

Analysis on the Children's Literature Genres Abecedarium and Limerick: The Picture Books by Edward Gorey / *Uma análise dos gêneros abecedário e limerique na literatura infantil: os livros ilustrados de Edward Gorey*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze two different genres, an abecedarium and a limerick, which are common in Children's Literature. The selected exemplars, *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* and *A Limerick*, were written by Edward Gorey. This analysis aims to identify stylistic, thematic, and rhetorical aspects in the exemplars, both in the written text and in the illustrations, through exploratory documental research and under the perspective of multimodality. As a result, traditional aspects of the genres are present in both the texts, such as the rhetorical and structural organization; while the theme is distinct because it is more tragical. However, balance between form and content in the books distances the reader and relieves the tension regarding the theme. Finally, the illustrations tell a story even when isolated from the verbal text, but they are complementary when verbal and non-verbal texts are seen as unit.

KEYWORDS: Edward Gorey; Children's Literature; Illustrated book; Verbal and Non-verbal text; Multimodality

RESUMO

Este trabalho propõe uma análise de dois gêneros comuns na literatura infantil e juvenil, o abecedário e o limerique. Os exemplares selecionados são, respectivamente, The Gashlycrumb Tinies e A Limerick, ambos escritos e ilustrados por Edward Gorey. A análise busca identificar aspectos estilísticos, temáticos e retóricos nos dois gêneros, no texto verbal e nas ilustrações, através de uma pesquisa documental exploratória, sob uma perspectiva multimodal. Em ambos os exemplares, o autor mantém elementos tradicionais dos gêneros, como a organização retórica e estrutural, mas brinca com a temática ao abordar temas trágicos. Todavia, o balanço entre a forma e o conteúdo dos textos distancia o leitor e alivia a tensão em relação ao conteúdo narrado. Por fim, as ilustrações contam uma história por si só, mas enquanto unidade, texto verbal e não verbal se complementam.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Edward Gorey; Literatura infantil e juvenil; Livro ilustrado; Texto verbal e não verbal; Multimodalidade

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Introduction

Two literary genres commonly found in Children's Literature are analyzed in this research, the abecedarium and the limerick. The models of each genre selected for this analysis are the books *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* (Gorey, 1980c) and *The Limerick* (Gorey, 1980b), which were written and illustrated by Edward Gorey (1925-2000). The aim of this analysis is to identify characteristics of the genres in the selected texts and analyze the relation between verbal and non-verbal texts in two pictures of the abecedarium and in one of the limericks in order to understand if these models follow a structure pattern, how the author's style is developed within these texts, and what the role of the illustration in each model is. Incidentally, the illustrations are not included in this article, but they can be easily recognized on the website *Goreyesque.com* through the descriptions given.

The alphabet book¹ *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* and its pictures was previously studied by the Translation Studies perspective (Micoanski, 2015), some of Edward Gorey's alphabet-books and limericks and their respective illustrations were initially studied by Júlio Plaza's Intersemiotic Translation viewpoint (Thomazine, 2019), but it analyzes a different *corpus*. Similarly, a selection of texts and illustrations by Edward Lear and Edward Gorey, including limericks and alphabet-books, are analyzed in (Granato; Bastazin, 2019; Bastazin; Granato, 2020), grounded on concepts by Sophie Van der Linden, which discusses about the interaction and interdependence relation between text and image, most of this analysis is focused in different texts and it does not emphasize the models selected for this article, though.

Considering previous studies, this documental and exploratory research (Paiva, 2019) aims to identify traditional characteristics of the genres in the selected books and to understand how the relation between verbal and non-verbal texts is, for example, if they are complementary or independent, and what impressions they express based on the book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, written by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006), and on the organization of aspects for an analysis proposed by Roséli Nascimento, Fábio Bezerra and Viviane Heberle (2011) in the article

¹ Different words might be used as synonyms for the word abecedarium, such as alphabet, alphabet book and ABCs. In this paper, they all refer to the literary genre in which an alphabetical order is used as a tool for the rhetorical structure of the text.

“Multiletramentos: iniciação à leitura de imagens” [Multiliteracy: Initiation to Reading Images].

The article is structured as follows: it begins with a brief introduction of Edward Gorey as a Children’s Literature writer; then, the *corpus*, in which characteristics of the genres limerick and alphabet are described, will be presented. After this, an exploratory analysis will be conducted, so that particularities about the author’s writing style regarding form and content can be understood. Finally, the three selected illustrations will be analyzed, two of them are in the alphabet-book and the other one is in the limerick, through a multimodality perspective, considering the concepts of representation, interaction, and composition (Kress; Leeuwen, 2006; Nascimento; Bezerra; Heberle, 2011).

The genres in the *corpus* of this analysis - alphabet and limerick - contain similar characteristics. For instance, they are classic in traditional oral Children’s Literature, they narrate short stories in form of poems, and they can be classified as *new* and *old* examples of genres at the same time because they occur in different contexts and are revived every time a writer endeavors to write them. In accordance with the title of the “Editorial” in 18.3 *Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*,² these genres are old because they have been present in the oral literature for a long time, but they are new at the same time because they are reinvented even when their formal aspects are maintained.

1 Edward Gorey and Children’s Literature

According to Ricardo Azevedo (2003), Children’s Literature is, even before any kind of classification or description, literature because it contains fiction, poetry, subjectivity, fantasy, metaphors, creative and playful use of language, and it speculates without pedagogic intentions. It may sound obvious for educators; however, children’s books can still be censored because adults consider their subject are not suitable for children³ whereas “children should have the right to play the games they want [...], to

² The title of the editorial is: The genre is always new and old at the same time [*O gênero é sempre novo e velho ao mesmo tempo*] (Brait; Pistori; Lopes-Dugnani; Stella; Gontijo, 2023).

³ An example of a book which was criticized and removed from the shelves was about Luiz Gama, published by *Companhia das Letrinhas*, in Brazil, as commented by Dirce W. Amarante, a Brazilian scholar, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2021/09/retirar-de-circulacao-livro-infantil-sobre-luiz-gama-e-fugir-da-discussao.shtml>. A more recent example is the book *O avesso da pele* [The Inside Out of the

play make-believe games to know oneself and from that, build their self-identity” (RAMOS, 2017, p. 20, translated by the author⁴).⁵ Likewise, children should be free to choose whatever they would like to read, deciding on themes, style, and genres, because reading, as well as playing, helps children increase their own individuality (Meireles, 1984).

Writer and illustrator of more than 100 books in North America, Edward Gorey became famous mainly for his drawings. He illustrated books of different writers, covers of books and cards, the introduction of a cartoon called Mystery! and settings for and adaptation of Dracula for Broadway. He was later known as a Children’s Literature author,⁶ since his books have elements that are commonly found in children’s books, e.g., children as characters, illustrations, metrical patterns, ludic verses, short narratives, and small edition books. Besides that, some details in his works might shock adults, such as the black and white pictures, settings, excentric characters, who have deep, sad or bulging eyes, wearing peculiar clothing, and monstrous characters commonly seen in horror stories. Consequently, some of the adjectives used to describe the author’s works are peculiar, absurd, mystical, and unforgettable (Loughman, p. VII). As a result, stories themed by death, neglect and violence may be banned by adults.

The classification and censorship of Gorey’s books are discussed by Angelica Micoanski Thomazine and Cláudio da Silva Oliveira (2021) when they analyze a letter written by Gorey, in which he defends that children find what was written for them besides all the labels. From Peter Hunt’s perspective (1991),⁷ people can share advises and opinions about whatever they think is good or bad, but all the reading material must be available no matter what consequences they might have. Thus, adults should only be a mediator between books and children, offering different books but allowing children decide what on their read, since a child can understand a book differently from the adult’s expectation and it is not possible to have a complete knowledge of the effects that a book

Skin] written by Jeferson Tenório. This book was aimed to be banned by means of a censorship this year (2024), as exposed in the following piece of news: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/diretora-critica-livro-o-avesso-da-pele-e-alega-vocabularios-de-tao-baixo-nivel/>.

⁴ All the texts and books published in foreign languages will be translated by the author.

⁵ In Portuguese: “A criança deveria ter o direito de brincar do que sentir vontade [...], experimentar ser outros na brincadeira para aprender a conhecer-se e ir construindo sua identidade.”

⁶ According to Bastazin and Granato (2020), Gorey did not plan to be a children’s writer, but it happened throughout the time.

⁷ HUNT, Peter. *Criticism, Theory and Children’s Literature*. Oxford: B.Blackwell, 1991.

produces on its reader (Hunt, 1991).⁸ Furthermore, Marisa Fernández López (2006) wonders if it would not be more convenient to help children to understand difficult topics through literature, such as violence, death, divorce and sickness, instead of censoring them.

Children's Literature is commonly related to pedagogical, religious or ludic purposes, but Edward Gorey, inspired by different authors, plays with traditionally pedagogical genres and create ludic versions of them. One of his inspirations is the nonsense Victorian writer Edward Lear, who also wrote fatidic limericks, alphabets, and poems (Granato e Bastazin, 2019; Thomazine, 2017).

Gorey was an eclectic collector and a great variety of pieces of art⁹ could be found in his house, which might have influenced his own work, such as the cats and children that allude Balthus pictures, the settings and private spaces for backgrounds as in Pierre Bonnard pieces, characters who seem to melt and mingle with the scenery as in the art of Édouard Vuillard, the etching, addition of fantastic events for *real* views and the themes related to madness as present in Charles Meryon artwork, the bizarre reality and the sceneries photographed by Eugène Atget, the animal shapes with overemphasized characteristics, similar to Bill Traylor's drawings (Monroe, 2018), or the ballet of George Balanchine in the pictures expressing movement (Micoanski, 2015; Greskovic, 2018).

Other inspirations might be the writings of Charles Dickens, according to Eden Lee Lackner (2015), who investigates Victorian aspects in Gorey's books in order to depict a *goreyesque* aesthetics, which might have influenced future writers and artists, such as Tim Burton and Daniel Handler. In summary, Lackner (2015) explores relations between Gorey's books and the melodrama, the pedagogical nonsense, the Gothic horror, and the detective stories. In his research, the scholar identifies the absence of certain elements in each of the genres, which distances the reader from the book and makes Gorey's style unique and distinctive when contrasting his models to traditional patterns of the genres analyzed.

Besides the books selected for the analysis proposed in this article, there are other picture books and limericks written by Edward Gorey, which will be briefly described for a general understanding. Concerning alphabet books, *The Fatal Lozenge* has quatrains

⁸ For reference, see footnote 8.

⁹ The author's house and collections were photographed by Kevin McDermott (2003) and are organized in the book *Elephant House: or, The Home of Edward Gorey*.

and alternate rhymes to narrate short tragedies in which every letter of the alphabet introduces a stereotyped character; *The Chinese Obelisks* tells about the walk of an author, and each verse starts with an alphabet letter associated with an object that pops up in the author's way and interrupts his journey somehow; *The Utter Zoo* is similar to a zoo catalogue, a creature invented by the author is present in each line, then a drawing of the creature is followed by a neologism that names it; *The Glorious Nosebleed* is an alphabet of adverbs, each line narrates briefly a scene in which the main action is described by an adverb, following an alphabetical order; *The Deadly Blotter* is a concise detective story, the lines follow an alphabetical order and has only one or two words each; similarly, *The Just Dessert*, equally short, also has lines starting in alphabetical order to tell a nonsense story which ends with a huge dessert, and *Figbash Acrobat* is a picture alphabet without verbal narrative, but all the creatures are doing acrobatics and each of them represents an alphabet letter. With regard to limericks, *The Listing Attic* has sixty illustrated limericks, and each one of them tells a different story; and *Random Walk*, which is similar to *A Limerick* because it also has only four pictures and each picture has a single line, resulting in a book of only one limerick; however, its theme is completely different and less tragic, it tells the story of a person who buys new clothing, but who makes a mistake for not calling a cab before it starts raining and ends up getting soaked.

Every book listed above has its own peculiar characteristics and are worthy of deeper analyses. However, the focus of this work is on the books *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* and *A Limerick* because they are short models, of their complicated themes – death and violence – and they are both brief narratives, which prevents the establishment of empathy for the reader (Novaković, 2022). According to Kristin L. Mcglothlin (2015), Gorey is ironic and criticizes the traditional illustrations from century XIX by offering the reader a different perspective about potentially disturbing and unsettling daily life situations involving children. *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* is an example of that, since tells how a child dies in each verse, sometimes as consequence of accidents, other times as consequence of abandonment or violence. Similarly, *A Limerick* narrates a bullying situation, and death can be inferred from the context, whereas it is not explicit in the analyzed material.

2 Edward Gorey's Abecedarium and Limerick Explorations

Literary genre are relatively stable types of utterances used in literary sphere (Bakhtin, 1986).¹⁰ Thence, some aspects are intrinsic to the genre, in its sphere, such as content, style and compositional structure. On the other hand, because they are *relatively stable*, each exemplar has its own particularities and expresses the participants', i.e., the author's, unique style. Thus, a brief review regarding the genres alphabet and limerick is stated to contextualize the genres before analyzing particularities in the selected models.

2.1 The Alphabet Book

Alphabets have pedagogical tradition because its rhetorical organization facilitates memorization due to the alphabetical order. This genre can be found in religious contexts, useful for moral and concept teaching, as in Psalms 119, in the Hebraic Bible,¹¹ or in the poem *Psalmus contra Partem Donati*, written by Santo Agostinho in 393 (Thomazine, 2019).

A diachronic review of alphabet books organized by Sara Silva e Diana Maria Martins (2016) informs they were used for religious teaching and had pedagogical purposes from the Medieval Era to XVII century. Then, in 1963, John Locke defended alphabet books should entertain children and would be helpful to teach them read. Subsequently, an edition of Aesop's fables written in English and in Latin, in the format of an alphabet book, which associated letters to animals, was published in 1963. According to Câmara Cascudo (1984), ABCs became popular during Renaissance, when Juan del Encina wrote one in Spain, and Luís de Camões wrote another one in triplets, in Portugal. Thus, alphabets have gradually become ludic texts which contain different concepts and traditions (Silva, 2019) aiming to amuse readers through illustrations, unusual typography and unique formats, which help to weaken didactic purposes, as Martha Sanjuán (2015) exposes in her research.

¹⁰ BAKHTIN, Mikhail. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp. 60-102.

¹¹ The complete Psalm 119 is available in Hebraic in <https://www.bibliaonline.com.br/acf+bhs/sl/119>. Each stanza starts with a letter of the Hebraic alphabet, which starts from the right to the left side of the page.

In summary, “alphabet-books are illustrated books whose essential function is teaching children about the letters and their association to the relevant sounds” (Sanjuán, 2015, p. 44). An Alphabet Poetics is proposed by Sanjuán (2015), who reviewed different researches about the topic, mainly in Spanish Literature, and stated that nearly all the alphabets have the same pattern: there is a standing out letter, which is associated with a picture - usually an object or an animal - whose name starts with the highlighted letter, and this letter is repeated in the following words, sentence, or verses. Similarly, Silva and Martins (2016) complement this description when they observe that the main letter might be written in upper case, while the rest of the text is in lower case letters. In addition, alphabet books can be printed as art artifacts, like a puzzle.

Different elements might be found in alphabet books and were listed by the authors: it can be ludic, it can have association strategy, humor, hyperbole, contrast, irony, parody, paradox, nonsense, ambiguity, eccentricity of characters’ physical or psychological features, rhythmmed poetic discourse, sensitive and serious content exposed through fun alphabets, connection with pictures – which attracts reader’s attention, helps with meaning, mediates verbal message, assists in characterization and complements verbal text – linguistic economy, abundance of illustrations, brevity, language conciseness, absence of sequential and causative connectors traditionally found in narratives, alliteration, assonance, association with anthroponym and onomastics and formative or didactic-pedagogical intention.

In addition, modern alphabet books might work as parodies of the functions and formats of traditional alphabets, “[...] their didactic function decreases as their diverting and aesthetic aspects increase” (Sanjuán, 2015, p. 50), as in books by Edward Lear during Victorian Era, by Gertrude Stein during the Modernism and Edward Gorey. However, diverting does not stories are happy, since horror stories can also divert, as in Gorey’s works or in *The Abhorrent Abecedarium*, by H. P. Lovecraft, for example.

The Gashlycrumb Tinies, which is analyzed in this article, is a narrative poem. It has a regular rhythm – four-beat decasyllables - and AABB rhyme scheme, which is important to the musicality that is common in oral tradition verses. All the verses start with a letter of the alphabet followed by the expression *is for* and a proper name started with the same alphabet letter, an anaphora traditionally present in alphabets because it

helps with memorization.¹² Every line of this story succinctly narrates a peculiar or tragic death of a child, without many details and in a musical way that isolates the reader, who does not feel empathy for the characters.

This book challenges boundaries between children's and adult's literature and exposes some ambiguity regarding the author's intention, who exposes a sarcastic rebellion against the idyllic view of childhood (Sanjuán, 2015). Therefore, this book is a post-modern alphabet book, and

[...] although they seem to be simple children's books, the comprehension of metafictional and ironical games, as well as their semantic ambiguity require recipients with high reading competencies who can perceive the contradictory perspectives presented in them (Sanjuán, 2015, p. 60).

Each verse has a black and white detailed illustration which can be seen online.¹³ The two first verses are: (1) *A is for Amy who fell down the stairs*; (2) *B is for Basil assaulted by bears*. The illustration of the first verse has a girl falling down the stairs on her chest, her arms are open, and it seems she is trying to stop the drop. In the background, there are wood made lined Victorian style stairs, textures detailed hatched by Gorey. The white girl is carefully outlined and wears a white dress; this whiteness stands her out of the stairs and of her own shadow, which is stained in the background. The description of her fall is also depicted in the illustration because of her position and some other details, such as her open arms, her misaligned legs off the ground, as well as her fluttering dress and its sleeves. Details like these ones are common in Gorey's illustrations and represents movement (Wilkin, 2009), as snapshots in Photography (Benjamin, 2008).¹⁴ According to Fernanda Marques Granato e Vera Bastazin (2019), who are supported by Liden, the described scene represents the exact instant of the action.

¹² Anaphora is a repetition in the beginning of a sentence, for example when we are spelling a name or an unusual word by phone, or when children repeat letters associating them to everyday use objects, such as A is for apple...; B is for ball..., during literacy development.

¹³ As stated in the Introduction, the illustrations are available on the website: <http://www.goreyesque.com/gorey-images> and they can be identified through the description given in this text.

¹⁴ Benjamin, Walter. Little History of Photography. In: *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008.

The illustration of the second verse has a boy as protagonist, who is in open field. The character is centered in the illustration, between two big bears. One of the bears is standing its paw and its snout is also pointing the boy, as if it was heading towards him. The child, wearing a dark sailor suit style clothing, seems to move slowly, lifting one of his feet and bending his body. His face, drawn in thin line, is highlighted in the picture, and express movement, as if he were looking back.

Each verse, combined with its illustration, seems to narrate a single story, since it has a single character, scenery, and actions. The alphabet order is the main link between the narrative verses; therefore, they can be read as if they were isolated, or as a sequence of scenes belonging to the same story; in fact, they depend on this sequence to be classified as an alphabet book.

2.2 The Limerick

The limerick is also an oral popular genre common in English Language Literature. It has been known in Brazil because some translations have been published and because of the publishing of writers such as Sousândrade, Lispector and Mattoso, besides César Obeid and Tatiane Belinky, in Children's Literature. Different scholars (Tigges, 1987; Ávila, 1995; Amarante, 2006; Bastazin; Granato, 2020) have studied this genre, which is a short narrative poem in a fixed form: five verses and AABBA rhymes; each A verse has three beats and each B verses, which can be visually organized in a single or in two lines, have two beats.

There are two main kinds of limericks in terms of content, the obscene and the comic ones. The second type is present in Children's Literature, as expected, and Edward Lear is one of the most important names in this field with his book *A book of nonsense*. Another example of comic limericks are the ones written by Edward Gorey; they are darker and more tragic, though.

In order to detail limerick form and themes, Wim Tigges (1987) compares it to sonnet. According to the author, the fixed form of a sonnet, its rhythm, rhymes, meter, themes, such as love, beauty, and the metaphors, are all used to signal love, while the fixed form in the limerick is its verbal art apex, but themes include character's physical, behavioral and emotional imperfection elicitation through the literal meaning of words.

In 1973, the writer published the book *A Limerick*, which has only one limerick, indeed. Each page of this book has a verse of the poem and an illustration, but the B rhyme verses are placed on a single line, so the whole book has four pages instead of five.¹⁵ A particular characteristic in Gorey's short poems is that the narratives are enigmatic and the climax is placed in the last verse.¹⁶ However, because it is a concise genre, details, explanations, or the character's reasonings, are not exposed, so the reader is limited to the short narrative and the illustrations.

A Limerick is a story about a bullied boy called *Zooks*. In the first verse: *Little Zooks, of whom no one was fond*, it is explicit that nobody liked the boy, a fact that is reinforced by the illustrations, which complements the misfortunes of the story. In summary, the second verse tells other kids launched him over a roof; the third and fourth verses describe his journey and tell he went over a rectory, and the last verse mentions his fall into a pond full of lilies. Besides the delicate theme, the exaggeration is one of the reasons for humor, since it extrapolates reality boundaries (Propp, 2009).¹⁷ Both verbal and non-verbal texts present exaggeration in different moments, as in the children's strength when they launch the protagonist, also in the distance and height of the launching, or in the quantity of lilies in the pond.

In the first illustration,¹⁸ three big kids are pulling the main character to a human slingshot. The fact of having three children working together might justify the strength of the launch; however, even three children are not enough for that long journey, which helps with the absurdity of the story. In the second illustration, the boy is in the sky, as if he were flying over the roof of a wood cabin where a woman cares for a baby, which can be seen in the window of the cabin. This cabin has a pointed wood carved decoration on the gable, like a branch, which causes tension on the reader, who may think the boy will get trapped. However, the next illustration shows that nothing bad happens to the boy and he keeps the journey, flying over a chapel. Ironically, this chapel has a pointed iron crucifix, its arms look like arrows, so the fear of having the boy hurt is back. Through the chapel

¹⁵ As previously mentioned, the book *Random Walk* has the same kind of structure of *A Limerick*.

¹⁶ It differs his work from Lear's limericks, for example, because Lear's last verses repeat the idea of the first verses, which makes the poem circular.

¹⁷ PROPP, Vladimir. *On the Comic and Laughter*. Translated by Paul Perron and Patrick Debbèche. North York, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

¹⁸ The illustration of the first verse of this book can also be found on the website <http://www.goreyesque.com/gorey-images>

window, we can see a priest reading some sheets and drinking tea, so it is possible to observe how the adults' routines are not influenced by the launching of the boy in the second and third illustrations because nobody seems to realize the main situation is happening. Finally, after the reader feels relieved for the absence of the cross accident, there is the last misfortune: the fall in the lily-choked pond.

In the verbal text, the adjective *little*, in the first verse, is important for the narrative because it exposes the boy's fragility at the same time it justifies the launch distance: if the boy were not little, all the journey narrated would not be possible indeed.

The descriptions in the narrative, along with the illustrations, help us understand Edward Gorey's limerick style. This story has tension because of its delicate theme involving children and a tragic ending. The last verse has the narrative climax, but there is not any denouement. The lack of denouement, conjointly by the lack of details, the exaggeration and the short form of the limerick, distance the reader from the scenes. Consequently, tension is relieved and enables humor, as it is common in comic limericks and as it is with the Nonsense (Tigges, 1987; Thomazine, 2019; Novaković, 2022).

3 Illustrations: Intersemiotic Translation and Multimodality

As previously discussed, the illustrations in the works analyzed complement the meaning of the verbal text, albeit the picture can express meaning and is representational independently of the written text, as defended by Maria Angélica Melendi (1997). On one hand, if the relation between illustration and verbal text is analyzed under the Translation Studies perspective, one can be considered the rewriting of the other. Thus, two different kinds of language have the same level of importance, but they are not equivalent, as argued by Then, two different kinds of language are alongside, but they are not equivalent, in a Nilce Maria Pereira (2008).

On the other hand, Gorey's picture books can be seen as a unit in which verbal and non-verbal text work as one single text and, at the same time, there is certain independence between these codes. In this case, the text is multimodal (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006), which means they have two or more semiotic codes to establish

meaning.¹⁹ “To generalize, pictorial elements can receive stronger or weaker ‘stress’ than other elements in their immediate vicinity, and so become more or less important ‘items of information’ in the whole” (Kress; Leeuwen, 2006, p. 176).

Nascimento, Bezerra and Heberle (2011) believe the development of reading skills of multimodal texts needs to be conscious, so they summarize the main concepts and categories developed by Kress e Leeuwen (2006) to analyze meaning of images and of multimodal texts. Three main meanings are discussed: *representation, interaction, and composition*, which will guide the analysis of the three selected pictures.

In the *representation meaning*, Gorey’s illustrations are *narrative*, because they “[...] build and experience as an event that occurs in space and in time, i.e., they depict participants performing actions at other participants or involved ones in the event” (Nascimento; Bezerra; Heberle, 2011, p. 534).²⁰

In the first picture of the alphabet (hereafter referred to as picture 1), the character Amy falls from the stairs with open arms, which shows movement. In the background, the stairs are very detailed in black and white. In the second picture, (hereafter referred to as picture 2), the participants are a boy called Basil and two bears, which are about to assault him. The action is represented by the raising paw of one of the bears, by the snout of one of the bears pointing to the boy, the boy slightly raising his left foot, as if he were planning to escape from the dangerous situation, and by the boy’s look, expressing melancholy. The action happens in an open field, possibly at nightfall; detailed sceneries in black and white that guides the reader about time and space are common in Gorey’s illustrations. In the third illustration of the *corpus* (hereafter referred to as picture 3), a pattern can be seen: the background is made of a clear scenery, which guides us about time and space, it is daytime and there is grass, they are probably in a park. Regarding to the participants, the main character is in a human launcher while three other kids are lined up, joining forces, to launch the boy.

The *representation meaning* may include *actional, reactional, mental, and verbal processes*. There are *actional* processes in pictures 1 and 3, in the approximation of the

¹⁹ To analyze the *corpus* of this research under the multimodality perspective, the illustrations will be described, and they are available on the website mentioned in footnote 14. The illustrations were not included in this paper because of copyright rules.

²⁰ In Portuguese: “[...] constroem a experiência como um evento que se desencadeia no espaço e no tempo, isto é, retratam participantes realizando ações sobre outros participantes ou envolvidos em acontecimentos” (Nascimento; Bezerra; Heberle, 2011, p. 534).

bear and in the line of children holding the protagonist Zooks. Picture 2 has a non-transactional process, because the character suffers the action alone. However, the *processes of reaction* in pictures 1 and 3 are *non-transactional*, since the reader cannot see what the characters are looking at. Picture 2 has a *transactional reaction*, though, because the bears face the character, who looks backwards. There are not *mental* or *verbal processes* in these pictures.

Images can also have *interactive meaning* between the picture participants and the reader. For instance, Basil, the character in picture 2, seems to eye contact the reader when he is looking backwards; it seems he might be asking for help. On the other hand, there is not any eye contact between characters and reader in pictures 1 and 3; otherwise, the main characters in those pictures seem to look the other way, which gives us the impression they are aware of their final destiny. Another way to have interactive meaning is through social distance. In this case, the illustrations are medium shot, which does not approximate the reader, so it enables text distancing and tension relief.

Characters attitude also represent interactive meaning, as the oblique angle of characters in pictures 1 and 3, which reinforces the distancing to the reader. Nonetheless, the attitude of the boy in picture 2, approximates the reader, because, besides he is backwards, he is looking back. Finally, concerning the *power representations*, picture 1 has low angle, which places the character in a powered position, while the girl is still on the top of the stairs. This angle changes throughout the fall; consequently, the power representation would also be altered. The opposite is found in picture 2 due to the fact that the boy is smaller than the bears, which intensifies his fragility and represents a high angle. Nevertheless, in picture 3 there is an eye-level angle, which express equality regarding power relations.

The *composition meaning* can be understood as the description of “[...] the organization of elements represented in the picture according to the space they occupy in the picture or in the multimodal page” (Nascimento; Bezerra; Heberle, 2011, p. 54, translated by the author).²¹ Within this function, three main elements are observed: *information value, framing and salience*.

²¹ In Portuguese: “[...] organização dos elementos representados na imagem conforme o espaço que ocupam no todo da imagem ou da página multimodal” (Nascimento; Bezerra; Heberle, 2011, p. 54).

The *information value* is related to the page layout, but before detailing this aspect, it is important to state that in the first publication of each book there was only one picture and verse in each page. Later, Gorey's works were organized in anthologies (1980a; 1980b; 1980c), in which the pictures and verses have a different layout, placing more than a picture and a verse on the same page to publish cheaper editions. In the anthology *Amphigorey*, the alphabet *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* has two pictures and their respective verses on each page, vertically, while *A Limerick*, included in the anthology *Amphigorey Too*, has all the four pictures and their verses on one single page. Consequently, the content regarding the *information value* is different depending on the edition selected. Since this article aims to analyze only a part of the books, we will consider the organization of the first printing – a single picture and verse on each page. Considering this, a pattern can be identified, since the verse is always placed below the picture, i.e., a top-bottom arrangement.

According to Michel Foucault (2008),²² there is always a subordinating relation among elements organized on a page, which establishes hierarchy. Therefore, verses are subordinated to pictures in the models analyzed. Nascimento, Bezerra and Heberle (2011), in accordance with Kress and Leeuwen (2006), state an element placed below another one specifies the above one by introducing it or giving details about it. In the models analyzed, the reader might spend some time reading the picture, since it is on the top of the page, before reading the verse.

With respect to framing, the picture is separated from the text through a white area, which works as a boundary (Foucault, 2008) and strengthen the independence between the two languages (verbal and non-verbal). Some elements are highlighted in the pictures, mainly because of proportion and black-and-white contrast. In Picture 1, Amy is all white, including her body and clothing, and drawn in thin lines, so she is highlighted from the dark background. In picture 2, the size of the bears is contrasted to the shortness of the character in terms of proportion, which intensifies the tension in this scene. Similarly to picture 1, the whiteness on the boy's face drawn in thin lines expresses innocence and fragility, which reinforces the tragical elements of the narrative. Finally,

²² FOUCAULT, Michel. *This Is Not a Pipe*. Translated by James Harkness. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008.

picture 3 also has contrast in relation to proportion and shade, because the protagonist is shorter than the other children and has a white face in thin lines.

Conclusion

The writer and Illustrator Edward Gorey plays with different genres and themes. Regarding genres, he is meticulous about form, but audacious about themes. Based on that, the books *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* and *A Limerick* are two examples of how old genres are reinvented according to the author's style.

Tragic death and other usually avoided subjects in Children's Literature represent Gorey's style, as well as humor through exaggeration and the use of words in their literal meaning. All these aspects can cause discomfort to the reader, and probably disturb adults who believe children's books must contain only pedagogical references or have beautiful stories; however, the form of the genres analyzed helps to distance the reader and results in more ludic texts.

In addition, the books are illustrated by Gorey, who always writes the narratives before illustrating them. As a result, we could consider his stories are told twice: first in the written text, then in the pictures, which can be analyzed as intersemiotic translation, on one hand, or as a unit, on the other hand, in which both verbal and non-verbal texts work together despite they have different semantic content. Based on this second perspective, elements on the page are related, and the composition of the pictures, namely the way how picture elements are organized, influences on meaning. In conclusion, reading a picture book means reading the illustration, its nuances, contrasts, movements, and features, i.e. meaning is essentially found in all these aspects.

Finally, this study urges an analysis about the relation between verbal and non-verbal in picture books through different perspectives, or in different books written by Gorey. In addition, analyses of other models of alphabet books and limericks written by the author could be developed, as well as comparative analyses of his artistic style to other artists or writers.

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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

I reviewed the article “Analysis on the Children’s Literature Genres Abecedarium and Limerick: the Picture Books by Edward Gorey” with a lot of interest, attention and curiosity.

In general, it is a serious and meritorious work, it is original and results in a valid contribution to the knowledge area/field in which it belongs.

The proposed topic is developed coherently and well-supported. The research question shows a wide knowledge of important bibliography. However, there are some lacks in this respect. Referring, for instance, the following bibliography, in our point of view, might contribute for a deeper approach of the theme:

- a) About alphabets or alphabet-books:
 - Marta Sanjuán Álvarez, “Illustrated alphabet-books as aesthetic and literary ‘artifacts’: An approach to its poetics” January 2015 DOI: 10.18239/ocnos-2015.14.04
 - <https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/62174>
 - <https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/65992>
- b) About Edward Gorey, for example:

- Kevin Shortsleeve, “Edward Gorey, Children's Literature, and Nonsense Verse,” in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Volume 27, Number 1, Spring 2002, pp. 27-39

- a) - “A Melancholy Meditation on the False Millennium: Time, nonsense, and humour in the works of Edward Gorey” – disponível em https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nikola-Novakovic-4/publication/366267320_A_Melancholy_Meditation_on_the_False_Millenniu_m_Time_nonsense_and_humour_in_the_works_of_Edward_Gorey/links/639b53e6e42fa

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 19 (3): e64217e, July/Sept. 2024

[a7e75c_____58d36/A-Melancholy-Meditation-on-the-False-Millennium-Time-nonsense-and-humour-in-the-works-of-Edward-Gorey.pdf](#)

The work would be even more consistent if a succinct approach of the aspects which approximate or distance the selected author's literary/artistic works to other contemporary authors (namely, regarding the literature potentially written for children). Another aspect to reconsider would be a more objective and systematic reference to the aspects which make Gorey's alphabets and limericks unique in comparison to different models of the same kind.

An aspect that needs improvement is the punctuation, and, also, the proper use of some words. A detailed language revision is needed.

After a review of these aspects, the article could be published.

APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on February 01, 2024.

Review III

The reviewed version of the article is in accordance with the suggestions previously given, which resulted in expiation and refinement (bibliographical, for example) of the relevant aspects. Therefore, the remarks were fulfilled. APPROVED

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