

Reading with the Body, Writing on the Skin: A Case of Blast over with Literature, Illustration, Editing and Tattoo inside / *Ler com o corpo, escrever na pele: um caso de blast over com literatura, ilustração, edição e tattoo dentro*

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by the concept used in the “tattoo scene” of blast over, which designates the use of spaces between tattoos to add others, without hiding or disguising the previous ones, we propose an exercise of analysis of an artist’s book, *Coração com Estrela-do-mar Dentro* [Heart with Starfish Inside] by Filipe Homem Fonseca (2019). The concept emerged from one of the pages of the book to become a target of questions of literary reading, from a pragmatic perspective as well. The proposal will follow a route: enter the text through the book-object that gives an important place to the illustration, by *death_by_pinscher*, remove it from there and then include it again to make the global reading, in order to also enhance the appeal of the potential young reader to the text.

KEYWORDS: Artist’s Book; Literature and Youth; Illustration and Tattoo; Horror and Humor; Filipe Homem Fonseca

RESUMO

Inspirado pelo conceito usado na “cena da tatuagem” de blast over, e que designa o aproveitamento de espaços entre tatuagens para inserir outras, sem esconder nem disfarçar as anteriores, propõe-se um exercício de análise de um livro de artista, Coração com Estrela-do-mar Dentro, de Filipe Homem Fonseca (2019). O conceito surgiu de uma das páginas do livro para se tornar alvo de questões da leitura literária, de uma perspectiva também pragmática. A proposta seguirá um percurso: entrar no texto pelo objecto-livro que dá um lugar importante à ilustração, assinada por death_by_pinscher, retirá-lo de lá e voltar a incluí-lo para fazer a leitura global, no sentido de realçar a adesão do potencial leitor jovem também ao texto.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Livro de artista; Literatura e juventude; Ilustração e tattoo; Terror e humor; Filipe Homem Fonseca

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Introduction

It starts with an artist's book, *Coração com estrela-do-mar dentro* [*Heart with a Starfish Inside*], and the concept of blast over, used in the “tattoo scene,” which refers to the use of spaces between tattoos to add new ones, without hiding or disguising the previous ones (as in Fig. 2). This connection was immediately apparent on the first leaf-through of what we classify as an artist's book, almost handmade, as we will see later when we describe it.

The cross-referencing that we will do in this text with regard to aesthetic languages, different media and the social implications of the analyzed object, we will do so under the umbrella of the immense path opened up in Literary Studies by Comparative Studies, which are also a logical consequence of Cultural Studies. The former organizing and theorizing the treatment of various aesthetic languages, the latter paying more attention to themes and their respective social contexts, both draw from the long history of Philology - the initial step in the study of a literary work that defines the text, explains the authorial pretext, describes its creation's context and those that follow it in terms of reception - methodologies that are not only verbal, but that result in what we should call a specialized, deeper reading, which we propose to realistically call literary reading. It is Claus Cluver who has the greatest impact in helping us legitimize this intersection, as he follows a path of stages that begins with intertextuality, moves on to inter-art dialogue and reaches the field of study that he calls Intermediality and which “concerns not only what we still broadly call the ‘arts’ (Music, Literature, Dance, Painting and other Visual Arts, Architecture, as well as mixed forms such as Opera, Theatre and Cinema), but also the ‘media’ and their texts (...)” (Cluver, 2006, p. 18).¹

Thus, for our reading of the chosen artist's book, we have crossed two languages that express themselves and relate to each other in order to communicate in harmony - achieved in this case, but not in every case - in the same medium, which is the book itself, an exercise that is common practice in academic studies of the children's literature

¹ In Portuguese: “diz respeito não só àquilo que nós designamos ainda amplamente de ‘artes’ (Música, Literatura, Dança, Pintura e demais Artes Plásticas, Arquitetura, bem como formas mistas, como Ópera, Teatro e Cinema), mas também às ‘mídias’ e seus textos (...)”

subsystem, for the book-album or the book-object, in which the impact of graphic and material aspects on the construction of the narrative - such as spacing, typeface and typographic styles - are analyzed together with the words and images.

But in addition to this classic exercise in which the materialities of literature gain special relevance in the reading exercise, and consequent discovery of the meanings of the work, also with the require approximations to horror fiction, we allow ourselves to make the connection to the “tattoo scene.” Here we listen to Werner Wolf, who said that “intermediality is at least as much a ‘reading’ effect as a fact of the phenomena under consideration” (Wolf, 2005, p. 254).

Following up and as a consequence of this exercise that goes from the book to the skin in a sociological extension of identification between social and age groups, we wanted to leave the reader of this text with a reaffirmation of the importance of knowing how to ask texts and other cultural objects with clear aesthetic intentions the questions that best suit them. It is not just a matter of practicing factual analysis, but of enriching those “good questions” that literary reading encourages, with the critical and creative capacities relating proficiently. These capacities seem to be threatened, we think only by the dazzle of novelty, with the success of artificial intelligence (AI).

Blast over, literally speaking, means “explosion,” a term that in our personal encyclopedia as reader of recently published books as well as thinking about the entry dedicated to contemporary youth literature in Portugal, immediately evokes Ana Pessoa’s work, *Supergigante* [Super Giant] (2014, published by *Planeta Tangerina* [Tangerine Planet]), to which we have already dedicated some, but not enough, research for proposals of reading, analysis, interpretation and discussion (Pereira, 2021). In that novel the title has its immediate reference to the field of astronomy, where through metaphor the whirlwind of feelings and emotions characteristic of adolescence is materialized. In *Coração com estrela-do-mar dentro* by Filipe Homem Fonseca, with a limited edition of 24 signed copies, from 2019, even though the dialoguing support between the book with the illustration and graphic design reacting to it, it is the world of the tattoo that is the, almost immediate, plausible interpretation to us. Subsequent, multimodal readings - text, illustration, graphic design - led us to this less sudden proposal, which nevertheless pragmatically aims to bring contemporary literature and youth culture closer together.

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Figure 1 - Photograph of the book cover
<https://www.facebook.com/deathbypinscher/>



Figure 2 - Photographic example of a blast over
<https://www.tattoodo.com/tattoos/738703>

Super Giant, despite being built around death, ends up luminous. *Coração Com Estrela-do-Mar Dentro* is a dark tale from start to finish. And even beyond that, in the reflection, which will only be confirmed and proven after the reading exercise, beyond the epidermal, or even visceral reaction. But this reaction is what you'd expect from a story that's built around what we might call a curse, to avoid mentioning a kind of death that does not come from the natural end of life. And this is the voice of Filipe Homem Fonseca, an author who does not seem to be concerned with writing with the age of the reader in mind, but rather with the surprising universes that words can construct from realities that are often so sadly obvious to those most attentive and (pre)occupied with reading the world and individuals around them. João Paulo Cotrim wrote about this short

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story, and also about the difficulty of addressing literature to younger readers, in a chronicle in the electronic newspaper *Hoje Macau* [*Today Macau*]:

At the crossroads, I was run over by the darkest of tales for children, “Coração com Estrela-do-Mar dentro,” by Filipe [Homem Fonseca], with realistic, and therefore frightening, illustrations by death_by_pinsher (I see you!), in a thousand-care edition. I joke that this tale about the genetic manipulation of imaginations and beings isn’t aimed at children, but it should be. I joke, but this mixture of enchantment and horror really calls for childish mischief (Cotrim, 2019).²

Filipe Homem Fonseca was born in Lisbon in 1974, the year of the 25 April Revolution and the beginning of democracy in Portugal. He has a degree in Advertising and, as well as being a writer, he is also a screenwriter, musician, director and comedian. He has been part of numerous projects in various audiovisual areas, for which he often writes as part of a team. If we can limit ourselves to the publication of his literary writing, apart from the short story we are dealing with here, we can say that Filipe Homem Fonseca released his first novel in 2013, entitled *Se não podes juntar-te a eles, vence-os* [*If you can’t Join them, Beat them*], published by Divina Comédia. In 2015, his second novel, *Há sempre tempo para mais nada* [*There’s Always Time for Nothing Else*], published by Quetzal, where, in 2019, he published his third novel, *A imortal da graça* [*The Immortal One from Graça*]. He writes haikai, some of which have already been published in a book entitled *conta gotas* [*dropper*] (2008, tea for one). He also writes poetry, and *e enquanto espero que me arranjem o esquentador penso em como será a vida depois do sol explodir* [*while i’m waiting for them to fix my heater, i’m thinking about what life will be like after the sun explodes*] (2015, *do lado esquerdo*). Three of his short stories were also published in 2010, one in the book *O fio à meada* [*The Thread*], another in the collective *E outros belos contos de Natal* [*And Other Beautiful Christmas Tales*], both by Escritório Editora, and the third in *Antologia de ficção científica*

² In Portuguese: “No cruzamento que se instala, fui atropelado pelo mais negro dos contos para crianças, “Coração com Estrela-do-mar dentro,” do Filipe [Homem Fonseca], com ilustrações realistas, e portanto, assustadoras de death_by_pinsher (estou-te a ver!), em edição de mil cuidados. Gozo, que este conto sobre manipulação genética dos imaginários e dos seres não se destina aos petizes, mas devia. Brinco, mas esta mistura de encanto e horror está mesmo a pedir uma infantil maldade.”

fantasporto [Science Fiction Anthology - *Fantasporto*] (Asa, 2012), published in Portugal and Brazil. Although he does not write for young people, his knowledge of contemporary audiences who attach in mass to the objects and phenomena he creates, will in some way explain the possibility of a younger generation of readers connecting to him. This may be a parameterized measure in the sociology of reading which we will not explore, but on which this exercise is proposed. Literary reading because it is creative and uses methodologies from contemporary criticism and literary studies.

As far as the artistic activity of tattooing is concerned, it is the subject of marginalized study in the ever-crossing fields of arts and sociology (Fischer, 2002; Atkinson, 2003; Sanders; Vail, 2009; Ferreira, 2013). In the review of a 2000 study by the American author Margo DeMello, entitled *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community*, we can read this eloquent summary of the perspectives involved:

DeMello chronicles the process by which this transformation of meaning has taken place, paying particular attention to how the contours of an American tattoo community have been redrawn in the process. To explain these transformations, DeMello draws on familiar ideas: Bakhtin's grotesque body, Bourdieu's class body, Hobsbawm's invented tradition, and Anderson's imagined community (Mascia-Lee, 2000, p. 700).



Figure 3 - Photograph of page 3, seminal page for this article;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bkm3AHGgB-j/>

The expression that is both designation and concept of blast over came to us inspired by a page from Filipe Homem Fonseca's book that we will analyze (see the

seminal figure in Fig.3). We will use it to address the issues of the literary reading of objects in which languages (verbal, iconic and graphic) intersect, creating a discourse that densifies enigmas, despite the information that the diversity of chosen signs seems to provide. And it is from a pragmatic perspective that the objectives of this study will be achieved: to interpret the text within the object, which is a book, but which could be only a narrative, in order to transform it into a kind of descriptive memory of a tattooed body. The book, enlivened by multimodal reading thanks to illustration and graphic design, will, at some point in its reader's journey, be emphasized again by the literary nature of verbal grammar, which, in an opinionated argument, adds to its value.

The article will tend to follow a path with a plurality of languages that may make it somewhat sinuous (like the pieces of bodies grafted onto whole bodies that are thus marked and come to be read in a different way or with a different reaction), which is why this introduction gives it a guiding line. This guideline is also the methodology for the textual, literary and visual analysis of the book that was followed: enter the text through the book-object that gives an important place to the illustration by *death_by_pinscher*, remove it from there, analyze it, include it again and make the interpretation, as a global reading, in the ultimate objective sense of highlighting the young reader's potential appeal to the text.

So, not forgetting that a literary analysis is an intellectual exercise that can start from an emotional reaction to the reading of an artistic object, especially when the creative intention highlights the publication of the literary text in its material realization in book form, this approach attempts to achieve an intentional re-contextualization. This proposal for a re-contextualized reading naturally also becomes a fictional act, albeit an argued one, since the authors of the text, illustration or graphics have not confirmed any intention to relate the object to the "tattoo scene."

With this article, we propose just that: to carry out one of the many possible exercises that allow the polysemic reading of aesthetic objects, those that are constituted not in reality, but in the possibility of figurative or evocative discourses that create perceptible realities. Our concern is, in fact, in line with the theme of the dossier, which calls for attention to works in which the literary text "establishes relationships with other

arts, media and codes” for an intense and fruitful dialogue with other languages, challenging children and young people to undertake a multi-semiotic reading.

The article will therefore comprise four parts. In the first and second parts, we will formally and semantically analyze the texts that are interwoven in the book: first the verbal text, then the iconic and graphic texts. In the third part, we will clarify the intrusion of the subject of the tattoo into the field of the book, the literary text and reading, in what is, after all, the most innovative aspect of a theoretical-practical text that belongs to and speaks from the double field, sectioned and shared, of literature and culture. Here too we will justify the classification of the chosen object as pertinent to the dossier’s project, with regard to this envisaged age condition of implicit potential readers. Finally, in the conclusion, we will justify our proposal as an exercise that not only valorizes this object-book with an illustrated short story inside, but pragmatically brings it into the stream of cultural products that create affinity between young people, reading, and education for the critique of aesthetic processes with individual and social impact.

But let’s go into the verbal text of the book, which took us away from literary studies for a moment and led us to the tattoo scene, and then we can enrich this reading with the so-called materialities, in which the iconic language, that is more central, is conditioned by techniques and options of expression, which are also materialized by nature for visual materialization and contribution to the meanings that the work gives to literary reading.

1 *In the Stories the Mother Told...*

The text of *Coração com Estrela-do-mar Dentro*, as we have said, is a tale that we could uncontroversially classify under the established designation of Horror Fiction, corresponding to the consensual and general history of the genre: a “simple form” of fiction, narrative, synthetic, a direct heir to the ancestral forms of oral storytelling. The “tellers” are those who, by the particular magic of their voices and imagination, hoped the “listeners” imagination would meet their own. And the listeners would reconstruct facts or events with words, giving them an existence that, because it was so appealing,

could probably be repeated, becoming the dominant versions of what had happened or could have happened.

The first sentence of the story sounds sibilant - “Always that sound, as if something was moving inside the drawer of the bedside table” (Fonseca, 2019, p. 1)³ - setting the tone for the environment in which Horror hopes to find its model reader in the text. A reader who brings with them knowledge from a known origin - traditional folk stories or stories told to children - and that reaches them, the character and the reader who immediately establish a relationship of identification, as atavistic as the fear that we do not know the origin of: “In the stories the mother told, before the girl pretended to fall asleep, it was from under the bed or inside the closet that the strange sounds came from” (Fonseca, 2019, p. 1).⁴ And the verbal text on the first page, where the illustration takes up three quarters of the whole page, closes like a caption: “But there, in her new room, it was from the drawer” (Fonseca, 2019, p. 1).⁵

Turning the page, we have the paragraphs that make up the longest and densest patch of verbal text in the book, paragraphs that contextualize the reader as to the circumstances that keep the character nameless: a girl with a fear that she controls like a hero. Paragraphs, that are graphically difficult to quantify, state facts directly and unequivocally. Facts that are commented on with poetic rhetorical images, which function as curious manipulations that guess possible feelings as a reaction from the readers. The creative intention of the text’s effect on those who read it pushes what seems to be an undoubted reality that, even so and in an apparently natural way, allows and desires reactions as different as they are close: Horror and Humor linked by the poetic polysemic possibilities of words. And so begins the text on this page:

Most of the toys were still boxed up.
Outside, only her favorites, which she let go as soon as she felt trapped in the new house. A pink brush that played music when she combed her hair, a Scuba Diver Barbie without an arm, and a broken mirror of which only the plastic was left, but in which the girl still pretended to

³ In Portuguese: “Sempre aquele som, como se alguma coisa se mexesse dentro da gaveta da mesa de cabeceira.”

⁴ In Portuguese: “Nas histórias que a mãe contava, antes de a menina fingir adormecer, era de baixo da cama ou do interior do armário que vinham os sons esquisitos.”

⁵ In Portuguese: “Mas ali, no seu quarto novo, era da gaveta.”

see a reflection, just as she pretended to fall asleep every night. She couldn't sleep knowing that the sounds from the drawer would wake her up. They were going to make her open the drawer and see one of those weird animals, always different, yesterday's less weird than today's, and so on, until the final weirdness that would be a night like this (Fonseca, 2019, p. 2).⁶

The atmosphere is what a reader normally recognizes from Horror films, such as the music that, in the darkness or dimness, comes out of objects in an unusual way, either because they do not normally produce music, like brushes, or because, like when there are music boxes or audiovisual devices, they turn on by themselves. The character is that of someone capable of seeing what is not there, not out of self-delusion, but as a way of recognizing that their reality isn't the socially, and even psychologically, accepted reality: pretending is not the same as imagining, which seems to be an important condition for anchoring the literary fact in a reality that doesn't disappear through the art of writing.

But the text on this introductory page goes on to tell us about the relationship between the child character and her mother. The mother is the figure who seems to begin by doing what is socially accepted and attributed to this relationship, in both directions, daughter-mother-daughter: stories told before going to bed that are found in texts validated by their publication in writing, chosen by the recipient. The notices that share responsibility for the effects of this shared reading, rather than revealing the exemplary closeness and intimacy of this relationship, may perhaps be dissonant with what is legally called "parental responsibility." This is a condition that regulates the hard task of making people grow up and is not inevitably protected from the relationships that those who grow up establish with the rest of the world. And the text goes on like this:

Her mother always warned her, "Are you sure this is the story you want Mom to read?" "Look, it's scary, then you won't be able to sleep, and who's going to put up with you? You, Mom," the girl answered, "there were only the two of you in the new house, the two of you for twelve

⁶ In Portuguese: "A maior parte dos brinquedos ainda estava encaixotada.

Fora, só os preferidos, que ela soltou assim que se sentiu presa dentro da casa nova. Uma escova cor-de-rosa que tocava música quando ela se penteava, uma Barbie Mergulhadora sem um braço, e um espelho partido do qual só sobrara o plástico. mas onde a menina fingia ver ainda um reflexo, como fingia adormecer todas as noites. Não conseguia dormir sabendo que os sons da gaveta iam acordá-la. Iam fazê-la abrir a gaveta e ver um daqueles bichos esquisitos, sempre diferentes, o de ontem menos esquisito do que os de hoje, e por aí fora, até à esquisitice final que seria uma noite destas."

nights, twelve strange animals.’ It was the thirteenth night, and she remembered something bad about the number 13 in one of the stories her mother had read to her before she pretended to fall asleep. Today’s creature would be terrible.

She was never able to explain to her mother that she had nothing to worry about: no matter how scary the story was, it was her mother’s voice that told it, the same voice that said goodnight before kissing her on the cheek, which almost made her fall asleep, such was the peace it filled her with, before she remembered the drawer again and the strange noises that were going to be heard before long (Fonseca, 2019, p. 2).⁷

And there follows, throughout the heart of the book between pages 3 and 17, verbal text interspersed with, or even interrupted by, iconic text, leaving no doubt as to the possibility of the existence of the mutant animals that might seem to live only in the main character’s imagination. Creatures that, among others that depend on life stories and cultures, populate both the Horror universe (spiders, bats, crows) and the children’s universe (dogs, cats, and mice, for example), seem to come not from a drawer, but from a genetic experimentation laboratory. The suspension of disbelief is ensured by the presence, in this gallery of monsters, of the mouse with a human ear growing on its body, a documented experiment, made accessible to many television viewers or those who frequent other screens. However bizarre they may appear in the illustrated image or in the reader’s imagination, the text gives them the necessary verisimilitude, placing the terrifying effect of the aberrations in the realm of science. And it does so with an ironic humorous tone that treats “serious things” as if they were minor:

On the fourth night, it was the mouse because it hadn’t been the bat. He was all white and fluffy, and the little girl was about to put down the mutilated Scuba Diver Barbie and pick him up. Then she noticed the ear on the mouse’s back. The next day, she found a photo of it on the internet - a famous mouse in her drawer. The little girl chewed his ear off asking for his autograph, but then kept quiet so as not to wake her

⁷ In Portuguese: “A mãe avisava-a sempre, tens a certeza que é esta a história que queres que a mãe leia?, olha que isto mete medo, depois não consegues dormir, e quem é que te atura? Tu, mãe, respondia-lhe a menina, só lá estavam as duas na casa nova, as duas há doze noites, doze bichos esquisitos. Era a décima-terceira noite, e ela lembrava-se de qualquer coisa má acerca do número 13 numa das histórias que a mãe lhe lera antes de fingir adormecer. O bicho de hoje seria terrível.

“Nunca conseguiu explicar à mãe que não tinha com que se preocupar: por mais assustadora que fosse a história lida, era a voz da mãe que a contava, a mesma voz que lhe dizia boa-noite antes do beijo na bochecha, que quase a fazia adormecer tal era a paz com que a enchia, antes de voltar a lembrar-se da gaveta e dos ruídos esquisitos que iam ouvir-se não tardava mesmo nada.”

mother. She knew that her mother was afraid of rats (Fonseca, 2019, pp. 6-7).⁸

Note the comical use of language with the expression “chewing the ear off” of a mouse with a human ear on its back, with the comical situation that represents the media fame of a mouse taken over by the entire “class” of laboratory mice, resulting in the significant and serious mimicry of a maternal behavior of the girl towards the adult, her mother.

If the time of the narrative corresponds to an analepsis in the timeline of the discourse - we are at the beginning of the thirteenth night and the previous twelve nights are recounted - this effect doesn't put the reader's mind off the possible outcome, as it is only the beginning of a night announced as the end. As for the space in which the story takes place - old despite having just housed these two characters and their fears, empty despite the visitors coming out of the drawer, silent so that you can even hear a bee buzzing inside the drawer - this coincides with the impression we get of the house, predictably poor if we take into account what the text says on the last page, at the end of the story. A paragraph that puts the fears back not in the imagination of the child character, but precisely in the house haunted by inherited tenants who, unexpectedly, seem to be the result of science experiments, that place where we place precisely not the ghosts of the past, but the hopes of the future. Thus ends the tale:

The creature better work tonight, otherwise they'll have to leave the new house. That's what's agreed on. House prices are going through the roof. Fingers crossed. It'll be fine. Today's creature is terrible. The girl will scream and pay in fear to the old owners of the house (Fonseca, 2019, p. 19).⁹

⁸ In Portuguese: “Na quarta noite, era o rato que o morcego não fôra. Todo branco, ar fofinho, e a menina até esteve para largar a Barbie Mergulhadora mutilada e pegar nele ao colo. Reparou então na orelha que o rato tinha nas costas. No dia seguinte, encontrou uma fotografia dele na internet - um rato famoso dentro da sua gaveta. A menina gritou-lhe ao ouvido a pedir um autógrafa, mas depois calou-se para não acordar a mãe. Sabia que a mãe tinha medo de ratos.”

⁹ In Portuguese: “É bom que esta noite o bicho resulte, de outra maneira terão de abandonar a casa nova. É o que está combinado. O preço das casas está pela hora da morte. Dedos cruzados. Vai correr bem. O bicho de hoje é terrível. A menina vai gritar e pagar em medo aos velhos donos da casa.”

If the ending remains open, the beginning of the end, on what seems to be the last night if everything goes as in the stories and their tradition, reveals the mother figure as the evil that has been diluted over the twelve nights: the Horror qualified for the fictional genre will be confirmed. But the revelation simultaneously opens up the uncertainty of the end, also on a textual level: the narrator's voice seems to distance itself from the voice of the child character in order to hear the voice of the mother. After all, it seems that neither the narrator nor the reader knows what will happen. At the beginning of the end, the text takes up the words of the first two pages:

It's the thirteenth night and the little girl remembers something bad about the number 13 in one of the stories her mother read to her before she pretended to fall asleep. Today's creature will be terrible. Inside the drawer. The girl will open it (Fonseca, 2019, pp. 18-19).¹⁰

And the focus falls on what the mother is doing, a definitively cinematic image that changes the category of space to make the time of the child's tormenting action simultaneous, which we have been witnessing throughout the story. The macabre confirms the Horror, leaving out the Tragedy through unlikelihood, but above all through the saving resistance of dark humor. This is what the text reveals:

Two rooms away, the mother sits waiting, picking scabs off her needle-punctured fingers with her teeth. She's running out of ideas. Even worse, she's running out of corpses, dying people to cut pieces from to sew into creatures. There are plenty of animals in the basement, attic and garden. The house is new, but many lived here before the mother and child arrived. What's missing is human material, and with all the work involved in moving, the mother had time to go out and kill (Fonseca, 2029, p. 19).¹¹

¹⁰ In Portuguese: "É a décima terceira noite e a menina lembra-se de qualquer coisa má acerca do número 13 numa das histórias que a mãe lhe leu antes de fingir adormecer. O bicho de hoje será terrível. Dentro da gaveta. A menina vai abri-la."

¹¹ In Portuguese: "Duas salas ao lado, a mãe aguarda sentada, com os dentes arranca crostas dos dedos furados por agulhas. Está a ficar sem ideias. Mais grave ainda, está a ficar sem cadáveres, sem moribundos de quem cortar pedaços para coser nas criaturas. De bicharada estão cave, sótão e jardim cheios, a casa é nova mas já muita coisa por cá vivia antes da mãe e da menina chegarem. O que falta é material humano, e com tanta trabalhadeira nas mudanças a mãe tinha lá tempo de sair à rua para matar. Canseira."

Naturally, as the genre of this literary subsystem of Horror dictates, we will not know what freak-creature will come out of the drawer in the girl's room, feeding the fear that nourishes the relationship between daughter and mother through stories that apparently come true. To us, the readers, the freak of which we also have examples on the internet has already revealed itself. Readers will perhaps need to exercise their imagination to discover which possible story corresponds to each of the monstrous combinations, apparent inspirational muses of the mother who lovingly cradles the daughter who listens and lovingly pretends that they are perfect for falling asleep.

Just as Horror and Humor intersect in words, love and fear intersect in the stories of lives brought into books. In this exercise, after briefly looking at the visual and graphic texts, we'll stick to the story of the twelfth night, the one that may result in a different combination from the other bizarre ones: the story of the starfish that lives with a human heart inside and that will have something to do with the heart grafted onto the starfish that comes out of the bottom of the drawer.

2 Stamping Imagination into Images and Words

Since it was the material aspect that led us to this exercise of reading a short story, as if the result was a "Playbill" of a tattooed human body, it is important to look at these characteristics which, as we know beforehand, also arose from readings of the verbal text. It's not important, because we wouldn't be able to even prove it, to affirm that the authors of the short story, the illustrations and the layout coincided in their intentions, which Luís Favas assumes to be his own in the specificity of the graphic arts chosen. The result is almost handmade and, as João Paulo Cotrim said, in an "edition of a thousand cares" (Cotrim, 2019), which allows us to perceive an intentionality that seems, at the same time, meta-referential.

In an almost *mise-en-abîme* composition, the body of the book grafts the visual text onto the verbal text, the images and the technique with which they are printed on the paper, and with which the typographic characters are adjusted. We know, and we can see, that the illustrations were printed using the stamp technique and it could be the case that Risograph Printing was the printing technique used. This printing technique uses a type

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 19 (3): e61283e, July/Sept. 2024

of rough, absorbent paper that is used in this publication and the results leave a handmade appearance, which is also evident here. A technique of duplication (and multiplication) that appears unique through imperfection, which couldn't make form and content more semiotically consonant.

At the heart of the book, with dimensions of 14x20 cm, vertical, six sheets sewn together by hand, instead of stapled at the fold, result in the front cover, back cover and 20 pages. The text has the right place in an album-book, i.e. there are no orphaned or widowed lines left to chance in the spacing dimensions. We will take a closer look at three cases, chosen because as well as interfering with or stemming from the literary text, they relate to peritextual and epitextual elements.

Thus, on page 3 (Fig. 3), the text is divided into two hemistiches by the finger-embedded-spider, forcing us to live with the repugnant creature and notice the details of the finger that make it up. The verbal text explains the visual text which, in turn, is the result of the illustrator's privileged first reading of the verbal text. A circularity that lingers on the page, with obvious reactive effects as well as reflective ones. As we said and remember, this articulation between verbal and iconic texts, which are so related and at the same time seem asynchronous in their creation, is also what drew our attention to the solution of the tattoo that tells a story that is reread with changes and is constrained to the space of the body and the permanence of the indelible inks. What is added and/or modified remains legible and with semantic intent.

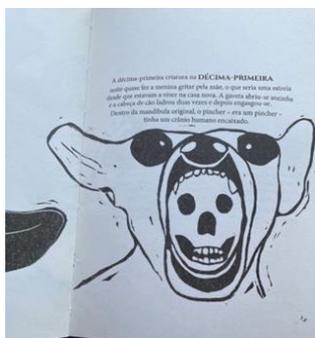


Figure 4 - Photograph of page 15
https://www.instagram.com/death_by_pinscher/

On page 15 (Fig. 4), the eleventh creature, a pinscher dog that only reveals its deformity when it chokes while barking, showing a human skull embedded in its jaw, almost makes the girl scream. Almost at the end of the story, we still do not have a predictable sense of scale, because we do not know the dimensions of that drawer, or because when a second tarantula with a cold appears, the girl blows its grafted nose, or the dog-cat has a man's hand grabbing it, we are confused as to the real size of the animals. But that pinscher looked like it could swallow a girl. This illustration also becomes a reference to the authorship of the iconic text, since the illustrations, as indicated on the back cover of this book by the author(s), are by *death_by_pinscher*, the name that Ana Roque, the illustrator, chose as her signature.

Finally, the illustration of what appears to be a bedside table with the drawer where the mutant animals hide, which appears on the seventh night (page 11), becomes the illustration and logo of the label: *Edições Fundo-da-Gaveta* [Back-of-the-Drawer Editions]. As Luís Favas,¹² who was responsible for the layout, says: “I did the layout by making/breaking a grid and finding a balance between the text, illustration and white space.”

Once we reach the back cover, we can confirm by the absence of an ISBN that this handmade book is an artist's book. The book is not for sale, perhaps it will have a registered edition with other features that will allow it to reach more readers. Let's hope that, even if some of the material characteristics are altered, the relationship between literature, illustration and graphic design does not lose its meaning, nor does it diminish the intensity that makes reading a body printed with a certain aesthetic intention (among other intentions and perspectives that have already been highlighted here), an opportunity for communication between various instances and planes, from the most public to the most intimate. This can be done both through the reading of those who create and those who receive, activating what is the alpha and omega of the human superpower that needs to be developed: imagination.

With imagination in the place of creativity of the giver and in dialogue with the receiver, the heritage of the two ends of the path of a living aesthetic object is added

¹² See Luís Favas' profile on the social network Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bkm3AHGgB-j/>.

together, memory is put to work to find points of convergence, confrontation, and learning, and what has been read, learned and contested is kept in order to create heritage to be added to. It is in this web of relationships, in this overlapping of know-how and communicative skills that facilitate understanding and open up space for argumentation, that we arrive at the illustration of the cover, and of the creature of the twelfth night (Fig. 1).

We have been dealing with the girl's fear of the monstrous animals with parts of human bodies grafted on to them. The illustration that shows us what, according to the text, was the worst of the monsters, does not fool the reader who has fallen into the rhythm of the girl's sleepless nights. An attentive reader who gradually improves as they enter the swallowing world of Horror. The book's title plays precisely on this misconception, like a pair of verses in different languages (verbal and iconic) that form an oxymoron or, at the very least, a contradiction. What we see on the cover is not a heart with a starfish inside; at most, it is a heart with a starfish on top of it. We need to reach the penultimate night survived to perhaps find the meaning, to understand the equivocation and/or disambiguate its meaning:

Number twelve was the worst. The little girl thinks: a yesterday with so many fears, one wants a lifetime away. And it does seem far away, at least now, while her mother reads her a horrible story in her soothing voice. Yesterday, creature number twelve was a starfish inside a heart. Both were pulsating, or maybe just one of them, the girl didn't know which. She stared at the star-heart all night until it stopped beating. Then she closed the drawer and waited for her mother to enter the room, blinds open, to forget all about it. As much as possible. Until the next night. This one (Fonseca, 2019, p. 16).¹³

It opens up space and opportunity for personal, symbolic, mystical, psychoanalytical or mythocritical readings, those that fit the anthropological structures of the imaginary, unconscious behaviors, hereditary and/or atavistic reactions: these are the

¹³ In Portuguese: "O número doze foi o pior. A menina pensa: um ontem com tantos medos quer-se há uma vida de distância. E parece mesmo distante, pelo menos agora, enquanto a mãe lhe lê uma história horrível com a sua voz tranquilizadora. Ontem o bicho número doze foi uma estrela-do-mar dentro de um coração. Ambos pulsavam, ou talvez apenas um deles, a menina não sabia qual. Passou a noite toda a olhar para o coração-estrela, até ele parar de bater. Depois fechou a gaveta e esperou pela entrada da mãe no quarto, persianas abertas, esquecer aquilo tudo. Tanto quanto possível. Até à próxima noite. Esta."

art forms that tell the stories that science can't explain any other way, with other evidence, facts, samples. However, it is in the girl's thoughts, in the twenty syllables full of poetry within, that we may have the key to understanding the suspense, the horror, the emptiness of persistence in them, the inexplicable: "a yesterday with so many fears, one wants a lifetime away."¹⁴

In the verses, let's call them that, the time counted in the chosen formulations euphemizes death and the repetition of a cycle of inheritances, of expendable patrimonies. The heart and the starfish, the conventional center of feelings and the animal that regenerates despite all the amputations, beating together, are imprinted on the page of the book like a body that brings to its skin the story it desires, or tells, and that takes place within itself. The drawing appears as a complex and visceral defibrillator system in which hope for survival and healing, for regeneration, is placed. A heart that, like the starfish that was grafted onto it, yearns for healing and raises more questions than answers: the girl's heart or the mother's? Or that of the sacrificed? When we write these "grafts" into the human body in ink and blood on our skin, by tattooing it are we already interpreting what we are saying about ourselves? Or do we exorcise them? Or are they just images that we like and want to keep with us, in our memory, and therefore with their own meanings? Or are they shared and with whom?

When a book object gives us so many spaces to read between what it says, textually or visually, it allows us an explosion, and we return to the blast over, of proposals that give it another or the same meaning at each reading, which moves or remains depending on the context of those readings, with the certainty of the texts that remain available there. And, when coherent, but without obligatory meaning, giving a pretext to the time of its creation that we usually call the author's intention. It is these possibilities of plural readings that, in our opinion, constitute the path that leads the young reader to the aesthetic object with which affinities can also be just a matter of choosing from the possibilities of offered readings. No explicit messages, no rhetorical questions with only didactic aims.

¹⁴ In Portuguese: "um ontem com tantos medos, quer-se há uma vida de distância."

3 The Tattoo Scene: Inscription, Artistic Writing and Blast Over

In a ten-year-old text, the result of research and empirical study, Vítor Ferreira concludes that the history of tattoo artists in Portugal is not very different from what happens in the Western world of reference,

dissatisfied with the expressive limitations of the traditional institutionalized arts, tattooing also appeals to these young people as an original and little-explored form of graphic art, available to more iconoclastic paths from an aesthetic point of view (Ferreira, 2010, p. 56).¹⁵

We do not think these inferences have changed much, apart from the natural increase in the age group of tattooists and the spread of tattooed bodies. What seemed important to us was to take it as a given that tattooing is a practice that creates objects and follows processes that, beyond circumstantial phenomena, have a place in society that, crossing the field of aesthetics, does not escape the civilizational domain of social life in progress:

Finding a tattooist who is willing to teach and work with an apprentice can be crucial to establishing oneself in the trade, and women are often discouraged from serving an apprenticeship. (...) Tattooists' aspirations tend to fall into one (or both) of two categories: owner of a profitable shop and recognition as an artist (Fischer, 2002, pp. 97-98).

The tattoo scene, an expression used by its scholars in this zone crossed by sociology and art, goes beyond the realms of the ritual or the marginal, of religion or societies, where it has remained beyond aesthetic evaluations for centuries. This approach, which refocuses the observation of the phenomenon on aesthetic issues, is therefore very recent, although the readings made of artistic expression, even in the creative act itself, do not rule out traces of spiritual evocations and motives that mix

¹⁵ In Portuguese: “insatisfeitos com as limitações expressivas das tradicionais artes institucionalizadas, a tatuagem também alicia estes jovens enquanto forma de arte gráfica original e pouco explorada, disponível a caminhos mais iconoclastas de um ponto de vista estético.”

personal intimacy and relational complicity between individuals. Let's see what Fischer confirms about this scene that is apparently so far removed from literary studies:

Both Blanchard (1994) and Sanders (1989) identify four primary overlapping functions of the tattoo. First, the tattoo functions as ritual. In a culture in which there are few rituals or rites of passage outside religion, the tattoo can serve (as it did for indigenous people who practiced tattooing) as a physical mark of a life event. These life events are interpreted as significant by the bearer, if not by society, and can vary from the winning of a sporting event or competition to the completion of a divorce to the remission of cancer (becoming a 'cancer survivor'). The tattoo also functions as identification. By inscribing established symbols on the body, the tattooee is identifying him/herself as part of a given group. Groups can be as broad as 'American' to the very specific, such as a family or partner's name. A third function of tattooing is protective.

The tattoo can be a symbol or talisman to protect its bearer from general or specific harm. Sanders (1989) relates an interview with a man who had a tattoo of a fierce and angry bee inscribed on his arm. The man told Sanders that he was allergic to bees and had been stung so much that his physician feared the next sting might prove fatal. Having decided he needed protection against bees, the man decided to get a bee tattoo/talisman to frighten the bees from stinging him again. Finally, the fourth function of tattoos is decorative. Regardless of their particular psychosocial function for the individual, tattoos are images (even words become images as/within tattoos). By modifying the body with tattoos, the individual has chosen to add permanent decoration to his/her body (Fischer, 2002, pp. 100-101).

On the other hand, every inscription - monument or document - is a mark and a landmark that highlights moments or periods that do not escape time, and whose traces or vestiges reveal a struggle in defense of memory against oblivion. At the same time, the increasing availability of access to past facts has also created the need to make an exception to this enduring nature of past time, with what is known as the right to be forgotten. "Forever" has become an adverbial form with heavy semantics in today's times of speed and voracious media, in which information and counter-information, fact and opinion, novelty after novelty follow one another. And for this reason, the inscription on the skin seems to take on a form of contemporary resistance, which is not clandestine and is even confused with a way of keeping up with trends in the fashion world. In this confusion, which usually displeases those who see convictions being confused with distractions, there is even a solution that gives the option of having temporary tattoos as

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 19 (3): e61283e, July/Sept. 2024

an alternative to real tattoos, a kind of counterfeit of a product or process that you want to preserve in its original or fundamental identity.

In the tattoo scene, the human body is transformed into a canvas, stucco, or sheet of paper on which ink is printed, with an expiry date that is the lifetime of the tattooed person, an intentional representation that communicates something with those who become the support for this representation. But it also communicates with those who read that body, in detail or as a whole. Expression and communication mark the tattoo scene, like that of any other art, when the aesthetic is also intentional, or as a testimony, like that of any monument or document that keeps a moment or a story for the future, or for the absent. And these inscriptions are relativized over time, gaining, or losing importance: culturally dynamic, as objects that correspond to ritualistic social gestures, interruptible or discontinued in the market of successes validated by groups, or because stories, of lives too, have their twists and the right to be forgotten.

If we think of the palimpsest technique, for example, as the embodiment of an intention to exchange the less for the more important, for whatever reason, even financial (think of the unavailability of parchment material on the market or in our pockets), we will realize that the skin of a person who commissions artistic work from a tattooist is no exception to this type of choice. Choices that, in addition to being financially motivated, can be the result of regrets, if we stick to the sentimental, or the fitting of a new layer of communication of this expression of emotions with the consideration of the aesthetic aspect of this intentional “addition” which, in addition to being just that, ends up resulting in a rewrite. And, as such, it lends itself to another reading that corrects, but does not erase, the previously proposed reading. This is what happens with the blast over in the tattoo scene.

When certain moments in life, like certain episodes in a narrative, strike you as if you were reading them with your body, reacting to them with terror, or love, or humor, the recording seems to deserve to become obligatory - just as the question that tries to understand it more naturally arises - and that seems to be reason enough to write it on your skin. Perhaps even leaving room for blast over, in other words, for other moments, or episodes, to also become those written drawings that, when made on the skin, are called tattoos. Just as a compulsive and attentive reader can't stop reading but can choose what

deserves to remain in their memory, the addiction to tattooing one's body seems to follow a similar pattern.

Conclusion

And with this basic subject of the fixation of memory in a book or on the skin, let's begin the conclusion of this article precisely with what has just appeared in the world, as a result of human intervention and with both individual and social impacts. As we now introduce the subject of artificial intelligence (AI), which we announced at the beginning, we also do so with Werner Wolf's advice in mind:

although the term 'intermediality' originated in a literature-centred milieu and is still used mostly in relation to literature, it has far transcended the boundaries of the literary field. This is also why, strictly speaking, the objects that are linked or characterized by intermediality should be called 'semiotic complexes or entities', a designation that includes not only various genres and groups of texts but also artefacts, performances, installations, and so on (Wolf, 2005, p. 252).

The emergence of a technological tool, in addition to what happens in the Digital Humanities that facilitate philological work and access to works, has, with AI, intervention in creation that emulates works of art, a field to be explored. But above all, it will have an impact that we consider significant and worrying in the proposals for reading literary texts on which AI seems to offer only answers as if they were official readings. And that's not counting the errors that even the Digital Humanities can't eliminate. We're not yet in a position to present studies on these impacts, but we don't want to be left out of this issue, bringing the contribution of literary reading into the discussion and, possibly, making us rethink the direction of literary studies, deepening one type of approach to *corpora* more than others.

Born in 2022 and tending to go viral from 2023 onwards in the bookstores frequented by internet users, the AI program available on the digital platform application is known as ChatGPT or AIChatbot. It is a computer tool that allows people to interact, in written or spoken dialog, in a considerable number of available languages, with a *bot* -

short for robot - equipped with said intelligence. The *bot* uses all the information at its disposal, entered by a human hand, to combine it in the context of the questions asked. The words in the question act as keywords which, when detected in their conjugation and formulation, allow the *bot* to compile what seems most appropriate, expressed in a very concise way, almost like a dictionary entry, not as extensive as that of an encyclopedia. There is no room for impressions, either epidermal or visceral, although if it were a perfect tool, it could only compile what is factual and historical, stored in an enviable memory. Now, as we know and have already developed, literary reading is done with more than this possible - we repeat, if it were a perfect instrument - demonstration of erudition.

But the use of AI also confirms what we already knew about critical and literary reading: even when it comes to accessing information, the important thing is knowing how to ask the right questions. Furthermore: if having easy access to the most accurate and complete information is equivalent to having an enviable memory, it's what we do with that information, it's the use we make of that memory using creativity beyond the replicable aesthetic plane, in other words, a use conditioned to the concrete of life and history, which the creator tells and the reader receives with greater or lesser imagination, that distinguishes us from *bot*.

And the time we have gained by receiving information is time we can use, preferably with pleasure, to talk about and give our opinions on that information. Beauty, so debatable, is a great starting point for this time gained with technology. As is ideology, which creates both affinities and conflicts: between generations and cultures. And tattoos, like anything that is difficult to accept or understand, are always grounds for a good conversation. Like the conversation that results from reading a book or a written and illustrated body, in other words, a work of art:

Some tattooists have a concept of mutual artistry for which they often strive (Sanders, 1989). This can best be characterized as a process in which the tattooist and client design a tattoo based on the individual personality of the client and based on the client's body, using the natural contours of the body to make a more beautiful tattoo. This process is often restricted by the client's cost considerations and his/her desire to know exactly how the finished product will look in the end.

Are these clients seeking art? How do they choose not only a tattoo, but also a tattooist? What are the ways in which they envision the ink on their body? (Fischer, 2002, p. 99).

When readers finish reading *Coração com Estrela-do-mar Dentro*, they are forced to revisit the beginning, to fill in the synapses and find the missing links that the suspense, or the effect we call literature, has created. The exercise we have proposed on this illustrated and published short story, reading it as if it were a tattoo made and explained on a human body, is both another example of the importance and richness of multimodal readings of objects that call for, cross and highlight dialogues between different but related languages, and a suggestion for those who, while not forgetting potential readers/spectators of works of art, do not forget above all the quality in the specificity (texts, pretexts, contexts) of these works. This is what we consider to be a good, if not the only, way to train more critical and, as such, demanding readers. The quality of art is born from criticism and demand, shared between authors and readers.

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