

**DIALOGUES BETWEEN PICTUREBOOKS FOR
CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD SCIENCES AND
CULTURES**

**DIÁLOGOS ENTRE OS LIVROS ILUSTRADOS PARA CRIANÇAS
E AS CIÊNCIAS E CULTURAS DA INFÂNCIA**

Roberta Asse

Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Social Sciences of the
University of São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract

This article presents reflections on the dialogue between contemporary children's literature and the conceptualisations about childhood investigated in the social sciences. The analytical readings of three picturebooks form the basis for these reflections along with, in the field of social sciences, the research works by Daniel Goldin, by David Buckingham and by Manuel Sarmiento. Two of the picturebooks examined were selected during an academic internship in Portugal in 2022: *O meu avô* (2014), by Catarina Sobral, *Andar por aí* (2017), by Isabel Minhós Martins and Madalena Matoso. The Brazilian picturebook *Inês* (2015), by Roger Mello and Mariana Massarani, was included alongside the Portuguese titles. The selection criteria for the corpus focused on literary works that recognise young readers' comprehensive interpretative and creative skills. This material provides a contextualised critical framework to demonstrate a network of multidisciplinary formative agents engaged in creating and transforming plurisignificant artefacts in dialogue with child cultures.

Keywords: contemporary children's literature; social sciences of childhood; multidisciplinary approach; Portuguese and Brazilian contemporary picturebooks analysis

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta reflexões sobre o diálogo entre a literatura infantil contemporânea e as conceptualizações sobre as infâncias investigadas nas ciências sociais. As leituras analíticas de três livros-álbum constituem a base para estas reflexões, complementadas pela inter-relação com os trabalhos de investigação de Daniel Goldin, David Buckingham e Manuel Sarmiento no domínio das ciências sociais. Dois dos livros-álbum examinados foram selecionados durante um estágio académico em Portugal em 2022: *O meu avô* (2014), de Catarina Sobral, e *Andar por aí* (2017), de Isabel Minhós Martins e Madalena Matoso. O livro-álbum brasileiro *Inês* (2015), de Roger Mello e Mariana Massarani, foi incluído ao lado dos títulos portugueses. Os critérios de seleção do corpus centraram-se em obras literárias que reconhecem as capacidades interpretativas e criativas dos jovens leitores. Este material proporciona um quadro crítico contextualizado para evidenciar uma rede de agentes formativos multidisciplinares envolvidos na criação e transformação de artefactos plurisignificativos em diálogo com as culturas infantis.

Palavras-chave: literatura infantil contemporânea; ciências sociais da infância; abordagem multidisciplinar; análise de livros ilustrados contemporâneos portugueses e brasileiros

Introduction

The child doesn't know less, the child knows something else.

Clarice Cohn (our translation)

We are facing the revolution that was missing, the revolution of the child!

Lydia Hortélio (our translation)

The notable effervescence of diverse currents of thought and movements emerging from various fields of knowledge has been evident, both in academic research and in empirical experiences, amplifying and representing the voices of occupation and recognition for contemporary childhoods. From this perspective, the child is regarded as an integrated and active agent within the social sphere, embracing specific knowledge and their own childhood cultures. This conception may be compared to that of researcher and literary critic Nelly Novaes Coelho:

It appears to be evident that the path to the invention/construction of the new order that shall come will pass through education, through the cultural/ethical/existential formation of the new generations. (...) There is a "silent revolution" on the way, we just need to pay attention to the research effervescence in all fields of knowledge or to step into the

world of literature of the past and of today, and we will see that there is a new world view on the way (Coelho, 2012, p. 102 – our translation).

In fact, the perspective that a significant change is in progress, with dimensions that can generate “a new order and view of the world”, also resonates in the social studies of childhood, especially in sociology and anthropology, the two areas that are pushing the borders in the disciplinary fields dominated by psychology, medicine and education sciences, to shape a fresher approach to theory, epistemology and methodology.

Under the social sciences’ theoretical knowledge, childhood has been approached as a social category of generation type, whose essence is manifested through singular languages in which the imaginary and the understandings of the daily experience converge to create proper meanings. This child knowledge is manifested in the relation to the individual and the universal contexts, as well as in the production of cultures based on the relationship between children and adults, and among the children themselves. In this context:

Children have been increasingly considered for what they are, what they know, what they can do, for their competences, their ways to build culture, the way they create ideological systems, not necessarily coinciding with the adults’; children do that in the social world in the relations with the adults, and in the relations among themselves. This has been the great transformation of the past 25-35 years in how childhood is viewed: children are considered for the positivity of their own characteristics. (Sarmiento, 2016, p. 7 – our translation).

Observing such revolutionary changes in the views of childhood, we also notice that most critics, attentive readers and researchers of children’s literature agree on the presence of innovative books that propose literary experiences that can be multiplied in the contemporary scenario. In this collection of publications for children, these experiences spring from the resources that renew and expand languages in all compound elements of the codex and in the kinds of support for the stories. This multiplicity and expansion presuppose a reader who can create and re-create readings from these books.

Within the possible relations between these movements that, on one hand, involve the voices and the visions of childhood and, on the other, children’s literature in motion, we raise the hypothesis about the existence of relevant implications and influences between the two and about the transforming effects that both have been showing.

Building on that hypothesis and recognising the historically established premise of the reciprocal interplay between the dominant conceptualisations of childhood and the cultural and literary productions for young audiences, this article

seeks to revisit and analyse the development of contemporary literature as a significant cultural manifestation that catalyses the emergence of new social and cultural paradigms.

Finally, we analyse contemporary Brazilian and Portuguese projects in the picturebook genre, primarily characterised by books in which the “narrative is articulated between text and images” (Van der Linden, 2011, p. 8 – our translation). In the concept of picturebooks as discussed in this article, the verbal and visual elements complement one another to form an integrated narrative and message, creating various layers of reading and interaction possibilities for readers to engage with and co-create. In Portugal, picturebooks are called “livros-álbum”.¹

Such works incorporate a diverse repertoire of sensitive, scientific, and technological elements into their narratives, fostering the playfulness proposed by the particular and universal qualities of literature. This process of representing life, characters, feelings, and sensations through linguistic resources is as old as the book itself – historical and boundless – and has been updated in contemporary picturebooks, embracing the complexities of discoveries about childhood that some adults are willing to confront daily, while remaining open to the diversity of the children with whom we interact and the children we once were. These books invite dialogue, invention, play, and imagination, allowing readers to look between holes and pages, extend beyond the margins, conceal secrets, endure suffering, forgive, redeem, read invisible words, and engage with whatever comes along.

Based on these observations about the landscape of literary production for children and the foundational premises established, this article aims to offer a theoretical framework for the understanding of the above interdisciplinary flow, in which the arts have new roles and spaces in the new media, and in which children take on new roles within their social groups and in relation to themselves, often displaced due to the empty spaces left by the absent adults. Thus,

discourses that fundament the formation of readers (...) suppose that it is through reading that the transformation of people occurs. (...) they expect that, by being formed as such, readers amplify or modify their ability to establish relationships with themselves, with others and with institutions, and, therefore, even if collaterally, they help transform (or maintain) the social surroundings. (Goldin, 2006, p. 126 – our translation).

Literature and science, science and literature: the strengthening link and the enduring limit

To further the methodological theory foundation of this research, we selected the works by social scientists whose thoughts and views on contemporary childhoods and assumptions may re-signify readings as well as encourage

¹ Translator’s Note: The terms *Livro ilustrado* is used in Brazil and *álbum* or *livro-álbum* is used in Portugal.

innovative and sensitive literary activities. Mexican publisher Daniel Goldin approaches the transformations of childhood conceptions in literature investigating it as a tool for the establishment of new relationships between children and adults. In his opinion, through its polyphonic and multiplied language, contemporary children's literature enables readers to re-create stories, and, by so doing, it offers readers rights and powers. In this liberated territory of language, it is possible to bring adults and children closer together, for they contribute with one another in the readings with their individual knowledge and an equivalent exchange of the reading experience. According to Goldin (2006, p.59 – our translation): "Children's literature is no longer a literature to listen to and acquit, it has become a literature that seeks or enables, in many ways, dialogues and the active participation of the children in the world."

Portuguese sociologist **Manuel Sarmiento** sets the shift in the idea of childhood as a time of silence, of incapacities and of transition into the adult life – a mini adult, a blank to be filled, confined with no public life, incomplete and dependent – to a sociological view in which childhood is a social category of generation type, and children are active members of society, they are subjects of the institutions they belong to; they are social actors who have a different identity from the adults, children have their own way to give meaning to the world. According to Sarmiento (2002, p. 3): "The order is about difference and not deficit when we talk about the child's imaginarieness in comparison to the adult's." (our translation).

David Buckingham questions the view of childhood as exclusion, which, in his opinion, is the prevalent view, created by adults, and it may be observed in the way children have been represented in the media throughout time. He examines, for example, the ideas about childhood in the Golden Age of English Literature². Buckingham proposes that the same differences that segregate may be used to build new behaviours, in which adults and children take unprecedented positions in the face of new contexts, increasing possibilities in the context of electronic media:

The attempt to protect children restraining their access to the [electronic] media is destined to fail. The opposite must be done, we need to prepare them now to deal with this experience, and, by so doing, we must stop defining them simply in terms of what they lack. (Buckingham, 2000, p. 32 – our translation).

Daniel Goldin, Manuel Sarmiento and David Buckingham take off from the common perception of childhood as a social construct: "The idea of childhood as a social construct is today commonplace in childhood history and sociology, and it is being gradually accepted even by psychologists." (Buckingham, 2000, p. 19 – our translation). These constructs vary significantly along history, as announced by Philippe Ariès (1960), also according to interests of the social, political and

² In reference to the books by Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and J.M. Barrie, in the second half of the 19th century.

economic complex compounds of each time. Our investigation notices such crossings with literature, which, according to Sarmiento³, has the property of “anticipating many of the questions that later will be tackled, worked on and examined by the sociological thought, which, in turn, will produce its own knowledge. (...) somehow, the sociological work has an anchoring function for what intuitions and insights produced by literature are, and transforms them into knowledge susceptible to proof and validation in theory and practice” (our translation).

The detailed analysis and evocations generated by the picturebooks discussed below, can illuminate, in a magical and timeless manner, the threads of connection between sciences and literature.

Through reinvented language

The picturebooks analysed in this work reveal through their multiple possible readings relevant comparative references that can be established by observing specific features of literary projects aligned with the perspectives of childhood discussed here, according to the theoretical view of the three selected authors: Goldin, Sarmiento and Buckinham.

The works created within this context have been presented as productions engaged to a live movement for the creation of narratives that allow the plural participation of the creator-reader. This is one of the several connections that can be established between literature and the contemporary childhood views, as anthropologist Clarice Cohn stresses:

When culture is understood as a symbolic system, the idea that children are incorporating it as they gradually learn “things” should be reviewed. The point is not anymore just when and how culture is passed on in its artifacts, but how children formulate a meaning for the world that surrounds them. Therefore, the difference between children and adults is not quantitative, but qualitative; children do not know less, they know something else. (...) To anthropology, the point is not to know in which cognitive condition children create meanings and significations, but from which symbolic system they do so. (Cohn, 2005, p. 33 – our translation).

To understand and analyse the cross relations presented here so far and how they are applied to books, we selected two Portuguese titles and a Brazilian one. According to morphologic, syntactic and semantic characteristics present in these three titles, they are placed in the contemporary picturebook scene. They are:

³ The author of this article has interviewed Professor Manuel Sarmiento in 2020.

- O meu avô⁴, by Catarina Sobral, Editora Orfeu Mini, 2014.
- Andar por aí⁵, by Isabel Minhós Martins and Madalena Matoso, Editora 34, 2017.
- Inês, by Roger Mello and Mariana Massarani, Companhia das Letrinhas, 2015.

Both Portuguese titles are narrated in the first person and explore the theme of the child adult relationship, particularly the bond between grandson and grandfather. Before commencing our analysis, it is important to examine the social context surrounding these works.

“The new Portuguese children’s literature”

For the latest decades, Portugal has had an intense literary production for children and young readers, and a significant number of published titles have been internationally acclaimed, especially the picturebooks. To name but a few authors in this new generation, we have Catarina Sobral, Isabel Minhós Martins, Ana Pessoa, Bernardo P. Carvalho and Joana Estrela, who have been translated into many languages and received international awards, as well as their Portuguese publishers, among which Planeta Tangerina was awarded the BOP (Bologna Prize for the Best Children’s Publishers) at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair, in 2013.

This flourishing may be seen as a consequence – or as an opportunity – of several factors linked to the country’s social, political and economic contexts that converged at the end of Salazar’s dictatorship, when in-school and at-home reading incentive policies were inaugurated. Among them, the PNL (Plano Nacional de Leitura⁶) of 2006 has been a clear factor in the book circulation growth.

According to José António Gomes, since 1974, the social and political changes in Portugal have had an overspread impact on culture; and for children’s and young readers’ literature, in particular, this impact has resulted in a significant growth, referred by the author as “the so-called boom in literature for young readers in Portugal”. This kind of literary and artistic creation found then “the conditions to regain its breath, in an environment of freedom, and in a context where the number of works and the variety of productions directly or indirectly related to children’s universe increased” (Ramos, 2019, p. 151 – our translation).

The democratic system also facilitated a departure from the didactic commitment that had previously been imposed on books, allowing for innovative experimentation in the realms of illustration and non-linear narratives. This shift

⁴ My grandfather.

⁵ Walking around.

⁶ Reading National Plan.

resulted in books created through the free expression of art. Similar movements occurred in other countries emerging from dictatorial regimes, including Brazil, where the effects of the re-democratization process are reflected in the productions published during this period, incorporating aesthetic and thematic references from democratic nations. It appears that it was after this experimentation, influenced by the international scene, that local groups devised new solutions and began to establish new national identities. Considering the resources of a playful nature applied to the making of the book, the examination of some titles published by Planeta Tangerina, Pato Lógico, Orfeu Mini and Bruáa, among others wisely run by multidisciplinary teams, evidences a similar playfulness in the field of language, as found, for example, in *Livro Clap*⁷ (2014), by Madalena Matoso, published in Portugal by Planeta Tangerina, and in Brazil by Companhia das Letrinhas, and in *Daqui ninguém passa*⁸ (2014), by Bernardo P. Carvalho and Isabel Minhós Martins, published in Portugal by Planeta Tangerina, and in Brazil by SESI; as well as open invitations for the creation of new meanings, as in *Para onde vamos quando desaparecemos?*⁹ (2011), by Isabel Minhós Martins and Madalena Matoso, published in Portugal by Planeta Tangerina, and in Brazil by Tordesilhinhas, and in *Enquanto o meu cabelo crescia*¹⁰ (2010), by Isabel Minhós Martins and Madalena Matoso, published in Portugal by Planeta Tangerina, and in Brazil by Editora Peirópolis¹¹.

To value increasingly complex proposals in terms of narrative structure and of interaction with the reader, with many erudite intertextual references, for example, is no obstacle to value their playful dimension. (Ramos, 2018, p. 157 – our translation).

As timeline connections are relevant in this study, it is worth noting that the innovative movement in Portuguese literary productions resulted from the progress of studies in social sciences and, consequently, the views of contemporary childhoods that started in the 1970s. Also in Brazil, the relation between literature and science may be considered one of the triggers for the growing sophistication of languages and the appreciation of children's voices in the book production in Portuguese.

Andar por aí e O meu avô: unfolding dialogues between children and adults

The focus of the analysis of the two Portuguese books selected is the literary device of "voice", intricately interwoven within the textual and visual narratives.

It is through this reading, in particular, that the relations between character and narrative building become powerful, with the views of childhood outlined as

⁷ Clap book.

⁸ No one crosses this line.

⁹ Where do we go when we disappear?

¹⁰ While my hair was growing.

¹¹ Translator's note: these titles have been translated in the footnotes for this article.

theoretical references for this work. It is relevant to mention that the richness of themes in these picturebooks and their layers of meanings and literacy have produced varied and profound analyses published by academic critics specialised in contemporary children's literature. *Andar por aí*, for instance, was one of the titles examined as a "picturebook that depicts a healthy relationship between a child and the urban space" (Ramos, 2023). It was also noted for its narrative from the point of view of time, in which play and subjectivity compose the city and its multiple symbolic faces, all seen and experienced by the child and the adult (Andrade, 2021). *O meu avô* was examined under the intertextuality perspective and the intergenerational relations readings, in parallel with the homonymous book by Manuela Bacelar (Silva, 2019). It was also analysed under the perspective of the relationship between text and image (Cardoso, 2017), one of the strongest points of this book, qualified for the International Illustration Award of the Bologna Children's Book Fair, 2014.

Considering the characteristics that are common in the two books analysed here:

- They are written in the first person singular; the narrator is a child character that tells the story shifting his viewpoint from observer to participant. Each boy leads us through a journey with their grandfathers, who are "hip" gentlemen, behave freely and affectionately towards their grandsons and are admired by them.

- Both works have the grandfather as the adult character, the partner in the relation narrated by the child character. These characters and their representations are in the scope of interest of this analysis because of how the generational question appears in the relationship between the child and the old man. One of the pillars of theory introduced by sociology is the view of childhood as a generation class, still seen within the spectrum of limitations by some adults. Such view may also be applied to the elderly, for whom alleged ability limitations can often be used to justify their exclusion from social activities. In the two books analysed here, child and elder drive these limitations away, they do not bother with nor accept them, thus offering themselves the freedom that other adults, represented by the mother and Mr. Sebastião, immersed in their duties and chores, fail in offering and in enjoying themselves. The care the grandfathers have for their grandsons is affection, not control, and their protection is assured by their presence. Affection and presence are given and received in an even mutual flow between the child and his elder. Everyone has the same hierarchical authority in looking after themselves and others.

- In the two narratives, besides the grandfather, there is another adult who works as a kind of counterpoint for the grandfathers' behaviour. In *O meu avô*, it is Mr. Sebastião, a very busy neighbour; and in *Andar por aí*, it is the boy's mother, who lives with them and is often mentioned by the narrator, but only appears in verbal form.

- The use of graphic elements and visual and linguistic techniques is clearly emphasized and frequently crafted in the picturebooks published by this generation of authors in Portugal: solid colours, characters represented in narrow perspective (representation in 2D), simple shapes and patterns, use of humour and of parallel narratives in details of the illustrations. These elements may contribute to diverse reading experiences, welcoming readers of varied cultures and ages, for it relies on what makes good story telling: simplicity.

Proceeding to the analysis of the characteristics in each work:

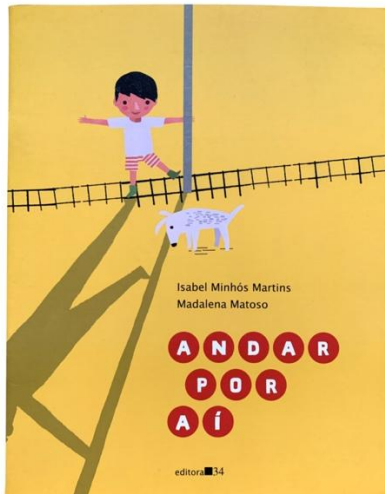


Image 1. cover of *Andar por aí*
Source: Martins e Matoso, 2017.

The text in *Andar por aí* is a sequence of short phrases, with alternating and overlapping themes, that creates a rhythm resembling that of our thoughts when we receive sensorial stimuli in motion, which is the case of this story's thematic argument: a stroll around the town.

In *Andar por aí*, we observe the work with the eyes, the points of view and the voices of the child narrator through solutions created by authors who know what it is like to be in the shoes of a child, connecting contexts, moving points of view within a child's perspective and his/her multiple skills of perception and fabulation. This care and attention appear, for example, in the use of colours and patterns that create the ambience for hot, cold, rainy, etc. Also, in the size difference between the boy and his grandfather, and of the other characters and the urban equipment, according to their importance at a given moment in the stroll.

It is important to notice how the trust and care the boy and his grandfather have for each other is represented throughout their journey. It is highlighted by the use playful resources and it is free from the logic of reality: the book plays with proportions and the characters' presence on the page, creating a sensorial experience for the character and the reader during their stroll, suggesting and subverting fears, frights and the unknown.

In the first half of the book, the images show the boy and his grandfather very close to each other at times (in the linear sequence), or very far away, for example, with one on the top and the other at the bottom of the page, resulting in the suggestion of an adult who trusts the child and gives him autonomy while protecting the little one with his presence; the boy, in his turn, relies on his grampa's protection and walks ahead to explore the distractions on the way.

This relationship of trust offers opportunities for the boy-character to wonder, to observe and to experiment in his city. The feeling of autonomy and freedom can also be noticed in the variation of proportions: sometimes the boy is nearly the size of his grandfather or, as the pages are turned, the boy grows bigger and bigger. He is also manner, different feelings in relation to how he is inserted in the urban space or his gradual assimilation of a sense of belonging to that place and context where he is and where, in the text, he affirms his place for strolling, in walks of recognition and familiarity as well as new elements for discovery.

This movement of the characters on the graphic field of the pages has a peak in the doublespread in the middle of the book, where, for the first and only time, the protagonist appears on his own, involved in a game of following traces on the floor, as shown below:

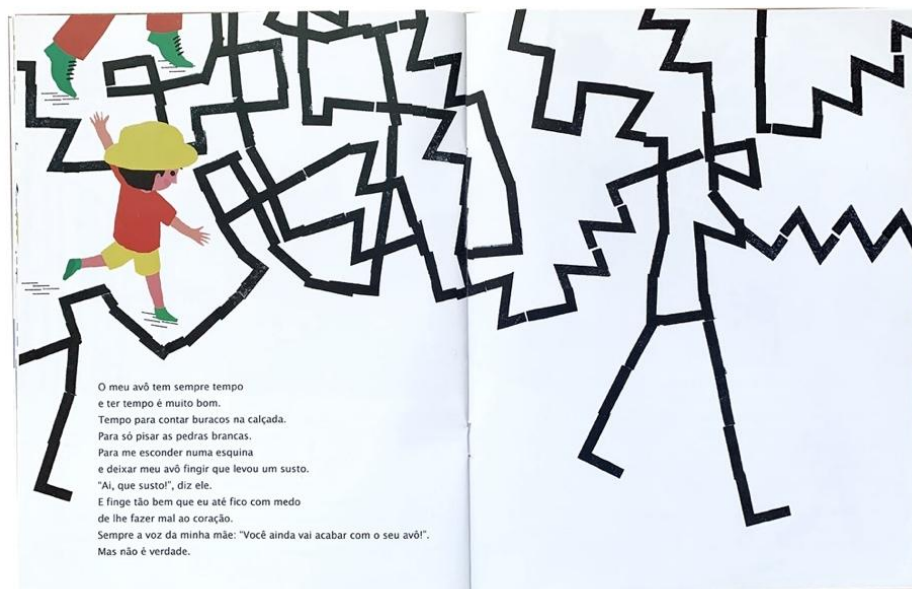


Image 2. pages 20-21 in *Andar por aí*
Source: Martins e Matoso, 2017.

In this doublespread, the grandfather is absent, but his body and presence are graphically suggested by the black lines that are also play material for the boy. That possible meanings of the black lines are suggested to the reader since the beginning of the story. The object the boy plays with on this doublespread may be the pavement, the neutral and tri-dimensional space, the book's open white paper that was written and drawn on, the endless drawing that overflows beyond the page

margin into the thin air surrounding the book, or any other place, into the real city. It is a significant toy-object with a non-utilitarian potential.



Image 3. cover of *O meu avô*
Source: Sobral, 2014.

Right from the cover, *O meu avô* invites us to participate in the child's point of view, as the framing shows the pair boy-grandfather: the complete image of the child and only part of the adult, guessingly the grandfather. The boy is looking up at him, in his elegant striped trousers, laced shoes and umbrella, making us curious about this adult.

We only meet the grandfather in person on page 6. Before that, we are introduced to a set of details represented by the overlapping of four solid colours of unusual combination. It is a meticulous portrait in loose details, a child's typical way of seeing. On equidistant settings on the doublespreads, with the child's eyes, we see the comparison between the grandfather's environment and Mr. Sebastião's. Here the narrator may be revealing what he knows and what he imagines about Mr. Sebastião's home. As we read on, we learn that Mr. Sebastião is the grandfather's neighbour, so, the boy may not know the place he is showing the reader.

Then, the next pages bring comparisons between the two adult characters, revealing both in the text and in the images these grown-ups' peculiarities with playful language, which we intuitively guess is the child's point of view.

From page 12 on, where the yellow colour is used for the first time, the text talks only about the grandfather, while the images still compare him to Mr. Sebastião on equidistant plates, inviting the reader to pay attention to the graphic details and relate them to the written text to continue the comparison game that leads us to the gradual introduction of these two grown-ups as pages are turned.



Image 4. pages 18-19 in *O meu avô*
Source: Sobral, 2014.

Going back to the point made earlier about the characters' features in response to the views of childhood in different periods, by observing the narratives in these two books as representatives of the contemporary production, it may be said that authors like Catarina Sobral, Isabel Minhós Martins and Roger Mello (whose book analysis is next) are transfiguring in their literatures a more balanced power relationship between child and adult characters, in stories that unfold without isolating the child or giving the adult a position of authority and control. If this is true, time and the readings will tell.

Retelling a literary myth in *Inês*: from ancestral orality to the place of the voice in children's narrative

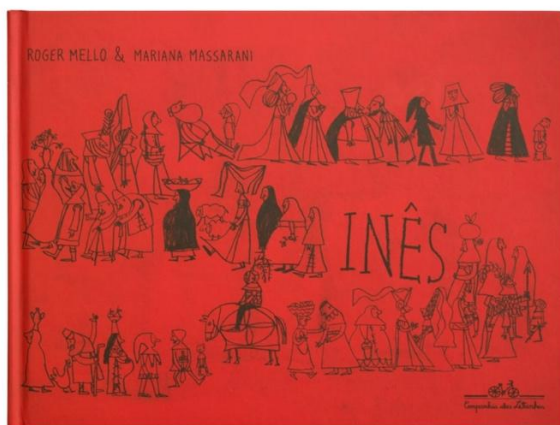


Image 5. Cover of *Inês*
Source: Mello e Massarani, 2015.

Inês retells the story of Inês de Castro and Pedro I, king of Portugal between 1357-1367, as told by their daughter Beatriz, a child narrator. In the literary myth, Inês is killed in front of her children and crowned after her death.

This title's tour de force is the narrative voice given to a child character for her to retell a traditional story whose central themes are death, jealousy and treason – normally seen as adult matter according to common sense. The narrative told by the images is permeated by the children's points of view, here "the children's points of view" are considered, according to the languages that compose the book, the appropriation of an open look to the wide universe of the symbolic, the literal, the poetic and the philosophical, often shown without the filter of a previous determining repertoire, and with the freshness and the surprise of the encounter, the commotion and the emotional abundance of first experiences. We can look at the details, the voids, the silences, at what is said and what is meant.

In regard to the objective of this article, we raise two points in *Inês* that are approached in a peculiar manner by the authors, in tune with the co-author reader: a) the child's view has plenty of the non-linear poetic narrative, through which adults are looked at "without a bias"; b) the narrative perception and complementarity between word and image in the approach of difficult themes.



Image 6. pages 6-7 in *Inês*
Source: Mello e Massarani, 2015.

*“Quando eles se conheceram, / “When they met,
eu andava escondida no meio de outras coisas. / I was hiding amid other things.
Curva de brisa, alga vermelha, briga de passarinho. / A bend in the breeze, red algae,
a bird*

[bout.

Eu ainda não era uma vez.” / I wasn’t a once upon a time yet.”

(our translation)

The text structure in first person singular uses dramatic and lyric resources, resulting in material and fantasy images that suit the space-time of a literary myth. With such lyric insertions, the narrator seems to lace herself as an inseparable part of the happenings that occurred before her birth. Thus, the layers of meaning

derived from the text are filled with an “affective tone that incorporates the events to the experience of an “I”, who rhythmlessly incorporates the experiences to the free game of meanings, through which the language feedback about the self is operated”. (Nunes, 2013, p. 10 – our translation).

It comes from the child narrator’s voice the images and words that compose the material available to the reader, and this elaboration is innovative when the girl speaks about the adults. There is no place for preconceived or stigmatized values in her words, however, that does not mean that she is not aware of facts, for she is an empowered child who articulates her knowledge. To introduce inferences about her father, Pedro, the Prince of Portugal, she plays with words, suggesting nicknames that entitle her father:

“Pedro, o Desobediente” / Pedro, the Disobedient

“Pedro, o Confuso [...]” / Pedro, the Confused

“Pedro, o Mentiroso, foi é encontrar Inês” / Pedro, the Liar, went and met Inês

“Pedro, o Apressado, bateu em disparada.” / Pedro, the Hasty, fled like a bird.

“Até que Pedro, o Resoluto, alcançasse a torre.” / Until Pedro, the Resolute, reached the

[tower.

(our translation)

The author here uses this resource cannily, employing language as a play tool with which the narrator introduces a father with an unstable personality trying to adapt to the situations he is exposed to in his historical lifetime. With the nicknames, the narrator invites the reader to participate in a word game that sometimes evokes unexpected qualities for a father (or for a king), but they are softened by the playful tone of the game and of irony. This resource approaches Pedro to the imperfections of the human condition, with the fleeting behaviours revealed by his playful nicknames, but fully preserving the affection of the text. The narrator herself later confesses:

“Conheci muitos dos nomes do meu pai. / I knew many of my father’s names.

Pedro, o Cruel. / Pedro, the Cruel.

Pedro, o Cru. / Pedro, the Raw.

Pedro isso. / Pedro this.

Pedro aquilo. / Pedro that.

Só Pedro.” / Just Pedro.

(our translation)

The narrator comprehends the adults’ roles and facts through affection and free observation, focused on the present time of each happening, associated with the poetic and linguistic game. This is unarguably one of the reasons that allow the retelling of a myth plenty of difficult themes with beauty and conversations

connected to childhood culture. This story is a re-creation of the literary myth of Inês de Castro, not as a distant historical event, but, seen with a fictional intimacy, built with the wisdom of children's understanding, which move from the awareness of reality and fantasy, entwined by poetry, play and affection. A childhood that is, at the same time, medieval and contemporary.

"Pedro, o Vingativo, acabou com o silêncio: / Pedro, the Vengeful, ended the silence: Desenterrem Inês!" / Unbury Inês!

(our translation)

The resource that was a joke a minute ago (*Just Pedro*), now reveals a key to the plot. The king's nickname reaches a higher level in his daughter's eyes:

"Pedro, o Justo." / Pedro, the Just.

(our translation)

The story moves on and we are on page 39, where the dead queen's hand-kissing ceremony is happening.



Image 7. pages 38-39 in *Inês*

Source: Mello e Massarani, 2015.

We see a crowd. The expressions on each face vary from mourning tears to pious or fearful looks, some barely dare to raise their head, others are upset or maybe disgusted. Some have their eyes shut, for respect or in prayer. King Pedro is amid the crowd, watching the scene. The girl-narrator is integrated to her mother's body, she gently touches her mother's hair. The girl's eyes are closed and, together with the soft and tender caress, it looks like a final farewell. The image of this ritual, with the crowd and the leading characters, compose both a celebration of the queen and the loss of the mother.

The careful construction of the images softens but does not hide the presence of death in the scene. Inês and her death are crowned, on the throne. And not only is she dead, but time has also passed, and her body is a putrefying corpse, as the blue color on her face and hands shows us.

All these elements contribute to placate the harshness of this brutal and painful situation, without dissimulation or omission. The choice for graphic and textual elements that are open to the reader's participation and the diversity of interpretations may awake feelings of hope and redemption regarding the fact. What we see here regarding difficult or frustrating themes is the way contemporary authors and books take the stand to show they trust in children's skills and competence as readers and as people in constant construction, to know, to experience and to create identities or rejections, intertextualities, transpositions to reality or imagination, in reference to their own repertoire, or even readers who can sophisticate and add to reality gems of their playing and cultural background. This trust involving multidisciplinary knowledge and full artistic awareness, by considering life's complex unfoldings, is a tool to envision childhood according to the demands and transformations of our time. Buckingham invites us to prepare for and to participate in the use of this tool:

We cannot take the children back to the secret garden of childhood, nor find the magical key that will keep them locked inside its walls forever. Children are escaping to the big world of adults – a world full of dangers and opportunities where the electronic media have an increasing and important role. The era when we could expect to protect them from this world is coming to an end. We must have the courage to prepare them to deal with this world, to understand it and to become, by right, active participants. (Buckingham, 2000, p. 295 – our translation).

Final considerations

So far our investigation has allowed consonant and dissonant comparative approaches between the voices, views and thoughts about childhood and contemporary children's books in the light of the paradigm revolutions and transformations we have had in the past decades, especially in the fields of social sciences and literary production. We could document some ways to manifest narratives for children and to contribute with their testimony of an innovative amplification of experiences that a polyphonic literature for children may create in the future.

Through the methodology of comparative analysis (Carvalho, 2006), both unfolding and cohesive, we selected works that weave the plot to the consolidation of the thesis about children's literature as a space for the artistic manifestations of multidisciplinary features. These manifestations are deeply linked to the perception of contemporary childhoods and their cultures, all capable of fully interacting with the books and re-create the stories.

In the light of these imbricated views, the comparative analyses of the selected titles for this article could show an overview of the recent production of picturebooks internationally acclaimed and in which we could verify the use of

morphologic, syntactic and semantic resources aligned with concepts of a participant child reader.

The three books examined here, as well as the context they fit into, are tuned to the concept of the invention space, as indicated by Daniel Goldin:

The children's literature that truly regards itself as literature, that is, as a liberated territory for language, allows not only the recollection of the past of each person in the etymological sense of the term *re-cordis*, "to pass through the heart": it allows to open a space for the child to invent, or, at least, to make an enlarged freedom possible to build a world that bans violence, that establishes a greater balance among the potencies of power. (Goldin, 2006, p. 85 – our translation).

Inspiring or generating, to hear the self or the other has always been the fuel of literary writing. To observe, learn and read with children is a political attitude and a connection between social groups with equivalent importance in the social fabric, in all its diversity. What books and literary experiences shall spring from this proposal? We can see here some charming answers in surprising formats, linked to the sensitive, playful and attentive skills of some adults that, aligned with children's cultures, can create and expand realities from what is given. These books shine with the magic of an open window, they offer a cruise in the wind across realities and imaginations. A strong wind that sustains a round flight. Books that participate in the formation of the readers of worlds, not only of books.

May the new views and developments come! Let's share Roger Bastide's call in the preface of *As trocinhas do Bom Retiro*¹²: "We need to multiply this kind of research. Let's be fearless in the illumination of a science by another science", with the belief that literature can manipulate magical formulas for growth, so that more children may become adults that do not harm one another so badly.

We close this article with the call for hope by Ana Maria Machado, in the preface for *Os dias e os livros*¹³, by Daniel Goldin:

Children's contemporary literature has been observed in what concerns the re-creation by the reader, for language is neither unambiguous nor transparent, and so gives rights and powers to those who read it. This potential dialogue between children and adults through children's literature represents hope. As any other cultural creation, it can offer a redefinition for their relationship, from a liberated territory for language, with a power redistribution that is no longer based on the authoritarianism of the adults. (Goldin, 2012, p. 77 – our translation).

¹² The little jokes of Bom Retiro.

¹³ The days and the books.

Contributing to the study of children's literature and its possible relationships with other arts and areas of knowledge is to understand that literature is a movement that unfolds a universe beyond its pages. This study demonstrates and celebrates an era in which children's literature and the phenomenon of the picturebook constitute a true manifesto of excellence, grounded in free social, historical, and political thought, while contributing affectively, artistically, and technologically to the development of individuals and childhoods filled with enchantment and a more fulfilling existence, in connection with the world and with others.

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Bionote

Roberta Asse is a Brazilian researcher of childhood cultures, author and book illustrator. Graduated in architecture from Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Graphic designer, participated in and created award-winning projects in digital and printed media. Master's degree from the Faculdade de Letras at USP.

Email: roberta.asse@yahoo.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9402-280X>

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