

BORDERS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND ITS INTERSECTIONS

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
PICTURE BOOKS
IMAGINARY
SILENT BOOKS

Children's literature travels from one era to another, from one age to another (from early childhood to early adulthood), overcoming boundaries thanks to the many translations, while it is crossed by several genres and is contaminated by them. For a long time, children's literature has been combined with the creation of metaphors. Childhood metaphors that represent the best way to

penetrate and investigate the shadowlands of the childhood universe beyond the thick and homologating mist that makes it invisible. In particular, the picture books, of which the wordless or silent books represent the most innovative aspect, are considered the main instruments in children's literature for the stunning aesthetic quality that connotes them.

Entering the plurality of interpretations that children's literature contains is an exciting undertaking, full of cognitive surprises and profound references to the world of the imaginary. In fact, it contains a large communicative universe with open borders, capable of making original connections with other disciplines and offering immense potential to the scholar's eyes.

From the indispensable historical context to the more strictly literary context, from the iconological field to the new frontiers of cross-media and to the changes in the recipient's multi-faceted figure –the child reader– children's literature is characterized, for its own interpretative vocation, as a varied, complex sector, a *border country* according to Peter Hunt's definition, open to new combinations and multiple ramifications (Hunt, 1991). Substantially intertwined with the cultural history of childhood, its image and its relationship with the adult world, children's literature travels from one era to another, from one age to another (from early childhood to early adulthood), overcoming boundaries thanks to the many translations, while it is crossed by several genres and is contaminated by them: from fable to adventure, from detective story to horror, from science fiction to fantasy without forgetting poetry and the 'instructive' novel. For a long time, children's literature has been combined with the creation of metaphors, representations, themes and narratives that branch into cinema, theater, art, media, although it is rooted in the production of books for childhood. In fact, stories for children and teenagers, from the classics to the current and very important editorial growth that has conquered many readers, are a mirror with many facets reflected in all the media. Orality, writing, illustration, animated drawings, films and interactive media, while adopting different codes, participate in the same narrative dimension, creating a continuous renewal of the imaginary.

Therefore, the lens of complexity is indispensable for identifying a sort of fil rouge that connects many languages on the different bookshelves of children's literature and to decipher,

by means of new instruments, the representation of an often invisible and unknown childhood universe to which quality children's books lend a voice and provide expression.

However, a profound ambivalence, crosses children's literature poised between the audacity of its symbols and the subtle desire of control coming from the adult world. Every artistic language is exposed to control systems, but children's literature suffers more than others because the stakes are higher and it regards an age group, i.e. childhood, invested with social expectations and attempts at modeling, a menace forever lurking in the background.

The shackling of the genre that undergoes different declinations over time (from the censorship and the didactic norms of the past to the current invasive commercial canons) always risks creeping in for the most authentic nature of children's literature is able to probe the child's otherness without denying it or homologating it into conventional proposals. The scholar's objective is to bring to light the quality of a rich and complex production notwithstanding the intrusiveness of the publishing market, enhancing the bold and creative experimentation of new languages capable of penetrating, by means of original "childhood metaphors," the more secretive nooks and crannies of childhood experience, narrating its most intimate and profound experiences.

Childhood metaphors that represent –thanks to the “poetics of the point of view”, the child's gaze, the engine of the story, masterfully dilated and situated in the foreground– the best way to penetrate and investigate the shadowlands of the childhood universe beyond the thick and homologating mist that makes it invisible. The meaningful scenarios that spring from these explorations find a privileged channel in the illustrated books with which to grasp the otherness of a child-like world which can be offered new possibilities of vision through an authentic education of the gaze.

Today, the picture books, of which the wordless or silent books represent the most innovative aspect, are considered the main instruments in children's literature for the stunning

aesthetic quality that often connotes them together with the charm and the strong appeal exerted upon the readers. The complex poetic form enclosed within the apparent simplicity of the illustrated books, the multiplicity of references (i.e. painting, cartoons, photography, cinema, music) that flow into the narrative language of picture books, puts them at the center of a rediscovery of studies that have become ever livelier thanks to the new perspectives that have developed in the field of illustration.

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