

Elderly characters in children's literature: Scenes of intergenerational coexistence and social isolation

Personagens velhos em obras de literatura infantil: cenas de convivência intergeracional e de isolamento social

Personajes viejos en la literatura infantil: escenas de convivencia intergeneracional y aislamiento social

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Abstract

Based on a series of studies previously conducted on the theme of old age in contemporary children's literature, the present study aims to analyze, from the theoretical perspective of Cultural Studies in Education, how a set of recent works of children's literature positions elderly characters in the narrative. Three main representational trends were identified with regard to elderly characters and the space in which their actions unfold: the first trend brings together narratives in which elderly characters are inserted into extended family contexts, living in the same residence with children and grandchildren, with old age represented as integrated into everyday family life, marked by constant interactions and the sharing of intergenerational experiences. The second trend presents the elderly character in their own residence, a space in which they receive visits from family members (especially grandchildren). The third trend, which is rarer, brings together stories of solitary elderly characters, detached from direct family relationships.

Keywords: Cultural Studies in Education; Children's Literature; Representations of old age.

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Resumo

A partir de uma série de estudos desenvolvidos anteriormente sobre o tema da velhice na literatura infantil contemporânea, o presente trabalho tem como objetivo analisar, desde a perspectiva teórica dos Estudos Culturais em Educação, como um conjunto de obras da literatura infantil recente posiciona os personagens velhos na narrativa. Foram identificadas três tendências representacionais principais no que diz respeito aos personagens velhos e o espaço no qual as ações destes se desenrolam: a primeira tendência reúne narrativas em que os personagens velhos estão inseridos em contextos familiares ampliados, convivendo em uma mesma residência com filhos e netos, sendo a velhice representada de forma integrada ao cotidiano familiar, marcada por interações constantes e pela partilha de experiências intergeracionais. A segunda tendência apresenta o personagem velho em sua própria residência, espaço no qual recebe a visita de familiares (em especial, dos personagens netos). Já a terceira tendência, mais rara, reúne histórias de personagens velhos solitários, desvinculados de relações parentais diretas.

Palavras-chave: Estudos Culturais em Educação; Literatura Infantil; Representações de velhice.

Resumen

A partir de una serie de estudios desarrollados anteriormente sobre el tema de la vejez en la literatura infantil contemporánea, el presente trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar, desde la perspectiva teórica de los Estudios Culturales en Educación, cómo un conjunto de obras recientes de literatura infantil posiciona a los personajes viejos en la narrativa. Se identificaron tres tendencias representacionales principales en lo que respecta a los personajes viejos y al espacio en el que se desarrollan sus acciones: la primera tendencia reúne narrativas en las que los personajes viejos están insertos en contextos familiares ampliados, conviviendo en una misma residencia con hijos y nietos, y la vejez es representada de forma integrada a la vida cotidiana familiar, marcada por interacciones constantes y por el intercambio de experiencias intergeneracionales. La segunda tendencia presenta al personaje viejo en su propia residencia, espacio en el que recibe la visita de familiares (en especial, de los personajes nietos). La tercera tendencia, más rara, reúne historias de personajes viejos solitarios, desvinculados de relaciones parentales directas.

Palabras clave: Estudios Culturales en Educación; Literatura Infantil; Representaciones de la vejez.

INTRODUCTION

Since its emergence in eighteenth-century Europe, Children's Literature has mobilized distinct images and representations of childhood, based on the specific social and historical contexts in which the texts were produced. A sense of childhood marked by naivety, innocence, candor, and grace emerged in that historical period,

associated with the child from a bourgeois family and, according to Ariès (1981), establishing a pact of symbolic protection whereby children should be protected from the adult world and, at the same time, moralized. Until the mid-twentieth century, according to Kirchof, Bonin, and Silveira (2013), a large proportion of texts for children were produced by pedagogues and teachers in an explicitly pedagogical and moralizing register. In narratives that reached Brazilian schools during periods of authoritarianism (such as the Military Dictatorship, between 1964 and 1984), exemplary endings and the conclusion of the text with an explicit 'moral of the story' were common, indicating an intention to shape the child according to adult values, an aspect that impoverishes the experience of literary reading (Zilberman, 1987).

From the 1970s onward, in Brazil, criticism of the purely pedagogical purposes of literature for children gained prominence. Discussing the subject, Cademartori (2009) states that the traditional link between literature and school generates tensions between the aesthetic function of the literary text and the formative and moralizing ideal of pedagogy, and that such tensions challenge the production of books intended for children. In more recent decades, a tendency has become consolidated toward producing literary texts that prioritize aesthetic experience, ambiguity, and the problematization of social issues considered complex, aligning literary production with the representation of the child as a subject endowed with the capacity to deal with the complexity of the world. Literary reading at school emerges as a space of disputes over the meanings of literature and childhood. In this regard, Carlo-Gomes and Cosson (2021) state that there are at least four different ways of understanding the function of the literary text. The most fragile and reductive conceives literature as entertainment and amusement, with the school being responsible for creating habits and providing opportunities for the pleasure of reading. A second understanding associates the literary text with the reader's integral development, with literature viewed as a pedagogical instrument and a form of expression of individualities. The third way of understanding literature links the text to ways of accessing the experiences of others and also as a means of developing empathy (humanization, positive identification with characters and their dramas) or cultivating democratic values. Finally, some understand the literary function as a unique and unrepeatable experience that a reader undergoes in relation to the work, based on a repertoire that expands through engagement with literary language.

It is, therefore, in the context of transformations involving both the Modern sense of childhood and the meaning of literature for children that themes such as old age, death, illness, violence, ethnic-racial and social inequalities, racism, and stereotypes of body, gender, and sexuality begin to appear in books addressed to young readers. These themes are considered sensitive or “fracturing” precisely because they “fracture” the pact of symbolic protection established in relation to the child subject. The inclusion of such themes in literary texts challenges, to some extent, notions of incompleteness, innocence, and limited capacity to recognize and deal with emotions, attributes understood as ‘natural’ to being a child. In addition, Michèle Petit (2019), in her work with reading in contexts of war and forced migration, emphasizes that literature can act as a symbolic space for working through trauma, conflicts, and symbolic violence, especially in contexts of social vulnerability. In the author's view, by addressing sensitive themes, the literary text offers readers possibilities for subjective reconstruction in the face of adversity.

However, according to Colomer (2007), the formation of a literary reader requires contact with meaningful texts that do not simplify human experience and that broaden the interpretive and aesthetic spaces of literary reading. In the same vein, Cosson (2014) states that the possibility of including sensitive themes in children's literature is based on the wager that a dialogue is possible between children's experiences and literary creation, especially when dealing with works marked by aesthetic delicacy and careful graphic-editorial treatment. Similarly, Silveira, Kirchof, and Bonin (2021, p. 80) argue that reading and literary mediation occur productively when narratives are thought-provoking, rich, and surprising, “in which the text and illustrations represent lines of flight that make it possible to avoid the obvious and the banal.”

In contemporary children's literature, one sensitive theme that particularly interests us is old age—sometimes addressed from the perspective of relationships with children and grandchildren, sometimes as a stage of life filled with health problems (Alzheimer's, dementia, various forms of forgetfulness, various difficulties, various absences, etc.), and sometimes as a stage preceding death. Thus, based on a series of studies previously developed on the theme of old age in contemporary children's literature (see Kaercher and Dalla Zen, 2009; Silveira and Bonin, 2010; Silveira, Bonin, Ripoll, 2013; Silveira et al., 2013; Silveira, Ripoll, Kirchof, 2024), this

study aims to analyze how a set of recent works of children's literature positions elderly characters in the narrative. Accordingly, it seeks to identify certain representational trends regarding the ways elderly characters are inserted into intergenerational, family, and social contexts.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE THEME OF OLD AGE

Regarding academic studies involving children's literature and old age, it is important to mention first the study by Kaercher and Dalla Zen (2009), which explored stereotyped representations of old age in 11 children's literature books. The authors show how elderly characters are reduced to illness and the finitude of life, as well as to various constraints and problems. The sick elderly character was also studied by Silveira, Bonin, and Ripoll (2013) on the basis of 10 works of children's literature, since a certain proliferation of works in this direction was observed—works interested, above all, in teaching child readers how to deal with situations arising from illnesses affecting a grandfather or grandmother. In the set of works analyzed, the prevalence of scientific popularization discourses was noted, especially around Alzheimer's disease.

The interesting study by Rabinovich and Azambuja (2023) presents an analysis of what would constitute the 'new image of grandparents' in literature for children: moving beyond the bodily and behavioral stereotypes still found in many works (grandmothers wearing long skirts and short gray hair or hair tied in buns; grandfathers and grandmothers with various difficulties in mobility, vision, hearing, etc.; with health problems and forgetfulness; dependent on family members; without a social life, etc.), the authors demonstrate, in the 13 books analyzed, the presence of active grandmother characters who want to contribute to raising their grandchildren and help them face bullying by other children. They also show grandmothers in relationships of complicity and companionship with their grandchildren:

Across the stories as a whole, grandmothers are shown in different ways and forms. Many of them are contemporary, taking part in parties, trips, university courses, and dating, while there are also more conservative grandmothers who live confined to the home. Some choose advanced age to take the reins of their lives into their own hands: To work, to date. All participate actively in the lives of their grandsons and granddaughters. The thirteen books emphasize relationships of affection and care between children and adults; the spatial context of houses with

backyards and fruit trees; work relationships, in which the woman is a professional and a mother, taking on a double workload; the temporal relationship, returning to the past through memory; the social relationship highlighting the role of women in different situations; and they describe the special relationship of intimacy and secrets between grandmothers and granddaughters. However, amid these changes, society is shown as conservative, which can be seen in stories portraying a granddaughter who is ashamed of the 'different grandmother' (p. 11).

The authors also emphasize that the contemporary works analyzed show the elderly character as a subject who has a body "marked not only by suffering, but also by pleasure, in dating and remarriages, and by interaction with grandchildren at a level of democratic complicity" (Rabinovich; Azambuja, 2023, pp. 12-13). In any case, even when a powerful body is attributed to them in some more recent works, grandfather and grandmother characters continue to be portrayed as old and, predominantly, as subjects in deficit (of memory, sanity, health, vitality, etc.) (Ramos, 2015; Rabinovich; Azambuja, 2023). In addition, Barbosa (2018) emphasizes that, commonly in Literature, "old age and childhood are intertwined in representations and meanings, because these stages of life share a common trait, lack: For the elderly person, of what has already been (the past with its memories), and for the child, of the new, that is, of what they have not yet lived" (p. 244).

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

From the collection assembled through the project "Narratives, differences and contemporary childhood," coordinated by Rosa Maria Hessel Silveira, we selected, from an expanded collection consisting of more than one hundred titles, some works to be included in this study. We made no distinction between Brazilian and foreign authors—we merely limited ourselves to works published in a first edition in Brazil between 2010 and 2025 (that is, in the last 25 years). We sought to analyze some recently acquired works, although we also selected some of our 'old acquaintances' to compose the corpus (for example, *Blusa listrada com calça florida* and *Vovô é um super-herói*). We also chose works that present a certain balance between image and text and are therefore addressed to a child reader.

The works were analyzed from the field of Cultural Studies in Education, with the concept of representation (Hall, 2016) as the main theoretical support. For Hall, to

represent is to give form to the world through different languages within a given culture—that is, it is through representation that thoughts, ideas, feelings, and cultural practices are constructed, disseminated, negotiated, and eventually instituted or rejected. In addition, to analyze the works, we used some of Yves Reuter's (2011) understandings regarding the function of space in literary narratives. For him, spaces (that is, the places where stories take place and the elements that constitute them in representational terms) initially define whether the stories are more (or less) anchored in reality and therefore participate 'in the construction of the reality effect (we believe in the existence of this universe and even come to "see" it)' (Reuter, 2011, p. 52, author's emphasis). Reuter (*op. cit.*, pp. 51-52) states that space in narrative actively participates in the functioning of the story, attributing certain meanings to characters ('the place where a character lives and the way in which they live consequently indicate what they are'—p. 54), indirectly announcing the sequence of events ('places and their atmosphere somehow predict the story that is going to happen'—p. 55), structuring groups of characters, marking stages in characters' lives, and also facilitating or hindering certain actions. The author presents four analytical possibilities for space in narratives: a) which places are invoked (corresponding to our world or not; exotic or not; more or less affluent; urban or rural, etc.); b) the number of places invoked (a single place, several places, a multiplicity of places, etc.); c) the way places are constructed (explicit or not; detailed or not; easily identifiable and stable or not, etc.); d) the functional importance of places (a simple frame; a determining element at different moments in the unfolding of the story, etc.).

In this regard, three main representational trends were identified concerning elderly characters and the space in which their actions unfold: the first trend brings together narratives in which elderly characters are inserted into extended family contexts, living in the same residence with children, grandchildren, or other members of the family group. The second trend presents the elderly character in their own residence, a space in which they receive visits from family members, among whom children take the leading role in the narrated story. The third trend, in turn, brings together stories of solitary elderly characters, detached from direct family relationships. This article focuses on these three trends.

FIRST TREND: THE ELDERLY CHARACTER SHARING THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

As mentioned previously, in this first category we bring together works that present elderly characters inserted into broader contexts of family interaction, in a home shared with children and grandchildren (and, occasionally, partners). This is an important representational trend and one that, to some extent, corresponds to some of the prevailing statistics on old age in Brazil today: Data from the 2022 Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), for example, indicate that there are more than 32 million elderly people in Brazil and that most live with family members in multigenerational households (with spouses, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc.). However, it is important to keep in perspective the study by Ramos (2015), which analyzed representations of grandparents in 24 Brazilian children's literature books and showed that:

(...) the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, with regard to its duration and articulation over time, is a contemporary experience. Until recently, average life expectancy did not allow many grandparents to see their grandchildren be born and grow up. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this figure was only 33.7 years (...), which considerably limited coexistence among three generations (Ramos, 2015, p. 192).

Ramos (*op. cit.*) also points out how increased longevity has changed family configurations and ties between generations: "Today, grandparents not only have the possibility of seeing their grandchildren be born and grow up, but also of seeing them become adults and, often, parents. Throughout this extended period of coexistence, grandparents may assume different meanings in the lives of their grandchildren, changing the type of interaction established as well as the very intensity of contact when the latter are children, adolescents, or adults. The phase of grandparenthood lasts throughout an entire family cycle and is redesigned during these different moments (...)" (2015, p. 192). This is what we see, for example, in "*O pai da mamãe*" (Mom's dad), written by Cristiana Gomes and richly illustrated by Odilon Moraes (Editora Caixote, 2020), which shows the discovery of kinship and family ties among a girl, her mother, and her grandfather after an intense day at the beach. The girl actively plays with her grandfather in the beach sand, amid sun and sea—and it is their affectionate coexistence and the lessons he gives her that ultimately make the

girl understand that her grandfather is her mother's father. There is a beautiful textual and visual contrast between what the girl had heard about her mother's father (a man with brown hair who always wore a tie and closed shoes; someone who liked to read the news in the newspaper and who built tunnels and bridges; a man who swam where his feet could not touch the bottom and the waves were large; a man who taught her mother to swim and appreciate days at the beach) and what she actually knows and experiences with him as his granddaughter. The narrative highlights the action of time on the body, actions, behaviors, emotions, and priorities in life and, at the end, shows the three of them together, sharing the same family space: around a table.

The work *"Enquanto o almoço não fica pronto"* (While lunch isn't ready), by Sonia Rosa and Bruna Assis Brasil, portrays the daily life of a family composed of two young children, a baby, the grandmother, the father, and the mother. The spaces are shared by everyone, who help and care for one another—for example, the grandmother combs her hair in the bathroom while watching her grandchildren bathe together in the bathtub and the baby plays on the bathroom floor with the family dog. Later, the children appear outside the house reading stories, while the father is seen making the beds and the grandmother talks on the telephone by the window (watching the children outside, the dog on the roof, and the baby crawling on the living-room floor). The mother enters the story closer to lunchtime, being embraced by the father while the children play in the living room and the grandmother lays the tablecloth and prepares the table for everyone's meal. In the narrative, the grandmother is positioned as a central member of the family in the mother's absence, represented as someone who performs the task of caregiving with great joy and happiness. There is an atmosphere of great tenderness and affection, and the spaces—despite the frantic actions of the whole family and the mess made by the children—are decorated with plants, cushions, rugs, etc.

Two other works stand out not only because the home is shared by grandmothers, grandfathers, and grandchildren, but because of the complete change in status of the elderly characters into grandparents who care for their grandchildren: *"Cartas de um menino para a pior avó do mundo"* (Letters from a boy to the worst grandmother in the world), written by Neusa Sorrenti and illustrated by Aline Abreu (Autêntica, 2013), and *Vovó esqueceu meu nome*, written and illustrated by Lilian Guinski (Giostri, 2018). In the first work, the main character, Enrico, dictates a rather

insolent letter for his grandfather to write down and deliver to his grandmother. In it, the boy insults his grandmother (“annoying,” “bossy,” “decrepit,” “nosy”) and complains about all the demands she makes of him (“You’re always asking me to be polite, use less water in the shower, brush my teeth properly, wash my ears, flush after I pee and poop. And you’re always telling me to wash my hands, and you don’t see that my skin gets thin and wrinkled; it won’t be long before it gets holes in it” - p. 9). These demands are, in fact, very similar to those a mother would make of a child. Despite the insolent tone of the letter and Enrico’s complaints, the illustrations show a strict grandmother, with a furrowed brow and a raised finger, but also an affectionate woman, hugging her grandson in photographs, attentive to his uniform and diet, careful with the plants and the house, etc. In *Vovó esqueceu meu nome*, the first-person narrative shows the grandson recalling events that occurred throughout his upbringing by his grandmother: leaving the maternity hospital (directly for his grandmother’s house), losing his first tooth, mealtimes, knitting, the ‘strange games’ she taught him (spinning top, cup-and-ball, card flipping, etc.), his first illnesses, first letters, bedtime stories, etc. The grandson character sadly shows how everything abruptly changes when the grandmother begins to become ill (the roles are reversed in terms of care), but not the love and affection between grandmother and grandson.

In *“Vovô é um super-herói”* (Grandpa is a superhero) (Saber e Ler, 2016), written by Fernando Aguzzoli and illustrated by Juan Chavetta, the boy narrates how much he loves his grandfather and how his grandfather is different from the others: “I have a grandfather, and he’s amazing! He is very, very, very old, or I am very young. He lives with me and my parents. Grandpa isn’t like my friends’ grandfathers, nor does he seem to be like the old man at the bakery or the man who sells pinwheels on my street. I even think it’s a secret, or maybe it isn’t anymore. They think I’m too much of a child to know. But I know: My grandfather is a superhero” (p. 3). As the grandfather’s adventures are narrated (he faces an evil neighbor, forgets pans on the stove, and flies above the mountains in search of the fairy of forgetfulness), several surreal environments are shown—sometimes blurred, alluding to fantasy; at other times, blending the real and the imaginary. In the narrative, the elderly character is shown as a powerful subject, not as someone ill and deficient in memory and discernment: In the grandson’s eyes, he is a superhero who leads him in play and inspires him to have courage and overcome fears in/of life. The work concludes by

emphasizing the persistence of the grandson's love and affection for his grandfather even with the abrupt passage of time—and despite the presence of the ‘monster’ of Alzheimer's.

In “*A dentadura do seu Mokó*” (Mr. Mokó's dentures), written and illustrated by Thiago Lopes (Callis, 2014), we follow the “journey” of Mr. Mokó's dentures from the moment when, in a moment of distraction, he drops them into the toilet. Mr. Mokó lives with his wife and relies on the help of an already adult grandson, who calls a plumber to try to solve the problem of the dentures disappearing into the toilet. The narrative, permeated by a great deal of humor, unfolds in two places: Inside the bathroom of Mr. Mokó's house, always represented monotonously (in grayscale and with tiny details in light blue), and outside the house (in very colorful and vibrant places). The bathroom is the ‘stage’ of the humans' distress and, over the course of the narrative, becomes filled with people and ‘professionals’ mobilized to solve the problem (a plumber, a priest, a scientist, a witch, a cook, a basketball player, etc.).

At the same time, the dentures seem to be genuinely enjoying themselves in strange worlds (with even stranger beings), traveling through rivers and seas full of fish, alligators, eels, algae, corals, and other aquatic creatures. Some of the irony of the situation is constructed through the smiling representation of the lost dentures, which seem to have immensely enjoyed the trip through mangroves, high in the trees (filled with strange birds and other unidentifiable animals), across the vastness of the sky, etc., while all the action inside the bathroom to retrieve them generates anguish and hopelessness in the characters. At the end, the dentures return to the starting point, surprising everyone—but Mr. Mokó, represented as a “clumsy old man,” “bungling,” “distracted,” etc., ends up repeating his initial action. It is also important to mention that Mokó is portrayed as someone who, despite living in his own house with his wife, depends on outside help (his grandson, various people, and even aliens) to survive and solve an apparently simple problem. In addition, he displays a series of stereotypical markers of old age—for example, a stooped gait, the use of a cane, the absence of teeth, and deep sleep in unlikely places and situations, etc.

The book “*Vó, para de fotografar!*” (Grandma, stop taking pictures!), written by Ilan Brenman and illustrated by Guilherme Karsten (Moderna, 2023), presents a story told from the point of view of a child (the granddaughter), who is bothered by the fact that her grandmother always has a camera in her hand. The text and illustrations show the grandmother maneuvering to photograph her granddaughter in various

situations: at a costume party, at her dance performance, at her cousin's birthday party, during a visit to the zoo, at a pizzeria, and at the beach. In these circumstances, the granddaughter shows her displeasure and repeats her plea: "Grandma, stop taking pictures!" At the end of the narrative, the girl gains access to the photo album made by her grandmother and, through contact with the images, identifies with the scenes portrayed and begins to admire her grandmother's art. Thus, the narrative explores intergenerational relationships, giving place to memory and recording, but it also engages with other sensitive themes related to the fine line separating the recording of lived experience from the violation of privacy. The illustrations are colorful and dynamic and engage with the text by complementing it and allowing the reader to follow the scene, the camera click, and its result. In this work, the representation of the grandmother departs from the usual stereotypes that constitute elderly characters, since the grandmother is full of energy, participates in varied social situations, and skillfully handles a technological device.

The analysis of the set of works shows that contemporary Brazilian children's literature has been producing important shifts in the ways old age, intergenerational bonds, and forms of family organization are represented, although such shifts coexist with discursive and visual continuities historically associated with aging. In pedagogical and cultural terms, the books analyzed operate as artifacts that teach ways of perceiving, interpreting, and feeling old age, family, care, memory, dependence, and affection, participating in the production of sensitivities and ways of making sense of being old. By inserting the theme of old age into literature, these works highlight family relationships and rearrangements that include grandfather and grandmother figures in spaces of intergenerational coexistence such as the home, family events, and relationships with neighbors, through varied plots accessible to children.

SECOND TREND: THE ELDERLY CHARACTER IN THEIR OWN HOME

A second trend identified in our study positions the elderly character living in their own residence, a space in which they receive visits from relatives, notably children (grandsons and granddaughters). The first work representative of this trend is "*Os convidados da senhora Olga*" (Mrs. Olga's Guests), written and illustrated by Portuguese author Eva Montanari, translated by Peter O'Sagae (1st edition, Jujuba,

2018). At the beginning of the narrative, the reader is informed that “Mrs. Olga was old, and lived alone at the top of the hill” (p. 4). She is characterized as old and blind, yet organized and autonomous in her kitchen, with excellent hearing. Cooking was Olga's passion, and every night she received guests for dinner, each recognized by the sounds of their footsteps: The Tin Man, the Three Musketeers, the Tin Soldier, the literary character Dorian Gray, the white whale. The text engages intertextually with other literary works (which may or may not be known to the child reader), and meanings are constituted both by the text and by the illustrations alluding to the contexts from which these guests emerge. Only at the end of the narrative does it become clear that these are works read by Mrs. Olga's granddaughter, Nina, who comes every night, chooses a book from the many in Mrs. Olga's library, and reads stories while the elderly character prepares dinner. The setting of the story includes household utensils and books as markers of the elderly character's place, but the illustrations are populated by the many characters with whom Mrs. Olga, through intertextual resources, shares her dinner.

In “*Um dia com a vovó*” (A day with grandma), written by Andrea Hensgen and illustrated by Joëlle Turlonias (Globinho, 2013), we follow the character Bruno, who returns home after spending a day with his grandmother, and his mother asks what he did. The illustrations show the boy with his mother in a very organized environment, full of affective markers (pictures and drawings in the style of family portraits, made by him and attached to the wall; stuffed animals; toys). There is an atmosphere of great intimacy between mother and son, who are shown without inhibitions (the mother gets dressed in the bathroom with the door open; the boy is also seen using the toilet with the door open). There is considerable dialogue and mutual interaction, as the mother shows great interest in the child's experience with his grandmother. The work composes two simultaneous narratives: The version of the outing to the amusement park that Bruno narrates to his mother and that is presented in the verbal text, and the version constructed in the illustrations, a fundamental part of meaning-making because they diverge and compose scenes quite different from those told by the boy. Thus, while Bruno describes his exemplary behavior with his grandmother, the images show mischief and excesses (such as the image showing the character devouring a giant ice cream, or when the grandmother's living room is represented chaotically—with overturned furniture, scribbles on the walls, and things scattered on the floor—right after the boy returns home). In a sense,

the narrative plays with two distinct social functions: The mother who educates and directs conduct, and the grandmother who “uneducates,” opening spaces of freedom and complicity with her grandson. The elderly character thus stages a universe of unconditional affection and a suspension, albeit temporary, of prohibitions on the child's conduct. By narrating a story different from the one we see emerging in the images, the boy character omits the mischief and, in a sense, protects a particular affective space cultivated with his grandmother. Another notable aspect of the work is the representation of the grandmother as an independent woman (who goes to the amusement park with her dog on a leash, buys raffle tickets for her grandson, buys ice cream for both of them, etc.), who lives alone, carefully arranges her house, harvests fruit from her own garden, etc., avoiding stereotypical representations usually related to old age (for example, white hair, forgetfulness, various illnesses, use of canes, etc.).

The work “*Blusa listrada com calça florida: uma história sobre o mal de Alzheimer*” (Striped blouse with floral pants: a story about Alzheimer's disease) (by Bárbara Achnurbush, Artmed, 2010) presents a narrative guided by the granddaughter's gaze, a device that structures the fictional space according to a child's logic, which softens and, at the same time, intensifies the impact of the grandmother's illness. The opening scenes show grandmother and granddaughter reading stories, drawing, watching TV, and planting flowers in the garden. Thus, although it is a story about illness, the grandmother is not reduced to the disease; she is initially presented as an autonomous character who lives in her own home and builds bonds of affection and attention with her granddaughter. Gradually, the grandmother becomes confused and forgetful and begins to act strangely—and the instability of her behavior, initially regarded naturally by the granddaughter, becomes a source of concern for her. It is through the voices of family members that the picture of the disease and the representation of the fragility of the memory of a person who develops Alzheimer's are constituted. The text and images create a certain fragmentation—of scenes, time, and memory—but, at the same time, enable the reader to identify positively with the elderly character insofar as each strange action by the grandmother is placed within a context and time shared with the granddaughter. The illustrations show settings inside the grandmother's house—with elements such as an old armchair, an antique-style lampshade, and a basket with

yarn and knitting needles. But it is above all in the garden of the house that the narrative unfolds, among flowerbeds, trees, and flocks of birds, spaces in which the granddaughter builds bonds with her grandmother. At the end of the narrative, in a reversal that preserves the affective dimension, what the granddaughter learned from her grandmother is reinterpreted as possibilities for the grandmother to learn from her granddaughter. Although the book contains informative and even pedagogical aspects regarding the disease, these elements are inserted into a narrative that transforms a sensitive theme into an equally sensitive literary experience, valuing shared experience without denying the child's participation in contexts involving the illness of close relatives.

The works “*Colo de avó*” (Grandma's lap) (by Roseana Murray, with illustrations by Elisabeth Teixeira, Brinque-Book, 2017) and “*Como ser babá do vovô*” (How to be Grandpa's baby-sitter) (by Jean Reagan, with illustrations by Lee Wildish, Companhia das Letrinhas, 2013) also invest in constructing affective bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. In common, they explore the capacities and abilities (sometimes extraordinary) of elderly characters as they build spaces of play with children. In “*Colo de avó*” (Grandma's lap), the verbal text is written in verse, with short sentences and a strong poetic quality. There are multiple scenes of interaction with grandmothers, reconstructed through double-page spreads and texts superimposed on the illustrations. In one of the poems, the grandchildren's visit is described as follows: “Today is moving day,/ a day to move things around/ so the house becomes lively,/ so the house becomes a surprise,/ because the grandchildren are coming” (Teixeira, 2017, p. 6). The images show the elderly character twirling around the living room, arranging objects and cushions, and preparing food. Small animals interact from a distance: a dog, a piglet, a cat, and flocks of birds. In the illustrations, the grandparents' home is represented through old furniture—china cabinets and classic cupboards, decorated crockery, rounded sofas, cabinets ornamented in a woodcarving style, a rocking chair, and a sewing machine with fabrics waiting to be sewn. The grandmother characters are not only those who have a “soft lap and the tightest hug,” as stated on the back cover of the book, but are represented through ambivalent images of grandmothers who are adventure companions, grandmothers who transform the house and garden into settings for play: “the living room becomes a boat: two cushions are enough, plus sheets and some ropes. The grandmother, tied to the mast, looks at her grandson, the terrible

Silver-Leg Pirate [...]—Either you take me to the movies, buy chocolate and go with me to the park, or you will walk the plank until you plunge into the shark-filled sea” (p. 8). In the work, grandmother characters are also narrated as accomplices in small acts of mischief and transgression with their grandchildren: As when chocolates and popcorn are rewards after adventures, or in scenes of a grandmother happily riding a tricycle with her granddaughter “until reaching the highest cloud” (p. 16). The grandmothers are lively, companionable, active, and fun; they play, jump, dance, fish, plant, run, and are capable of things that exceed the limits of an old body. The work also introduces the theme of the grandmother's death, stating that when she leaves, she ‘moves to the sky’—and if she previously prepared dreams in her kitchen, she then begins to make the most beautiful dreams “made with dust from the Universe” (p. 27) for the grandchildren to dream while they sleep.

In the book “*Como ser babá do vovô*” (How to be Grandpa's baby-sitter) (Companhia das Letrinhas, 2013), we follow the arrival of the smiling grandfather at the home of his young grandson—the character and narrator of the story. It is interesting to note that, rather than being set in the grandfather's home, the story takes place in the grandson's home, where the grandfather comes to spend the day. The game begins as soon as the grandfather enters the living room, and the child hides so that he will look for him. Through a light and humorous structure, the narrative articulates sensitive themes such as role reversal—when the child's parents leave for work and the grandfather takes responsibility for his care. Above all, the work highlights intergenerational affection, constructed through the games the grandfather plays with the grandson, although, from the perspective of the child narrator, it is the child who imaginatively assumes the role of the grandfather's ‘babysitter.’ In this sense, the narrative values the child's perspective as legitimate, and the household dynamics are presented as if they formed an instruction manual. Thus, the narrator teaches how to care for Grandpa: “ask if he is hungry;” “When Mom and Dad leave for work, hold Grandpa's hand and say: Don't be like that, Grandpa. They'll be back soon!” Image and text humorously “teach” how to take Grandpa for a walk, how to entertain him at home, how to play with Grandpa and allow him to have fun safely, in a reversal of roles between adult and child. Throughout the narrative, grandfather and grandson interact and scatter toys around the house, which are put away before the parents return. Grandfather and grandson

say goodbye, and the boy asks when he will be able to take care of his grandfather again, ultimately generating an affective sense of reciprocal care. The elderly character is also constructed as a playmate and, despite imaginatively “being the one who is cared for,” he is not constructed as a fragile or dependent figure, but as an affectionate and available figure who shares the child's point of view.

The works analyzed within this second trend share a significant set of narrative elements, expressed in verbal and visual texts that make it possible to think about intergenerational relationships and representations of old age with a child reader in mind. Although each narrative mobilizes distinct strategies—prose and verse, humor, fantasy, illness, domestic everyday life, spaces of adventure—there are some points of convergence that can be highlighted. One of these aspects concerns the centrality of domestic space as a privileged place of affective coexistence between children and elderly characters, who are constructed as affectively central in children's lives.

In practically all the works, the home appears as a fundamental setting for intergenerational experiences: Mrs. Olga's kitchen and library; the grandmother's organized home in “*Um dia com a vovó*” (A Day with Grandma); the garden and indoor spaces in “*Blusa listrada com calça florida*” (Striped blouse with floral pants); the house transformed into a playful space in “*Colo de avó*” (Grandma's lap); or the grandson's house in “*Como ser babá do vovô*” (How to be Grandpa's baby-sitter). These domestic spaces would be familiar and affective to young readers; in them, bonds, memories, games, and learning are established in the stories narrated. The elderly person's home is represented as a place of welcome, imagination, and intimacy, but it is also marked by old objects that evoke lived experience and memory. Even when the narrative addresses fragility, illness, or memory loss, as in *Blusa listrada com calça florida*, the affective bond remains the organizing axis of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents.

The stories also converge in valuing the child's perspective as the organizing principle of the narrative. In several works, events are narrated through the child's gaze, which shifts the ways old age is represented and can foster identification on the part of the reader. In “*Como ser babá do vovô*” (How to be Grandpa's baby-sitter), for example, there is an imaginative reversal of caregiving roles, in which the child ‘takes care’ of the grandfather. In “*Um dia com a vovó*” (A day with Grandma), the illustrations reveal experiences different from those verbally narrated by the boy. In

“*Os convidados da senhora Olga*” (Mrs. Olga's Guests), the imaginative universe of literature shared between grandmother and granddaughter reorganizes the meanings of the narrative. In all these cases, the child character is central to the story: The child interacts with, motivates, supports, accompanies, learns from, and teaches the elderly characters.

Another recurring element is the association between old age, imagination, and play. Some of these works show grandmothers and grandfathers as active partners in adventures, games, and imaginative experiences. At the same time that these representations make it possible to establish complicity between the characters, they also reinforce a certain cultural sense of loss of autonomy and dependence that leads to a sense of infantilization of the elderly person. In light of Debert's (1999) reflections, we can question cultural representations of old age that reiterate subjects' weakness and fragility, which in literature may emerge from the approximation between tastes, preferences, and mischievous acts performed by children and elderly people when away from the gaze of other (young) adult characters. In the more recent literary tradition, representations of the elderly character oscillate between positions of active autonomy and positions of guardianship and dependence, as observed in previous writings (Silveira and Bonin, 2010; Silveira, Bonin and Ripoll, 2012).

THIRD TREND: THE SOLITARY ELDERLY PERSON

A third trend is linked to the representation of the elderly person as a solitary character disconnected from family or even social relationships with other human characters. This is the case in “*Vovó viaja e não sai de Casa?*” (Grandma travels and doesn't leave the house?), written by Sylvia Orthof and illustrated by Bebel Callage (1st edition, Editora Rovel, 2012), which presents the grandmother character (without a proper name, simply Grandma), who inside her home creates situations alluding to journeys undertaken without leaving the house. This “tourist grandma” plays around the house and, accompanied by the cat character, simulates contexts described as follows: “Tourist grandma goes to the stove, makes the food... in German” (p. 8); “Tourist Grandma goes to Japan, goes down the basement stairs, goes with her cat, who is Siamese, meows with him in Japanese” (pp. 10-11). The

text continues by placing the character in household settings and, in dialogue with the illustrations, positions her among clothes, objects, and foods representative of different countries, which may suggest real journeys made by the character throughout her life. At the end, one final journey positions Grandma among the stars - "Tourist Grandma left home, pretended to be an angel, pretended to have wings, went to the horizon of near-far..." (pp. 20-21) and the illustration complements the meaning by showing the empty house. The text thus opens itself to a possible reading of finitude/death, but in a non-explicit way, preserving ambiguity and leaving room for interpretive work.

There are works in which the elderly character is not completely isolated but also has no family ties. This occurs in "*Uma estátua diferente*" (A different statue), by Belgian writer Charlotte Bellière, illustrated by Ian de Haes, translated and adapted by Clara Colotto (1st edition, Editora Ler e Saber, 2013). The work places the central character—named only as "an old lady"—in a building located on the corner of a busy avenue and characterizes her as someone who walks with difficulty and is afraid to face the traffic, which is why she takes any passerby by the hand to help her cross the street. The illustrations complement the meanings of the text, showing everyday situations and reactions from other characters that range from expressions of welcome and surprise to contempt. The scene that triggers the conflict occurs when a character (a young man wearing formal attire and carrying a briefcase marked "urgent") refuses to help her. The situation is exaggerated, perhaps as a strategy to generate identification with the elderly character's suffering, as she hears insults: "—What kind of madness is this? No! Old woman! What's your problem?" The shock caused by the aggressive reaction transforms the character, according to the narrative, "into an upset and sad statue." The following scenes show several attempts to restore her—the doctor and the healer Mamandu are called, "scholarly books" are consulted, but nothing answers the question of what might have caused the elderly character's paralysis. In the ending, she is healed by the affection of the neighboring family, who offer to do her shopping. Everything turns into a celebration at the end.

Other works present affective contexts experienced among characters who are friends and have no family ties. The book *Marina e Mariana*, written by Georgina Martins and illustrated by Salmo Dansa (1st edition, Ed. Araguaia, 2013), has as protagonists the two elderly characters who give the work its name, as well as the narrator character, a dog. This narrative condenses human tensions and feelings

such as separation, loss, and reconciliation. The work is illustrated in shades of gray, with characters superimposed on images of photographic negatives, like fragments of memory retained in old photographs. In a paratext, the illustrator explains that the inspiration came from a certain sense of the obsolescence of photographic negatives in the face of digital photography techniques. In this way, a sense of obsolete old age is also mobilized. It is through the dog's voice (a narrative strategy that shifts the focus of attention through animal mediation expressed as a sensitive, observant, and companionable gaze) that Mariana's solitary routine is narrated, sitting in the living room of her house and watching a television program without interest. The narrator informs us that Marina and Mariana were longtime friends who grew up together, but one day "had a terrible fight." A reconciliation scene is delicately inserted, and the illustrations allow us to see the characters sharing tea and memories (and they are portrayed in the illustrations as if emerging from photographic negatives). The ending remains open to questioning about this reunion: Was it, in fact, a meeting of reconciliation between friends, or the product of the solitary character's imagination?

The loneliness of the elderly character is also presented in the works "*A casa e a Velha*" (The house and the old Woman) (text by Adriano Gomes and illustrations by Raíssa Bulhões, 1st edition, Editora Comuniqué, 2016) and "*O velho e a mosca*" (The old man and the fly) (by Bel Barcelos, 1st edition, Editora Rocco, 2012). Both narratives incorporate aesthetic resources in text and image that allow the reader to infer meanings of loneliness. Thus, elderly characters are positioned in contexts lacking meaningful human relationships (they are always alone inside the house, which appears as protection and, at the same time, as confinement). Social bonds do not exist and, in the work, a kind of fusion occurs between the old woman and her environment - "once upon a time there was a very old house"/ "in it lived an old woman, despised and forgotten" (p. 6). The images show the character sad, downcast, sitting in an armchair with old-fashioned patterns, with aged furniture covered in cobwebs and dirty, disorganized spaces, meanings figuratively associated with loneliness and reversed at the end of the narrative. According to the text, her pastime was living on memories, without strength because of disenchantment. In "*O velho e a mosca*" (The old man and the fly), the house stands out in a carefully rendered image of a house on a hill, in an almost bucolic scene. The text states: "In the middle of that nothingness, lots of sun, lots of wind, and a single house with an

old man inside” (p. 5). An interaction then begins between the elderly character and the fly, and it is precisely the fly that momentarily breaks the isolation and brings dynamism to the quiet, linear space of old age represented there. The image of the elderly character reinforces meanings associated with a repetitive, silent, and solitary daily life, reinforced in images of the old, nearly empty house, with few pieces of furniture and utensils, and of the elderly character wearing pajamas and slippers. At the end of both narratives, the elderly character is removed from a sense of stagnation through the action of a child or an animal.

A first aspect that can be mentioned in relation to the works representative of this trend is the way the characters are named. Only one of the works gives the character a proper name - Mrs. Olga - while the others name the characters as old man, old woman, or little old lady. This literary choice can be interpreted as a marker of identity erasure of the elderly subject. In this way, the narratives tend to reduce the character to their old age, emptying out other dimensions of existence. According to Hall (2006), identity is a discursive construction that takes place through language and representations. In this sense, generic naming and the symbolic reduction of the elderly figure to a single characteristic can be understood as a form of representation through stereotypes. But this representation dialogues with broader repertoires that, according to Beauvoir (1990), reduce old age to a social condition marked by invisibility and depersonalization.

A second aspect to highlight concerns the presence of companion animals that replace social bonds and, while revealing loneliness or the absence of other human characters, mitigate the experience of isolation. In literary works for children, the animal character sometimes operates as a narrative device for addressing difficult themes.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this text, we addressed some representations of old age in books of literature for children, seeking to indicate how this sensitive theme is brought into the universe of literary reading for children. Three main representational trends were identified: In the first, elderly characters are inserted into family contexts and share their home with other family members who are responsible for their well-being. In these cases, old age is represented as integrated into the family's daily life, with the

stories constructed through interactions and the sharing of intergenerational experiences. In these works, one can perceive an environment marked by a strong presence of picture frames, photographs and family albums, large tables with many chairs, and objects shared by the family that help interweave the characters' lives within a common space. The second trend we analyzed presents the elderly character in their own residence, a space in which they receive visits from family members. In this set of stories, social relationships with children and grandchildren also occur, as does the affective bond between elderly characters and, especially, child characters. However, the narratives are structured around spaces belonging to the elderly character, with their belongings, furniture, utensils, and objects also marked by time (aspects that characterize them as old). Finally, in the third trend, we analyzed stories of solitary elderly characters, detached from direct family relationships. In these works, old age is frequently associated with isolation, the absence of close family ties, or the vulnerability of the old body, bringing into play issues such as abandonment and representations that intertwine old age and memory. We thus observe that old age figures among the themes constructed within the space of literature through ambivalent and dynamic representations that are constantly changing, but that also reaffirm certain stereotypes.

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