that true happiness lies in living with their loving parents. In *Peter and Wendy (Peter Pan)* (1911), by James Matthew Barrie also depicts a model of home close to the traditional

representation. When Wendy, John, and Michael, the Darling couple's children, escape to Neverland with Peter Pan, it highlights the typical nuclear family where Peter takes on the role of the Lost Boys' father, while Wendy becomes the mother figure, taking the place of the jealous and cranky – and rightly so – Tinker Bell.

As exceptions to this rule, we find Mowgli, in the *The Jungle Book* (1894); Dorothy, in *The Wizard of Oz* (1900); and *Kim* (1901). Children's stories in which orphans are the main characters include *Oliver Twist* (1837), *David Copperfield* (1850) or stories in which, for some reason – generally widowed due to sickness or war – the mother is the one responsible for educating and providing a roof and food for the young hero, just like in *Treasure Island* (1883), by Robert Louis Stevenson. By the same token, the presentation of a family composed of a father and his son that in no way corresponds to the orthodox canon is also an exception, as portrayed by Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

Over the past few decades, the family has undergone major transformations, triggering a debate on a crisis of this institution, the basic nucleus upon which the organization of society is based. In the face of the number of multiple socioeconomic, political and cultural transformations, the family has resisted and adapted (Imber-Black, 2011). Between these transformations, women demanded their right to decent work and to equal opportunities (Pacheco, 2012). This would have two consequences that affect the mother-child relationship: a) the weight of educating children does not fall solely on the mother, b) the mother is still a mother, but she is also a socioeconomic asset who, in some cases, will spend long hours away from home, assuming that the child is not with her 24 hours a day anymore.

All this will result in different mother types whose relationship with their children is determined by the role that they adopt in their families.

According to García Surrallés (2013), in European and American children's literature of the past two centuries, four mother types emerge and, as a result, four mother-child relationships:

a) The traditional mother, as in *Manolito Four-Eyes* (1998-2012), by Elvira Lindo, or in *V come Valentina* (2001), by Angelo Petrosino. Here, it is the mother who takes care of her family and that dedicates herself exclusively to the home and to her offspring's education. On some occasions, there are mothers that become careless and neglect the intellectual education of their children. This is the case of *Matilda* (1988), by Roald Dahl.

b) The liberated mother, like the one in *You are Not Like Other Mothers* (2012), by Angelica Schrobsdorff. In this children's book, the mother wants to live life intensely, sometimes dedicated only to her professional work, without having to exclusively take care of her family and educate her children. In other cases, we find single mothers fighting against prejudices and exclusionary traditions, such as the main character's mother in *My father lives in Brazil* (*Mijn vader woont in Brazilië*) (1974), by Thea Beckman.

c) The doubly-occupied mother, or the type between the traditional mother and the liberated mother. She has two jobs, one at home and the other away from it. This is a loving type of mother that only shares her role as educator with the father or with a grandfather or grandmother. In any case, the mother-child relationships appear to be normal, without conflict, because the narrator focuses on the children's mischief, adventures or misadventures, mostly seen with humour. We find this type of mother in the series *Anastasia Krupnik* (1979), in which the mother, who is a painter, of the main character unsuccessfully attempts to combine her artistic occupation with the mission of being a mother.

d) The demanding and, sometimes, challenging mother, the loving mother type, who loves her children but that sometimes is a terrible mother who only uses strength and toughness to educate her children. That can be seen in *Tom Sawyer* (1876), or more recently in *My Mother is Weird* (1988), by R. Gilmore and B. Jones, and *Erika's history* (2003), by R. Vander Zee. This type of mother does not rely on the father's help in instructing their children.

These types of mothers, albeit with some idiosyncrasies of which we will take note, are the ones we find in the children's stories that we analyse in the next section of this paper. The role these mothers play in the three texts we present leads to a range of emotions expressed by the mothers and their children that enable us to identify a unique mother-child relationship that is not, obviously, free of difficulties. All this is so the potential reader, whether child or adult, can relate (or not) to the characters of literary texts that have been written with the specific intention of persuading the reader from the characters' behaviour and so that the same reader can identify himself/herself with them.

1.1.- The day mother had a face like a teapot (2008), by Raquel Saiz and João Vaz de Carvalho (*O dia em que a mamã ficou com cara de chaleira*, 2008)

The first book under study was published by OQO books in 2008, in Portuguese and English. Written by Spanish writer Raquel Saiz and illustrated by Portuguese illustrator João Vaz de Carvalho (1st Prize *Ilustrarte* 2005, of the International Biennial of Children's Book Illustration; *45th The Golden Pen of Belgrade Award*, 2009), *The day mother had a face like a teapot* is the result of this Iberian partnership, which is a very common practice of this Galician publisher.

This hard cover picture book is illustrated in soft but warm pastel colours, in which reds, browns and greyish blues stand out. In the paratexts, there is a dedication from the author to her grandmother: "For Teadora. What a great general you would have been, grandmother!" (Saiz and Carvalho, 2008, n/p). In a way, it seems to us that this dedication materializes not only in the verbal text, but mostly in the plastic text. While in the verbal text the mother's character appears to get mad, in the illustrations these emotions are enhanced quite a lot, with the mother displaying an enraged attitude, fuming through her mouth at her son's mess. Usually, the general officer stereotype, a figurehead of the military hierarchy, appears as someone who wants to impose order, in most cases in a non-friendly manner. We indeed find

some similarities between the mother's character and that of the general officer stereotype.

Graphically, this text plays with two different fonts, written in different sizes and showing distinct focuses, in a ludic exercise between narration and the characters' lines, facilitating reading for the younger audience and making the text, in the aesthetic sense, very dynamic and attractive.

João Vaz de Carvalho's illustrations, in which the expressiveness and originality of his line work is immediately recognized, depict specific details and, in this case, dialogues with what is unusual in the verbal text: characters featuring big noses, glazed and wide eyes, in an almost hypnotic expression that nevertheless reveals the characters' feelings, such as surprise, astonishment and distress.

In this text, humour and the unusual mark their presence and punctuate the mother-child relationship, both in the verbal and plastic text. This story shows us the mother-child relationship very likely as it is, marked by not-so-good moments due the child's mischief, but a context in which the unconditional love between both is omnipresent. These aspects are clear in a text of an oneiric and circular nature that begins just like it ends: the main character, Little Mark, jumps out of bed and breaks mother's favourite jar into a thousand pieces. If, at the beginning of the story, this incident results in an accelerated and rushed adventure, at the end, the incident is left in suspense, enabling a completely open outcome. This openness of outcome seems so much broader when we realize that the frantic hurry of little Mark and his mother with a face like a teapot belongs to the oneiric domain; what will happen to little Mark after breaking mother's favourite jar, something that leaves her completely furious, is something that is totally left to the imagination and creativity of the younger readers.

The story's disastrous opening event is what triggers the mother's metamorphosis. The purpose of the hyperbolic representation, and to some surrealist degree of the mother, is none other than to reveal the negative emotions of the parent, who wants to show her son Mark

that his behaviour caused her such distress that she even literally fumes from her mouth like a dragon. This causes the mother's metamorphosis, turning her into a teapot fuming from its spout. Something that looks like a funny thing is not actually that funny, since Mark wants to recover his mother's original identity and morphology at any cost. Hence, a very concerned Mark wants to help her and, being scared, he went to see his neighbour, grandmother Lucy, Uncle John, Frank the friend, the librarian, Mr. Ignatius... but no one seems to be able to do anything about it.

A traditional story's typical motive, according to Jean (1990), the metamorphosis represents a deviation from normality that surpasses the limit between matter and spirit, enabling access to the fantastic or to the symbolic; the metamorphosis shows "a distressing duality that affirms change, reaffirming continuity" (Albuquerque, 2003, p. 84). In the case of Mark's mother, we are confronted with a progressive, advanced metamorphosis that is corroborated by the illustrations. As soon as the mother's jar breaks into a thousand pieces, the plastic text shows us a completely enraged mother that shouts her son's name with her arms held high, blowing "out smoke like a dragon" (Saiz e Carvalho, 2008, n/p). However, instead of transforming into the expected dragon, the mother progressively transforms into a teapot:

> Worried about what was going to happen, Mark thought: She's starting to get a teapot face! Just then, his mother's nose turned into a funny spout. Next, her left ear began to change till it looked like a perfect handle. Finally, with a metal sound, a teapot that looked very much like his mother fell to the floor (n/p).

In the face of this unexpected metamorphosis, the illustrations show us Mark shocked and calling for his mother, but realizing that, because of the transformation and of the steam coming out of the teapot, his mother was still angry.

While at first the mother appears infuriated with her son, in a second moment the unconditional love between a mother and a child immediately arises – Mark grabs his mother, transformed into a teapot, and hastily rushes to try to change his mother back, the reader surmises.

Along the way, Mark talks to the teapot, who answers back with clouds of smoke, and he holds it "as if it were a treasure" (Saiz and Carvalho, 2008, n/p), in spite of the careful scrutiny and strange looks from the people he asks for help, who consider the phenomenon to be truly odd. Whereas in his distress little Mark holds his mother-teapot like a treasure, his most precious possession, the illustrations broaden the written text, showing the oddness and the astonishment of this son's interlocutors.

In Mark's quest, the story becomes a cumulative tale (Simonsen, 1987), "Stories in which the episodes are successively chained" (Câmara Cascudo, 2010, p. 12). In fact, Mark grabs his mother-teapot and runs, from character to character, looking for help: from Miss Peters to grandmother Lucy, to Uncle John, to Frank the friend, to the librarian, to Mr. Ignatius and, again, Miss Peters, in a chained circular movement that leads readers to the outcome of the story. Even though they are puzzled by the situation, all characters try to help Mark.

In this text, the mother-child relationship and some associated emotions are problematized: If, in the face of the child's mischief, emotions such as anger and rage can take over the mother, the umbilical relationship that bonds these two beings eventually prevails. In *The day mother had a face like a teapot*, a curious situation arises at this level. While in other books, such as *A Mother's Heart* or *Schreimutter/Shrill Mother*, we place ourselves in the mother's position regarding the reestablishment of the harmony between a mother and her son (Azevedo, Cruz and Balça, 2015), in this text we are seeing it through the child's eyes. It is the child that seeks to restore the lost order and harmony; it is the son who seeks reconciliation in an act of love toward his mother.

1.2.- Quero uma mamã-robot (2007), by Davide Cali and Anna Laura Cantone *(Mama Robot,* 2008)

The second book presented in this study is written by Davide Cali, entitled *Mama Robot*, with illustrations by Anna Laura Cantone. The Portuguese version of this book was published by Livros Horizonte

in 2007. Swiss writer Davide Cali has won several awards, in particular with the album *I Can't Wait* (2005 Baobab Award Montreuil) and the album *Piano*, distinguished with a Special Mention Award in the *Words and Music Award*, in the Bologna Children's Book Fair in 2006. Anna Laura Cantone, born in Alexandria, is an awarded illustrator, having received, among others, the Bologna Ragazzi Award at the Bologna Children's Book Fair.

Mama Robot is a hard cover picture book characterized by the various shades of bright pink. Symbolically connected to the feminine universe, the omnipresence of a palette in tones of pink is very interesting in a text that problematizes the mother-child relationship in the present world and which, through colour, brings us to the world of women, in this case of the woman-mother.

Of the paratexts present in this book, there is a dedication, a subtitle that complements the title, and the back-cover text. The dedication may lead young readers to understand, in this case, the illustrator's feelings about the people to whom she dedicates the book and about her own work, especially if the analysis is supplemented with the subtitle and the back-cover text.

The subtitle, only present on the title page and absent from the book cover, may be a summary statement of the back-cover text. In fact, we may consider the back-cover text to be an explanatory text that immediately broadens the book's title and provides a very clear interpretative hypothesis for the young readers,

> A real mom is always busy. On the contrary, a robot mom, besides having lots of time, would do whatever we wanted to. And best of all […] she would never yell. If she did, we would turn her off with the remote control! But does a robot mom smell just as good and tickle us like a real mom?" (Cali and Cantone, 2007, back cover text).

The back-cover text lays down the dilemma present in the book and clarifies it to the children. In this way, by looking at the title and subtitle of the Portuguese version "I want a Mama Robot because my real mom is always busy" (Cali and Cantone, 2007, title page), besides

having a summary on the back cover, through the causal connector "because," we have the reason why the main character, present in the book cover illustrations, wants an artificial mom, a non-human, who is no more than a machine. By the same token, the cover and the back cover of this book, which form a diptych, allow us to move forward with the same interpretative hypothesis, given that the main character is present in both, manipulating a robot that is holding a bag of popcorn with one hand and the main character's cat on the other.

These paratexts, because they are so obvious, in our opinion allow a quick connection between children and the main character of the story, in the sense that the suspected problem is, in fact, common to the majority of western societies' children who, from an early age, are confronted with the prolonged daily absence of their mothers (and fathers).

Graphically, this text creates a game between the different fonts and their sizes, with italics (for the note that the mother leaves for her son) and bold being used to emphasize relevant words or expressions from the text. Still regarding the book's graphical concept, highlighted aspects such as the mother's note to her son, which is in an epistolary form, and the scheme, where the main character lists the things that Mama Robot lets him eat. We also draw attention to the fact that the entire book graphically unfolds horizontally, but has an illustrative diptych displayed vertically half way through the book; thus a change in the way the book is read is required. All these aspects of a graphical and typographical nature make this book aesthetically attractive, dynamic and compelling for younger readers.

The illustrations by Anna Laura Cantone are revealing of her style, present throughout her plastic work, as it combines drawing, collage and painting, using strong tones that give the book an intense brightness. By taking us through the familiar universe of the main character, through the illustrations, the child reader easily identifies not only with the main character, but also with his vision of reality.

Mama Robot is a book in which the plot unfolds in an opposition, in a duality of emotions from the child in relation to his mother. This duality is marked by the lack of time and attention from the mother toward her son, felt by the main character who narrates it in the first person. In this way, in the beginning, the narrative handles the child's complaint, presenting its premises: "My mom is always busy. She's at her desk every day, sometimes even on Saturday. She leaves me home alone. It's not fair." (Cali and Cantone, 2007, back-cover text). As we can see, the main character immediately positions himself in the opening of the story: the situation caused by the mother's absence, even on Saturday, is considered and felt by the child to be unfair. By way of explanation and justification for this feeling, the main character describes his daily routine: he gets home from school and finds a note from his mother with recommendations that he follows, "After I eat, I brush my teeth, do my homework, and tidy up my room. Then I play with my cat, Fluffy, and pretend that he's a dog. Boring. Boring. Boring." (Cali and Cantone, 2008, n/p). Once again, the child positions himself in relation to the loneliness and abandonment to which he's subjected, his feelings shining through.

After the presentation of this reality, the narrative tells us about the child's decision: since his mother is not around, he decides to build a Mama Robot. From this point on, the narrative appears in an opposition between the child's emotions regarding Mama Robot and his real mom. In the beginning, Mama Robot appears to only have benefits; she does everything that the child wants and dreams about as well. Everything that the real mom can never do. In these actions, we learn the child's various wishes and dreams: on the one hand, those concerning protection, company, comfort; on the other, those that concern the child's education. In this way, Mama Robot offers the child every possibility for him to be happy, accompanying him and giving him everything he wants: she would not work and she would take him to school; she would protect him from all dangers; she would allow him to eat everything he wanted; she would do all his homework; she would let him do everything he wanted. Mama Robot would only offer benefits and, best of all, she could be controlled by the child: "She

would never yell at me! If she yelled at me, I would turn her off with my remote control." (Cali and Cantone, 2008, n/p).

Despite the apparent perfection, this Mama Robot, however, has several flaws that stand out as being the opposite of the real mom's qualities. These flaws in Mama Robot and qualities of the real mom concern feelings and affections. The real mom is warm and soft, smells good, tickles him, hugs and kisses him, everything a Mama Robot cannot do.

Here, sensations, feelings and emotions win, prevailing over the child's will. Even with no time for him, even being absent, the real mom is irreplaceable. About the Mama Robot, the main character says, "I've decided to take her apart and build something else." (Cali and Cantone, 2008, n/p).

This picture book addresses a reality present in our current societies: the son's wish to spend as much time as possible with his mother and the search for happiness in technological objects, in this case a *robot* that does not yell and does all chores and homework, is a response, a form of revenge, to his mother's attitude, who spends long hours working to provide for her home. A similar message is shared in *Caroline and the secret door* (2002), by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, in which the main character's parents are very busy with their jobs and do not give her enough attention. Such loneliness invites the young girl to explore new worlds, which will result in the appreciation of her real parents.

In *Mama Robot*, marked by humour but also by hyperbole, the mother-child relationship is problematized, taking into account the reality of many children. The lack of time and attention from the mom towards her son can mark this relationship, although the narrative, on the mom's part, lets her concern for the well-being and education of her child shine through. Despite this absence and the main character's complaints, the unconditional love between mother and son is ubiquitous.

1.3. *La mamá de Tesla no quiere* (*Tesla's mom doesn't want to*), (2010), by Åsa Mendel-Hartvig and Caroline Röstlunf

This picture book is a Spanish translation of the original in Swedish *Tesslas mamma vill inte*, by Swedish author Åsa Mendel-Hartvig, illustrated by Swedish artist Caroline Röstlunf. The original book, published in 2010, was translated into Spanish in the same year by the team of Editorial Gatosueco translators.

This 28-page album is illustrated with light and suggestive shades of colour that represent the two main characters of the text. Tesla, a little girl who observes how her mother does not want to do several everyday activities; and Tesla's mother, whose name we don't know, but who is committed to surprising her daughter, as Tesla's wishes are once again not followed. The illustrations depict the mother with a very big build compared to Tesla, who is represented with very small but attentive black and white eyes, surprised in the face of her mother's actions, which confuse her. There is a side to Tesla's mother that is graphically represented to affirm her attitude of doing what she wants to do without listening to her daughter's recommendations.

From a graphical point of view, the text is presented with a single font of medium size and in black, which fits perfectly with the illustrations that predominate every page of the album. This creates a synergy between the written text and the illustrations, allowing the young reader to interpret the substance of a message to which he/she is not indifferent. Alongside each illustration, larger than the text, there is a dialogue between Tesla and her mother with a dual purpose: the mother does not want to obey a shocked Tesla, who suggests a game so that her mother will obey her wishes.

This book presents a very common problem in mother-child relationships. The problem is articulated from the mother's non-compliance with everything Tesla suggests. In fact, in this situation, it is not the daughter that fails to obey her mother, as would be expected, but the mother that does not obey her daughter. In one of the album's

paratexts, the back cover, the reader gets a sense of the behaviour and attitude of both characters throughout the text:

> What a bummer! Tesla's mother doesn't want to come back from the park, or climb the stairs, wash her hands or even take a shower. How will Tesla convince her?" (Mendel-Hartvig and Röstlunf, 2010, back cover)[1].

There is an obvious swap of roles, in an attempt, on the part of Åsa Mendel-Hartvig and Caroline Röstlunf, to lead the young reader to dwell on, to ask why the roles are reversed, and what is hidden behind this mutation of personalities. Therefore, this children's story presents a mother-child relationship marked by the sense of Tesla's surprise, who will have to handle it so that her mother does what she should do.

This mother-daughter role reversal is a response to an attempt in which the traditional mother, who knows how to, and should, take care of her children in spite of the work pressure imposed by the 21st century society, makes a claim on her child. While the mother initially appears to be disobedient, it is only because she wants to copy her child's behaviour when she spends what little time she can with her. Logically, what makes Tesla's mother change her attitude is the love that her daughter, transformed into a caring mother, shows her. Hence, the message of this text represents a clear message to children who should learn to expect from their mother what she can, lovingly, give them according to her work obligations.

In this text, the mother does not want to do anything that Tesla says. It is about everyday activities that any girl would do during the afternoon, but, in this case, it is the mother who adopts the role of the disobedient daughter. The mother does not want to come back home from the park, or climb the stairs, or change clothes or wash her hands before eating. She does not want to eat or wash her hair, put on skin lotion, pee before going to bed, brush her teeth, go to bed or sleep alone. She replies with a flat "No!" to any new activity.

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[1] Back cover translated from Spanish by the authors of this paper.

Tesla, her daughter, is responsible for finding the resources and ways to make her mother cooperate, so that she finally does what she has to. This is a customary situation for mothers, who hear *no* on many different occasions, sometimes when they least expect it.

With an impressive honesty, Tesla handles every single *no* in a very correct manner: she does not get mad, she does not yell, she doesn't lose her cool, rather she finds nice and efficient resources to elicit reactions from her mother. In this way, Tesla, just like any other mother, starts to run so that her mother comes back from the park, climbs the stairs like a dog, disguises herself as Spider-Man so that her mother will change her clothes, plays with the soapbox so that her mother washes her hands, puts salt on the food so that her mother eats it, makes soap bubbles in the bathtub so that her mother bathes, draws figures with lotion on her mother's skin, gives her an original potty so that her mother pees before going to bed, offers her different brushes so that she brushes her teeth, sings a lullaby before falling asleep and sleeps in the same bed so that her mother is not afraid.

What should be a reason for rage and annoyance, for Tesla it is transformed into an occasion to show how unconditionally she loves her mother. Thus, what prevails is that filial love can overcome the most difficult adversities and impose the strength of generous love over all the initial contempt. Tesla's caring and conciliatory attitude is the reason why the young reader should reflect upon the role of children with their parents. In this regard, Tesla does not stop smiling in the face of her mother's negativity and does not lose the excitement of finding respectful alternatives. Her behaviour and smile are a perfect example of a committed child. Consequently, this child character shows young children and also adults that reaching an acceptable compromise is not a sign of weakness but one of intelligence.

This text teaches us that mother-child relationships do not always require the other party to do something because they have to, taking the emotional conflict to the extreme, but that there are much more respectful and conciliatory ways to accomplish the same goal. There are things that can be done differently so that the subject, whether

it is the mother or the daughter, can feel that they are the key character and not a simple victim of another's will.

Conclusions

Children's literature, being a form of art and linked to an aesthetic aspect, can contribute to the social and emotional development of children at an early age. They learn to recognize, regulate and control their emotions. Because of the situations it presents in a fictional world, children's literature can aid in this socio-emotional development. Art and literature enable the awareness and recognition of emotions, allowing a complete and effortless development of the human being:

> Contemporary literature for children and the young reflects, more frequently, the transformations that have been produced in the concept of family. In this manner, presenting a wide range of organizational ways of family and a critical view of its functions and relationships is a valuable contribution to the promotion of respect, the fight against intolerance and the acceptance of the existence of family models that are more and more present in our society due to economic imperatives that make them possible. Children's Literature translates in its texts the issue of family structure and of coexistence in its sphere, as non-schematic and not trivial, but complex, a satisfaction-generator and phenomena characterized by serious conflict (Joosen, 2015, p. 146).

Considering that the maternal figure is central in a child's life and considering the emotional relationship established between a mother and her children, in this study we aimed to analyse children's literature books in which the mother-child relationship is present and where those emotions play a key role. The bond between a mother and child is established along several stages and the quality of the relationship and of the emotions between both will determine the future emotional system of the child.

The mother is central to the emotional development of her children. In the three children's stories analysed in this paper, we observed how the mother establishes a type of relationship with her children that determines their actions, following two objectives of this

study: how children's literature problematizes the mother-child relationship and how children's literature addresses the issue of emotions within the scope of this relationship. On some occasions, we find maternal behaviour aimed at developing their children's will, such as the case of *Tesla's mom doesn't want to,* where Tesla is in charge of her mother's education, with the relationship role play being clearly reversed. Tesla's mother, according to García Surrallés (2013), is a traditional mother that plays with her daughter all day, despite her continuous *no's*.

In the other books, we find a mother that wants to elicit in her children a sense of cooperation when it comes to chores, as in *Mama Robot*. The main character of this text, who does not want to obey his mother's instructions, finds out that if he does what his mother kindly tells him to, he will get affection from her. It is about a mother who corresponds to the profile of a doubly-occupied mother and wants to meet her professional obligations without neglecting the education of her children.

Finally, we also observe the authoritarian attitudes of a mother whose goal is not the abandonment of her children, but only to make them think when their behaviour is not appropriate. In this way, in *The day mother had a face like a teapot*, we see the angry mother figure whose only goal is to warn her son when his attitude is not appropriate and to let him know that he should get back on track. Consequently, we can say that the main character's mother in this children's story is a demanding one who only uses her authority to elicit a sense of regret in her son.

In contrast, we should highlight the fact that the mother-child relationships we see in these three books are dealt with a fine sense of humour, the purpose of which is to attract the complicity of the potential reader. It seems, therefore, reasonable to conclude that the moralizing intention is in the basis of the texts we studied herein, but that humour helps to smooth the mother-child relationships so that both benefit from a coexistence that does not leave them indifferent to each other.

In conclusion, the analysis of these works allows us to discuss how children's literature contributes to the social and emotional development of children, which was our third objective. Children's literature is always attentive to the needs of readers in addressing critical issues that are at the basis of human and familial relationships. Only in this way can we understand the problems that affect the relationships between mothers and children and how these are determined to understand and develop emotional states (Mincic, 2009). These states can vary over time, but they will always be remembered, especially by the mother and the child, as important moments for both, such as the formation and education of a new generation.

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