

From Page 1 to Many Others: A Proposal to Encourage Children's Interactive Book¹

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the few but diversified interactive productions existing in Brazil. To this end, some works by Athos Beuren (1986 –), José Roberto Torero (1963 –) and Marcus Aurelius Pimenta (1962 –) will be selected. The works that will make up the corpus are: *Os Oito Pares de Sapatos de Cinderela* (2012), *Joões e Marias* (2014), *Branca de Neve e as sete versões* (2016), *As Belas Adormecidas* (2017), *João e os 10 Pés de Feijão* (2019), *Os 33 Porquinhos* (2019), *O Fantasma do Relógio* (2019) and *O unicórnio do arco-íris* (2020). It is believed that presenting the interactive production of these authors can stimulate reading and encourage the production of works of this type aimed at the reality of Asian child readers, since interactive books are still new to many readers, although they have been known by the adult audience for decades. The benefits of reading something different from sequential reading can be many, and authors such as Albuquerque (2020), Assis (2009), Oliveira and Oliveira (2013); Bernardo (2005) and Azevedo (2005) will be used in order to illustrate such importance. Silva (2019), in turn, will be used as an explanation of the concept of interactive book. Although the corpus chosen for this work is not Asian since the works that compose it belong to Brazilian authors, it shows an eclectic set of interactive works that can inspire new texts focused on the Asian context, as well as serve as a rescue of interactive productions of this continent that, for some reason, have not known repercussions in their contexts.

Keywords: Gamebook. Interactive book. Children's book.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a practice that should, in theory, be part of everyone's life due to its numerous benefits. To this, the mediation of readers in the early years of children is when the best results can be obtained and make them readers for life. However, sometimes the selection of what to read can cause the opposite effect: making young potential readers averse to reading.

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The reasons that even presenting children's texts to young readers is not always effective may lie in certain details. Age incompatibility may be one of them, as books that worked for children 30 years ago, for example, may no longer interest today's budding readers. Another reason is the textual selection itself, since offering contemporary readers recent texts is not synonymous with success either.

One alternative reading possibility can be found in interactive books. It is not known if all countries have productions that go beyond the reading standards usually found in the publishing market, so we selected for this article some Brazilian productions of rare books that can please readers who seek something more when reading. With this, we aim to inspire new projects and research in the publishing market, since the interactive books to be analyzed have the potential to supply an existing demand.

WHY INVEST IN INTERACTIVITY

Indicating the right book for the reader in training is an important part of the success of this mission. Therefore, it is advisable to know a little about the so-called generation Z. According to Carmo (2019), young people born in the 21st century tend to have as some characteristics to be more reserved, challenge-driven and immediatist, among many others. This means that interactive books of the gamebook and interactive fiction type may be more interesting and stimulating for the future readers of the 21st century.

Although the classification of interactive book is wide, Silva (2019) manages to delimit it in at least two: gamebooks and interactive fiction. These have as a common point the narrative endowed with non-sequential reading, usually an adventure story in which the reader takes the decisions for the protagonist, being uncertain his/her success. However, the gamebook, besides the narrative that bifurcates and narrows, has its own system of rules, usually with the use of rolling dice, drawing of playing cards or even another element outside the book itself. This makes texts like these sought after by more immersive readers, who seek texts that can offer them something in which they can participate actively, as if they were, simultaneously, readers and authors building their own story.

Thinking about the beginner reader, the following corpus was created because it contains several examples of how interactive fiction type books can work.

INTERACTIVE BOOKS FOR INTERACTIVE READERS

Some of the works by co-authors Marcus Aurelius Pimenta (1962-) and José Roberto Torero (1963-) belonging to the *Coleção Fábrica de Fábulas*² are a good example of how non-sequential reading can stimulate readers whose contact with sequential reading has not proved satisfactory and fruitful.

José Roberto Torero, according to Feba e Souza,

[...] has a vast body of work. The aim of this interview is to praise this important cultural producer in our country, as well as to reflect on his literary production for children and young people. He was born in 1963 and has a degree in Literature and Journalism. He received the Jabuti Award in 1995, for the book *O Chalaça*, has produced scripts for films, such as *Pequeno dicionário amoroso* (1997), and for television, such as *Professor Planeta* of the ESPN Brasil network (1995 to 1997) (2019, p. 299).

Marcus Aurelius Pimenta was born in São Paulo, capital, is a journalist, writer and screenwriter, having worked in the series *Peixonautas* (2009) and in other important programs, such as *Fantástico* (1973) (Vidigal, 2013).

The *Coleção Fábrica de Fábulas* is a series of fairy retellings, among which six books can be considered interactive fictions, such as *Os Oito Pares de Sapatos de Cinderela*³ (2012), *Joões e Marias*⁴ (2014), *Branca de Neve e as sete versões*⁵ (2016), *As Belas Adormecidas (e algumas acordadas)*⁶ (2017), *João e os 10 Pés de Feijão*⁷ (2019) and *Os 33 Porquinhos*⁸ (2019). An adaptation of the famous popular biography of Rapunzel is in the authors' plans, but has not yet been officially released (Companhia das letras, 2020). Of these interactive books, Pimenta highlights *As Belas Adormecidas (e algumas acordadas)* and *João e os 10 Pés de Feijão* as his

² *Fable Factory Collection*, in rough translation.

³ *The Eight Pairs of Cinderella's Shoes*, in rough translation.

⁴ *Johns and Marys*, in rough translation.

⁵ *Snow White and the seven versions*, in rough translation.

⁶ *The Sleeping Beauties (and some awake)*, in rough translation.

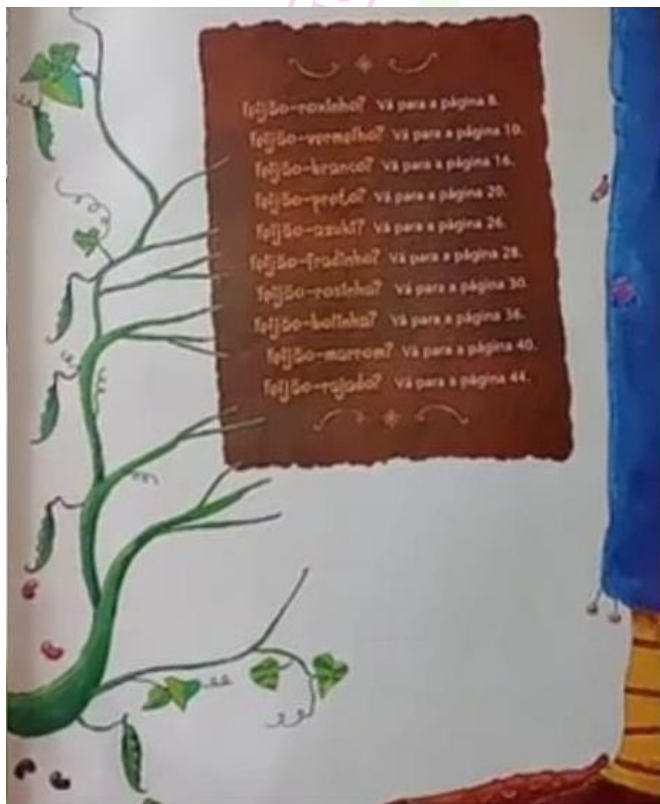
⁷ *Jack and the 10 Beanstalk*, in rough translation.

⁸ *The 33 Little Pigs*, in rough translation.

favorite works, while Torero makes it clear that his preference is for the work about Rapunzel, still in press. (Companhia das letras, 2020).

Based on the fairy tale *João e o pé de feijão*⁹ (Rocha, 2010), in *João e os 10 Pés de Feijão*, for example, we know the story of the poor family of young João, who at a certain point began to have only a cow as a possession, besides the place where they lived. The protagonist goes to the market to sell it, but is persuaded by a man to exchange the animal for a grain of beans that has magical powers. On returning home, he shows his mother his strange solution to her problems. Disgusted with her son, she throws the bean out of the window. The reader, from then on, decides which of the 10 types of beans this grain is in order to know the rest of the story. This makes *João e os 10 Pés de Feijão* a text with 10 different endings, each one carrying a moral.

Fig. 1 – Bifurcation in *João e os 10 Pés de Feijão*

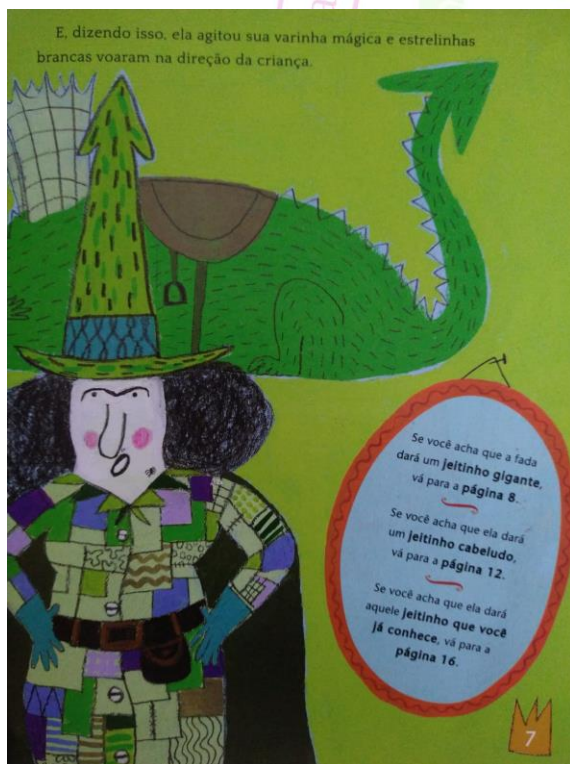


Source: Torero, J. R. & Pimenta, M. A. (2019, p. 7).

⁹ *Jack and the Beanstalk*, in rough translation.

Through the fairy tale *A bela adormecida*¹⁰ (Fiúza, 2006), Torero and Pimenta created *As Belas Adormecidas (e algumas acordadas)*. In this retelling the complexity increases a little in relation to the previous book, giving 12 possibilities of stories, some with a quick ending and others that can be prolonged depending on the reader's choices. The story begins when a king and queen have Bela, a very beautiful daughter. A big party was thrown and everyone in the kingdom was invited, except for the forest witch, who was forgotten. On the day of the celebration, the witch invades the event to cast a curse on Bela: when the girl turns 15 she will sleep forever. After the consummated enchantment, a fairy thinks she can help the young princess, and it is up to the reader to decide how to break the spell. In this book, the narrator's dialogue with the reader is more evident, and consequently there is greater immersion in the playful reading offered.

Fig. 2 – Bifurcation in *As Belas Adormecidas (e algumas acordadas)*

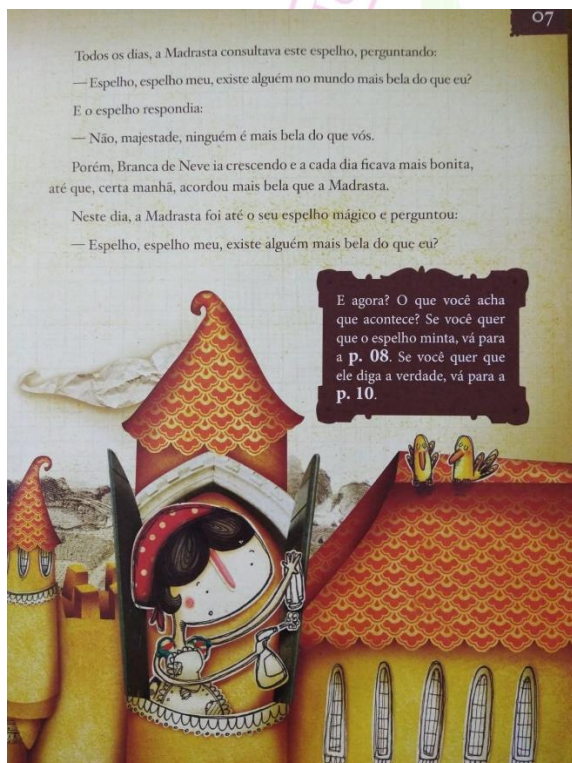


Source: Torero, J. R. & Pimenta, M. A. (2017, p. 7).

¹⁰ *The Sleeping Beauty*, in rough translation.

From *Branca de Neve e os Sete Anões*¹¹ (Murray, 2021) emerged *Branca de Neve e as sete versões*. Its lack of plot variations is compensated by narrative constructions at length and the possibility of frustration with unsatisfactory endings to the reader, something important to stimulate readers who make a point of the happy ending to new readings. The story of this text is the following: a king and queen have a daughter who is so white that they name her "Branca de Neve". After a certain time, the queen passes away and the king marries for a second time. Some more time passes and the king passes away, leaving Branca de Neve to be raised by her stepmother, who turns out to be an evil person. Just like *As Belas Adormecidas (e algumas acordadas)* the reader is faced with more chances of sad endings than happy ones, which stimulates new readings and possibilities of exploration of this interactive text.

Fig. 3 – Bifurcation in *Branca de Neve e as sete versões*

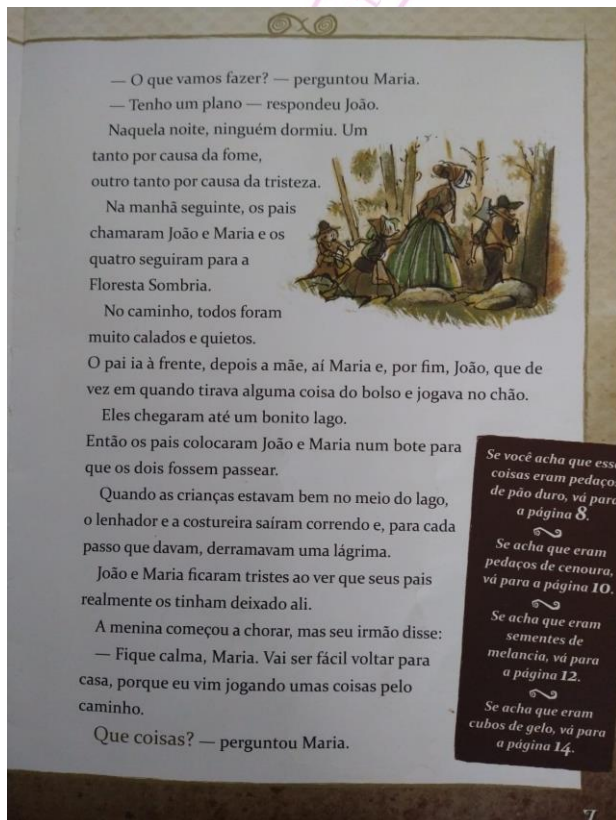


Source: Torero, J. R. & Pimenta, M. A. (2016, p. 7).

¹¹ *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in rough translation.

*João e Maria*¹² (Rios, 2010) was the inspiration to create *Joões e Marias*, a modern version of this famous fairy tale. In it, a woodcutter and his wife have two children, João and Maria. They all live in a simple house and have a miserable life, although they even have a refrigerator at home. One day, the parents take the children for a walk in the forest. João and Maria go to play in a boat and sail a little far from the shore, the reason for their parents abandoning them. The reader then makes decisions such as: what João left along the way (i); what the forest witch's house looks like (ii); how he and Maria can defeat her (iii); what is in the witch's chest (iv) and how the reward will be used. Each fork presents four possibilities to the reader for six times, which makes the book reach the capacity to create 1024 different stories.

Fig. 4 – Bifurcation in *Joões e Marias*



Source: Torero, J. R. & Pimenta, M. A. (2014, p. 7).

¹² *John and Mary*, in rough translation.

The retelling *Os Oito Pares de Sapatos de Cinderela* was generated from the fairy tale *Cinderela* (Susie, 2017). In this interactive story, Cinderela lived with her parents. Her mother dies and her father remarries. Cinderela's stepmother is a seamstress, a widow with two daughters from her first marriage. One day, Cinderela's father also dies and she learns how her stepmother and daughters are preserved. The prince of the kingdom announces that he will give a ball and all the women of the kingdom will be invited. Knowing Cinderela's beauty, her new family tries to stop her from going to the event as she would easily win the prince's heart. The reader decides how Cinderela should arrange her house before going to the ball, which fairy godmother will be responsible for helping Cinderela go to the ball, which shoes will be the most suitable for her and, when the ball is over she must return home in a hurry, how will be the contact with the prince in search of the love of her life who left one of the shoes behind.

Fig. 5 - Bifurcation in *Os Oito Pares de Sapatos de Cinderela*



Source: Torero, J. R. & Pimenta, M. A. (2014, p. 13).

Finally, the adaptation of *Os Três Porquinhos*¹³ (Cassinelli, 2019) for *Os 33 Porquinhos* is perhaps the most different interactive book from the others in the corpus. In this work, three little pigs lived with their mother, grew up and left home. They decided not to live together as in their mother's house because they were very different from each other, and each one decided to build their house as they wished. The big bad wolf tries to catch the first two little pigs by destroying their houses, but fails in the third and gives up the mission. The originality is in the physical part of the book: the 11 pages of *Os 33 Porquinhos* are divided with two horizontal cuts, dividing each page into 3 strips: top, middle and bottom.

Fig. 6 – Top strip of the book, turned



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRg0gpJ4PsQ>, 00'57''.

Fig. 7 – Middle strip of the book, turned

¹³ *The Three Little Pigs*, in rough translation.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRg0gpJ4PsQ>, in 01'39''.

Fig. 8 – Bottom strip of the book, turned



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRg0gpJ4PsQ>, in 02'31''.

The top strips show 11 different pigs and how the big bad wolf knocks down their homes; in the middle strip the wolf also successfully leaves any of the other 11 pigs homeless, and in the bottom strip there are 11 revivals of the last pigs and the end of the wolf's plans. The story sequence is the same for any combination, but the book with 33 protagonists instead of 3 becomes capable of generating 1331 different stories.

The books *Os Oito Pares de Sapatos de Cinderela, Joões e Marias, Branca de Neve e as sete versões* and *As Belas Adormecidas (e algumas acordadas)* have what Torero calls turning points (Companhia das letras, 2020), that is, opportunities in which the reader has to create a sequence to the narrative where there are bifurcations. According to the author, they are

[...], moments in history where you can influence, and this perhaps prepares you somewhat to create narratives. I visit many schools and what I see is that this works. After reading "Chapeuzinhos Coloridos"¹⁴, for example, children invent many other stories (Feba; Souza, 2019, p. 301).

In a different way, Athos Beuren (1986-) published his interactive fictions. His works are not the result of retellings, but of creations of his own authorship, arising from diverse inspirations. According to the Associação Gaúcha de Escritores¹⁵,

Athos Beuren was the first and youngest national author of interactive adventure books. He had his first work published at the age of 10, supported by Osvino Toillier, from Sinepe/RS¹⁶, in a trajectory that started at school. He received the Açorianos Award of literature, the main literary award in Rio Grande do Sul, in the category Author Revelation in Children's and Teenage Literature, and also the Vasco Prado Trophy for Literature. He was also the patron of several Book Fairs, took part in the National Literature Journey and has already given hundreds of lectures all over Brazil. His works have already been prefaced by Moacyr Scliar and Maria Dinorah. Athos Beuren's books are a success among children and teenagers and are well accepted by parents and teachers.

The writer is graduated in journalism and usually presents his students with a work that combines learning and fun (Ages).

Beuren started writing early, having published at the age of 10 her first book – *Viver ou Morrer: Esta é a Jogada!*¹⁷ (1997) –, a collection of solo adventures – a textual genre that,

¹⁴ *Little Coloured Hatchets*, in rough translation.

¹⁵ Rio Grande do Sul's Writers' Association, in rough translation.

¹⁶ *Private Schools Agency* (Sindicato das Escolas Particulares), in rough translation.

¹⁷ *Live or Die: This is the Play!*, in rough translation.

according to Silva (2019), are short texts that offer non-sequential narrative, may or may not contain a system of rules itself, are found in books, magazines and other media and are less than 50 pages in length – and

[...] has a significant trajectory in the national cultural scene. Among the main works, are *Viver ou Morrer*¹⁸, *O Inimigo Digital*¹⁹ and *O Senhor das Sombras*²⁰, which arouse the interest of young people, teachers and aficionados in the areas of games and literature (Assessoria de imprensa, 2018)

Beuren's early career brings to his readers-players storylines closely linked to fantastic adventure, from the simplest to the most complex gamebooks. The adventure pattern of the bounty hunter or the fearless warrior who goes out on a quest to accomplish a mission is broken with *O Inimigo Digital* – an adaptation of the game *Minecraft* (2011) into a gamebook –, which may have been the incentive for the author to experiment with innovating his creations. As of 2019, Beuren has confirmed he is more than a standard gamebook author with the publication of interactive fiction under independent production.

Far from being a series like Torero and Pimenta's, but with merits for the production of his own authorship, two works by Beuren deserve to be known: *O Fantasma do Relógio*²¹ (2019) and *O Unicórnio do Arco-Íris*²² (2020), both interactive books aimed at children's audiences²³.

The plot of Beuren's debut interactive fiction can be summarised as follows:

[...] after listening to a story of his grandmother, the boy watches the snow falling outside his room, until he also falls asleep. When he hears the old clock in the house ringing, he wakes up scared and goes to check where the noise is coming from. When he touches the clock, he releases the ghost Benjamin, whose nickname is "Bubble Gum", who proposes a game of hide-and-seek. He soon hides somewhere in the house and it is up to the reader-protagonist to look for him through bifurcative choices offered at each end of the page, coming across illusions and unusual situations to be wisely resolved by his intuition (Silva, 2021, p. 55).

Both *O Fantasma do Relógio* and *O Unicórnio do Arco-Íris* follow the same structure: to present the reader with a child as the protagonist – male in the first book and female in the second – who meets a supernatural colleague – a ghost in the first book and a unicorn in the

¹⁸ *Live or Die*, in rough translation.

¹⁹ *The Digital Enemy*, in rough translation.

²⁰ *The Lord of the Shadows*, in rough translation.

²¹ *The Clock's Ghost*, in rough translation.

²² *The Rainbow Unicorn*, in rough translation.

²³ A third work, called *Jalymba* (2021), is known to exist, but could not be analysed in time.

second – and goes on to live an adventure together. These works by Beuren have poetic language from the explanatory introduction to the end of the adventure. According to Assis, a text that offers playful and affective interaction to its reader can stimulate a taste for reading by bringing emotional and psychological benefits in itself (2009, p. 85-86). Moreover, classroom mediators can use them to facilitate the literacy process, because poetic texts help readers in phonetic awareness, phonological awareness, use of rhymes, memorization, recital performance, playfulness – in the sense of perceiving and promoting play with words – and familiarization with various textual genres.

The illustrations inside are full of bright colours and there are also illustrations that must be filled in by the reader. Alongside activities such as drawing, colouring is a recurring practice in children's everyday reading, and the benefits of this activity are relevant, as it has the potential to help readers diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as stated by Albuquerque (2020) and can integrate toy libraries for hospitalized children, encouraging them to face the fear of the unknown (Oliveira; Oliveira, 2012).

Fig. 9 and 10: Colored and colorless images, respectively



Source: Beuren, 2019, p. 2²⁴ and 35²⁵, respectively.

Like the works of Torero and Pimenta, the works of Beuren manage to offer the child reader interactive narratives with many attractions without being mostly pedagogical. With this,

²⁴ The book in question has not numbered pages and only has the numerical references of the sections, a characteristic feature of texts of interactive fiction, solo adventure and gamebook. Therefore, it is a full-page illustration next to the 2nd reference, which would be equivalent to page 2.

²⁵ It was considered for this numbering the five pages after the 30th numerical reference of this interactive fiction, equivalent to page 35.

its literary aspect is the highlight, preventing the text from becoming didactic material disguised as literature. To do the opposite, that is, to load the text with pedagogism, for Azevedo (2005) means to take away the literary essence there is in it, which would make it meaningless.

We conclude that the reading of interactive fiction goes beyond offering the reader a text in which the pages are not sequential, but rather offer literature endowed with benefits and potentialities that are often not perceived or known.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It was not possible to know Asian literature of this kind of textual production, but the two sets of Brazilian works previously presented can inspire the creation of new ones by at least two means: the retelling technique employed by Torero and Pimenta or the poetic creations of Beuren.

It is precisely the lack of knowledge and media dissemination that create opportunities for an interactive production of this kind. As already discussed, interactive fiction has the ability to attract beginning readers, because it is still new to the general public while put the reader “inside” the story as the main character.

The retellings of Torero and Pimenta represent a natural step that the reader makes to also become a new creator of stories, whatever the adapted product is, including it can be new stories (Feba; Souza, 2019, p. 301). This is because

[...] in the case of the retelling, it is not only the characters that go beyond the fictional world. The very act of retelling, of changing what seemed immutable, is already an experience that can reach the reader. He realizes that stories (and history) are not eternal, are not finished. Everything is a question of how you tell something. I think, or dream, that this can teach the reader to relativize absolute truths, to see that all stories (and History) can be modified (Feba; Souza, 2019, p. 300)

Athos Beuren, in turn, "[...] published at the age of 10 a book that was born in the classroom, proving that any age can be the stage for many achievements!" (Ages). The author has extensive experience in works of this kind and has frequent contact with book fairs and educational institutions, where he publicizes his works while collecting suggestions for future interactive texts. Investing in non-sequential children's texts is the greatest proof that the author

sees a demand in existence that can be met with a type of book that – still – proves to be a novelty for mediators and readers.

Interactive fiction cannot be classified as the best option to encourage and stimulate children to be young readers or textual producers, but these interactive books are one among many options that can meet an existing demand for reading different from what has already been offered to readers who have not been enthralled with the practice of reading in previous attempts. New Asian authors may find in this medium a way to situate their interactive creations.

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