

**Children's Picturebook as Polyphonic Cultural Object / *O livro ilustrado para crianças como objeto cultural polifônico***

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of the present article is to rebuild picturebooks' identity as polyphonic cultural objects based on a brief historical trajectory. Dialogue established between text and reader in contemporary picturebook's production is broadened by the presence of different semiosis that allow multiple voices to be heard, since they act as meaning enhancers. The Bakhtinian concept of polyphony is herein held at the picturebook reflections scope to set contrast in children's literature, which has a moralizing nature and is substantiated from a monological perspective. The books by Angela Lago, who is a representative of the Brazilian children's literature, are herein analyzed to disclose multimodal aspects found in this cultural object (book). In conclusion, picturebooks open a window of possibilities for open minded and creative readings, as well as for different readers, due to their polysemic and polyphonic nature.

**KEYWORDS:** Picturebook; Children's literature; Polyphony

**RESUMO**

*Este artigo tem como objetivo recuperar, por meio de uma breve trajetória histórica, a constituição da identidade do livro ilustrado como objeto cultural polifônico. Na produção contemporânea do livro ilustrado, o diálogo que se estabelece entre texto e leitor é ampliado pela presença de diferentes semioses por meio das quais múltiplas vozes se fazem ouvir e atuam como potencializadoras de sentidos. O conceito bakhtiniano de polifonia é apropriado, neste artigo, no âmbito das reflexões sobre o livro ilustrado, para estabelecer uma contraposição a um tipo de literatura infantil de caráter moralizante e, por conseguinte, pautada numa perspectiva monológica. Para exemplificar os aspectos multimodais presentes nesse objeto cultural, analisam-se obras da autora Angela Lago, expoente da literatura infantil brasileira. Conclui-se que o livro ilustrado, por seu caráter polissêmico e polifônico, cria inúmeras possibilidades de leituras abertas e criativas para diferentes leitores.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Livro ilustrado; Literatura infantil; Polifonia

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## Introduction

Picturebooks<sup>1</sup> have been explored by artists, mainly by children's book writers, illustrators and designers, as specific story-telling profile, due to the particular way narratives are created in them. According to Odilon Moraes (2019), this profile turns these books into a real literary experience, which is forged from constant associations set among verbal text, pictures and the book itself. Pictures gain a new meaning when they are entangled to words that, in their turn (unfinished by purpose), also gain new meanings due to the presence of images. Therefore, picturebooks are featured by inseparability and interdependence among verbal text, images and the object (book).

The historical study on how the picturebooks' field has been built is an essential tool to recover their trajectory and to better understand their role in contemporary times. Pictures historically emerge as children's book identity, and they have been exerting different function in picturebooks, such as holding narrative dimensions and meanings, which demands readers to adopt other reading-keys. Besides, books as objects in themselves, have also been explored for their most diverse possibilities. The awareness of a new national inventory of picturebooks in Brazil is growing, although it is relatively new. These books' specificities and the higher quality of their national production demand close attention to mediation-action planning, if one has in mind that they are hybrid objects, i.e., they use different languages and gather different voices. Therefore, they demand different reading strategies.

The aims of the present article were to highlight some important aspects of picturebooks' historical trajectory in Brazil, as well as to express the material features of some works published by the author Angela Lage. She was a very relevant character in the national scene, because her publications were bold at exploring the books' graphic and physical elements, such as including readers' experiences in the object to make narrative articulation feasible by entangling words and images. Accordingly, based on Paulo Bezerra (2005), pictures provide Lago's books with an opening, an unfinished and inconclusive dimension that features the Bakhtinian polyphony. These features help teasing a creative imagination and opening a window of possibilities for meaning-production by readers.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of *picturebook* will be addressed later on in the text, mainly at section 3.

## 1 Picturebook as Polyphonic Cultural Object

The expression “polyphonic cultural object,” which is used in the present title to feature picturebooks, was first addressed by professor Marília Amorim (1998), in “Research text as cultural and polyphonic object.”<sup>2</sup> She addressed the research text in the aforementioned publication as cultural object echoing different voices, namely: those of the researcher, of all authors they interact with, of research subjects. The concept of polyphony is adopted in her article to stress how these different voices are heard in human sciences’ research, based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s language philosophy.

In his work *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin (1999) shows, in its initial pages, his interest in this writer’s work, who he sees as innovative, because he created a sort of artistic thinking called “polyphonic” by Bakhtin. The concept of polyphony applied by the Russian philosopher to the theory of novels regards the fact that the hero’s voice, in Dostoevsky’s work, is heard along with the author’s voice, and it discloses the complex ideological profile of the hero, as well as puts its word “it sounds, as it were, alongside the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 7).<sup>3</sup>

By addressing Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony, Bezerra (2005) points out the counterpoint between the monological and polyphonic novel, based on the analysis carried out by the philosopher of language. The monological novel meets the sense of authoritarianism and completeness, whereas the polyphonic novel fits the sense of inconclusiveness and incompleteness. Bezerra (2005) states that

when it comes to literary representation, the transaction from the monological perspective to the dialogical one, which has polyphony as its most outstanding form, corresponds to releasing the individual who, from mute slave of the author’s consciousness, turns itself into the subject of its own conscience (Bezerra, 2005, p. 193).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “O texto de pesquisa como objeto cultural e polifônico.”

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. (Theory and History of Literature; v. 8) Translation of: Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo. Edited e Translated by Carl Emerson. University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> In Portuguese: “Para a representação literária, a passagem do monologismo para o dialogismo, que tem na polifonia sua forma suprema, equivale à libertação do indivíduo, que de escravo mudo da consciência do autor se torna sujeito de sua própria consciência” (BEZERRA, 2005, p. 193).

Accordingly, most of all, polyphony regards the opening of senses, the expression of multiple viewpoints that, when it comes to novels, is featured by the full manifestation of heroes' voices, which implies all reading possibilities.

Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (1984, p. 241) state that “what Bakhtin calls ‘polyphony’ is simply another name for dialogism.”<sup>5</sup> These authors have highlighted that polyphony – which Bakhtin observes in Dostoevsky’s novels – features the relationship set between heroes’ voices expressed in the narrative by addressing the role played by Dostoevsky in Bakhtin’s philosophical production. Thus, based on Clark and Holquist (1984, p. 241), Bakhtin observes the “self and a set of values grounded in the other”<sup>6</sup> within this articulation of voices.

Based on the herein adopted concept of polyphony, which was used to analyze the aforementioned book, we assumed that different semiosis composing these books act as voices that polemicize, complete, subvert, broaden and stress the verbal text (the word) by broadening likely meaning productions. Although the writer and illustrator of many books is the same person, the visual text is another narrating-voice that provides a second viewpoint about the script, and it broadens likely readings. When it comes to a child’s experience with a book taken as cultural object, this polyphony - which is set by images and other semiotic resources based on interactions with the verbal text - potentiates the meaning-production processes and boosts the creative imagination, as shown in the analyses provided in the sections below. However, first, we will briefly address picturebooks’ historical trajectory in Brazil.

## **2 Short Path: Books for Brazilian Children in the Last Centuries**

Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, books available in Brazil were mostly influenced by the Portuguese literature, consequently, by the European production. This scenario gave birth to the distance between what was being sown and grown as Brazilian identity and culture.

Within the transition between centuries, when the market started to see children as likely consumers, and schools became essential to change the rural society of that

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<sup>5</sup> CLARK, Katerina; HOLQUIST, Michael. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote n. 8.

time, literature and Pedagogy were entangled and they aimed at forming the new generations. Accordingly, some national books were published, such as *Contos Infantis* [Infant Tales], by Adelina Vieira and Júlia de Almeida Lopes (1886), and *Contos Pátrios* [Homeland Tales], by Olavo Bilac and Coelho Netto (1904). This movement opened room for other publications, such as the collection called *Contos da Carochinha* [Carochinha Tales], from 1896, which was a Brazilian children's literature collection comprising translations of famous European fairy tales. According to Nelly Novaes Coelho (1991), this collection was ordered by Quaresma Book Shop to Figueiredo Pimentel, who was in the Brazilian mainstream due to his performance in making books popular by producing cheaper publications, as observed by Verbal texts without much formal and symbolic room for visual dimensions were largely valued at late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While writers were becoming more professional and gaining space due to productions about ideological projects in the country, works focused on illustration were just an additional and complementary activity of professionals from other fields, such as painters and cartoonists.

Within a context where literature aimed at the children and youth audience, books mainly targeted didactic and moralizing goals, and illustration played the role of merely depicting what was said in the verbal text, of inducing the expected meaning production from a monological perspective that, sometimes, could be authoritarian. It was not by coincidence that literary book illustrators were hired to illustrate didactic materials for the children audience.

The visual dimension started gaining relevance in children's books at early 20th century, after *Tico-Tico* magazine's publication and circulation. From 1920 onwards, Monteiro Lobato's books launched a new scene in children and fictional literary production. According to Eliette Aparecida Aleixo (2014, p. 113), "from this time on, fiction started to value the infant universe, either in its verbal or visual elements, and it allowed boosting imagination in scripts and images, without the expectation of turning the possibility of 'pretending' into a pedagogical tool."<sup>7</sup> Monteiro Lobato's works are gathered into stories of *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* [Yellow Woodpecker Cottage], which have granted this author the status of relevant reference in the search for Brazilian-

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<sup>7</sup> In Portuguese: "a partir daí, a ficção começa a valorizar mais o universo infantil, tanto nos seus elementos verbais como visuais, permitindo incitar a imaginação nos enredos e nas imagens, sem o propósito de pedagogizar as possibilidades do 'faz de conta'."

identity valuing, since he built narratives that always dialogue with children.<sup>8</sup> Based on critiques to foreign references and to the low quality of children's literature at that time, one can observe that elements of the national culture in Lobato's production are linked either to language or to the books' topics, although it did not put aside the connection between reality and fantasy. Besides emphasizing elements of the Brazilian culture, Lobato's publications opened physical and symbolic room for images focused on valuing the visual language as important part of his work.

Artists like *Voltolino* – byname Lemmo Lemmi –, Odiléa Helena Setti Toscano and André Le Blanc illustrated some of Lobato's books. Image construction by these and other Brazilian artists compose the very visual inventory of *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* characters. These illustrations also represented relevant enhancement in drawing techniques (Aleixo, 2014), since they explore elements, such as using perspective, different shades of grey, black and white drawings, contrasts, textures and other aspects that enrich the graphic composition, at different moments. These same elements were equally explored at different moments and by different artists who have illustrated Lobato's books (Aleixo, 2014).

It is worth highlighting that these books were pioneers in including illustrators' names on book covers to reinforce their role as other determining voices for polysemic meaning's construction. Yet, just as in Europe, pictures' authorship was limited to the signature of the artists on the sides of their pictures. Despite Lobato's attention to his illustrators, which was quite unusual at that time, several names were forgotten. This finding reinforces the lack of value given to illustrators' work at a time when children's literature was conceived from the monological perspective of closing meanings.

Except for Lobato's books, the following decades would remain marked by intense literary production aimed at forming characters and at morally molding children's behavior. This process expresses the adherence to the monological perspective, which is quite restrictive in terms of meaning construction by readers.

Back in the 1960s, one could observe important changes in fields connected to children, given the aesthetical references linked to constructivism and expressionism,

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<sup>8</sup> The problems surrounding racism manifested, either in verbal texts or pictures, in Monteiro Lobato's books, are well known. Representations of *Tia Nastácia* and *Saci Pererê*, for example, are subjected to significant changes in comparison to past publications. For further information about this discussion, check on Heloísa Pires Lima (2011, 2019).

which were concepts deriving from academic debates about graphic arts. According to Rui Oliveira (2013, p. 23), conceptions about books and childhood, at that time, allowed understanding books' images as "act of culture, [and as] children's first contact with plastic arts, thus, it could not be excluded from any entity concerned with promoting and assessing it."<sup>9</sup> This process was strengthened by Brazilian illustration professionals' initial actions. These illustrators were deeply influenced by the creation of graphic design higher education schools, such as Industrial Design and Graphic Arts schools, which have incorporated research actions and qualification in this field.

Design influence on how to think on pages' space, the concept of book as object and materiality, and even conceptual lines in illustrations, are some of the features observed far from painting techniques and concepts, which were the basic references for the Brazilian illustration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These references were based on European aesthetical standards, which were in the mainstream in the country since 1808, after the creation of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, when the Royal Family arrived in Brazil. According to Graça Muniz Lima (2000, p. 104),

[...] the process to teach and outspread art in Brazil held several concepts that will form the aesthetical sight. Artistic elaboration skills will be associated with the social model in place. Social classes holding the narrative power will somehow set the visual reading each individual will have of image contents.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the *Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil* [National Foundation of Children and Young People's Books], also known as FNLIJ,<sup>11</sup> was launched in 1968 from the perspective of boosting the national production of books and research on children's books, as well as to support and value writers and illustrators.

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<sup>9</sup> In Portuguese: "ato de cultura e educação, [e como] o primeiro contato das crianças com as artes plásticas, logo ela não poderia ficar excluída de qualquer entidade preocupada em promovê-la e estudá-la" (Oliveira, 2013, p. 23).

<sup>10</sup> In Portuguese: [...] o processo de ensino e divulgação da arte no Brasil passa por várias concepções que irão construir o olhar estético. A capacidade de elaboração artística estará condicionada a modelos sociais vigentes. As classes sociais detentoras do poder narrativo determinarão de certo modo a leitura visual que cada um fará de seus conteúdos imagéticos (Lima, 2000, p. 104).

<sup>11</sup> FNLIJ is a private institution of federal and state public use that represents the Brazilian section of the *International Board of Books for Young People* (IBBY). It has played important role in the children and young people's literature scenario since its creation. Among its actions, FNLIJ promotes contests and awards, which are relevant actions that interfere with the promotion of high quality books published by publishers. These actions remain to present times, they protect literature as artistic expression, and value the textual, visual, graphic and thematic dimensions in books.

The increased number of publications to the children's audience at late 1960s was followed by intense publication of books focused on children's imaginary and creative processes, to the detriment of the utilitarian and moralist profile in place in the national trajectory of children's literature, so far. Didacticism, civil formation and love for an idealized view of children are remarkable in publications from previous decades, but they started sharing some room with texts more committed to creativity, fantasy and, therefore, closer to the children's universe. According to Coelho (1991, p. 259)

[d]ozens of male and female writers have emerged, and they followed a new watchword: experimentalism with language by structuring the narrative and by visualizing the text; replacing the confident/safe literature by the restless/argumentative literature, which puts at check the existing association between children and the world surrounding them, by also arguing values about societies they lie on.<sup>12</sup>

It is important highlighting Ana Maria Machado, Bartolomeu Campos de Queirós, Elias José, Lygia Bojunga, Ruth Rocha, Ziraldo, and others, among these writers. This turning point in the conceptual field of illustration and design was mostly expressed in Ziraldo's *Flicts*, which were published at late 1960s and became an emblematic example of that process. He suggests displacing figure 'illustration' to build an abstract character: one color. This revolution also expresses the space filled by images in books, as observed by Graça Ramos (2013, p. 30): "with *Flicts*, we started understanding image as element linked to the dialogue with the verbal text, which is as important as the text itself, and it provided a new status to the role played by illustrators."<sup>13</sup> The statement by Roger Mello (2012) also helped better understanding the relevance of the aforementioned work:

Ziraldo reached all narrative dimensions of the abstract when he wrote the *Flicts*! This is a revolutionary children's book that shows how the artist can be as experimental as a child! Ziraldo is a turning table here and abroad. When red suggests: 'Is it the Japanese flag or is it the

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<sup>12</sup> In Portuguese: "[...] dezenas de escritores e escritoras, obedecendo a uma nova palavra de ordem: experimentalismo com a linguagem, com a estruturação narrativa e com o visualismo do texto; substituição da literatura confiante/segura por uma literatura inquieta/questionadora, que põe em causa as relações convencionais, existentes entre a criança e o mundo em que ela vive, questionando também os valores sobre os quais nossa sociedade está assentada" (Coelho, 1991, p. 259).

<sup>13</sup> In Portuguese: "com *Flicts* começamos a compreender a imagem como um elemento em relação de diálogo com o texto verbal, tão importante como ele, o que deu também novo status ao papel do ilustrador" (Ramos, 2013, p. 30).



sun?', sensation, narrative, shape, idea, everything turns red (Mello, 2012, pp. 205-206).<sup>14</sup>

According to Eliane Pimenta Braga Rossi (2007), the 1970s were a milestone in children's literature, because, as aforementioned, that was the time when Brazilian children started to be seen as potential consumers. Children's books became an object of consumption that needed a different packaging. This new marketing perspective opened room for publishers' investment in graphic projects, so that children's books would become a cultural attraction for infant eyes.

Just as the 1970s stood out for the rise of children's book writers, the 1980s were supported by the professional ascension of illustrators. Based on Moraes (2017), at that time, one could see the first Brazilian picturebook productions, although they were not fully aware of it. Writers, illustrators, editors and other professionals were then mostly producing books that were bold enough to set closer associations between verbal text and images, or even the supremacy of image over the verbal text.

At that time, important artists in the Brazilian scene published literary works for children, among them one finds Angela Lago, Roger Mello, Nelson Cruz and Eva Furnari. Many of these authors started their careers as illustrators in newspapers, supplements and magazines, and it points out the relevance of these communication vehicles to outspread their work and to images-ascension process. Many children's books were illustrated by cartoonists. This new era of illustration was not linked to the new concept of image 'as more than mere accessory' of the verbal text, but to a powerful expression, meaning and transformation language.

In 1994, FNLIJ assembled the exposition *Brazil! A Bright Blend of Colors*<sup>15</sup> as part of the program set for the Bolonha Fair.<sup>16</sup> It was based on selected works by active national illustrators whose pieces formed the foundation's catalogue. According to the statement by Brazilian illustrators like Nelson Cruz (2012) and Marilda Castanha (2012), this event seemed to have been a turning table episode either in the history of

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<sup>14</sup> In Portuguese: "O Ziraldo atingiu todas as dimensões narrativas do abstrato quando fez *Flicts!* Um livro infantil revolucionário e mostra que o artista pode conseguir ser tão experimental como a criança! O Ziraldo é um divisor de águas aqui e no mundo todo. Quando o vermelho propõe: 'É a bandeira do Japão ou é o Sol?', sensação, narrativa, forma, ideia, tudo tudo fica vermelho" (Mello, 2012, pp. 205-206).

<sup>15</sup> Translated by the authors: "*Brasil! Uma brilhante mistura de cores.*"

<sup>16</sup> Children and Young People's Book Fair of Bolonha has been taking place in Italy since 1964 and it is known for being a space for the international exchange and circulation of what has been produced in the worlds' children and young peoples' literature,

illustration or in the history of picturebooks in the country. Based on them, during the event, they observed the presence of a colonized sight in their own work, as well as of the extreme subordination to the European aesthetics. In Maria da Graça Muniz Lima's (2012) own words, these authors realized that their drawings did not have elements of the culture they were inserted in and, from that experience onwards, they started reasoning about the aesthetics of their own work. This process led to significant changes in the visual profile of national books, such as changes in color shades, in shapes and in the approaches linked to most regional topics (Lima, 2012).

It was also in the 1980s and 90s that, according to Helena Alexandrino (2012, p. 116), one could see the first “individuals interested in editing and assessing children's books as an artistic form.”<sup>17</sup> These books got significant design influence on their graphic production, mainly in the 1990s, and it broadened creation and innovation possibilities, including the use of paratexts.<sup>18</sup> Several illustrators are also designers, and it enables thinking a book as a whole. Updates in image production and printing technologies also helped books' sophistication and final quality, as stated by Andrea Rodrigues Dalcin (2020). The artist Angela Lago, whose work will be later approached in the present article, is a great representative of the group of artists who started thinking the object (book) as narrative possibility.

Nowadays, contemporary picturebooks, mainly those dedicated to children, have been the object of study and investigation in several fields, be it in the visual arts field, in language, design or in Teaching fields. The trajectory of their construction shows how they became a polysemic cultural object whose different voices are found in their composition and broaden the reach of their embedment, the opening for plural meaning constructions, as well as the voices of those who read them.

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<sup>17</sup> In Portuguese: “pessoas interessadas na edição ou no estudo do livro infantil como uma forma artística” (Alexandrino, 2012, p. 116).

<sup>18</sup> According to Tatyane Andrade Almeida and Celia Abicalil Belmiro (2016, p. 3), “Paratexts – title, subtitle, preface, epigraph, dedication, frontispiece, endpaper, cover and back cover, among others – introduce the text and guide a reading way, besides acting as entrance to allow their embedment and consumption.”

### 3 Contemporary Picturebooks: Multimodal Literatures

Among all different types of children's books and their story telling modes, picturebooks have been the object of study and appreciation of theorists, artists and readers. In order to better understand the concept of picturebook, it is important taking them apart from books with pictures, whose illustrations emerge from the verbal text, i.e., they are the artists' interpretation of what is written in words. Thus, the picture is due to what is written. Although illustration adds new elements to the narrative, and allows broadening aesthetic concepts and creativity, in this case, it is linked to the written word. We must point out that the difference between books with pictures and picturebook does not mean defining a hierarchy of judgment-of-value towards different modalities, because they represent different ways of introducing a literary narrative.<sup>19</sup>

The term "picturebook"<sup>20</sup> in turn refers to a specific story-telling mode whose verbal text, images and book (itself) are deeply entangled within an interdependence relationship. Thus, there is no pure word, but a word that is always changed by the image or by the book itself. Accordingly, image and object are changed by the word, within a polyphonic move where these different book dimensions are conceived as voices building the narrative. Thus, readers are invited to conceive the book as polyphonic literary experience, because all these dimensions – verbal, image and concrete object – are utterances that work along with all sorts of possible book meanings.

As aforementioned, taking picturebooks as polysemic cultural object implies assuming them as the very expression of a given "artistic thinking," by borrowing the expression created by Mikhail Bakhtin (1999, p. 1)<sup>21</sup> to stress the polyphony typical of Dostoevsky's novels. Thus, the voice of the hero in these novels fully and independently manifest itself in connection to the author; yet, different semiosis in

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<sup>19</sup> Although there is some interdependence among text, image and object in non-fictional books, we will herein emphasize literary books, i.e., works whose main interlocution action is fictional, based on the theoretical formulations by Graça Paulino (2004).

<sup>20</sup> It is worth highlighting that there is no consensus in Brazil about using the term *livro ilustrado* [picturebook]. Sometimes, there are references using *livro álbum* [album book] or [*álbum ilustrado*] illustrated album. Lago (2012) and Moraes (2019) justify it by the different translations of the English word "picture book."

<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 3.

picturebooks also get fully connected to the verbal text. The other voices in the literary discourse are in charge of contributing to the aesthetic experiences lived by readers.

According to Valentin Vološinov (1973),<sup>22</sup> language materializes itself into utterances featured by their unit of meaning and by encompassing the word in its linguistic dimension, as well as by the utterance's communication condition; therefore, it presents an essentially social profile. All utterances are inserted in a given context, and it is crossed by ideologies and regards others who have a counter-word as feedback. It is important highlighting that utterances are not limited to verbal contexts, but that they are also expressed by the body, by images, by music and by all other elements that turn out as language. If one takes books as printed verbal discourse and, therefore, as verbal communication element (Vološinov, 1973), it is possible understanding that meanings and senses produced by narratives in picturebooks emerge as the ideas authors intend to disclose, as well as rise from the relationship readers set with the book by interacting with it as object, in its multimodal construction. Who are readers? What are their experiences with reading itself? All elements are entangled to readers' responsive understanding to the book, to the quality of its utterance and to what is outspread about the book in order to produce meanings and senses to it.

As shown by the brief historical trajectory provided so far, the rise of a picturebook concept in Brazil came from a cultural, historical and political context that has allowed such a production. We herein assumed the work by illustrators as literary work authorship action, as voices that made themselves heard as utterance. However, historical fragments tell us about a long journey to get to the point when these artists could be valued as authors. This late authorship-acknowledgement process is also related to a certain communication-will whose children's book concept was referenced by the monological, prescriptive, discourse. We must suggest that the picturebook concept helped boosting these reflections and putting illustrators and designer in the mainstream, rather than just writers. These other professionals were new voices whose interlocutions in books formed new utterances. Thus, the Bakhtinian dialogism, mainly when it comes to polysemy and polyphony, are theoretical constructs that help

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<sup>22</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. N. (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trad. Ladislav Matejka e I. R. Titunik. Seminar Press. New York and London, 1973.

broadening the possibilities of analyses applied to the role played by these books in experiences lived by readers accessing them.

Picturebooks, observed within the interaction between literature and visual/graphic arts, demand specific readings, both horizontal (time direction, from cover to the fourth cover) and cross-sectional (deep connection points among word, image and object). These books help forming a dynamic reader, because they demand a particular reading type, and these readers are opened to meanings that are built over a dialogue that presents the book's form and content.

Subsequently, we will analyze some books by the artist Angela Lago in order to reason about the complexity of picturebooks, which are art pieces that demand readings attentive to several narrative-construction languages and possibilities. The choice for this author is justified by her work's relevance for the national production, mainly because of her pioneering actions in exploring literary books as multimodal object, in Brazil.

#### **4 Angela Lago and the Multimodality in Her Works**

Angela Lago is among Brazilian artists who started thinking books as objects. Most of her work takes into account folding techniques, pace and the act of turning pages as narrative possibility. As we will further observe, she assessed, experimented and included several carefully-elaborated digital interventions to play with the very physical structure of her books, over her career. This technique exceeds utterances' edges in verbal texts.

The very particular features of Lago's work account for setting a new way of building narratives, and they meet aspects attributed by Bakhtin (1999)<sup>23</sup> to the same construction process in Dostoevsky's novels. One finds the polyphony observed in her books among these aspects, and it derives from interactions between semiosis elements whose illustrations and book (itself) form the narrative voices. It is so because they fully participate in narrative formation. Accordingly, the herein carried out analyses of her books aimed at shining light on how she broke with the monological perspective in

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<sup>23</sup> See footnote n. 6.

narratives focused on children, as well as at pointing out her artistic dimension based on how different semiosis types are entangled in it as narrative voices.

Angela Lago was born in Belo Horizonte City, Minas Gerais State, Brazil, in 1945. Before publishing her first books, she studied and worked with publicity and visual production in the USA, in Scotland and in Venezuela. In 1980, she published her books, *O fio do riso* [The Thread of Laughter] and *Sangue de barata* [Cockroach Blood]. She published more than 30 children's book throughout her life, some of them of her exclusive authorship and others were written in partnership with other writers. She was awarded with several prizes for her work, among them, with the FNLIJ Award (14 times) in categories like *O melhor para criança, Livro de imagem e ilustração* [The best for Children, Picture Book and Illustration].

In 1984, Angela Lago published the picture book<sup>24</sup> *Outra vez* [Once Again], which was awarded with the FNLIJ Award and stood out for proposing the narrative circle. Its images tell the story of the path taken by a flowerpot that gets on the hands of several characters and that, finally, goes back to its first house. This entire path is seen in a city that seems to be magical. A dog with a watering can and a gardening fork stuck on his tale follows all the pot's path until it is given to a woman who is seen holding a flowerpot in the first page of the book. The picture stamped on the book cover is the same observed at the end of the story, and it reinforces the book's circular profile. Furthermore, other pictures in paratexts complete the narrative, since they suggest that the story goes beyond the elements provided inside the book. The dog is drawn on the book cover asking readers to keep a secret. Readers just understand what it is all about after they finish reading the book and start reading it again, as they are asked for by the story's title.

Pictures in the book have many details that ask readers to pay close attention to, and to follow, all the small narratives linked to so many characters living in the city. It is important highlighting the delicacy of the city-scenario's architectonic constructions, which are small houses with colonial roofs. This scenario takes us back to a small, baroque-style city, whose magic is expressed by its residents and by how they occupy and use the spaces in it, by the sky full of stars, by the color shades, by the lines and the

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<sup>24</sup> Picturebooks are those whose narratives are exclusively provided by images. According to some authors, books with pictures are in the group of picturebooks, given the visual feature as narrative axis and the time association set by images with the object (book).

author's compositions. There is a water-capture structure, for example, that captures the stars and takes them to a sink. Therefore, what comes out of the tap are stars, rather than water.



*Figure 1 - Outra vez [Once Again] (double page). Source: Lago (1984, pp. 4-5)*

It is curious how Angela Lago invites us to think about the imaginary profile of this scenario by providing a final-initial scene on the fourth book cover, which shows the hug between the dog and the woman who gets in her apartment. Some objects and animals in this apartment refer to the city scenario, such as the fabric coating the couch or the blanket over the iron board, which are both stamped as if they were a sky full of stars.

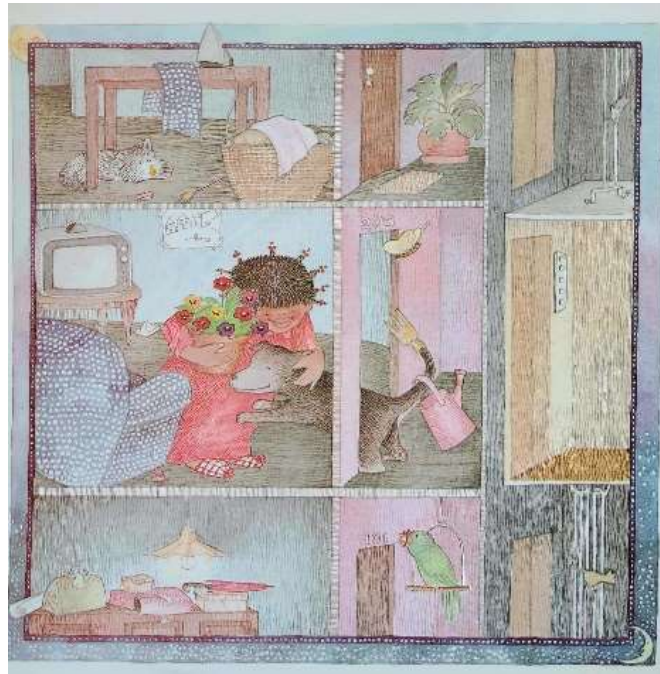


Figure 2 - *Outra vez* [Once Again] (fourth book cover). Source: Lago (1984)

The books' circular profile points out its appropriation as artistic object whose page-turning corresponds to time passing, besides stressing children's literature as visual-arts' field. This narrative structure "has the sequencing of its pace linked to the books' inner space,"<sup>25</sup> as stated by José Salmo Dansa de Alencar and Luiz Antonio Luzio Coelho (2016, p. 3693). Other books by Lago also show this same circular and image-like narrative, such as *O cântico dos cânticos* [The Chant of Chants], from 1993, and *Cena de rua* [Street Scene], from 1994.

In her book *Chiquita Bacana e as outras pequetitas* [Cool Chiquita and the Other Tiny Winy Ones], from 1986, Angela Lago suggests some games linked to the book's materiality, as well as images and meta-fiction. *Chiquita Bacana* [Cool Chiquita] is a kid,<sup>26</sup> a girl who is visited by small creatures at night. One night, the girl plots a plan to catch all the small ones. Although Chiquita hides herself, readers are those who can see where she is when they open the book (right on the first page), where they find her in the place where the book folds, between the cover and the first page.

<sup>25</sup> In Portuguese: "tem o encadeamento de sua sequência circunscrito ao espaço interno do livro."

<sup>26</sup> The word *pequetita* is used by the story narrator to refer to small creatures who break into the window of *Chiquitita's* room at night and who seem to make some mess in it.





Figure 3 – *Chiquita Bacana e as outras pequenitas* [Cool Chiquita and the Tiny Winy Ones] (double page – book cover). Source: Lago (1986, p. 1)

Besides this playful joke, there are pictures and page illustrations over the whole story, as well as spaces allocated to verbal texts and to images that show exclusive story scenes, i.e., there is a book within the main book, and readers access a narrative momentum that is not told in it. This feature sets a polyphonic move observed in the voices of the book inside the book, of pictures inside the pictures, and it broadens all meaning-production possibilities in an almost vertiginous way. It is also essential emphasizing the game of perspectives suggested by the pictures and by the use of the book (as work piece) to allocate illustrations that ‘bleed’ over the book’s edges. At a certain point in the story, stairs emerge as connection between one page and the other, and they give a sense of changing stores, in the same house.



Figure 4 - *Chiquita Bacana e as Outras Pequetitas* [Cool Chiquita and the Tiny Winny Ones] (double page). Source: Lago (1986, pp. 8-9)

Just as *Chiquita Banaca* [Cool Chiquita] hides in the book, another character by Lago also interacts by using this same resource. In her book *O personagem encalhado* [The Stranded Character], from 2006, part of the character pops up right in the connection of two pages. Readers get surprised when they find out that the character is stuck in there, since its feet are tied to a staple that links the two pages in the book.



Figure 5 - *O personagem encalhado* [The Stranded Character] (double pages). Source: Lago (2006, pp. 8-9 and 12-13)

Another innovative resource that gives a sense of humor to this project lies on the presence of a main verbal text, which was printed with capital letters, right over a secondary verbal text that is printed as page-background in the whole book. The secondary text looks like a handwritten one, and the author plays with readers by chatting with them about different subjects related to the book, such as the following excerpt:

I was sure that nobody would have the patience to read this. Then you came up. Do you know what? You do not matter. You are nuts! Look at that, I can mess with you. I can write whatever I feel like. I can tell you everything! But I will tell you nothing. The character is stuck,

period. Do you want an explanation? I do not have it. (Lago, 2006, p. 5).<sup>27</sup>

Just as we saw in *Chiquita Bacana e as outras pequetitas* [Cool Chiquita and the Tiny Winy Ones] and in *O personagem encalhado* [The Stranded Character], Angela Lago uses the book folds.<sup>28</sup> The book ‘*Cena de rua*’ [Street Scene], from 1994, is one more example of entanglement between pictures and the object (book), mainly in her work. This book stands out for approaching problems resulting from huge Brazilian social inequalities as main topic: it regards kids who sell goods in traffic lights to survive. She does not only approach the topic, but turns these children into the narrative’s main characters. She starts from the perspective of life conditions experienced by these Brazilian subjects who have been outside literary production. She reports that not all stories have happy endings.

Besides the relevance of this topic, her book stands out for its graphic arts, since Angela Lago creates a game of visual perspectives among the child selling goods in the traffic light, car passengers and the reader itself. Yet, she uses dark acrylic colors, in such a combination, so that each picture and the impact of different perspectives can potentiate the emotions felt on the street scene. The author uses this book as narrative resource, since its pictures were intentionally produced to be experienced by readers, because she uses the book’s natural opening at reading time. If the book is opened at 180°, the pictures do not have the same impact as if it was opened in a smaller angle. Just as in *Cena de rua* [Street Scene], this same resource was adopted in other books like *A festa no céu* [Party in the Sky] (1989) and *Cântico dos cânticos* [The Chant of Chants] (1992).

The next picture from *Cena de rua* [Street Scene] shows blue-color prevalence in pictures of the mother with her baby. This color was not chosen in an arbitrary way.

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<sup>27</sup> In Portuguese: “Eu estava segura de que ninguém ia ter paciência de ler. E aí pinta você. Quer saber de uma coisa? Você não conta. Você é doido varrido! Olha que maravilha, posso espinaftrar com você. Posso escrever o que me der na telha. Posso contar tudo, tudo! Só que não vou contar nada. O personagem encalhou e pronto. Tá querendo explicação? Não tem” (Lago, 2006, p. 5).

<sup>28</sup> The fold, also known as gutter or spine, “[...] is the fix axis that splits the open-book space into two equal parts. The double page includes a mandatory division,” as stated by Sophie Van der Linden (2011, p. 66). [Free translation. Original text in Linden (2011, p. 66): “[...] é um eixo físico que divide o espaço do livro aberto em duas partes iguais. A página dupla inclui assim uma divisão obrigatória”]. This central message can be ignored, but some picturebooks give them a narrative dimension by using them as an important resource to be taken into account during the reading process. From this perspective, the book’s material axis turns into a symbolic resource.

Raquel Matsushita (2011, p. 211), by approaching the sensation and symbolism of blue-color in design projects highlights that “the blue sky represents the full human search for a place where the perfection of the spirit is possible. Thus, the blue-color turns out inaccessible and reaches the unconsciousness level.”<sup>29</sup> The baby and the mother are dressed on a blue coat full of stars in this street scene, and they have experienced a deep affection relationship inside a car, which is expressed by the way they gaze at each other, by their gestures and care – a blue sky, a place of completeness, inaccessible to the boy. Outside the car, on the edges, the hope-green boy looks around with begging eyes, begging not much for money but for a physical and symbolic space in the blue sky full of stars.

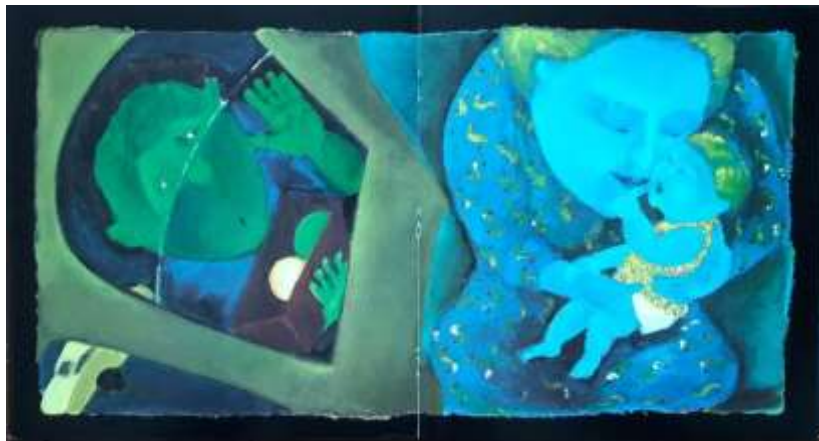


Figure 6 - *Cena de rua* [Street Scene] (double page). Source: Lago (1994, pp. 12-13)

In 1988, Angela Lago illustrated and created the graphic design of her book *Mãe da mãe da minha mãe* [The Mother of my Mother's Mother], in partnership with Terezinha Alvarenga from *Miguilim* publisher. This is the story of a girl that gets to the huge and unknown home of her great-grandmother. When she looks for her great-grandma, and gets lost among so many big rooms and hallways in the house, readers can turn the pages and face rectangular cuts in the very core of the pages (graphic printing knife<sup>30</sup>). These cuts are mixed to the pictures and they simulate doors and

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<sup>29</sup> In Portuguese: “[...] o céu azul representa a plenitude da busca humana de um lugar em que a perfeição do espírito seja possível. Sendo assim, o azul torna-se inacessível e atinge o nível do inconsciente.” (Matsushita, 2011, p. 211).

<sup>30</sup> According to Matsushita (2011, p. 329), the graphic printing knife is a “metal tool assembled on wood whose function is to cut printed papers into special shapes.” [Free translation. Original text in Matsushita

windows inside the great-grandma's mansion. They overlap each other, so that one can access the blueprints outside, in any page. The cuts also give a sense of depth.

Another graphic resource largely applied by Angela Lago regards inserting small images entangled to the text. Images replace the words they represent through this entanglement process. This resource is observed in several Lago's books, such as in *Sua Alteza a Divinha* [Your Highness Fore Seer], from 1990, in *De morte!* [That's Killing!], from 1992, in *Coleção Folclore de Casa* [House Folklore Collection], from 1993, and in *João Felizardo – o rei dos negócios* [John Fortunate – the Business King], from 2004. Besides, the author investigated the range of likely associations among words, images and design, of movement and the association among possible images, movement, verbal text layout and the choice for the right letter as likely utterance profile. All these elements make us think about the visual dimension of the word itself.



Figure 7 - *A mãe da mãe da minha mãe* [The Mother of my Mother's Mother] (detailed image and cuts in the page). Source: Alvarenga; Lago (1988. p. 7)

The books *Sua Alteza a Divinha* [Your Highness Fore Seer] and *De morte!* [That's Killing!] present some common features. Firstly, the narratives were told by the author based on oral-language folkloric texts. Secondly, she used illustrations by old artists, sometimes anonymous ones, to set the books' scenes. The verbal text in *Sua Alteza a Divinha* [Your Highness Fore Seer] is always full of small images that form the

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(2011, p. 329): "instrumento de metal montado em madeira, cuja função é recortar impressos em formatos especiais"]

words. Furthermore, oftentimes, she sets associations between text shape and the meaning built by it. It is important, for example, highlighting the time in the story when the four characters seeking to marry *a Divinha* are hanged; therefore, they are seen hanging on the letters of the story's own verbal text. Some of these letters seem to be fallen due to the weight of the hanged ones. There is another time at the story when one sees the expression "*Bateu um vento*" [the wind blew], whose letters are slightly higher, as if they were about to be taken by the wind. Subsequently, when the verbal text refers to a nest with seven eggs in it, the word 'ovos' [eggs], in Portuguese, is written with seven 'o' letters – oooooovos [eeeeeeeggs] -, as if each one of these letters o's would represent one egg in the nest.

When it comes to material aspects, the book *Sua Alteza a Divinha* [Your Highness Fore Seer] also shows another relevant element. The second and the penultimate pages in the book are written in tracing paper, and it allows playing with the move triggered by the superposition of printed images, due to the paper's transparency.

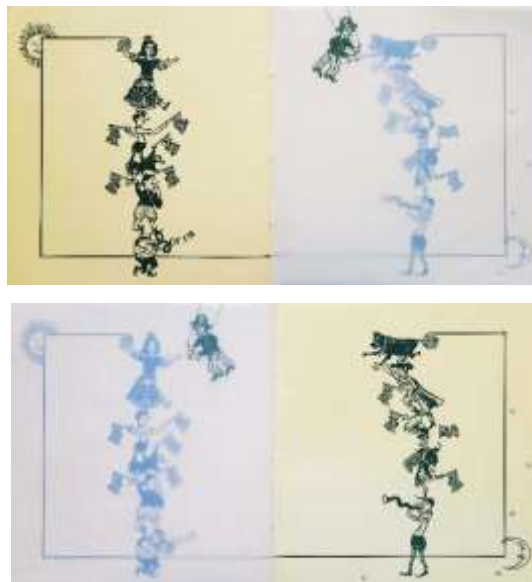


Figure 8 - *Sua Alteza a Divinha* [Your Highness Fore Seer] (Double page). Source: Lago (1990, pp. 32-35)

Angela Lago suggests another game in the book *De morte!* [That's Killing!] by using some resources in the book flaps. She displaced one of the pages to the right. At first, the flap shows the image of death, and it seems that its bones are hiding under a

black coat. The final flap simulates a door that can be really opened and closed; it is so, to represent the door of heaven and Saint Peter's image.



Figure 9 - *De morte!* [That's Killing!] (double page with the closed and opened flap).  
 Source: Lago (1992a, pp. 28-29)

As aforementioned, the book *O cântico dos cânticos* [The Chant of Chants] was inspired by the biblical poem with the same name. Lago suggests a circular narrative based on images in it. The graphic project included the same cover in both sides of the book, so that readers could choose where to start reading the book from, without losing the construction of meanings. The book's technical information, such as the catalog card, are gathered in a bellyband,<sup>31</sup> in order to make sure about this experience.

<sup>31</sup> According to Gavin Ambrose and Paul Harris (2006, p. 36), the bellyband is a "plastic or paper loop that is used to enclose the pages of a publication. Bellybands are typically seen on consumer magazines,

The narrative's circular profile is potentiated by the way the author builds the sequence of images. At first, it seems that two characters move over the mazes drawn on the pages, one going towards the other. They meet each other right in the middle of the book (either on the fold or on the pages' binding point). This meeting point is materialized by the reader's action of opening and closing the object (book), rather than just by the pages' sewing. At this point, reading becomes an intense dialogical move comprising the verbal text, the image, the book itself and the reader. Consequently, the text acquired a polysemic profile because there is no single meaning to be imposed to the reader by the verbal text, and it is reinforced by the picture. On the other hand, there is a polyphony through which the voices are brought by different semiotic resources that echo "plenivalent"<sup>32</sup> (Bakhtin, 2013, p. 4), giving the reader the condition of an active conscience in the process of producing meaning for the text. The pictures seem to represent the distancing between characters after the meeting, since they move in opposite directions. Pictures in the book were developed with such a care and technique that movements to represent the two characters' approximation/encounter/distancing can be observed when one starts reading the book from any of the book sides.

## Final Considerations

Picturebooks, as artistic objects, circulate between literature and visual arts edges. These books have stood out in the Western publishing market given artists and readers' large interest in them. They call people's attention for their complexity, mystery, pace, and aesthetic and literary potential. These productions are often found in children's books' inventories and more often awarded in national awards. Yet, they demand an attentive reading to the several languages and possibilities triggered by

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and often include information about the publication's content. Typically bellybands are a continuous loop, but can also be a strip of stock that is wrapped around a publication." Whenever bellybands are used, they come over the book's cover. Available at: AMBROSE, Gavin; HARRIS, Paul. *The Visual Dictionary of Graphic Design*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Ava Publishing, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> This is a term used in the translation from Russian into Portuguese of the work *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski*, replacing the expression "fully valid voices," present in the English translation of the same work. The translator, Paulo Bezerra, clarifies, in relation to this term: "That is, full of value, which maintains a relationship of absolute equality with other voices of discourse as participants in the great dialogue" (Bakhtin, 2013, p. 4, N. do T.). [Free translation. In Portuguese: "Isto é, plenas de valor, que mantêm com outras vozes do discurso uma relação de absoluta igualdade como participante do grande diálogo" (Bakhtin, 2013, p. 4, translator's note).]

*Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 19 (3): e64065e, July/Sept. 2024



narratives' meaning construction. Given their polysemic and polyphonic profile, picturebooks provide countless possibilities for an open and creative reading by different readers.

When it comes to the national picturebook's field, its history is quite recent and encompasses technological possibilities linked to printing and shape, to the dilution of authorship borders that separate writers from illustrators, the recognition of the designer also in the authorship of the books, to illustrators' strong profile as unique book authors, to changes in editorial logics regarding book production, which is no longer focused on or ruled by the verbal text, among other aspects. Due to these and other specificities, picturebooks' historical trajectory in Brazil does not meet that of children's literature, despite their important influence over it. Furthermore, this trajectory shines light on changes taking place in books focused on children, since this perspective was previously mostly monological. Nowadays, this trajectory is influenced by the proliferation of polyphonic books.

This historical trajectory highlights the work by artist Angela Lago, whose books explore likely associations among the object's (book) verbal, image and concreteness elements. This multimodal profile features her picturebook works and reinforces the Bakhtinian assumption that the verbal element is not isolated from the context. Accordingly, materiality and visual-graphic are also seen as voices that integrate the narrative by completing, broadening or subverting the verbal text.

Therefore, the picturebook as polyphonic object will never be over, since it allows readers to constantly dive deep into other reading layers, depending on the context they are inserted in and on aspects linked to the search for meanings. Polyphonic works are open, i.e., they leave gaps by not fully concluding the narrative. If one has this profile in mind, we can highlight the potential of picturebooks' collective reading, since they are an open window for chats, debates and for reading perspectives' diversification, as well as for broadening the very possibilities of meanings.

Contemporary picturebooks invite readers to interact with several semiotic resources and with their potential within the books' meaning and sense construction process. They are an invitation to boost creative imagination and aesthetical experiences.

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### **Statement of Author's Contribution**

We declare that the present authors, Mariana Parreira, Hilda Linhares and Mônica Correia Baptista, had full and shared participation in all four following aspects for the evaluation of article “Children’s picturebooks as cultural polyphonic object.” These aspects form the conditions for the elaboration of the aforementioned article.

1. Concept and Project, or data analysis and interpretation;
2. Manuscript writing or relevant intellectual-content critical review;
3. Final approval of the manuscript version to the published;
4. Accountability for all work aspects to ensure the accuracy and integrity of all article parts.

## Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

## Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

### Review I

By having in mind the article's interesting academic content, I have made some considerations in my Opinion that might be followed by the writer in order to contribute to the final product to be published.

In my opinion, the article introduces a very interesting discussion and deserves to be published. I recommend taking out "etc" in page 4, because the argument is quite clear, and it does not need the reader to understand "among others."

I recommend replacing "at that time," on page 5, at the beginning of the paragraph, by another clearer expression applied to the article's narrative thread, because this expression refers to a generalization of the addressed topic.

The first paragraph, on page 16, starts with "In the following image," but there is no picture to be observed by the reader.

The article addresses an important discussion about picturebooks and the polyphony they refer to, but the authors could have provided pictures to exemplify the discussion.

In case it is not possible including pictures in the article, I recommend providing links (as hypertext) to the books mentioned in the theoretical discussion section, so that readers can have access to, and better understand, what is approached. APPROVED WITH SUGGESTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on December 11, 2023.

### Review II

The authors approach a very interesting topic and contribute to different study fields, such as to children's literature, language and history of books in Brazil. The introduced historical elements ensure proper contextualization and guides the reading process by providing information linked to different authors and times within children's book

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trajectory, as well as to illustration processes in Brazil. The adopted references are appropriate and the choice for the concept of Bakhtin's polyphony was right; however, I missed a broader discussion about this concept based on examples given by the main reference, Mikhail Bakhtin. Yet, I missed approaching Bakhtin in the books' analyses. It would be interesting having some pictures of the mentioned books in order to give more density and clarity to their descriptions and analyses; besides, the first paragraph on page 16 starts with "shows blue-color prevalence in pictures of the mother with her baby." By approaching the topic about the sensations and symbols of the blue color in the design projects, Raquel Matsushita (2011, p. 211) states... "The reader does not have access to the mentioned image. I suggest review this meaning and to provide some of the commented images; yet, the writing presents lack of a comma in the reference, on page 9" (Cruz, 2012; Castanha 2012), after Nut. After some adjustments, I recommend the article's publication: deepen in polysemy and polyphony concepts by connecting it to Bakhtin; bring Bakhtin to the book analysis. APPROVED UNDER RESTRICTIONS.

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Reviewed on January 18, 2024.

### **Review III**

The requested changes were followed and the images were inserted, and the upgrades in the text analysis are now clearer and dense. Therefore, the number of pages has increased, but it was necessary in order to include the pictures, as requested. I am favorable for the publication of this new manuscript version.

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Reviewed on February 22, 2024.