

Metaliterary Experiences in Children's Books: Acts of Creative Reading and Writing /

Experiências metaliterárias nos livros para crianças: exercícios de criação na leitura e na escrita

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses metaliterary experiences of reading and creation in Brazilian editorial production for children, both by national and international writers, with the picturebook serving as the primary genre. It analyses the books *Alice no telhado* by Nelson Cruz (Edições SM, 2011), *Pinóquio: o livro das pequenas verdades* by Alexandre Rampazo (Boitatá, 2019), and *Robinson* by Peter Sis (Companhia das Letrinhas, 2019), using the concepts of metaliterary experiences (Bértolo, 2014) and picturebook (Sipe, 1998; Van Der Linden, 2011; Nikolajeva e Scott, 2011). It concludes that metaliterary experiences serve as an invitation to read and reflect about books and literature as a cultural heritage that is expanded and reinvented over time and space, both individually and collectively.

KEYWORDS: Children's literature; Metaliterary experiences; Picturebook

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RESUMO

O artigo se dedica a discutir as experiências metaliterárias de leitura e de criação na produção editorial para crianças no Brasil, tanto de autores nacionais, quanto de estrangeiros em livros traduzidos, tendo como gênero principal para tal o livro ilustrado. Toma como objeto de análise os livros *Alice no telhado*, de Nelson Cruz, *Pinóquio: o livro das pequenas verdades*, de Alexandre Rampazo, e *Robinson*, de Peter Sís, apresentando suas narrativas e as que originalmente os inspiraram e analisando-os à luz dos conceitos de experiências metaliterárias e de trama leitora (BÉRTOLO, 2014) e de livro ilustrado (SIPE, 1998; VAN DER LINDEN, 2011; NIKOLAJEVA; SCOTT, 2011). Conclui que as experiências metaliterárias se mostram convite para ler e para pensar o universo literário e livresco, individual e coletivamente, como bem cultural que se prolonga e se reinventa no tempo e no espaço.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura infantil; Experiências metaliterárias; Livro ilustrado.

1 Introduction

The creation and publishing of books for children is increasingly inventive all over the world, both in terms of subjects covered, diversity of authorship, and editorial features. Year after year, we find books aimed at children with remarkable sophistication and aesthetic experimentation, demonstrating the breadth and strength of such production.

One of the most prominent trends in this scenario has been the creation of books that take place as a reinvention, with a certain tone of tribute, of literary works deemed classics. These are not retellings or adaptations, but rather new narratives in which the classics serve as inspiration and objects of admiration, demonstrating how influential they were in writers' literary formation.

Such works frequently combine text and images in an interdependent connection, resulting in hybrid narratives that also take the space of the pages and the materiality of the book. Because the narrative force is realised through the synergy of multiple languages, these qualities, which are distinctive of the genre "picturebook", invite a unique reading experience. Although ubiquitous in the current publishing market, the genre is yet little explored by teachers, librarians, and reading mediators, both in classrooms and libraries, if we take into account its formal particularities and potentialities.

Given the circulation of such books in Brazilian libraries, schools, and bookstores, we propose a reflection on metaliterary experiences, contemplating both reading and creation, in the editorial field for children, including national books and translations. As an example, we examine three works published in the county: *Alice no telhado* [Alice on the roof], by Nelson Cruz (SM, 2011), *Pinóquio: o livro das pequenas verdades* [Pinocchio: the book of small truths], by Alexandre Rampazo (Boitatá, 2019) and *Robinson*, by Peter Sís (Cia. das Letrinhas, 2019).

First, we introduce Bértolo's (2014) idea of metaliterary experiences, looking for parallels with some elements found in the selected titles. Then, we discuss the concept of picturebook,

highlighting that metaliterary experiences find strong reception and creative potential in the genre, as demonstrated by the titles of Cruz (2011), Rampazo (2019) and Sís (2019). Finally, we address the conditions for metaliterary experiences from the standpoint of reading, considering the demands that manifest as requirements for a comprehensive reading experience.

2 Metaliterary experiences: acts of reading and creation

There are several viewpoints on how to approach reading and, by extension, readers. Various theories and schools of thought handle the topic, in dialogue with multidisciplinary scientific fields. Some place more emphasis on cultural history and pedagogy, while others focus on linguistics, social sciences, psychoanalysis, literary studies, and so on. Many are the avenues for investigating, reflecting and applying the theme.

In this paper, we understand reading as a social, cultural and historical practice. An intellectual exercise in which subjects engage in literate culture based on their experience and prior knowledge and utilising language abilities. Readers appropriate the narrative elements present in a book (or any other reading material) during the reading process in order to grasp the meaning of the work and understand the process itself. Evidently, when it comes to children, their particularities must be taken into account, without excluding them from the aforementioned experiences.

When confronted with a word's polysemy, for example, a small child realises the various possibilities of language and begins to rely on a wider and more complex linguistic repertoire to comprehend, organise, and explore the world. Similarly, when reading a literary work, children and adults are driven to perceive time distinctly. The suspension of time for reading, as well as its diegetic passage in a narrative, demonstrates other – foreign and rebellious – uses of time, beyond its productive appropriation. Reading aloud a poem, a nursery rhyme, or a tongue twister, for example, shows how the lyrics may record in time and space not just narrative content, but also the melody or intonation of an artistic creation. All of these experiences further demonstrate that language can do much more than just communicate.

The above-mentioned notion of reading may be linked to Bértolo's (2014) concept of reading fabric, which provides a perspective for the complex operation of reading. According to the author, the reading process entails a number of activities and conditions that operate concurrently and in an interconnected, organic manner. As a result, reading

requires attention, memory, concentration, the ability to relate and associate, spatial vision, a certain mastery of the language's lexicon and syntax, knowledge of narrative codes, patience, imagination, logical thinking, the ability to formulate hypotheses and build expectations, time and work. (BÉRTOLO, 2014, p. 48, own translation)

In a didactic and analytical exercise, the scholar distinguishes four levels or categories that encompass the act of reading a literary narrative: textual, autobiographical, metaliterary, and ideological. He further suggests that, even when one or more aspects are emphasised, it is the more or less harmonious conjunction of the four that defines a mature or experienced reader.

The textual level concerns the ability to decode language and to build meaning from what is read. It is the most fundamental level and the first prerequisite for reading. It deals with the physicality, if you will, of the act of reading.

The autobiographical level is the one in which the reader finds parts of his own experience (values, beliefs, anxieties, desires) in the text. He seeks confirmation and validation of his own narratives, even if the text does not allow it, making reading a continuous exercise of self-discovery. Texts' collective and ample meaning is subjected and sometimes disregarded, often unconsciously, to individual demands. Bértolo (2014) contends that the autobiographical level is important in engaging readers' interest and identity in the act of reading. What this aspect offers in a first moment is the possibility of perceiving oneself as belonging to something greater, socially and culturally shared. However, when it overlaps with other aspects, the autobiographical level limits the reading experience to journeys of confirmation of previous worldviews. It may restrict the expansion of one's repertoire as well as the exercise of knowledge and inquiry into the world that literature allows.

The third level outlined by Bértolo (2014) is the ideological reading, which is related to the autobiographical and is sometimes mistaken with it. The difference is that at the autobiographical level, readers read their own life, experiences and feelings, while on the ideological they validate their beliefs about the world beyond their intimacy. While structured from an individual perspective, the ideological aspect assumes the form of broad values and beliefs that are accepted, practiced and shared by larger communities. The reader who favours the ideological level reads "the global on his personal scale, and from this reading – which provides, narratively, information about his surroundings – he may conceive, infer, think, and internalise the world, conforming his ideological reading" (BÉRTOLO, 2014, p. 58, own translation). It should be noted that Bértolo (2014) understands ideology as a system of beliefs that provide meaning to social practices and give support for interpreting the reality.

The last aspect defined by Bértolo (2014) is the metaliterary. Although the scholar asserts that the four levels are present in the reading experience, the metaliterary implies a degree of sophistication, given that it presupposes a certain reading trajectory. The metaliterary level functions as an instance of rereading, a return to authors and texts that is prompted by new experiences, and which resonates in his life in a relational way.

Reading generates echoes of previous reads. One character is reminiscent of another. A narrative resource transports us to another novel where it was employed in a similar manner. Another is evoked by a description. The piece we read has a brief, dry sentence that reminds us of another author's sentence. Each reading follows in the footsteps of previous readings. (BÉRTOLO, 2014, p. 54, own translation).

At this level, readers are able to have their readings interact with one another, reinventing and renewing them with each new text. The stories and poetry read build a perceptible repertoire, becoming the subject of reflection and discovery in interactions facilitated by readings over time. The metaliterary level is more intensely realised in readers who go beyond the narratives, transforming their repertory into a unique experience, their own universe of meaning.

Metaliterary exercises may also function as a catalyst for literary creations, acting as a sort of inspiration for the creative process. Regardless of the motivations that drove their authors to create their works, we can see in some books aimed at children, such as those chosen as the subject of this article – *Alice no telhado*, *Pinóquio: o livro das pequenas verdades*, e *Robinson* –, an intense and, in a way, loving dialogue with works from the literary tradition. It is not unusual to come across paratexts, either in the book itself or in other media (e.g. interviews), in which authors mention their relationship with one or more classic works and their influence on the creative process. Peter Sís, for example, tells that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was one of his favourite books as a child, and that *Robinson* was inspired by a real event from his childhood involving his passion for the book and a costume contest in which he dressed up as the character.

In an effort to define literary classics, Italo Calvino considers the impact such works have on readers and the cultural imprints they leave, particularly "when they assert themselves as memorable and also when they are concealed in the folds of memory" (CALVINO, 1993, p. 10-11, own translation). Following Calvino's assertion, the works inspired by metaliterary exercises form a creative dialogue with other books and reaffirm their significance both in the individual experience of the reader-author and in the fabric of culture. In addition to producing echoes of individual and

collective repertoires, the new narratives show writers' appropriation of classical works, resulting in the production of their own literary universe that is both familiar and unique.

3 The picturebook and its reading

The significant presence of visuality and the exploration of its narrative potential are some of the main idiosyncrasies of contemporary literature aimed at children. These characteristics are particularly embodied in picturebooks, a literary genre that is defined by the correlation of verbal and imagetic languages and in which the illustration ceases to exercise a complementary function in relation to the text, instead constituting a more organic and interdependent link in the narrative's construction (VAN DER LINDEN, 2011; NIKOLAJEVA; SCOTT, 2011). Because of its innovative character, the picturebook has established itself as an important domain for artistic experimentation and is regarded by theorists as one of the aesthetic contributions of children's literature to the field of literature as a whole.

The essential link between words and images is what distinguishes it from other literary genres, such as picture books, in which the meaning is constructed autonomously by the verbal text, with drawings serving only as a secondary and decorative function (VAN DER LINDEN, 2011). Aside from the interconnectedness of languages, another feature that underpins the genre is the exploration of materiality. The book format, the paper used, the type of binding, the typography, the arrangement of narrative components on the pages, as well as the presence and nature of the paratextual elements are some of the aspects that, when manipulated by writers, illustrators, designers and editors, create unique modes of expression that demand a special engagement from readers.

If the operation of reading is, according to Bértolo (2014), an act that is performed from many simultaneous acts, this is amplified in the case of picturebooks. Their multifaceted nature allows readers to look at the whole through its individual parts, which are made up of many languages, and then return to the whole with new possibilities of interpretation. "Whenever we move across sign systems, new meanings are produced, because we interpret the text in terms of the pictures and the pictures in terms of the text in a potentially never-ending sequence." (SIPE, 1998, p. 102). Reading each piece independently opens up fresh interpretation possibilities for the others, making the result always greater than the sum of the parts. Reading picturebooks thus requires both an attention to detail – the word, the lines, colours, and shapes, the arrangement of the pages,

the blank spaces – and a distancing, so that the book can be visualised and appreciated as a single and cohesive whole, rather than as a collection of elements.

The textual skills described by Bértolo (2014) are also requirements for the process of reading picturebooks, with the addition of others. It takes more, for example, than deciphering the linguistic code, given that the works go beyond the textual order. Reading and interpreting the images presupposes familiarity with the visual code and attention to its implications in terms of meaning. Aside from identifying a book's colour palette, we may ask ourselves if it affects the setting of the narrative or how it reflects the mood of the characters. And also: how does this relate to readers' individual experiences, even the most novice ones? What additional associations and connotations can be apprehended in the usage of colours, and what do they reveal about ourselves and the social and cultural bonds we share?

In addition to familiarity with visual codes, other skills are required. After all, reading a picturebook is not the same as interpreting a painting. To borrow an expression coined by Will Eisner (1999), this genre works as a “sequential art” that takes place in the succession of pages. Unlike an essentially textual book, in which words flow from one page to the next, the passing of pages in picturebooks indicates a cut carefully thought out by their creators, which confers temporality and spatiality to the narrative, besides dictating a reading rhythm. Not rarely, in the passing of pages the narrative leaves gaps that only readers can fill, either by inference or speculation. It is up to readers, therefore, to stitch each pair of pages into a continuous narrative.

When it comes to metaliterary experiences, picturebooks provide numerous creative possibilities. On the one hand, the constraint in terms of textual length requires from writers an exercise of synthesis; on the other hand, it offers up fresh avenues for dialogue across works, whether through words or pictures. The echoes of authors' (writers and illustrators) previous readings can materialise in the new narratives through thematic or formal features, characters depiction, verbal and/or pictorial intertextuality, by mobilising or subverting representations entrenched in the collective imagination (for example, the image of Alice as the blonde girl in the blue dress, cemented by Disney studios animation). In many cases, the metaliterary experiences are referenced to, directly or indirectly, in the paratexts, whether through an allusion on the cover, a mention in the book blurb, preface or in authors' notes, for example.

Each of these aspects, deployed in the creation of a new narrative, bears the imprint of writers' prior readings and their desire to creatively appropriate them. Returning to Calvino's (1993) discussion on classics, these works emerge as a “background noise”, a rumour that resonates

today in different forms. When reading a picturebook born from metaliterary experiences, experienced readers may find in these elements signs of familiarity, whereas novice readers will find an invitation to recognise those texts that, for various reasons, remain enduring and resonant in the sum of texts that form a culture.

4 *Alice no telhado, Pinóquio – O livro das pequenas verdades e Robinson*

The three books under consideration are reinventions of well-known works deemed classics of universal literature. They are neither retellings, abridgements or adaptations, and they do not attempt to convey the original story. These works do not present new outlines or endings to these narratives, with variations that usually try to update texts or place them in different scenarios, as we see on occasion in the editorial production for children. Cruz, Rampazo and Sís' picturebooks are better described as *recreations*, which are based on authors' own readings and experiences with the works that inspire them, having at their core an expression of admiration.

Alice no telhado immediately brings to mind Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Originally written to entertain the three daughters of a friend during a boat trip, one of whom was called Alice, the novel was first published in 1865 and achieved great public success. The story of the girl who falls into a hole to follow a hasty White Rabbit and finds herself in a parallel universe, where she meets unusual characters – a Caterpillar who smokes shisha and offers advice; a Mad Hatter who is always drinking tea and playing enigmatic jokes; a Cat who is made of smiles and tries to guide the girl's path, but confuses her even more; an authoritarian Queen who can't stand being contradicted – and experiences unusual adventures is regarded as a classic of children's literature. More than 150 years after its publication, it has been the subject of numerous editions in books, adaptations for films and animations, stage shows, as well as the image of the girl Alice, which is heavily represented by the illustrations created by Walt Disney Studios, and its characters appear in toys and a wide range of commercial products.

Alice no telhado is a reenactment of Carroll's book that revolves around the process of writing and illustrating, with the blank page of a notebook serving as a support and the author's desire acting as a drive. The hole through which the original character throws herself into Wonderland is taken by the narrator of Cruz's book as the starting point for the story he wants to tell, but does not yet know how. While sketching a circle on a notebook sheet, as if in search of inspiration, he hears a scream and then sees a rabbit in a coat carrying a large clock and telling

him he was late. Fearful, the narrator tries to confine the enigmatic rabbit by changing the page of the notebook that has become the scene for all that begins to unfold, independently of the artist-narrator's pencils and brushes. A girl and a guy with numerous hats on their heads, holding a teapot and a teacup in their hands, arrive behind the rabbit, both yelling and racing after him. Soon after, a soldier, a bloated king and queen, and three more soldiers appear running after the rabbit. The narrator observes the scene, both terrified and curious; his observation and position in the narrative are marked by some discrete elements: he is the one who locates the characters he sees parading in front of him, both in the text and in the illustrations. Although he perceives himself somewhat powerless in face of the characters' acts, who appear and shout for reasons unrelated to his writing or drawing, he coordinates the turning of the notebook pages, drawn on the pages of the book, reminding the reader of the nature of what it being told.

On another scene, the narrator observes a girl named Alice wondering how to escape the place and being replied by a voice that frightens her. A smiling cat in the sky tries to assist her after proposing a riddle, which is promptly dismissed by the girl, who simply wants to run away. The cat's ideas are of little help due to their vagueness: he suggests that Alice walk in any direction, seek for the white rabbit, or rediscover the passage that put her in that situation. When the narrator hears the cat's proposals to the girl, he remembers the circle drawn on the notebook page and crumples the paper before tossing it away. By doing so, he interferes in the story that he had previously merely observed.

Alice asks the cat, who is up high and has a privileged view, for aid in finding the white rabbit, but the cat replies that it cannot assist her at the moment. At the same time, Alice notices a tail in front of her, and then the cat's body gradually emerging. Embraced by this large tail, the girl is lifted into the air and her vision, which is in search of the white rabbit, is taken over by the scenario of poor houses, which altogether resemble a typical favela picture. Discouraged by the cat's insistence on leading her in any direction, she sees the rabbit running across the rooftops she was watching earlier and shouts it, "RABBIT!!!!". Running to find the rabbit, which has vanished amid the roofs, the girl is run over by the other characters – the man with the hats, the teapot and the teacup; the king, the queen, and the soldiers – who, together with her, slip into a void and begin to fall slowly, as if in a dream. The narrator, who is paying attention and watching everything, regrets throwing away the leaf with the circle painted on it and collects it from the trash, allowing everyone to find the path that will take them back to their original places.

Narrated with words and images, *Alice no telhado* is a praise to creation, both in the narrative's premise – an uninspired artist facing a blank page – and in the way the story is constructed. Several elements in the verbal text, illustrations and in the graphic design support this viewpoint: the statement of a desire to write a story and indecision about its theme; the drawings of notebook sheets with perforations; the squared paper.

Despite appearing to be a random act of someone waiting for an idea or inspiration to work, the drawing of the circle on the blank sheet of a notebook reveals a creative desire and provides the conditions for it to happen – the similarity with the idea of a hole through which characters can pass immediately brings us to *Alice in wonderland*. The deep knowledge of Carroll's classic, as well as a certain proximity with such work, anchor the proposition of *Alice no telhado*. Unlike the many books that retell the story of Alice and her adventures in Wonderland in adapted versions (frequently with different endings or changes in the context), Cruz's picturebook appropriates the classic to tell another tale, namely that of known, and perhaps loved, characters who impose themselves on the author's attention. There does not appear to be an aim to repeat Carroll's work, but rather, from the perspective of both reader and author, to reimagine the world in question.

Pinocchio is a well-known character almost worldwide. Most Brazilian children were introduced to the story of the wooden puppet through Walt Disney cartoons or Monteiro Lobato's narratives in books or television adaptations. It is also common to find books about Pinocchio (almost always accompanied only by Gepetto and the Talking Cricket) in popular editions, published in adapted and much reduced versions of the novel written by Carlo Collodi. Few people have had access to the full text. Most, admittedly, are familiar with the character solely because of his reputation as a liar, unrelated to his adventures. However, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is much more than the story of a child liar.

The story of the puppet who grows into a real boy is made up of several episodes that constantly put his character and good intentions to the test. Pinocchio dislikes studying and working, and is always drawn into adventures that promise him a good and carefree life. A fine example is the episode involving the Cat and the Fox, who persuade him to plant four gold coins in the Field of Miracles to harvest two thousand; or when, following his colleague Pavidio, he moves to the Land of Follies, where there is no school, no books and no work. With his desires always coming first, the puppet is impulsive and betrays the trust of his father, Gepetto, and of his eternal protector, the Blue Fairy. Only after many trials, some of which lead him and his father to the verge of death, does Pinocchio realise the value of education and labour. Above all, he recognises the

efforts of the ones who, despite all his misdeeds, take care of him, ending up with transformation from puppet to boy.

Pinocchio, like Alice, has a significant presence in children's editorial production in Brazil, despite the fact that the quality of the publications is sometimes dubious. Today, readers may find a large number of volumes of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, many of which are in school and public libraries, thanks partially to governmental programmes.

While critics have long been aware of the irreverent wooden puppet, devoting studies to reflect upon Collodi's novel, the character's reinventions in Brazil are more recent. Besides the adaptations and retellings that narrate the stories of Pinocchio, there are some works that take it as a motto for creation. This is the case with *Pinóquio: o livro das pequenas verdades*, by Alexandre Rampazo and published by Boitatá.

Rampazo's book combines words and images to create a hybrid work. Unlike Collodi's Pinocchio (and absolutely different from the cheerful and breezy boy created by Walt Disney, extensively reproduced in books and films), this one is more intimate, both in terms of visuals and textual description. The story encourages readers to go beyond his existence as a puppet, sharing his yearning to become a boy. It is a statement of love for Pinocchio's literary universe. The author creates a mirror that reveals the search for another who, in an exercise of humanity, seeks the kindness and justice of Geppetto, the intelligence and responsibility of the Talking Cricket, the control of the puppet master, the cleverness and cunning of Mr. Fox, the trickery of Mr. Cat, the tranquility of the donkey, the strength of the giant shark and the loving power of the Blue Fairy. At the end of this journey, he finds himself.

Rampazo's Pinocchio is marked by his wood-tree-puppet-dream existence – by "what was, what is, and what could be...". The sorrowful and terrified expression, strange to Collodi's character, is invested with curiosity, refusal, suspicions, uncertainty and possibilities in the imagined encounter with others. Pinocchio's nose, made of wood, does not denounce lies uttered, but rather the ways and matter that sometimes create it and sometimes present themselves as a horizon.

Imagining what it would be like if he were a dreaming tree, Pinocchio becomes a boy, in the dream of the tree and in the concreteness of its essence. The story narrated is also materialised in the book's physicality: his nose grows, like a tree branch, on pages that unfold in the shape of an accordion, pointing to a walk whose path is marked by detours, pauses and possibilities of moving forward. The mirror, which previously reflected his encounter with others, turns to himself. The outstanding graphic design makes all the elements of the book converge on the narrative of

Pinóquio: o livro das pequenas verdades. Nothing is missing or left out of this book for readers of all ages.

Unlike *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, which were both originally written and published for children, *Robinson Crusoe* was written for an adult audience. It has undergone numerous modifications throughout time, bringing it even closer to young readers.

Robinson Crusoe, the novel's protagonist, is the sole survivor of a ship's crash in the Caribbean Sea while travelling from Brazil to Africa to obtain slaves to work on a sugar cane plantation. He makes it to a barren island, where he stays for the next twenty years. On the island, he struggles to survive by adapting to local surroundings in order to feed and defend himself, even sparing the life of a native from an attack by cannibals, whom he calls Friday and teaches his language and faith to. When *Robinson Crusoe* returns to England years later, he brings Friday with him as a servant, maintaining the relationship that they had on the island.

There are several adaptations and retellings of *Robinson Crusoe* intended for young readers in Brazilian editorial production, the majority of which present abridged texts. *Robinson* by Peter Sís, on the other hand, is a narrative using as its motto an incident from the author's boyhood, which is provided to readers in a text at the end of the book:

My book *Robinson* is inspired by a true story from my childhood. I remembered it when I came across this photo of myself dressed as the brave adventurer for a costume contest at my school. My mother, Alenka, a talented artist and crafter, made this outfit out of my sister's tights, a waistcoat, a wig, furs or small rugs, and plush. She also fashioned the bow and something resembling a spear. I won the contest and my photo appeared on the front page of the local newspaper. My mother was overjoyed. (SÍS, 2019, p. 51, own translation)

The author's recollection is the starting point for *Robinson*. Faced with the announcement of a costume party at school, the first-person narrator informs his mother that he, too, wants to dress up as a pirate like all of his friends. Thoughtful, the mother offers to her son a costume of *Robinson Crusoe*, a character from his favourite book, and soon begins working on the seams of the garments without his approval. However, unlike the author's memories at the conclusion of the novel, the child becomes the laughingstock of his classmates, who do not comprehend his costume. He comes home with his mother, upset, and locks himself in his room. His head spins in bed, and he is left wondering, adrift, and lost in time. This takes him to an island, where he finds himself alone, similar to *Robinson Crusoe* after escaping a shipwreck. Still in his pyjamas, he starts to explore the place, worried for his safety. But as soon as he gets water and food, he constructs a

shelter to shield himself from the rain and sun. And he learns how to manufacture the best clothing for his survival on the island.

By changing his pyjamas for the outfit sewn by his mother, he becomes Robinson Crusoe and feels strong and brave on the island he now calls home. Like his hero, the boy is always on the lookout for pirates who might attack him. And, similarly to many adventure tales, the pirates arrive. Frightened, the boy hides in the dark forest, afraid of being hurt. At this point he is no longer dressed as Robinson Crusoe, but in his pyjamas, and the gloomy forest in which he hides from the presences he suspects of being threatening turns into his own room. The pirates are none other than his schoolmates, who wish to know more about Robinson Crusoe. The boy is happy to see them and together they go on to new adventures.

Defoe's novel, published in England in the early 18th century, becomes a support for the boy in the picturebook *Robinson*. The sadness caused by the misunderstanding and mockery of his peers finds shelter in the boy's favourite book. Alone in the dark night, his imagination takes him to a desert island, where he walks the same paths as his hero. However, the nature of the survival that Sís character seeks is of a different order from that of Defoe's *Robinson*. In his imaginary adventure, the little boy builds a place of intimacy and security in his reading experiences.

The concept of finding refuge in imaginary realms is not new in children's literature. *Where the wild things are*, by Maurice Sendak, published in the United States in 1963 and regarded as a classic of children's literature, follows a similar structure to *Robinson*: upset by a scolding from his mother, Max, grounded in his room, is transported to the world of monsters, where, after taming them, he has fun in their company; on his return to his room, dinner awaits him, still untouched. The new element introduced by Sís is the construction of this imaginative experience by the memory of reading and the love for a particular book/character. Sís' character reinvents Defoe's narrative into a journey of self-knowledge in which the desert island and its elements are taken as objects of meaning for the boy. It is the boy's recalled experience on the island that allows him to return to the real world less frail and meet his friends in one piece. They no longer laugh at him, because mockery no longer finds a place in their friendship. His friends are now eager to meet the boy, while he is changed by his imaginary adventure. The challenges and trials he faces on the island, both the one where Defoe's book is read and the one he visits in his mind, including fears and triumphs, resonate in his own life.

Aside from the explicit reference to novels considered as classics, the exercise of reinvention that marks the works analysed has as a common feature: their creation under the form

of picturebooks. These are hybrid narratives comprised of verbal text, illustrations and materiality. As such, they make initial reading demands that go beyond the textual skills described by Bértolo (2009), with the addition of visual requisites. In other words, reading such books calls readers to engage in a comprehensive exercise of reading and seeing, sequentially and organically, what their authors and objects (pages, materials) present as narrative components in the space of the page.

Conclusion

The editorial production for children continues to be renewed, frequently to accommodate new trends and the need to respond to externally imposed demands, such as the rules of public policies, which in Brazil are critical to the survival of many companies in the sector. The development of picturebooks, which have become better known, created, published and studied in the country over the last two decades, expands the reading experiences of children and young readers by bringing to the narratives a prominent usage of illustrations, going beyond the decorative role that has previously prevailed in publications for this audience.

The possibility of telling stories with text and image in an organic relationship, with the materiality as another narrative element, opens the door to aesthetically sophisticated experimentations, raising the level of demands in reading and celebrating the intelligence and power of children in their encounters with books. Allied to metaliterary experiences, picturebooks are an invitation to read and think about the literary universe as a cultural asset that is prolonged and reinvented in time and space, both individually and collectively.

Metaliterary creations take as point of departure writers, illustrators and publishers' meaningful readings. Therefore, they work as an invitation to enjoy the experience of others, which in writing and reading become sharing. Nelson Cruz, Peter Sís and Alexandre Rampazo offer in their books the intimacy of their cultural trajectories, turned into words, images and narratives in the works they create, making them beckons to young readers, who will tread their own paths to read and get acquainted with Alice, Pinocchio, Robinson Crusoe, and many other characters and stories throughout their lives.

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