



## ***Beauty and the beast: reading proposals in object-book format***

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**ABSTRACT.** The published offer aimed at children up to six years old has undergone exponential growth in recent decades, mainly those which give particular meaning to the materiality associated with the emotional and playful exploration of reading and contact with books as objects, frequently close to that of toys. We propose to analyze four object-books as part of this trend, often with a recreational and parodistic propensity dedicated to the rewriting or recovery of narratives constantly present in the oral tradition, in this concrete case arising from the short story *Beauty and the beast* popularized, in 1756, by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780). The selected books, which are potentially addressed to pre-readers and early readers, show significant care in terms of editorial finishing, but also with regard to the markedly softened verbal-iconic recreation and, in certain cases, close to the universe of play for the instigations which they proposed. In these cases, the act of reading has a particular performative and experiential value, as we will endeavor to show.

**Keywords:** children's literature; object-book; *The beauty and the beast*; materiality.

### ***A bela e o monstro: propostas de leitura em formato de livro-objeto***

**RESUMO.** Nas últimas décadas, vem sendo exponencial a oferta editorial dirigida a crianças até seis anos de idade que concede uma particular significância à materialidade associada à exploração emocional e lúdica da leitura e do contato com o livro enquanto objeto, não raras vezes, próximo do brinquedo. Propomo-nos analisar quatro livros-objeto inscritos nesta tendência, não raras vezes, de propensão recreativa e parodística dedicada à reescrita ou à recuperação de narrativas constantes na tradição oral, neste caso concreto arquitetados a partir do conto *A bela e o monstro*, popularizado, em 1725, por Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780). Os volumes selecionados, sendo potencialmente endereçados a pré-leitores e leitores iniciais, ostentam um significativo cuidado ao nível do acabamento editorial, mas também no que respeita à recriação verbo-icônica marcadamente suavizada e, em certos casos, próxima do universo do jogo pelas instigações que aí se propõem. O ato de leitura aufere, nestes casos, um particular valor performativo e experiential, como procuraremos evidenciar.

**Palavras-chave:** literatura infantil; livro-objeto; *A bela e o monstro*; materialidade.

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### **The relevance of materiality and sensoriality in first readings**

The materiality of books for children has been investigated and recognized in recent academic studies and in different fields (Alaca, 2018; Reid-Walsh, 2018; Campagnaro, 2020; Linden, 2021; Martins & Silva, 2020c; Nikolajeva, 2008; Pelachaud, 2010; 2016; Sanchez, 2015) as an important vehicle for communication. In fact, whatever the typology, the whole book (and the concrete field of literature with potential for child readership is no exception) is the result of a negotiation and a physical adaptation of a verbal, graphic and also often visual or illustrative code. However, there is currently a growing trend in children's publishing towards taking particular care with the material aspect, which is central in decoding potential meanings regarding content and in defining the book as an artefact. We refer here particularly to object-books, a vast and heterogeneous range of volumes the media and potential apprehension of which are not limited to traditional means of reading (Ramos, 2017; Taberner, 2019; Mociño, 2019; Silva, 2020; Martins, 2021). They comprise several types of additions (from less to more complex) in the volumetric (or three-dimensional) aspect of a volume, concerning the material properties on which they are printed or through which they aim to simulate effects of movement and/or transformation (Trebbi, 2012; Pelachaud, 2010, 2016; Sanchez, 2015; Reid-Walsh, 2018).

The various actors involved in the design of these special books, in certain cases classified as magical, living (Parreiras, 2006), mobile (Reid-Walsh, 2018) or interactive (Linden, 2007), employ various strategies to prioritize first and foremost a unique (emotionally significant) involvement with the reader. The physical relationship with the book, especially its handling and the respective apprehension of the communicative exploration of the graphics and the medium of this artefact are of utmost importance when it comes to young children (Duran, 2002; Bonnafé, 2008; Ramos & Silva, 2014; Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2015; Silva, 2017; Martins, 2021). Thus, the selection of the physical form of these first works is not unwitting in its intended seduction of the reader, and its relevance is increasingly being recognized in terms of initiation to reading. In these volumes in particular, therefore, reading time, interruptions, repetitions and additions added to the main discourse, for example, are fundamental. Paula Serrano (2016) states as much in *A integração sensorial no desenvolvimento e aprendizagem da criança (Sensory integration in child development and learning)*

[...] in each interaction with people and objects, the child receives a substantial amount of information that is relayed to specific areas in the brain, where they can be unbundled, related to each other and made sense of. Each of these sensations is assigned a meaning [...] these records will form the basis for future learning and for how the child is or is not willing to engage in certain activities (Serrano, 2016, p. 11).

Thus, according to Serrano, from the moment we are born, we need tactile contact. This may, for example, be as a source of comfort and fostering of well-being or emotional security, but also as a way of controlling our responses to the surrounding environment. We acquire an understanding of the limits and limitations of our own body, as well as gaining learning through the combination of touch with the information acquired by sight (Wood, 2022). This latter is fundamental in the process of acquiring knowledge in early childhood. Publishers are well aware of this need for movement, sensory apprehension and mother-baby bonding as a vehicle for learning in the first years of a child's life, and for acquiring an appreciation of reading, in particular, what recalls, in this regard, the words of María Emília López about the constant restlessness of babies. In her view, we should consider these tiny readers as “[...] translators who are exploring, interpreting and comparing all the time [...]” (López, 2018, p. 29), since “[...] they invest almost all of their waking time involved in the transformation of the world around them [...]” (López, 2018, p. 27).

As such, the published offer aimed at children up to six years of age has undergone exponential growth in recent decades (Delahaie, 1995). Particular emphasis has been given to the material nature associated with emotional and playful exploration of reading and contact with the book as an object, which is often treated much like a toy (Martins, 2021). In these cases, the act of reading has particular performative and experiential value, in which one expects a careful verbal sampling as well as a visual and graphic one (since these are children who have not yet mastered the linguistic code).

Most of these publications are hybrid in nature, and are surprising and physically appealing to touch due to their proximity to the world of play. The unifying sensory appeal of the vast range of categories in the extensive editorial domain of book-toys, in a way, this graphically, reflects part of the bodily involvement and the pleasure of listening, so characteristic of the traditional oral repertoire, with special incidence in poetic-lyrical forms (such as chants or tongue twisters), often accompanied by hand-clapping games, for example, among others. A similar view is presented by Colomer (2007), who argues that

[...] however, books for children have brought new possibilities to the participatory games of folklore. The appeal to other senses such as touch or hearing, the exploration of materials, three-dimensional forms, etc., has led to the proliferation of a type of book that is halfway between a book and a toy. Some books seem more fun, imaginative and under-managing, others are more contrived, but they all explore the common links between literature and play (Colomer, 2007, p. 144-145, our translation)<sup>1</sup>.

In the case of babies and younger children, the importance of the tactile system is today recognized as imperative, either through direct contact with the body as a way of learning, in which the child reader touches everything they see, or as a means of comfort and pleasure, since “[...] from a very early age the newborn is picked up, cherished and touched, mainly in daily routines [...]” (Serrano, 2016, p. 87). It is, moreover, essential conduct in fostering mother-baby bonding. This constant conduct of bodily experimentation in the first years of human life, mediated by the tactile, proprioceptive and vestibular systems, gradually cedes primacy to the visual and auditory systems as we grow (Serrano, 2016). As such, the care taken in producing these books and in selecting

<sup>1</sup> In the original: “[...] sin embargo, los libros para pequeños han aportado nuevas posibilidades a los juegos participativos del folclore. La llamada a otros sentidos como el tacto o el oído, la exploración de materiales, formas tridimensionales, etc., ha hecho proliferar un tipo de libro a medio camino entre el libro y el juguete. Unos libros parecen más divertidos, imaginativos y subgerentes, otros resultan más artificiosos, pero todos exploran los nexos comunes de la literatura y el juego”.

materials and the finishings of graphic production means that attention must be paid to the fact that “[...] after six months, increased control of posture frees the baby’s hands to explore objects and not just hold them” (Serrano, 2016, p. 94). The child’s gesture of putting objects in their mouth to contribute to the assimilation of concepts concerning the properties of objects and surroundings is also frequent and fundamental.

We must, therefore, emphasize the exploratory and hermeneutic power that the baby’s gaze on the nearby also has in the realm of contact with the book and first readings, as proposed by María Emília López (2016). These days, this intense sensory and visual appropriation, which is characteristic of early childhood, increasingly demands an appreciation of playful actions and gestures on the book from mediators and authors of books for babies and very young children. Opportunities for contact with reading and with the object-book must foster a contemplative gaze and provide imaginative, new associations or combinations, guided by pleasure and values such as freedom and curiosity (Rampazo, 2020; Letria, 2020).

### The timelessness of the classics: the case of *Beauty and the beast*

Tactile stimuli go hand in hand with one of the main graphic strategies of the volumes dedicated to recounting the traditional repertoire. The transformation, parodistic retelling or encounter with the realm of the fantastical is therefore one of the most notable tendencies of these publications, with intense and multiple forms (Joosen, 2011, 2018; Martins & Silva, 2020a, 2020b; Martins, 2020a, 2020b; Pereira, 2020; Silva, 2020).

The appreciation of reading as an artistic experience and dialogue with a common immaterial repertoire is once again reason to emphasize the importance of this literary genre in reader training projects and, in particular, initiation to literary education from an early age, as

[...] mirror of life and the difficulties of existence, as well as an expression of permanent human aspirations, fairy tales nourish and enrich the fantasy, broaden the world of children’s experience, favour and accelerate the overall maturing process of the personality, strengthen the linguistic heritage and expressive means, satisfy deep affective needs, refine the aesthetic sense and initiate in the cult of the good, the beautiful and the true (Nobile, 2007, p. 52, our translation)<sup>2</sup>.

The capacity for regeneration and growth in the face of the adversity of everyday life feeds these classic narratives, as does an understanding of the unknown or the enigmatic and dialogue with the Other (and their mysteries) (Machado, 2002).

These days, the most popular version of *The beauty and the beast* is perhaps that from 1756 by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780), based on the French version by Madame Gabrielle Susanne Barbot de Gallon de Villeneuve (1685–1755) (Bravo-Villasante, 1977). It is included in *Contes Marins* (1740), “[...] a collection of tales supposedly told by an old woman during a long sea-voyage” (Carpenter & Prichard, 2005, p. 53). Constructed around a female protagonist with an undeniably altruistic personality, we should recall (albeit briefly) the role of women in the life of the French pedagogue and writer, who was responsible for the collection of short stories *O Armazém das Crianças* [*Magasin des enfants, ou dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusieurs de ses élèves*] (Beaumont, 1757). This work was inspired by *The Governess, or Little female academy* (1749), by Sarah Fieldings (1710–1768), which contains the short story under analysis. As a motherless child, Leprince de Beaumont was handed over to a religious institution, and experienced an unhappy first marriage that led her to move to London in 1745. Note that,

[...] salons had been in fashion since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the most famous and sought after are those which are the domain of women – women who thus achieved space and recognition in a society that deprived them of autonomy, denied them training and professional activity and, consequently, their own economic income [...]. This was revenge with a spirit that called certain traditional models into question (Birck, 1998, p. 144).

The discursive, strongly symbolic purification undertaken by Leprince de Beaumont, regarding mention of the tale’s sexual and erotic charge, engendered different revisions (Garraón, 2017). This includes the audiovisual, such as the film *La belle et la bête* (1946) by the poet Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), as well as Disney’s 1991 animated musical *Beauty and the beast*, directed by Gary Trousdale (1960–) and Kirk Wise (1963–), to mention just a few of the most significant.

Note, by way of example, the many diverse forms of anatomy which the figure of the Monster goes through, from the first written records alluding to the delivery of a (virgin) daughter to a deformed individual (Silva,

<sup>2</sup> In the original: “[...] espejo de la vida y de la dificultad de la existencia, así como expresión de permanentes aspiraciones humanas, los cuentos de hadas nutren y enriquecen la fantasía, amplían el mundo de la experiencia infantil, favorecen y aceleran el proceso de maduración global de la personalidad, potencian el patrimonio lingüístico y los medios expresivos, satisfacen profundas necesidades de tipo afectivo, refinan el sentido estético e inician en el culto de lo bueno, lo bello y lo verdadero”.

2012)<sup>3</sup>. This way, the husband “[...] in textual descriptions, in illustrations and in its cinematographic life, the Monster [with an often dangerous or repulsive animality] was once, or exhibited parts of, an elephant, lion, bear, buffalo, snake, lizard, frog or fish” (Botelho, 2013, p. 64). In the English version, for example, illustrated by the prolific, influential English illustrator of the Victorian era Walter Crane (1845–1915), in 1756, the figure of the beast shows a clear similarity to a wild boar.<sup>4</sup>

Its proximity to the group of variants entitled ‘The abandoned husband’, according to Francisco Vaz da Silva’s (2012, p. 94, author’s emphasis) categorization, in fact means it is “[...] that which most lends itself to moralizing reflections around proverbial lines such as ‘appearances deceive’ and ‘the face is no index to the heart’”. However, this sugar-coated contemporary reading, centred solely on praising spiritual and erudite virtues, “[...] is based on the idea of a sacrificial marriage between a supernaturally beautiful young woman and a supernaturally monstrous husband [...]” (Silva, 2012, p. 95) and therefore ignores the fact that “[...] the story [of *Beauty and the Beast*] allows different interpretations, many of which transcend superficial moralities, which are themselves subject to different readings and treatments” (Botelho, 2013, p. 68). This way, the variants collected and analysed by Silva and categorized into three distinct groups, namely ‘The snake prince’, ‘The abandoned husband’ and ‘Travels to the other world’, have a common process of the symbolic death of the female figure. According to Francisco Vaz da Silva, it is a marriage comparable to a funeral which “[...] expresses a sundering from the family of origin. In this view, a relationship of tacit competition can be discerned between the abandoned father and the conquered husband” (Silva, 2012, p. 14). At a time when marriage was a basic convention of social relations, the topic of symbolic death is closely linked to the disenchantment of the deformed figure of the groom and the detachment or rebirth of the female figure, arising from her daughterly love for her father (Silva, 2012).<sup>5</sup> In this subgroup, as mentioned earlier, the heroine occupies the central role, since Beauty is willing to give her life for her father figure and is unyielding in the face of her brothers’ and father’s attempts to dissuade her.

Thus, by breaking the enchantment on the Monster, which in certain variants is linked to the domain of the mother, the young woman attains perfect happiness, as opposed to what transpired with her sisters, who ended up transformed into statues. Thus, for Bruno Bettelheim (2012, p. 465–466), “[...] the essence of the tale is not only Beauty’s growing love for the Monster or even the transfer of her love from her father to the Monster, but her own growth in this process”.

The works analyzed (not published in Portugal) below share characteristics that identify them as belonging to the typology of object-books, potentially aimed at pre-readers and incipient readers. This selection took into account the care taken with the publication’s finishes, as well as the markedly softened verbal-iconic recreation, which, in certain cases, approaches the universe of games due to the stimuli included. It is our aim, with this brief investigation, to highlight the recognition of immersive interactions (distinct from traditional reading), specifically in the dissemination of the classic tale under study, due to the semantic potential that this attention to materiality entails in terms of positive contact with the book and with narratives.

### Analysis of the textual corpus

Let us start with the Spanish/Catalan volume ‘*La bella i la bèstia*’ (Milbourne, 2017), with illustrations by Lorena Álvarez and design by Jenny Hilbourne. The cut-outs of this book are graphically unique. This strategic use of materials is present on the cover itself, a peritext that focuses on an animal figure (and announces the scenario of the story) through a circular hole in the upper right corner. With a perforation in the center representing an ornate gate of naturalistic elements, it seems to anticipate admission into the narrative itself, announcing the possible entrance into a distinct physical space. The cut-outs are a work of great assiduity and have irregular different shapes and dimensions (from tiny to a reasonable size) and various functions (for example, encouraging the reader to turn the page or arousing curiosity and advancing in the reading, or focusing attention on a certain narrative aspect, among others). They contribute decisively to the textual semantics, as well as to the involvement and playful and active rendition of the extratextual recipient to the reading process.

<sup>3</sup> Among more remote traits, Francisco Vaz da Silva states that “[...] this motif of the father who, in order to obtain something extraordinary, has to promise the first person he meets when he returns home is common in modern variants of the tale [...] also the *Fable of cupid and psyche*, the oldest complete variant of this theme, recounts that the inconsolable father hands over his youngest daughter to a terrible being” (Silva, 2012, p. 11).

<sup>4</sup> Note that “[...] in the Christian tradition, the wild boar symbolizes the devil” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2010, p. 385).

<sup>5</sup> Thus, the rose that the daughter asks her father for, according to Bruno Bettelheim (2012, p. 462), “[...] symbolizes both his [the father’s] love for the daughter and the anticipation of her loss of virginity.

This edition has a board cover and back cover and an abundance of illustrations boasting a broad color palette and extending over seven double pages. The work is distinguished not only by the use of these material resources, but also by the lift-the-flap strategy employed in three core segments of the action: Beauty's entry into the Monster's huge house, the moment when he reveals or unveils his physical appearance and also his metamorphosis or transformation into a prince at the end of the story. This mechanism is responsible for expanding and clarifying meanings, in addition to stimulating curiosity and attention (Silva, 2017). Reference should also be made to the addition of different layers of reading from the first, in which contact can be made with no gestures or physical/sensory intervention on the object-book. In fact, the visual game that both the cut-outs – which enable one to peek inside and discover constituent elements of the story – and the illustrations support, favors a progressive construction of meanings by the reader. For example, by focusing on the information visible through the openings or by carefully observing some signs or indications visible in the accompanying images, readers will be able to devise the essence of the plot.

Regarding the verbal discourse or the story itself, a kind of textual 'purification' is present concerning the inclusion/omission of some aspects of the original text. The short story under analysis is shortened and stripped of more detailed description, with the addition of some important segments in direct speech, although there is the presence of an expressive, carefully qualified register, emphasizing topics such as beauty, sincerity, delicacy, and kindness, among others.

In short, this work is an example of how an ancestral fairy tale, permeated by ideothematic lines which are timeless or beyond time, namely appearance and essence, good and evil, beauty and truth, among others, can be brought closer by applying the option of a reflective and intentional verbal-iconic and graphic reconfiguration by younger readers. They can thus encounter examples of classics of universal literature which shapes their literary culture at an early age.

In the same year, a second edition of '*La Bella y la Bestia*' appeared, illustrated by Dan Taylor, part of the collection '*Mis primeros clásico*' (My First Classics) (2017), by the publisher 'Grupo Editorial Bruño'. This version is made up of a total of four double pages, and is designed to make an inaugural and summary version of the well-known tale for the youngest readers. The basic aim is to apply for the direct involvement of the recipient as the story unfolds. Careful choice of resistant materials and abundant illustrative discourse underlie this special retelling (Figure1). Pulling or rotating small moving parts (indicated with yellow arrows) broadens the scenarios, brings elements to attention which were initially covered, reproduces or imitates narrated actions (such as the cutting of the rose), and switches the food on the dinner table, which transforms reading into an activity which is both intellectually and physically challenging and also more participatory and inclusive. Finally, it reveals the true nature of the monster, which, with the help of the reader, becomes a prince (Figure 2). One of the stand-out features of the digitally created illustration is the presence of a small fox, which prompts recipients to look for this animal at the turn of every page. It is a strategy similar to a game of discovery or deciphering which, taking into account the development of readers in early childhood, encourages spontaneous and enjoyable participation. It easily lends itself to successive revisitations or re-readings, because, as noted by Elizabeth Wood (2022, p. 17), "[...] when children participate in play for their own sake, they are perhaps closest to free play where they are able to follow their impulses, motivations, interests and choices". Thus, the playfulness and interactivity inherent in this adaptation mean the child or baby can play with the book and build an affective relationship with it.

We know that one-year-old babies enjoy greater autonomy in exploring spaces and objects, as they are now able to use both hands to grasp and manipulate items. Therefore, small volumes like this, made with the inclusion of small strips, ribbons or movable pieces of cardboard, are especially attractive. It should be remembered that, at this early stage, babies are particularly apt to imitate and repeat actions, gestures, sounds and facial expressions, not forgetting that, according to Serrano (2016),

[...] babies are not limited to exploring the object visually, tactilely and orally, but have the intention to do something with it, showing purpose. For example, placing a cube inside a cup: the ability to link cause and effect. They begin to like cause and effect toys (e.g., touching to produce music) and perform actions in order to have an effect on others (e.g., hiding their face and 'reappearing' to see adults' reactions) (Serrano, 2016, p. 98, author's emphasis, our translation)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> In the original: "[...] o bebé não se limita a explorar o objeto visual, tátil e oralmente, mas já pretende fazer algo com ele, mostrando um propósito. Por exemplo, colocar um cubo dentro do copo. Capacidade para ligar causa e efeito. Começa a gostar de brinquedos de causa e efeito (ex.: tocar para ter música) e desempenha ações para ter um efeito no

Thus, movable characters are included to lead these young readers to mime part of the narrated actions enabling a playful and aesthetically instigating appropriation of these faraway plots.



Figure 1. Book cover of 'La bella y la bestia' (Mis primeros clásicos, 2017).



Figure 2. Book cover of 'La bella y la bestia' (Mis primeros clásicos, 2017).

Also, in Spanish for a young readership, in 2018, 'La bella y la bestia' came out, translated by 'Editorial Planeta'. The diegetic points of this rewriting are centered around the characterization of the triad sustaining the previously described topic of symbolic death. The existence of sisters (or brothers) is among the neglected contents (contrary to the previous works where their dissatisfaction with Beauty's happiness at the end of the plot was notable in the illustrations). Here, the focus is on the rendering of the protagonist to the misshapen figure of the Monster. There are various features of the illustrations that call for tactile reading, which is fundamental in the process of acquiring knowledge in early childhood, as previously stated. Contact with the story under study encompasses a set of material additions that aim to reinforce the power of imagination common to children in the first years of life. Thus, contact with this classic narrative is promoted through exploratory, free and spontaneous play provided by the book as an object. Emphasis should also be given to the surprise effect in the ending caused by the use of a holographic image that, by moving the book itself, allows the reader to alternate between the face of the monster and the face of the prince (Figure 3 and 4), a strategy that accentuates the enchanting nature of this plot.

Along similar lines to the publication of the second item analyzed here, the volume 'La belle et la bête' (Paku, 2020), published in 2020 by 'Editorial Base', with illustrations by Paku, is particularly appealing. As announced on the back cover, an animated reading is expected, based on the young reader's autonomous activation of several pull-the-tab mechanisms, or aided by an adult mediator. The preference for page-by-page visual units (there is only one double page) means each diegetic unit is compartmentalized, and the

outro (ex.: esconder a cara e "aparecer" para ver a reação do adulto".



interpretation and a physical action on each of the graphic elements is unhurried and progressive. Interacting with the object-book and altering images by joining in with the physical strategies provided is an integral part of reading. This process of reception and assimilation does not only contemplate the verbal register or only the visual discourse or only, even, the graphic composition. Indeed, the global meaning of the text is one of co-construction since the reader adds details and alters meanings or even the apparent course of action with his/her sensory involvement.



Figure 3. La bella y la bestia de Emmanuel Ristord (2018).



Figure 4. La bella y la bestia de Emmanuel Ristord (2018).

This reconfigured tale is slightly longer and more detailed and, therefore, closer to the original text. However, it maintains the structural diegetic aspects, as well as the most relevant symbolic elements and ideological lines. The essence of the plot and the protagonists – apparently so antagonistic, but, in fact, so close, and apparently also so incompatible, in spite of, in the end, being so harmonious in essence – prevail, a fact that contributes greatly to the survival of this text in the universal collective memory. It is therefore to be expected a progressively autonomous encounter on the part of the young reader, but also an affective and dialogical one, between adult and child, provoked by the (re)discovery of this intrigue, well known, now, dressed in a new guise.

### Final remarks

The tale of *Beauty and the beast* is, therefore, part of the list of founding texts of common literary heritage, and is widespread today, largely due to the contribution of Leprince de Beaumont. The contemporary trend of transposing and retelling fairy tales in object-book format helps accentuate the fantasy component of these plots, but also adds a playful and participatory nature to reading. It encourages moments of free contact or exploration of the printed object, and fosters development and stimulation of touch and motor skills, aspects that deserve to be highlighted.

There is a unique level of reader involvement by means of detailed graphic and editorial attention, designed in synchrony with the remaining content or properties that make up the object-book. In addition to a reappraisal of the book as an artifact, this surprises the recipient and motivates discovery of the content, even when, most of the time, it moves away from the original hypotext and gains new meanings, apprehended, now, in a plural way and through a sensorial exploration of the materials.

There is ludic activity associated with reading, that is, an active and uncompromising apprehension of these artefacts, in their entirety (design language, verbal and illustrative language), made through direct contact with the support, at the moment that the child desires and in their own time. Lending value to this, motivates the creation of bonds of affection in relation to reading, essential to the process of forming readers. Thus, the bodily dimension associated with the decoding of these works, in the first years of life, motivated by the choices of form undertaken by the designer, is fundamental (Martins & Silva, 2020c). It can therefore be seen that, in these works, the reading process is carefully foreseen or conjectured a priori by their creators, especially with regard to graphic and editorial options, and acquires a performative nature, close to that of play at certain times. It is thus important to point out that, when playing, children can make decisions and experience a feeling of dominance, power or control over situations and/or objects (contrary to other spheres of their life, in which they necessarily depend on parents or another adult). This often takes place in a process of trial and error, “[...] in a context where the consequences are minimal and they learn to react to them [...]” (Ferland, 2006, p. 50), thus strengthening self-esteem. This experience of the “[...] pleasure in action [...]” (Ferland, 2006, p. 50) with which the child reaches “[...] immediate satisfaction [...]” (Ferland, 2006, p. 50) stimulates children’s autonomy and their ability to adapt. As such, the strangeness or the challenge of these less common graphic strategies allows a greater sense of lightness or a certain informality to be combined with the act of reading, making the reader feel less intimidated. This is contrary to what occurs with certain more traditional approaches and therefore functions from an early age as alternative means of contact with the book and approach to literature. The seductive form contained in the material nature of these volumes, as we have tried to show, plays an important role in bringing the book and reading closer together. It is linked to the imaginative universe of these ancient plots, in which “[...] magic acquires subversive function, providing happy endings with a certain social justice [...]” (Botelho, 2013, p. 7), now revisited in books with novel morphology, but often precursors in terms of learning this classic literary repertoire.

As Angelo Nobile states in *La infancia y sus libros en la civilización tecnológica (Children’s literature and youth: childhood and its books in technological civilization)*, it is never too much to emphasize that these texts

[...] honestly bring children face to face with the main human problems, they encourage and favour the child’s contact with the world, that of objective reality and that of his subjective reality, of inner psychic contents, representing in fact, with their wealth of symbolic truth, an introduction to life (Nobile, 2007, p. 53, our translation)<sup>7</sup>.

Endowed with emotional properties, which appeal to memorable reading experiences, some contemporary illustrators and writers for children have proved that the aesthetic dimension of the book is not just disposable visual euphoria. It is also through the measured and unmetered exploration, in contrast to the rhythm of the day to which children are subjected, motivated by the beauty in small moments and by raising the reader’s awareness of what is beautiful and good. It is therefore up to adults to emphasize this latter and promote a devotion to art and a special awareness of the literary, often presented hand in hand with other aesthetic devices, such as illustration or design.

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<sup>7</sup> [...] ponen honestamente a la infancia ante los principales problemas humanos, propician y favorecen la toma de contacto del niño con el mundo, el de la realidad objetiva y el de su realidad subjetiva, de los contenidos psíquicos interiores, representando de hecho, con su riqueza de verdad simbólica, una introducción a la vida (Nobile, 2007, p. 53).



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