

**Contemporary Literature for Children and Youngsters: Plural
Space(s) / *A literatura contemporânea para crianças e jovens: espaço(s)
plural(is)***

What was essentially a linguistic unit 100 years ago has now become primarily a visual unit. The page is no longer, as it was predominantly in the 19th century, simply a convenient division for the purposes of printing. In Western culture, it is increasingly looked upon as a textual unit in its own right.

Anthony Baldry e Paul J. Thibault

Baldry and Thibault summarize the current situation of readers in the early 21st century. With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, which incorporate a variety of languages, from verbal text and images to music and sounds, literary texts have not remained unimodal.

When considering a piece of literary work, we would generally think only of a skillfully crafted text, composed of words and phrases organized in a linear way to represent characters, actions, spaces, times, thoughts, and feelings, but this is no longer current. The texture and weight of the paper, the colors, the layout, the typography, and even the presence of illustrations have taken on a narrative role, requiring us to analyze not only the words but also the page itself (and the work as a whole) in its material manifestation.

We are, therefore, faced with what Rojo (2016) calls multimodal texts, that is, texts composed of different languages (modes, semioses) that “require practical skills for understanding and producing each one of them (multiliteracies) to attribute meaning” (Rojo, 2016, p. 19).¹ In other words, as explained by Hallet, “being multimodally literate would therefore be defined as the ability to decipher, encode and ‘read’ various semiotic modes and their combination in a single act of representation or communication” (Hallet, 2018, p. 04).

¹ In Portuguese: “exigem habilidades práticas de compreensão e produção de cada uma delas (multiletramentos) para atribuição de significado.”

In the digital age, we are constantly exposed to multimodal texts. However, although their understanding occurs in a somewhat intuitive way in everyday life - in which each image suggests other ideas and each text recalls certain images so that multimodality appears to be an “instinctive” cognitive process in the attribution of meanings -, reading multimodal literary texts requires more careful attention and involvement from the reader.

Attention and involvement are necessary because, as Hallet highlights, “readers of multimodal fiction must be literate in every sign system that is part of the novelistic narrative in question, *i.e.*, they must be able to decode and apprehend the meaning of the specific mode that is presented” (2018, p. 28). Furthermore, the reader needs to be able to read the diverse compositional languages of the object synergistically, relating and integrating them, since, as Hallet teaches us, referring to multimodal novels, “only a full integration of all of the modes in a holistic apprehension (or interpretation) of the novel is an appropriate way of reading multimodal fictions” (2018, p. 29), a reflection that can be extended to other discursive genres. In other words, reading goes beyond simple decoding; The reader is required to interpret, which implies not only perceiving the compositional languages of the text but, mainly, carefully considering how these languages present themselves and relate to each other in the process of producing meanings.

It is evident, therefore, that the reader does not play a passive role. When faced with reading a multimodal literary text, one is not only expected to observe or describe the semiotic resources. “Different from the linear reading of monomodal texts, multimodal materials require the processing of more than one mode and the recognition of interconnections between these modes” (Eisenmann & Summer, 2020, p. 57), which means that images, colors, typography, layout, paper quality, together with information from the verbal text, are important elements for building global coherence in reading, carrying values and, therefore, demanding specific skills.

Each reader, therefore, is like a co-author, as they recognize the reading process as an active interaction. They are invited to interpret the text based on their repertoire and horizon of expectations, both of which play a crucial role in interpretation. This is because

a work never presents itself, not even at the moment it appears, as an absolute novelty, in an information gap, rather predisposing its

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audience to a very specific form of reception, through information, somewhat obvious signs, familiar signs, or implied references. It evokes works already read, places the reader in a certain emotional situation, and creates, right from the beginning, expectations regarding the ‘middle and end’ of the work which, as the reading progresses, can be preserved or altered, reoriented or even ironically disrespected, according to certain rules of the game regarding the genre or type of text (Jauss, 1993, pp. 66-67).²

When it comes to multimodal works, the situation becomes even more complex and challenging. The game played with the repertoire and horizon of expectations of the reader is not limited only to the verbal plane, but it also extends to the visual and graphic ones, allowing readers to review and rethink their beliefs, assimilated principles, and learned ideas, which, in turn, expands the act of interpreting.

It is this type of literary composition and the demands implied by its reading that we address here. Given the wealth of contemporary literary production aimed primarily at children and young readers – on the international scene and, especially, in Brazil – there are many studies directed at it, which is clearly reflected in this issue of *Bakhtiniana*, to which many submissions were addressed. In this volume, we have brought together a set of articles that, in addition to highlighting the different compositional languages of books for children and youngsters, point to the effects of meaning generated from their multimodal composition, establishing a close dialogue with the contemporary context.

The voices of the researchers gathered here, from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, highlight, observe, and analyze multimodal works for children and youngsters in which the literary text establishes relationships with other arts, media, and codes and, consequently, its implications in terms of narrative, materiality, and design. Some of the texts also discuss how this production contributes to the formation of more critical and reflective readers.

Claudia Sousa Pereira, from Universidade de Évora, Portugal, writes “Reading with the Body, Writing on the Skin: a Case of Blast over with Literature, Illustration,

² In Portuguese: “uma obra não se apresenta nunca, nem mesmo no momento em que aparece, como uma absoluta novidade, num vácuo de informação, predispondo antes o seu público para uma forma bem determinada de recepção, através de informações, sinais mais ou menos manifestos, indícios familiares ou referências implícitas. Ela evoca obras já lidas, coloca o leitor numa determinada situação emocional, cria, logo desde o início, expectativas a respeito do ‘meio e do fim’ da obra que, com o decorrer da leitura, podem ser conservadas ou alteradas, reorientadas ou ainda ironicamente desrespeitadas, segundo determinadas regras de jogo relativamente ao género ou ao tipo de texto.”

Editing and Tattoo Inside.” Starting from the tattoo space – familiar to young people – and inspired by the principle of blast over – which consists of using the spaces between tattoos to insert new ones without hiding or disguising the previous ones – the researcher proposes an analysis of the book *Coração com estrela-do-mar dentro* [Heart with Starfish Inside], written by Filipe Homem Fonseca, in 2019. The concept of blast over becomes, in this article, an object of investigation within the scope of literary reading, with a pragmatic approach. Starting with the exploration of the book/object, which gives significant prominence to the illustrations created by death_by_pinscher, Claudia Sousa Pereira analyzes it by building a dialogue between the text and the graphic design of the book, undertaking a global reading that highlights the capacity for involving young readers with this text based on tattoos – a common form of expression in the contemporary context.

Next, in “A Testament Immortalized in Scarlet Letters: Literariness, Materiality, and Illustration in *A verdadeira história de Chapeuzinho Vermelho* [*The True Story of Little Red Riding Hood*] (2020)” Lucas Silvério Martins and Silvana Augusta Barbosa Carrijo, both from the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), analyze the book/object *The True Story of Little Red Riding Hood*, by Agnese Baruzzi and Sandro Natalini. In their text, the researchers investigate the characteristics of the work that promote its aesthetic-literary appreciation, exploring, for this, the particularities of the verbal and visual text and the material elements that permeate the work, highlighting the techniques, tools, and interactions proposed, as well as its multimodal potential.

Roberta Gerling Moro and Edgar Roberto Kirchof, the former from the Universidade Luterana do Brasil (ULBRA) and the latter from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), explore a very current theme – the potential of Virtual Reality technology in creating and adapting stories aimed at children and teenagers, focusing specifically on its usage. In “Virtual Reality, Literature and Education: Immersive Narratives for Children and Young Adults” researchers examine narratives in Virtual Reality and their intersection with the field of children’s literature, exploring 360° videos aimed at young audiences and approaches to reading and involvement that arise from its particularities. Moro and Kirchof discuss the main challenges brought by this form of media to the appreciation of immersive works, using the analysis of the production *Invasion!*, created by the Baobab studio. It is evident, through investigation,

how both the production and reception of narratives in Virtual Reality require management of the vision and attentional focus of the observer, taking into consideration the reading protocols already learned and automated through other media.

Next, Diana Navas and Luara Teixeira de Almeida from Pontifícia Univeridade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) write “Literary Words and Images: Approximations between Comic Books and Picturebooks.” In this article, the researchers, based on their reading of *In the Night Kitchen* (2014), by Maurice Sendak, and *Are We There Yet?* (2016), by Dan Santat, highlight the similarities and differences between two types of literary works that combine verbal and visual languages – illustrated books and comic books –, demonstrating how the dissolution of boundaries between these productions points to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the literary phenomenon in a contemporary setting.

“Analysis on the Children’s Literature Genres Abecedarium and Limerick: The Picture Books by Edward Gorey,” written by Angelica Micoanski Thomazine, from the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), in turn, proposes the reading of *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* and *A Limerick*, both written and illustrated by Edward Gorey (1925-2000). In her analysis, the researcher identifies stylistic, thematic, and rhetorical aspects in both genres, in the verbal text and the illustrations, elucidating how, in both works, the author maintains traditional elements of the genres, such as the rhetorical and structural organization, but “plays” with the theme by addressing tragic matters.

“Children’s Picturebook as Polyphonic Cultural Object” was written by Mariana Parreira Lara do Amaral and Mônica Correia Baptista, from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), alongside Hilda Aparecida Linhares da Silva, from Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF). In this article, through a brief historical journey, the researchers rescue the formation of the identity of the illustrated book as a multifaceted cultural object, highlighting how, in the contemporary production of illustrated books, the dialogue between text and reader is enriched by the presence of different semiosis, through which multiple voices express themselves and, consequently, expand meanings. Undertaking the reading of works by Angela Lago based on the concept of polyphony by Bakhtin, the researchers reflect on the illustrated book as a multimodal composition – contrasting it with a type of moralizing children’s literature – and which, due to its

polysemic and polyphonic character, offers countless open and creative reading possibilities for children and young readers.

“Postmodern Experimentation in Anthony Browne’s Picturebooks: the Reinvention of a Canon in Children’s Literature” is the contribution brought by Carina Rodrigues, from the Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa and Ana Isabel Pinto, from the Escola Superior de Educação from Viana do Castelo. The study addresses how the narrative of Anthony Browne – a renowned British artist – plays a significant role in the formation of this privileged segment of contemporary children’s literature, whose narrative is constructed from the triad of text, image, and media. Starting from concepts such as intertextuality and metafiction – fundamental strategies in the writing of this specific author – the formal, rhetorical, stylistic, and thematic aspects of his work are analyzed, through a reading that dialogues with the verbal and visual elements, paying attention to the demands for the reception of his production, as well as the impact on the literary, critical and reflective education of his preferred readers.

Subsequently, “Contributions of Semiotics of Culture as a Reading Approach to *O Reino Encantado dos Pôneis 4D* [The Enchanted Reign of the Ponies 4D],” brings us the reflections by Sandra Takakura, from the Universidade Estadual do Pará (UEPA), on 4D books, that is, children’s books with augmented reality that allow the user/reader to visualize the world while interacting in real time with digital images, providing an interactive experience. Based on the notion of semiosphere, a concept developed by Lotman (1990) in analogy to the biosphere, and which can help to understand the topology of real and virtual worlds, known as the real and virtual subsemiospheres, both contained within the larger semiosphere of the Brazilian culture, the researcher demonstrates how in 4D books, such as *O Reino Encantado dos Pôneis 4D*, the elements of the virtual subsemiosphere are inserted into the real one, crossing and diluting its borders.

Patrícia Cardoso Batista and Sheila Oliveira Lima, both from the Universidade Estadual de Londrina, alongside Ângela Balça, from the Universidade de Évora, dedicate themselves to reflecting on the formation of young literary readers. In “Reading Education for Brazilian and Portuguese Youngsters: Supports, Works, and Authors” based on data from a survey conducted with youngsters from both countries, the researchers have identified the textual media used for literary reading, as well as the most

read authors and works by this audience, reflecting on the influences that shape these choices.

Also from the perspective of discussing the formation of young readers, Camila Alves de Melo, from the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), and Marília Forgearini Nunes, from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in “(Re)Approaching the Education of Young Readers: Formats, Convergences, and Transpositions Associated with Literature” present statistical data on reading among young people aged 11 to 17, considering what it means to read literature in the 21st century. In addition to discussing the transition from printed books to reading on screens, without adopting an exclusive view or defending one format as superior to another, the researchers emphasize the importance of mediating reading in a way that is open to the different media and ways that digital information and communication technologies offer, highlighting how the fact that young people are reading in various ways can be better used in the process of training literary readers.

“The Multimodality Approach in Planning Mediation Situations for Digital Literary Works: A Case Study at GRETEL,” an article written by researchers Giselly Lima de Moraes, from the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), and Martina Fittipaldi, from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), focuses on a pressing research question – multimodality in digital works and its mediation. It examines the approaches adopted by teachers participating in a research project dedicated to creating educational resources to deal with multimodality in digital fiction, to interpret multimodal elements, and the interpretative challenges associated with this process. Based on concepts from the fields of multimodality, intermediality, and digital fiction, they have proposed to analyze video recordings of meetings in which teachers discuss works, highlighting the challenges inherent to new forms of narrative provided by the digital medium.

Rosana Nunes Alencar, from the Universidade Federal de Rondônia (UNIR), and Milena Magalhães, from the Universidade Federal do Sul da Bahia (UFSB), contribute, in turn, with reflections around representation in the dialogue between verbal and visual language. In “‘Love Is What Love Does’ — Stories of Representation and Belonging in Hair Love, by Matthew A. Cherry,” the authors examine how the children’s literature book *Hair Love*, written by the African American director, producer, and writer Matthew

A. Cherry, addresses the issue of the representation of curly hair as an element of ethnic-racial identity. The researchers highlight how the interaction between verbal language and visual language, created by illustrator Vashti Harrison, also an African American, symbiotically uses recurring images to affirm the beauty of black children, highlighting family relationships.

Finally, “To Read and to Feel: The Multimodal Representation of Emotions in Digital Children’s Literature,” written by Aline Frederico, from University of São Paulo (USP), ends the volume with another contribution regarding digital literature. The researcher examines how digital literature introduces new ways of providing an aesthetic and emotional experience for children, reflecting on emotion and affectivity in digital literature based on the analysis of three literary applications aimed at children: *Little Red Riding Hood*, from the producer Nosy Crow, *The Monster at the End of This Book*, by Jon Stone and Michael Smollin, and *Hat Monkey*, by Chris Haughton. The analysis reveals how different semiotic resources are used to represent emotions and create emotional tension for young readers, highlighting the importance of corporeality and the intrinsic connection between bodies and emotional experience.

From tattoos to art books, from printed books to virtual reality, to 4D books and digital literature, from canonical literature to adaptations, from illustrated books to comics, alphabet books, and limericks – it is self-evident that the contemporary literary production focused on children and youngsters presents itself as plural and, in the same way, the perspectives for undertaking their reading and research are many. This is what this issue of *Bakhtiniana* reflects: plural readings, coming from the perspectives and reflections of 23 researchers from different universities located from the North to the South of our country – UEPA- Pará; UNIR – Rondônia; UFBA and UFSB – Bahia; UFG – Goiás, UFMG and UFJF – Minas Gerais; USP and PUC-SP, São Paulo; UEL – Paraná; ULBRA, UFSM and UFRGS – Rio Grande do Sul, – and also from outside of it – three in Portugal: Universidade de Évora, Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa and Escola Superior de Educação de Viana do Castelo; and one in Spain: Universidade Autònoma de Barcelona. Based on a widely expanding literature, especially in qualitative terms, and built from the synergy of different languages, the issue hopes to contribute decisively to the formation of new readers, researchers, and educators.

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