

Literary Words and Images: Approximations between Comic Books and Picturebooks / *Palavras e imagens literárias: aproximações entre histórias em quadrinhos e livros ilustrados*

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks, from a growing production of works in which literary narratives operate as verbal and visual languages in dialogue, to approach the formats widely found in bookstores, libraries, and in the hands of readers: comics and picturebooks. Thinking about the similarities and differences between them, we can understand how multimodal literature transits between the resources of these formats, without losing aesthetic quality and continuity, that is, highlighting the fluidity between them. To this end, we analyzed theoretical references (McCloud, 2005; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2011; Linden, 2011) and observed two narratives that do not reflect the traditional parameters of these formats: *In the Night Kitchen* (1970), by Maurice Sendak and *Are We There Yet?* (2016) by Dan Santat. We reflect, therefore, on this confrontation of borders that reveals a need for a broader understanding of literature.

KEYWORDS: Comic book; Picturebook; Literary languages; Multimodality; Graphic project

RESUMO

O presente artigo busca, a partir de uma crescente produção de obras em que as narrativas literárias operam as linguagens verbais e visuais em diálogo, aproximar dois formatos amplamente encontrados em livrarias, bibliotecas e na mão de leitores: as histórias em quadrinhos e os livros ilustrados. Pensaremos em suas similaridades e diferenças, buscando compreender como as obras literárias multimodais transitam entre os recursos desses formatos sem perder a qualidade estética e a continuidade, ou seja, evidenciando a fluidez entre eles. Para isso, iremos analisar o que dizem as referências teóricas (McCloud, 2005; Nikolajeva e Scott, 2011; Linden, 2011) e o que é possível constatar em duas narrativas que fogem dos parâmetros tradicionais desses formatos: Na cozinha noturna (2014), de Maurice Sendak, e Are We There Yet? (2016), de Dan Santat. Refletiremos, assim, sobre esse esfacelamento de fronteiras que revela uma necessidade de compreensão mais ampla do literário.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: História em quadrinhos; Livro ilustrado; Linguagens literárias; Multimodalidade; Projeto gráfico

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As a sign, the letter permits us to fix words; as line, it lets us give shape to things. Thus the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read.

*Michel Foucault*¹

Introduction

Inside the universe of books preferably addressed to children and young people, the multiplicity of languages in the creation of literary works of the narrative genre is common; it is necessary, therefore, to have a critical look at all of the present signs, especially those that promote poetic experiences. Graphic narratives — composed of different languages that express meaning through their values and visual aspects possess a steady space in bookstores, libraries, and the homes of readers of all ages, whether through picturebooks, image-book, comic books, or other formats in which a hybridism of verbal and visual texts operates. We perceive, in this article, the word *text* in the sense of *textile*, that is, “meaning something spun of many interwoven threads” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 86),² or, in other words, as a language that can be expressed as “and this expands, necessarily, to involve non-written texts” (Hunt, 1991, p. 13).³ From this, we understand that a narrative literary production can be an art composed of a multiplicity of languages, as a fabric of poetics which produce, with each other, a single text — shaped by its interweaving.

From this outline, in which the literary object is a multimodal text (Gibbons, 2015), we propose to investigate two formats that strongly privilege the relation between words and images: comic books and picturebooks. At first, we intend to employ the term *format* to describe these productions, from the idea that a literary text, in these cases, presents itself in a specific way, with characteristics that place it in the category of a comic book or picturebook. However, this matter will be resumed after we dig into theoretical studies and the analyses of works, seeking to understand if what we observe are indeed *formats* that can belong to different literary genres or subgenres, but which, in this article,

¹ FOUCAULT, Michel. *This Is Not a Pipe*. With illustrations and letter by René Magritte. Translated and Edited by Janes Harkness. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983, p. 21.

² EAGLETON, Terry. *How to Read Literature*. New Haven and London. Yale University Press, 2013.

³ HUNT, Peter. *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991.

are brought only as a *narrative* genre. The introduction, thus, of these two specific formats is given by a proposal of an approximation between them — since both present affinities and tangential points, both in theory and literary productions.

The approximation of formats is made, initially, by the presence of the pictorial element in sequence (in which the unity can be a frame or a page), establishing indivisible and complex relations with the verbal text to compose the narratives in both. The theoretical definitions and the historical references of productions that mark the beginning of the development of comic books and picturebooks are merged as well, as we shall demonstrate further along. However, besides having many similarities, we cannot declare that they are *equal*, especially if we dig into cultural aspects and evidence the public which is established as the readers of these two formats. Our hypothesis, therefore, is that there is a great range of artistic possibilities between comic books and traditional picturebooks, which function in the hybridity of these two formats, resulting in works that are difficult to classify.

Focusing our attention on these two formats, we notice a fertile territory for narrative experimentations that combine words and images in a complex literary system. It is necessary, as we face these works, to read the relations between languages — that are brought to the reader through a graphic design that equally contributes to the construction of a narrative — besides the assimilation of the unsaid and *empty* spaces in which the reader is summoned to perceive the thresholds.

Our goal with this article is to reflect upon the formats of comic books and picturebooks in literary works and to highlight how the nature of both come close — to the point of easily seeing traditional elements of one of the formats in productions that are named as the other — and how artistic expression ends up blurring certain qualifying barriers.

1 Comic Books and Picturebooks: What Does the Theory Say?

For this article, we consider it relevant to present some definitions for the formats here analyzed, once it is from which we start tracing a theoretical dialogue between these two formats that combine word and image in their narratives.

Starting with the *picturebook*, we need, at first, to emphasize that in Brazil we use the term *livro ilustrado*, which is equivalent to an *illustrated album* or just an *album* in other countries. This definition differs from the *book with illustrations*, which, as Sophie van der Linden defines, are “works which present a text accompanied by illustrations.” (2011, p. 24).⁴ The author also teaches us that, in these cases, it is the “verbal text that sustains the narrative,” or, still, the illustrations are present only to repeat what the words say — almost as an ornament — not raising an interwoven dialogue between words and images.

The *picturebook*, on the other hand, is defined specifically by the interaction between these two texts. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, in *How Picturebooks Work*, assure us that “the unique character of picturebooks as an art form is based on the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal” (2006, p. 1);⁵ while Linden, in *Lire l’album*, affirms that picturebooks are

[...] works in which the image is spatially preponderant concerning the text, which, in fact, can be absent (it is called, in Brazil, “livro-imagem,” an image-book. The narrative appears in an articulate manner between text and images (2011, p. 24).⁶

The authors indicate, in a relevant way, the relation between words and images in these literary narratives. The combination of verbal and visual texts occurs through a graphic design that explores the spatial and temporal possibilities of each of these languages and their associations. Linden proceeds to explain that

This type of book undergoes a wide creative effervescence which is unlimited in terms of size, materiality, style of technique, and all of its visual dimension, including typography, is usually very elaborate. Thus, the picturebook requires a critical reading up to these standards (2011, p. 21).⁷

⁴ In Portuguese: “obras que apresentam um texto acompanhado de ilustrações.”

⁵ NIKOLAYEVA, Maria; SCOTT, Carole. *How Picturebooks Work*. New York and London. Routledge, 2006.

⁶ In Portuguese: “[...] obras em que a imagem é espacialmente preponderante em relação ao texto, que aliás pode estar ausente (é então chamado, no Brasil, de livro-imagem). A narrativa se faz de maneira articulada entre texto e imagens.”

⁷ In Portuguese: “Esse tipo de livro passa por uma ampla efervescência criativa que já não tem limites em termos de tamanho, materialidade, estilo ou técnica, e toda a sua dimensão visual, inclusive tipográfica é em geral elaboradíssima. Assim, o livro ilustrado requer uma leitura crítica à altura.”

This effervescence allows the productions to exceed, in a freer way, the limits of the traditional book formats — whether through exploring the object as a narrative element, or in the visual composition of pages and the relations between the languages. The presence of flaps, windows, and/or die cuttings on picturebooks is common, but the possibilities of breaking with tradition are not limited to complex structures. They can be a simple invitation, verbal or imagetic, to the manipulation of the book in different directions, a diagramming which incites a different reading order, among others, creating a playful relation between book and reader.

One of the main characteristics of the picturebook is the use of the double page spread, that is, a work that uses the total space of the open book — even if, sometimes, the double page is divided into two simple pages, they are thought as a visual group to the reader — as Linden describes,

[...] the picturebook is an expression medium that has as its primary unity the double page spread, in which are inscribed, in an interactive way, images and texts, and that follow an articulate concatenation page after page (2015, pp. 28-29).⁸

In conclusion, we understand that the narrativity in the picturebook happens through articulate images and words, in a sequential reading page by page. These explanations regarding the *picturebook* lead us to the counterpoint with the *comic books*, in which their theoretical similarities and differences are pointed out.

Scott McCloud defined *comic books* as “[...] juxtapose pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (1993, p. 9).⁹ It is important to highlight, from McCloud’s reflection, the choice of emphasizing the presence of *pictorial* images and *others*, that is, the author points out the presence of verbal and visual texts in comic books, but comprehends both as *images*, being the illustrations the *pictorial images* and the words — that can be speech bubbles, captions or onomatopoeia — another type of image.

Another scholar of this format is Barbara Postema who, in turn, teaches us that

⁸ In Portuguese: “[...] o livro ilustrado é um suporte de expressão cuja unidade primordial é a página dupla, sobre a qual se inscrevem, de maneira interativa, imagens e textos e que seguem uma concatenação articulada página a página.”

⁹ McCLOUD, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. New York: Haper Collins Publishers, 1993.

[...] comic books, as a form or art and narrative, are a system in which the number of disparate elements or fragments work together to create a whole. The elements in comic books are partially pictorial, partially textual and, sometimes, a hybrid of both (2018, p. 15).¹⁰

From the author's description we can observe, once again, the importance of the relation between words and images (pictorial and textual elements), but now with the addition of the idea of fragmentation, that is, she exposes the presence of panels as relevant elements which, read alongside and in sequence, build the narrative. At last, Linden describes comic books as a

[...] form of expression characterized not by the presence of panels and bubbles, but by the articulation of 'solidary images'. The organization of a page corresponds — mostly — to a compartmentalized layout, that is, the panels that are juxtaposed in several levels (2011, p. 25).¹¹

It is interesting to highlight that in this definition, Linden discards the idea that comics are characterized by bubbles or layouts. In other words, these elements, besides being very peculiar and present in this format, are not exclusive and do not specify this production. One characteristic of comic books, therefore, is the articulation of images that interact with one another on the *same page* and throughout the *whole work*.

Resuming the definitions of both formats that are analyzed in this article, we can demonstrate that both comic books and picturebooks are similar regarding the use of *words* and *images* in their narratives, not only as separate languages but through a dialogue that makes them inseparable, demanding a reading of both together for a sheer understanding of the text. Besides that, the graphic design — visual and material composition of the book and its narrative elements — are greatly relevant for both formats, articulating rhythm and reading order.

Therefore, what differentiates both formats? Some critics such as Linden affirm that the reading of comic books is made *panel by panel*, whereas the picturebook is read *page by page*. That is, a greater fragmentation or disposal of images on the same page is

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “[...] os quadrinhos, como uma forma de arte e de narrativa, são um sistema em que o número de elementos ou fragmentos díspares trabalham juntos para criar um todo completo. Os elementos dos quadrinhos são parcialmente pictóricos, parcialmente textuais e, por vezes, um híbrido dos dois.”

¹¹ In Portuguese: “[...] form of expression characterized not by the presence of panels and bubbles, but by the articulation of 'solidary images'. The organization of a page corresponds — mostly — to a compartmentalized layout, that is, the panels that are juxtaposed in several levels.”

closer to the format of a comic book, while the presence of a single image that occupies totally or partially single or double pages tends to be more frequent in picturebooks. Saguisag reinforces this argument, stating that the use of panels is a differential between the formats, once “in comics, each page is typically divided into multiples panels, while in a picturebook, a page or spread is often occupied by a single panel (Saguisag, 2017, p. 316). Another aspect brought by the author is the relation between words and images: she states that in comic books verbal and visual texts are usually more integrated than in picturebooks.

However, none of these questions are exclusive to their preferential format. It is possible to observe, for instance, that in comic books splash pages — the resource of using a single illustration of impact on the page — are frequently used to cause a stronger effect on the reader or pages with a single panel. Besides that, the strategy of many picturebooks to work with a bigger fragmentation of scenes is frequent, which generates a sequence of panels disposed on the double page. Another relevant matter to point out is how contemporary productions break more and more with these *specific* characteristics that the formats traditionally presented: for example, the relation between words and images in contemporary picturebooks is increasingly more integrated, once all of the elements are thought to build meaning together at each page. Still, even if comic books present speech bubbles as a very distinctive characteristic, this element is not crucial for the format and is being used each day more in other productions, such as picturebooks.

In short, we can conclude that both formats operate as multimodal texts, that is, they are works that involve multiple semiotic modes in the development of the narrative. Thus, Gibbons (2015) describes that,

Creating the multimodal text involves more than just writing; it also involves considering the many different semiotic resources (words, image, colour, layout) available to the writer, who must decide how to use them in creative combinations for literary purposes (Gibbons, 2015, p. 294).

The strength of these formats which, in this outline, are literary texts, is precisely the combinations of different languages, without the restrictions that some classifications or concepts end up reinforcing. Comic books and picturebooks are located inside this spectrum in which traditional formats fall apart, opening space for new artistic

experiences and discoveries which result in works that are hard to classify — what does not mean they are less valuable from a literary standpoint. Literature, especially in the present day, is not limited only to words, allowing itself to embrace the multimodalities and to involve formats that, before, were left on the margins of this form of art. A closer look by the critics at the broadening of these literary productions allows the perception of a poetics that is, likewise, beyond the verbal text: it is present in images, colors, graphic elements, and in the book-object itself.

Comic books and picturebooks have, throughout history, traced their own distinct paths, but the time has come for us to recognize them, at last, for their literary assets. Thus, we must legitimize the literature that mixes languages, genres, and formats, allowing this phenomenon to overcome barriers and embody more and more graphic experimentations in literary art.

2 ... And What Do the Productions Show?

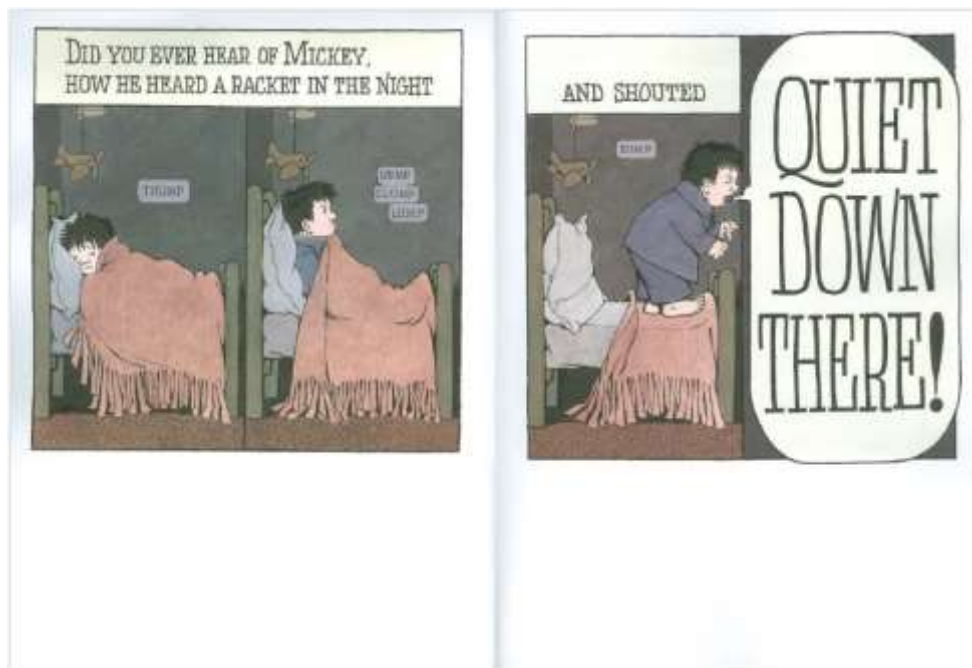
After our theoretical survey regarding picturebooks and comic books, we have selected two narrative literary works to demonstrate how, in practice, these two formats end up, many times, getting (con)fused and (con)joined.

The first work is *In the Night Kitchen* (1970),¹² by the great author of picturebooks Maurice Sendak, published in Brazil for the first time by Cosac Naify (2014) and, more recently in 2023, by Companhia das Letrinhas. On its index card, we found the information that it is classified as a *children's book*; it does not, however, specify if the format is of a picturebook or not. This non-definition gives room to what we find in its contents: a navigation within the narrative possibilities in which words and images dialogue freely, with no restraints to the limits of traditional characteristics or one or another format.

Sendak's narrative presents us to Mickey, a young boy who sleeps peacefully on his bed until he is woken up by night noises. The composition of the first double page (*Picture 1*) reveals that the work operates on a threshold in between the formats of a picturebook and a comic book. We can notice a well-delimited division of panels side by side, showing fragments between the character's moment of sleep and waking up; the

¹² SENDAK, Maurice. *In the Night Kitchen*. California: Harper Collins, 1970.

verbal text, on the left page, is present in the shape of a narratory block — or caption — in a layout that seems to be, at first, isolated from the images, and by the onomatopoeia — “THUMP, DUMP, CLUMP, LUMP” — introduced in the panels; on the page to the right, the narratory box text seems to build a bridge to the image by being complemented with a bubble speech that gives voice to Mickey — “and shouted” “quiet down there!”. The use of the most commonly seen resources in comic books is, accordingly, pretty evident in this work by Sendak (1970).



Picture 1 — First pages of *In the Night Kitchen*. Source: Sendak, 1970, n.p.

The reading of the pages goes on with a composition of words and images with the same format of division of horizontal panels — which reminds us as well of the format of newspaper strips —; we follow Mickey along on a fantastic journey with aspects of reverie to a kitchen in which, in the middle of the night, three cooks prepare a cake. At this point, the panels transform into single-page illustrations to, after that, extend until they bleed into double pages (*Picture 2*) in which the verbal text is absent, bringing the narrative closer to the traditional characteristics of the picturebook. This dynamics of alternation on the number of illustrations/panels in each one of the pages follows through all of the narrative, making use sometimes of the most common resources of comic books and, other times, the picturebooks.



Picture 2 — Double-page spread. Source: Sendak, 1970, n.p.

Even though it is possible to observe resources that are characteristic of both of the formats analyzed in this article, the work *In the Night Kitchen* (1970)¹³ takes into consideration its preferential audience: children, that is, a reader still in the process of learning. That said, the existing panels have a large size and regular shape, in addition to being presented in a reading arrangement that is always horizontal and linear. These characteristics allow that, progressively, visual literacy (Dondis, 1973)¹⁴ and familiarization with comic books happen to the children — once the most common format presented to them is the picturebook, deeply related to children's literature.

If, on the one hand, images in sequence in several pages remind us of comic books, on the other, the way by which the verbal text is worked on takes us once again to picturebooks: the sentences on the narratory blocks are short, no longer than two or three lines, following almost all of the narrative with the voice of a third person narrator, the typography takes uppercase letters and is placed on every single page, not every panel (*Picture 3*). These characteristics are more common in picturebooks, especially when conceived for children and their reading learning. The verbal text, in comic books, is more concentrated in speech bubbles and when presented in narratory blocks is configured as

¹³ See footnote 12.

¹⁴ DONDIS, Donis A. *A Primer of Visual Literacy*. Massachusetts: MIT, 1993.

small comments from some character, a narrator in a punctual off, or time-space mark, in addition to usually referring to each panel individually.



Picture 3 — Pages of *In the Night Kitchen*. Source: Sendak, 1970, n.p.

In the Night Kitchen (1970)¹⁵ is a work that places us on a threshold between the formats of picturebooks and comic books, once it possesses strong characteristics of both. Besides that, the limits become even more unstable when we highlight that the author, Maurice Sendak, albeit being recognized for his production of picturebooks, presents as a strong reference for the work here precisely analyzed a distinguished series of comics published in newspapers between 1905 and 1913: *Little Nemo*, by Winsor McCay. Nemo is a boy who lives great dream adventures in one single page, which always ends as the character wakes up in his bed on the last panel. Visually, the image that Sendak builds of Mickey lying on his bed at the beginning and end of the narrative transports us directly to McCay's work, just as the theme of a journey between reality and the world of dreams.

That said, *In the Night Kitchen*¹⁶ is an example of a narrative that transits between the elements of picturebooks and comic books through the relation between verbal and visual texts.

¹⁵ See footnote 12.

¹⁶ See footnote 12.

The second work that will be here analyzed to reflect upon the (un)limits between the formats of comic books and picture books is *Are We There Yet?* by Dan Santat (2016), unfortunately still unpublished in Brazil. The visual and verbal languages, in this work, are explored in the most diverse ways, seeking the construction of meaning through the dialogue between them. Thus, it is possible to recognize the speech bubbles, but also the captions, the sequence of images in panels, and those that are equally important, in double page spreads, claiming from the reader the reading perception of resources of both of the narrative formats here analyzed.

Initially, by opening the book, we face the endpapers that present a sequence of panels of the same size, that indicate the passing of time through the sunset and moonrise amid a landscape that includes a moving car (*Picture 4*). From this perspective, the use of the resource of comics enables the reader to be introduced deeper into the narrative, once they accompany the whole trajectory of the travel with the main-character family from the representation of time elapsed in a more fragmented way and, therefore, depicted in every step.



Picture 4 — The first endpaper of *Are We There Yet?* Source: Santat, 2016, n.p.

Next, we face a very traditional page configuration of comic books, in which we get to know the main character, a boy who, on the way to his grandmother's house with his family, transits between the feeling of excitement because of the destination and boredom because of the long travel (*Picture 5*). This piece of information is given to the

reader by the verbal text above the panels with the narratory blocks, but it also adds up to the reading of the images and the attributes of the graphic elements such as format and size of panels. The verbal text, just like in *In the Night Kitchen* (1970),¹⁷ is not limited to being *only* a caption or *only* the speech expression of characters, breaking with these barriers and intending to be both simultaneously, demanding from the reader a continuous reading of all languages as a single text, that is, the sentence of the narratory block continues on the speech bubble, creating a visual relation that is inseparable from all of the texts — as we can see on Picture 5, in which the narratory block and speech bubbles complement each other.



Picture 5 — A traditional page of a comic book. Source: Santat, 2016, n.p.

Taking into consideration this first double page the reader can envisage being in front of a traditional work in the format of a comic book. However, by turning the page, we face a transformation in the way the narrative is told. The verbal text says:

Staring out your window at a thousand miles of road can get boring pretty quickly. Not even all the toys in the world can help.
But/ what/ happens/ when/ your/ brain/ becomes/ TOO/ bored? (Santat, n.p.)

¹⁷ For reference see footnote 12.

The images broaden from panels on a single page to illustrations that take the whole double-page spread as one. Besides that, the distribution of the verbal text becomes the key to a bigger interaction between the reader and the book-object: the text boxes follow the borders of the double page, keeping the placement of the referred text on every border, which means, for the reader to be able to read it is necessary to turn the book around up to 180° (Picture 6). The text box of the last word is shaped as an arrow, indicating that the reading direction has changed: by turning the book upside-down, we begin a reading that will turn back in time and, thus, it must be made by turning the pages from left to right and not from right to left anymore, as we are used to. A more careful reader will notice that the illustrations have accompanied this *back in time* while the book is turned around: old cars and trains occupy the scene around the character.



Picture 6 — The page demands the reader to turn the book upside-down. Source: Santat, 2016, n.p.

The graphic design turns the book-object itself into a language, together with words and images, becoming part of what the narrative expresses to build meaning. The reader has to handle the object and follow the narrative by turning the book and discovering new ways of reading — all of this is provoked by the multiple languages that, with one another, offer an experience that exceeds the traditional formats.

We follow the reading in the appointed order, turning the pages to the left and going back in time progressively: each double page spread presents characteristics of older times — from cars to trains, from trains to carts and, finally, arriving at a time-space taken by the dinosaurs. The narrative, in this sequence, uses traditional resources of picturebooks: double-page illustrations, short verbal texts that complement (but do not repeat) the images, besides the game with the materiality of the object as a language.

It is relevant to highlight how the graphic and pictorial elements tease the reader: the arrow, working as a verbal text box indicates the continuation always to the left, while the car, the visual text, indicates a path to the right, constantly inciting the traditional direction of reading and challenging the reader to choose between going forward or back (*Picture 07*). It is always up to the reader to choose: keep going or interrupt the travel? Go to the path appointed by the arrow and go back further in time or follow the visual clues and go to the future?



Picture 7— Illustrated double-page. *Source*: Santat, 2016, n.p.

The car keeps going back in time until pre-history, a moment in which the narrative uses, again, the resource of text boxes next to the borders, demanding the reader to turn the book back around and resume its original position. The following pages interfile in between the ones that show the most traditional structures of comic books and

the most common ones in picturebooks, presenting a technological future where the family ended up finding themselves.

Observing the elements that interact with the narrative materiality, besides establishing the need to turn the book itself around, this work still brings two other possibilities of interactive opportunities for the reader: the first are the QR Codes present in the speech bubbles of the robots, as their own language that has to be scanned by a mobile phone and be revealed by this other technology; the second is the presence of a dust jacket that, when removed, reveals that the book cover is like a gift wrap which the more attentive readers will remember, for it has the same pattern of the gift that was in the car with the boy. In the end, we discover that this is a gift for the boy's grandmother: an old model wall clock. The object takes us to what was lived by the character and reader throughout the whole book: time travels from the circular movement of the clock hands (just like we turn the book-object around to leap in time), that is, the book we have in our hands is the very gift and a possibility of visiting other times and spaces from literature.



Picture 8 — Dust jacket and book cover. *Source:* Santat, 2016, n.p.

This game with material elements and the interaction with the book-object as a narrative are resources widely explored in picturebooks but less in comic books. However, this work encompasses resources of both formats to create a single story that merges verbal, visual, and material texts on the very object. Thus, we question whether it

is possible to classify this work exclusively as a picturebook or if the broad presence of comic book resources does not shift this classification to a new place.

If, on the one hand, these reflections regarding concepts are relevant for the comprehension of the works and the new experiences that literature allows, on the other, they should not bother the reader, to whom, in the fruition of the narrative, matters of classification do not alter the poetic perception. What can be noticed is that the resources of comic books and picturebooks can, in these works, easily merge keeping the flow and rhythm of the narrative — once they are both formats in which words and images are inseparable and create, together, a single final text.

(Un)conclusions

After a brief theoretical overview and analysis around the formats of comic books and picturebooks, we resume our initial reflection about their proximities, seeking to understand not how they get together, but how multimodal literary narratives explore graphic resources of both to create a work that presents difficulties in being framed into one single and steady category.

Thus, could *In the Night Kitchen*¹⁸ and *Are We There Yet?* be definitely considered narratives in the format of picturebooks? Or are they picturebooks that used the resources of comic books? How much can one work use the format of the other and still keep its original format? How can the hybridity between formats affect the perception of a work?

Perhaps these so-called *formats* are more than a simple *shape* in which texts are expressed. We need to take into consideration that they are, alone, means of transmitting meaning with their own characteristics and grammar. Thus, wouldn't they be *languages* composed of the confluence of other diverse languages (verbal, visual, and the object itself)? Donis A. Dondis¹⁹ explains the importance of *visual literacy* when we face multimodal literary works composed of texts in which the visual graphic work and its fusions are relevant to the construction of meaning. Thus, when we face comic books and picturebooks we do not talk anymore about a *shape*, a closed recipient that contains

¹⁸ See footnote 12.

¹⁹ See footnote 14.

languages, but about *languages* that can merge, interpolate, or even incorporate each other from the combination of the same other *languages* that compose them.

Evans (2010) proposes the concept of *fusion texts* when facing these works that are hard to define and that interlace the many languages:

A different kind of book is emerging, one that exhibits some, but not always all, of the characteristics normally thought of as belonging to comics, graphics novels and picturebooks. These books blur the boundaries, blending the characteristics of visual texts to create a category that is a synthesis of aspects from all of them. These are ‘fusion’ texts (Evans, 2015, p. 98).

Whether these productions are framed as picturebooks, comic books, fusion texts, or any other classification that seeks to handle whatever the multimodality may express in a narrative, they must be perceived, in the first place, by their poetic value.

The works analyzed in this article — besides so many others — are relevant specifically for the literality presented through their language, which is hard to name, but that explore graphically their visual components and, more than that, present layers of reading, challenge the comprehension and senses of the reader and operate inside an aesthetic quality that places them in the literary universe.

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Statement of Author's Contribution

Diana Navas and Luara Almeida were both responsible for writing the theoretical framework and analyzing the works selected as corpus. Both also worked on reviewing the final version of the text.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

This is a well-founded article, with good literary analyzes and a contemporary theme. It deserves to be published. It just needs a little adjustment in the following excerpt: “In the

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Night Kitchen,” by Maurice Sendak and “Are We There Yet?”, by Dan Santat. Done the adjustment, may be published. APPROVED

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