


Ana Margarida Ramos
anamargarida@ua.pt

Urban and rural landscapes in Portuguese picture story books

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Rui Ramos

rramos@ie.uminho.pt

University of Minho and Centre for Child Studies,
Portugal

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PAISAJES URBANOS Y RURALES EN LOS ALBUMES ILUSTRADOS PORTUGUESES: REIFICACIÓN Y PERCEPCIONES

Abstract

We have chosen to study a collection of three books published by the Metropolitan Lisbon Area with the purpose to disseminate the natural and cultural surroundings of the Portuguese capital. The selected books combine pedagogical intentionality and aesthetic dimension, recreating the adventures of a girl in natural Portuguese landscapes. The main character visits different natural scenarios and discovers all sort of new special places. With a scientific review, the books emphasize, without losing their literary quality, the environmental diversity of the area, which determinates its specificity. History, geography, geology and biology intersect with magic and wonderful and propose a different way of looking at reality. As we will seek to prove, these books represent, in an original way, various forms of personal and subjective appropriation of space, particularly concerning natural landscape, thereby stimulating a variety of readings and interpretations. Both text and images depict, in their own language and style, the relationship between children and environment.

Key words: Children's literature, illustration, ecoliteracy, nature, environment.

Resumen

Este estudio se centra en una colección de tres volúmenes publicados por el Área Metropolitana de Lisboa con el objetivo de difundir el medio natural y cultural que rodea a la capital portuguesa. Los libros seleccionados combinan intencionalidad pedagógica y dimensión estética a través de la narración de las aventuras de un niño que transcurren en pleno paisaje natural. El protagonista visita diferentes escenarios naturales y descubre una gran variedad de espacios únicos. Desde una cuidadosa revisión científica, en los libros se destaca, sin perder su calidad literaria, la diversidad y riqueza ambiental de un espacio particular y único. La historia, la geografía, la geología y la biología se cruzan con la magia y lo maravilloso para proponer una manera diferente de observar la realidad. El estudio tratará de demostrar cómo estos libros representan de una manera muy original, la apropiación personal y subjetiva del espacio, en particular del paisaje natural, lo que permite una variedad de lecturas e interpretaciones. Texto e imágenes recrean en su estilo y lenguaje específico, la relación del niño con el medio ambiente.

Palabras clave: literatura para la infancia, ilustración, ecoliteracia, naturaleza, ambiente.

1. Introduction

This paper is part of a larger research study carried out within the framework of the project "Environment and ecoliteracy in recent literature for children," which is currently being developed at the Centre for Child Studies at the University of Minho, Portugal.

The research project aims at identifying the lines of intersection between the aesthetic and recreational dimensions of children's literature and its pedagogical possibilities, specifically concerning ecoliteracy (cf.: Capra, 2002).

For this particular study, the analysis will be twofold:

- a) the first analysis is from a linguistic point of view, resorting to the principles of linguistic constructivism (Halliday, 2001) to identify frames and the interpretative repertoire (Fillmore, 1975; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; McKenzie, 2005) of texts¹;
- b) the second analysis is from a literary and semiotic point of view, establishing text-picture relationships and dynamics according to the postmodern theories pertaining to picture books (Sipe, 1998, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2001, Lewis, 2001).

2. Object of study

For this study, a collection of three picture books designed to disseminate the natural and cultural surroundings of the Portuguese capital, published by the *Área Metropolitana de Lisboa* (Metropolitan Lisbon Local Authority) in Lisbon in 2003 and 2004, have been chosen. The selected books frame environment in a particular way and combine pedagogical intentionality and an aesthetic dimension. Set in natural Portuguese landscapes, they recreate the adventures of Ana, a teenage girl. In these picture books, *A Minha Terra* (2003) (My Homeland), *Um Oceano de Histórias entre Sintra e Cascais* (2004) (An Ocean of Stories between Sintra and Cascais), and *Montanhas de Verde na Serra de Sintra* (2004) (Mountains of Green in the Sintra Mountain Range), the main character discovers all kinds of new, special places while in contact with nature. The three picture books were the subject of scientific scrutiny and reveal literary quality while emphasising a diversity of environments. History, Geography, Geology and Biology intersect with magic and wonder and demonstrate a singular way of looking at reality.



Figure 1 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003)

1 In a recent article, Lakoff defends that it is imperative to conceptualise (*framing*) the environment correctly and suggests a comprehensive definition of *frame*: 'One of the major results in the cognitive and brain sciences is that we think in terms of typically unconscious structures called "frames" (sometimes "schemas"). Frames include semantic roles, relations between roles, and relations to other frames. A hospital frame, for example, includes the roles: Doctor, Nurse, Patient, Visitor, Receptionist, Operating Room, Recovery Room, Scalpel, etc. Among the relations are specifications of what happens in a hospital, e.g., Doctors operate on Patients in Operating Rooms with Scalpels. These structures are physically realized in neural circuits in the brain. All of our knowledge makes use of frames, and every word is defined through the frames it neurally activates. All thinking and talking involves "framing."' (2010: 71-72).

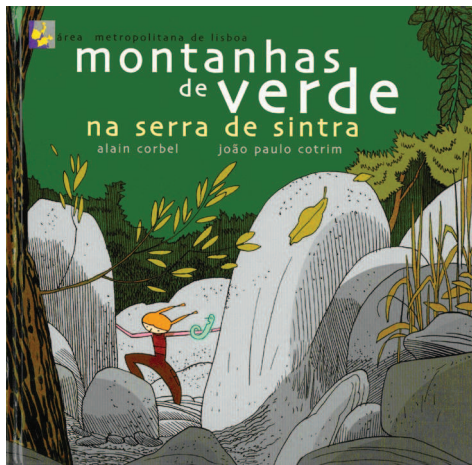


Figure 2 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a)

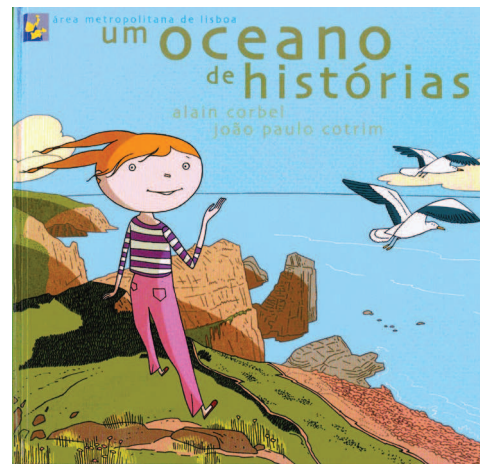


Figure 3 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b)

3. Conceptual unit and diversity of objectives

The three picture books which make up the *corpus* of this study work as a trilogy, creating a conceptual unit with internal cohesion (the character, landscape, actions and relationship between the character and the diegetic spaces are all the same). There is also external cohesion which is reinforced by paratextual elements, such as the collection, the format and the graphics. Each book has an introductory preface, which includes the objectives underpinning it. Written by the Head of the *Junta Metropolitana de Lisboa* (Metropolitan Lisbon Local Authority) at the time they were published, the three paratexts, in the form of a letter to the reader, underline the connection between the books and the theme of the environment and present the educational and ludic objectives supporting them. In the first volume, the writer points out that 'the first step towards creating a new ecological and environmental consciousness is increased knowledge of the region where we live and its natural richness. This book aims to initiate that process in a way which is both didactic and fun' (Rosinha, *in* Cotrim & Corbel, 2003² - our translation). In the second book, she goes on to say that 'it is another civic contribution targeted at youngsters, seeking to awaken their ecological and environmental conscience' (Rosinha, *in* Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a). In the third and final book, she reinforces the ideas presented in the previous two by stating that 'it [the book] helps to understand and respect nature' (Rosinha, *in* Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

The first volume introduces the protagonist and sets the scene in the geographical area of Metropolitan Lisbon. The inclusion of a magic map allows the heroine to move around and between very different spaces within that area. The transition between pages, whose reading implications have already been analysed by Sipe & Brightman (2009), takes on special relevance here as it is linked to the geographical leaps that occur. The onomatopoeic use of 'Zás' (Whoosh), used almost like a chorus which demarcates the text, expresses those unexpected changes, thus preparing the reader for them, as well as marking the open ending of the narrative, which encourages the reader to go on to subsequent volumes or even go on journeys similar to Ana's.

² In the books analysed, the pages are not numbered. Therefore, that information is omitted in the references.

This volume, which is the least educationally explicit of the three, surprises the reader by the way it understands the concept of natural heritage, proposing a wide ranging interpretation, capable of integrating the different local landscapes, reliefs, flora and fauna. The instructive aspect of the picture book, which has been revised by a specialist in the field, is not affected by elements of fantasy in the book, which intersect with the factual ones, thereby maintaining plausibility.

The title *A Minha Terra* (My Homeland) evokes the feeling of belonging, seeking to make the reader identify with the natural space surrounding them. Ultimately, the objective of encouraging the understanding of nature through its description is to value it and in due course protect it.

The narrative starts at school, a place which is familiar to the virtual reader, quickly escaping through the fantasy of maps out of the classroom. From that geographical boundary, the narrative unravels at a vertiginous rate, increased by the illustrations, making the most of the moment that the page is turned, encouraging the reader to accompany the character on their travels. The moment when Ana, the main character, goes into the map room, the pages, which are twice as big, suggest moving on to new places, as the colours and focus points change simultaneously. The text articulates with the images, interacting with them systematically, and expresses the concerns the character feels when faced with the unknown, her surprise at the successive discoveries and her constant curiosity and need to know.

The title of the second volume, *Um Oceano de Histórias entre Sintra e Cascais* (An Ocean of Stories between Sintra and Cascais), is built around the play on words using the expression 'an ocean of...' meaning a large quantity or size, with the denotative reference to a large physical expanse of water. The book promises to offer the young target reader a literary genre which is recognisable and usually attractive.

The greatness of the ocean is one of its most salient features, increasing and justifying the fascinated gaze of the main character. It is presented in the first person, seeing as the ocean is anthropomorphed, repeating to a point which is almost comic that it is a 'great storyteller', a 'gigantic storyteller' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a). It claims that it is 'deep and very blue', 'as big as two worlds, as gigantic as three worlds', harbouring 'waves of all sizes' (idem, ibidem). This obvious lack of modesty humanises the ocean and makes it familiar, and its insistence on its enormous size causes feelings of admiration and amazement in the protagonist, who despite being able to see very far 'cannot imagine the size of the ocean' (idem, ibidem). The ocean also describes itself as changeable, capable of 'creating horrible storms of all shapes and sizes', but also *knows* how 'to be sweet and green' (idem, ibidem). In this way, free will is demonstrated through the semantics of these expressions, which contributes to the ocean's humanisation. Its minimalist graphic representation is based on an interdiscursive game with the mythological representation of Neptune/Poseidon, sporting a beard, crown and trident. In this way, it becomes a recognisable and concrete image in the virtual reader's mind, and is no longer an element of nature without definable borders and too large to understand as a unique entity, but concrete and familiar, immense but individual and an active interlocutor.



Figure 4 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a)

In the second volume, the authors take advantage of the dimensions linked to the Atlantic and the elements of water in the Metropolitan Lisbon area to create a picture book where reality and fiction and History and myth intersect, with the *Parque Natural Sintra / Cascais* (Sintra/Cascais Natural Park) as a backdrop. Nature, with its variety, diversity, richness and beauty, is the ideal scenario for Ana's new adventures and for the extraordinary discoveries that this curious little girl uncovers along the coastline, with the sea as her company. Once transformed into a character, the sea, who is at the same time storyteller and guide, leads the heroine to discover the specificities of the coastal landscape, drawing attention to the geographical details of the region, the relief, local geology, marine biology and the marine ecosystems and flora, without overlooking its history and its stories.

In terms of content, the picture book incorporates a more didactic dimension, making concepts explicit and explaining phenomena, such as ice ages and thawing, erosion of the bluffs and cliffs, movement of dunes and sand and the four types of sand between the sea and the fixed dunes, including the identification of the species which live there.

As regards the illustrations, attention is drawn to the exploration of the different sections of each image, allowing a lengthy reading of the pages. The representation of the spaces and their inhabitants is often carried out from the point of view of the protagonist, giving it greater importance and resulting in a clear widening of horizons. Besides that, the illustrations reinforce the personification of the sea, collaborating with the text while it proposes the interaction of the protagonist with the natural space around her and its inhabitants, following the same line of fantasy by representing her on the back of birds or flying in the sky.

After discovering the coastline all along the borough of Sintra in the second volume, it is time for Ana to lose herself (and find herself as she discovers many new things...) in the mountain range in Sintra in the third book *Montanhas de Verde na Serra de Sintra* (Mountains of Green in the Sintra Mountain Range).

Once again, the title of this book centres on a play on words with 'mountains of...' evoking a large quantity, as well as taking on the identifiable reference to a part of the landscape. The ludic dimension of the picture book begins with its title and creates pleasurable expectations in the minds of its readers.

In this book, the protagonist discovers secrets, both big and small, held in the Mountain, when she comes into contact with nature and a multifaceted backdrop which is visible to all. History, Geography, Geology and Biology overlap with magic and fantasy and propose a different view of the reality which surrounds us. Surprise is the determining ingredient in the narrative, connecting the scenes and the route of the main character, from discovery to discovery as well as of Nature itself, stating that 'the things around us are like little boxes of surprises!' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

If in the previous volume, the role of guide is played by the sea, now it is a stone's turn – quickly christened 'Pocket Mountain' – to take on that role, giving explanations for the age of the Mountain and the slow yet progressive evolution suffered throughout millennia, dating back to a time before humans, who have been responsible for the biggest changes in the ecosystems, some of which have been incredibly detrimental. As a particularly rich and diversified ecosystem, the mountain range contains numerous species, different landscapes and even variations in climate. The beauty of the mountain range comes from careful observation using all the senses.

The text includes information about the geological processes in the formation of the mountain range, explicitly identifying the indigenous peoples like the Celts and the Romans, as well as references to human intervention, including buildings such as the *Palácio da Pena* (Pena Palace) by the king

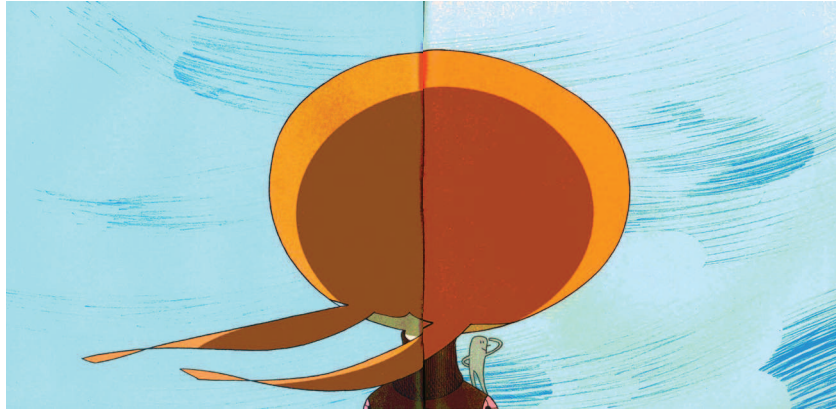


Figure 5 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b)

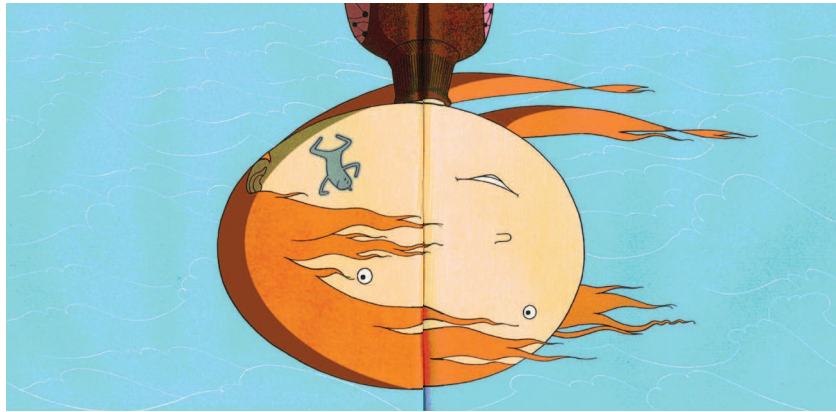


Figure 6 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b)



Figure 7 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b)

Fernando or the parks and botanical gardens which are characteristic of the 19th century. Furthermore, the information is given without the use of an instructive dissemination discourse in order to provide concrete and precise information about the species there, including the native ones. The connection between Humankind to the mountain range, a special relationship of complicity, is highlighted by the reference to various privileged associations within it. Examples include the case of the Franciscan monks secluded in the *Convento dos Capuchos* (Capuchos Convent), the battles between Christians and Moors, which took place inside the castle, the agriculture on the slopes of the mountain range or the windmills which exploit the natural force of the wind.

In relation to the illustrations, aspects from the previous volumes are maintained, with more realistic illustrations connected to species and physical phenomena, together with a freer and more personal, almost fantastical viewpoint. Attention is given to three consecutive double spreads made up entirely of images where Ana takes centre stage. These pages in quick succession aim to express a feeling of freedom from visiting the *Ermida de Nossa Senhora da Peninha*, (Our Lady of Peninha Chapel), at an altitude of 488m, where there is a fusion of various natural elements such as air/wind, water/sea and land/mountain. In these three double spreads, the absence of verbal discourse is significant conveying instead the sensory feelings experienced by the heroine, which words seem to be unable to articulate. At the end, to reinforce the relief of the landscape, the verbal component is suppressed once again from the pages, where one can contemplate the Sintra Mountain Range:

4. Major issues under analysis

It is possible to identify various *topoi* in this series of picture books, or recurring lines of force, which have special relevance in the conception and the internal cohesion of the trilogy. Some have already been covered briefly in the description of each book of the series but a deeper analysis of the most prominent features follows.

4.1. Genre Hybridity

The expectation of the reader who initially comes into contact with these picture books is to encounter narrative texts. That expectation is also supported by the title of one of the books, which proclaims 'An Ocean of Stories' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), and has the Sea as protagonist, which states repeatedly, as previously mentioned, that it is a great storyteller.

However, the conclusion of a more detailed analysis of these books will identify incomplete and atypical narrative structures. Each picture book has a group of verbal and visual markers which make them similar to classification books of the natural sciences, where one would expect a textual organisation of the explicative kind (according to the description suggested by Adam, 1997).

At a verbal level, there are frequent denomination structures, at times in discursive segments which appear in autonomous sections: 'the estuary is the place where the river runs to rest and the sea takes advantage of that fact to mix its saltiness with the sweetness of the river water' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'these are the fixed dunes,' 'they are plants which withstand dry spells and strong winds well' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'I am the cork oak tree, I like cool slopes at mid-altitude and non-calcareous soils,' 'I am the oak tree and I thrive on the humidity from the north, but in a gentle climate' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

As can be seen, besides the actual denomination structure, which establishes a co-referential



Figure 8 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a)



Figure 9 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a)



Figure 10 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b)

relationship between a designated entity and its verbal identification, normally through the use of the verb *to be*, there is a development of its referentiation/description in these segments which follows a model that clearly overlaps with the discourse of the natural sciences, with the features of each designated element.

The visual dimension takes on an important role, as there are various cases of captioned illustrations which are similar to scientific illustrations, as can be seen in Figures 8, 9 and 10.

It is important to note that in these denomination structures, as well as in other segments of the texts, there is a vast amount of technical vocabulary used, which brings specific terminology of this particular field, described generically here as the natural sciences, to the world of literary discourse. 'egrets', 'otters', 'stone pine tree', 'maritime pine tree', 'peregrine falcon', (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'consolidated dune', 'sandstone rock', 'limestone or clay cement', 'beach grass', 'herbivorous sauropods', 'peregrine falcon' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'ferns', 'long-eared bat', 'red oak tree', 'Portuguese oak', 'oak tree', 'shrubby' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b), but to name a few.

Lastly, it is important to highlight the fact that there are exact quantifications in the descriptions of the state of things, using a register which also appears to have been imported from scientific discourse: 'more than 900 plants live here', 'more than 140 different mushrooms', 'an altitude of 488m' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

4.2. Didacticity

The issue of didacticity in these narratives is raised and is strongly associated with both the hybridity of genre and the identified markers. It is true that children's and youngsters' literature is by definition characterised as a triple dimension with ludic, aesthetic and didactic aspects. However, it is important to identify and describe the linguistic markers of the didactic element, which is linked to the pragmatic objective of enabling knowledge.

A number of these markers have been described in the hybridity of genre section.

Others are linked to the use of rhetorical resources which allow the reader to understand the frames which have been evoked. Lakoff points out that framing reality appropriately is a fundamental requirement for the success of environmental discourse. When referring to environmental discourse in the *media* he goes on to say that 'truth must be framed effectively to be seen at all. That is why an understanding of framing matters' (2010: 80).

Among the rhetorical resources identified, it is imperative to highlight the comparisons made and the metaphors created. Both allow the reader to assimilate mental schemata more easily through associating new realities with those which are familiar to the reader: 'just as you have a back and tummy, a head and feet, so does the Mountain-Range-which-is-not-quite-a-mountain offer some parts of itself to the sea breeze,' 'the forest is a palace packed with precious objects which demand the eyes of a princess,' 'foliage wall,' 'it's a welcoming substitute for the entrance to the mountain range (...) it can even look like a palace' and 'a tapestry made up of bits of foliage,' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b), among others.

Another frame which clearly indicates didacticity is that of curiosity, surprise and discovery, all typical childhood characteristics or actions. The protagonist is repeatedly described as curious, experiencing successive surprises and making renewed discoveries as she explores the natural and human landscape which surrounds her. The scenery is also portrayed as a continuous box of surprises, making it even more appealing to the reader as they will easily identify with the main character and be taken on a voyage of discovery and learning.

This frame is evoked from the beginning of the first volume in the trilogy, where the initial scene shows Ana playing hide and seek with her school friends. She then enters a classroom she has never been in before and finds maps which 'prevent us from getting lost and help us to find out where things are' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003).

In addition, there is a vast interpretative repertoire that makes this frame current, where one can find lexemes and expressions such as: 'mysterious journey,' 'the walks and surprises never end,' 'it is worth (...) discovering them' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'promise the freshness of something new,' 'what pirate and battle secrets must they hide?' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'the things around us are like little boxes of surprises,' 'mysterious green of the woods,' 'a place so enchanted as fairy tales that it smells of mystery,' 'mysterious surroundings,' 'ready to begin discovering the many things which are hidden under each stone' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

It is important to add that the action of discovery is presented as something positive and as an attractive challenge: 'Ana was never scared of taking risks,' 'this is fun,' 'the dunes are fun to slide down' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'just the names themselves sound cute' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'I'm just amazed,' 'Ana is satisfied' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

There is a more autonomous dimension to this frame, because it is so salient in the books under analysis here. It is the dimension of discovery, shown through an interpretative repertoire related to the sense of sight: the protagonist *sees*, *nature is seen*, the landscape *reveals itself*. The verbs of visual perception are frequent: 'Ana can't stop looking around her,' 'Ana would look around as she walked about,' 'I didn't know there were so many things to see in this place,' 'Ana is so absorbed in what surrounds her that she doesn't even see where she is stepping,' 'it's good to be like this, on the banks, looking at the calm water,' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'you have to let your eyes mature to understand the differences,' 'look at how I build these dunes,' 'look at these details,' 'you can see their [the birds'] abilities,' 'Ana can see far into the distance,' 'Ana only had eyes for the difference in colour, so many and so subtle were the hues of green,' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'couldn't take their eyes off

the ground; 'as you can see,' 'can you see how the stones take advantage of the force of the wind,' 'the forest is a palace which is filled to the brim with gems which demand the eye of a princess. Ana is an extremely attentive princess' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

Articulating with visual perception, and evoking a relationship between the individuals and their surroundings, is another dimension, which refers to the aesthetic and ludic components of the books under analysis: the multiplicity of forms of understanding the world. Many of these forms are presented using synaesthesia and suggest a holistic or ecological perspective of reality, within which the individual finds themselves. The interpretative repertoire of this *frame* uses expressions such as: 'the estuary is the place where the river runs to rest and the sea takes advantage of that fact to mix its saltiness with the sweetness of the river water,' 'smelling lavender,' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), '[Ana] was hypnotised by the words of the age old Ocean. They tasted of droplets and promised the freshness of something new,' 'would listen to the roaring of the sea,' 'rough cliffs,' 'soft sand,' 'beautiful waves' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'she heard a sound, felt a vibration and smelt the earth after the rain,' 'feel these smells, this green, breathe in the humidity and watch out where you put your feet,' 'the place smelt of mystery,' 'it can even look like a palace full of scents, like this one of moist earth,' 'the ground is both soft and hard, says Ana, touching the blanket of leaves with pleasure,' 'Ana allowed herself to be enchanted by the way in which the smells, shapes and textures vied for her attention (...): whispering, dancing, emitting smells, emanating swathes of colour,' 'this scent that I cannot name smells good,' 'I like the creaking of the branches' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

In this way, all the senses are involved in the perception of the world, being conceived as a multifaceted and complex body with a tangible closeness between the subject who is experiencing the moment and the object being experienced, seeing as some of the senses are only activated if the subject exists.

4.3. Positivism and modalisation

It is possible to accuse these books of taking on a linear positivist attitude, in which the mere exposure to the evidence of the facts would make individuals attuned to the need to alter their relationship with the world in which they live, in particular natural elements, to thereby take on more sustainable forms of behaviour. Reference to aspects of the landscape would be enough for the reader to become more conscientious in relation to it and its conservation. The mention of elements of the sea, flora and fauna would provoke an immediate awakening to the issue, which would bring new perceptions and behaviours *per se*.

It is true to say that the books *show, uncover and give evidence of* real aspects which are frequently missed in our everyday inattentive eyes. One such example is illustrated by the following figure, where there is a magnifying glass accompanied by a text which carries out an illocutionary directive act, changing something normally unnoticed and not often seen into something visible, which plays an important role in people's lives: 'Look at these details: it's all sand but there are at least four types from here to there' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a).



Figure 11 (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a)

This attitude is criticised by Lakoff:

'The Trap of Enlightenment Reason

Most of us were brought up with a commonplace view of how we think that derives from the Enlightenment. Over the past 30 years, the cognitive and brain sciences have shown that this view is false. (...)

Folks trained in public policy, science, economics, and law are often given the old, false view. As a result, they may believe that if you just tell people the facts, they will reason to the right conclusion. What actually happens is that the facts must make sense in terms of their system of frames, or they will be ignored. The facts, to be communicated, must be framed properly. Furthermore, to understand something complex, a person must have a system of frames in place that can make sense of the facts' (2010: 72-73).

In the books under analysis, this positivist perspective is balanced by texts which carry out illocutionary directive acts which may or may not have an imposing function, where the deontic value is marked by modal verbs such as 'should' and 'can' as well as other linguistic resources: '[Nature] has so many things to show that it is worth counting up to three and going out to discover them' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'we cannot waste them [the dunes] with our jumping and hiking,' 'much can be done besides surfing my beautiful waves,' 'you can walk. You have to follow the paths (...) and respect each recommendation so that nothing is destroyed,' 'Nature is fragile and deserves to be treated with a multitude of cares. For everyone' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'we should always be conscious of the wonders of a plant or an animal, even of a name or a landscape like this one' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

In this way, reference to things and their states creates new realities through concrete perceptions and in consequence through introducing those realities in the symbolic world of each individual. Furthermore, the writer gives the target audience/reader explicit orientation, manifests the modalisation of the elements, and clearly seeks to make their point of view and action principles accepted. In other words, they explicitly encourage ecoliteracy and correct ecological behaviour.

4.4. Natural elements and agency

The final *topos* to be analysed is that of agency of natural elements.

These elements are frequently conceived as passive, suffering human action – an action which almost invariably destroys the landscape. This is the most common frame. However, in the books under analysis, it is possible to identify a systematic representation at the level of syntactico-semantic construction, natural elements as agents of action and of the states represented by verbs. Some examples include: 'the estuary is the place where the river runs to rest and the sea takes advantage of that fact to mix its saltiness with the sweetness of the river water,' 'the Atlantic Ocean thrives on the coastline (...) moistens the cliffs (...) creates good waves for surfing (...) slowly comes to wipe footprints in the sand clean' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2003), 'I [the ocean] do lots of things, such as drawing this coastline,' 'this is what I am: an artist,' 'with the help of some friends, such as the wind or time, more than drawing, I work on sculpting every inch of this coastline,' 'plants well nourished by the humidity drenched winds,' 'it is me [the ocean] that draws the coastline (...), I spend my time stealing kisses [from the bluffs] (...) and so I entertain myself swallowing both large and small pieces of live bluff,' 'I am an artist and I make every place a masterpiece' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004a), 'with a sea and the sky peeking from behind this wall of foliage,' 'the wood also needs to have a bit of fun, playing one or two pranks,' '[the wood] has suffered many changes over the years,' 'never did

the mountain stop providing firewood or coal; 'waves of all sizes make me [the ocean] dishevelled' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

Even the characteristics of nature are brought into play through metonymy: 'Ana allowed herself to be enchanted by the way in which the smells, shapes and textures vied for her attention (...): whispering, dancing, emitting smells, emanating swathes of colour' (Cotrim & Corbel, 2004b).

This linguistic resource is described by Goatly (2001) as *grammatical metaphor* and would be, according to the author, incompatible with *congruent discourse*. He defends that the congruent relationships occur when there is overlap between the syntactic and semantic categories. However, this does not always happen in discourse, and grammatical metaphors are used instead, which take place in unnatural relationships. Goatly considers that some incongruent structures can have a positive effect by expressing the processes, interrelationships and reciprocity in a productive way and not just the results.

In this particular case, it would seem highly productive that the natural elements be presented as active agents and that the discourse presents agency and responsibility of the phenomena explicitly, since it favours an ecological cause and effect viewpoint, demonstrating some natural processes and thus stimulating ecoliteracy³.

5. The visual dimension

From a graphic point of view, the collection is characterised by visual details which indicate difference and ensure unity. Besides the illustrations⁴, one can focus on the square shape of the picture books, the choice of high quality matte paper and the illustrations which take up the entirety of the pages and overlap with the text. In the first and third volumes, there are also autonomous unfolding maps included which situate the action and complement the reading, allowing the reader to identify with and locate textual references. The illustrations, which use the same register, vary slightly from book to book. They explore the games with shapes and colours and use their own language and register without trying to emulate scientific illustrations. Instead, they include realistic concerns, particularly in relation to how the natural species referred to are represented, in order to facilitate their identification. On the other hand, through the representation of the protagonist in relation to the way she interacts with the landscape, the illustrator explores the potential of the suggestion of movement and dynamism, playing with perspectives and attention foci, or recreating successive actions on the same double spread. The action generally takes place in a natural space, either within panoramic images and extremely open shots, or within more closed shots, focusing on representing small elements or details of spaces. This variation can also be seen in relation to perspective, and the visual narrator adopts a similar position to that of Ana, the heroine, so that the reader can identify with her. The landscape is given great prominence, seeing as its role is much more than that of a backdrop next to Ana, and is an important role in the action. The illustrations recreate the scenery respecting its mutability and polymorphism through variations in colour and shape.

³ Cf.: Ramos, 2009.

⁴ In relation to the importance of the relationship between text and image in the field of children's literature, see Ramos, 2010 and Ramos & Ramos 2011.

6. Conclusions

These books represent, in an original way, various forms of personal and subjective appropriation of space, particularly concerning the natural landscape, thereby stimulating a variety of readings and interpretations. Both text and images depict, in their own language and style, the relationship between children and the environment.

The books under analysis incorporate the various dimensions of children's literature, combining aesthetic quality on a literary and artistic level with a ludic component, which reduces the instructive dimension underpinning the picture book by using humour and play.

The instructive dimension is more implicit in the first volume of the trilogy and is discursively explicit in the following editions, resorting to behavioural recommendations which seek to defend and protect the environment. The discourse of scientific dissemination, despite being simple, overlaps with the register of the texts, intersecting with such diverse fields as Geography, various branches of Biology and Geology, among others. The construction of intrigue, along a similar line to the structure of adventure narratives, is linked to ludic aspect of the books, where unexpected events occur in a sequence of surprises and discoveries, a bit like a game of hide-and-seek. The choice between the dreamlike suggestion, which stems from the extraordinary travels of the heroine and her companions, the personified sea and stone, and the realism and referentiality of the spaces visited illustrate how well the various pedagogical and ludic elements of the narrative complement each other.

It is pertinent to highlight the complementary role of Alain Corbel's illustrations, which bring together an expressive, realistic and figurative trend which allows the reader to identify with the places visited as well as the various species and natural elements which characterise them, with another more conceptual and clearly more ludic and personal trend capable of playing with colours, shapes and volumes and redimensioning the text. As a result, the text interacts with this important role with complicity. Covering different scenery from the Metropolitan Lisbon area, the books highlight its richness and variety by exploring the coastline or the inland mountain range. In all three books, the instructive message within them is diluted in adventure narratives and permanent discovery, implicitly activating a feeling of admiration and worth in relation to the surrounding spaces. Drawing the reader in through knowledge, the writers propose a wider reading of the concept of the environment and natural space, connecting the landscape to human activities such as agriculture and fishing as well as tourism, or a merely contemplative or ludic pastime. Furthermore, the spaces are stage to and protagonist of myths and legends as well as historically relevant events. The architecture for example, alters the landscape and becomes part of it.

However, in truth, the real novelty of the collection resides in the fact that Nature, and in particular the scenery, is not presented as an immutable and idyllic backdrop within which human activity takes place. It is portrayed as a live force, constantly moving and acting, with changing landscapes which develop and transform through action, combining and interacting with other elements such as the sea and the wind. This dynamic balance is as much fragile and instable as it is beautiful, providing a spectacle of rare harmony. It is up to Humankind to take on the difficult task of understanding and conserving what surrounds them in order to guarantee its sustainability.

In a similar fashion to what occurs in other works from the world of children's literature, such as *Contos da Mata dos Medos* (Tales from the Wood of Fear) (2003), by Álvaro Magalhães, or the eight volumes of the collection *Pintar o Verde com Letras* (Colouring Green with Letters), or more explicitly in

O Sapo Francisquinho (Francisquinho the Frog) (1998), these three books are editorial projects⁵, which combine the production of literary text to the increased awareness of the ecological consciousness of children, or ecoliteracy, though perhaps more implicitly, localizing the texts, which are based on specific elements of nature, geographically. The books selected are more than just best practice guides, but focus more on the dissemination of natural spaces, focusing the children's attention on them so that they voluntarily want to protect what they know and value and learn to appreciate what is around them. To an extent, these picture books give special attention to the small things which are familiar to us, but which as a result of our daily routines we tend to ignore or devalue. As they are personified in these books, they become of interest in the world of childhood concerns by promoting empathy with the spaces and their inhabitants.

This collection justifies one of the suggestions presented by Lakoff, who states that this is the path to follow to change the point of view of the world in relation to the environment: 'provide a structured understanding of what you are saying. Don't give laundry lists. Tell stories that exemplify your values and rouse emotions. Don't just give numbers and material facts without framing them so their overall significance can be understood. Instead find general themes or narratives that incorporate the points you need to make' (2010: 79-80).

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5 It is important to notes that many of these editions have the support of public and private institutions.

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