

Suicide and Colours of Death in Lygia Bojunga's *O Meu Amigo*

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Abstract

This essay examines the emotional, psychological, and existential turmoil of a bereaved child following the suicide of his friend, as depicted in Lygia Bojunga's children's novel *O meu amigo pintor* (2004). Through a close textual analysis, the study interrogates the multi-layered causes behind the protagonist's suicide—including romantic disappointment, professional disillusionment, and political persecution and assesses its reverberations in the child's inner world. By tracing the dynamics of mourning and the strategies the child employs to cope with this profound loss, the paper foregrounds questions surrounding the nature of grief, the ethics of suicide, and the significance of affective bonds. Ultimately, it poses a philosophical inquiry: does Bojunga's narrative suggest that life possesses intrinsic meaning? And if meaning remains elusive, might suicide appear as a viable resolution to existential suffering?

Keywords: old man, loneliness, suicide, bereaved child's agonies, affection.

Almost everyone expects to live to be old. Young people assume that they will reach adulthood and probably marry; young adults assume that they will advance in their careers and have and raise children. They expect to see their children married later, to enjoy retirement and grandchildren. Most people, consciously or unconsciously, are planning the next stage of their lives and never think about death (Stedeford, 1984: 49).

“All sane men have thought about their suicide at some point”
Albert Camus (2004, p. 20).

Introduction

This essay, which is interpretative and bibliographical, will discuss the representation of suicide and colours of death in Lygia Bujunga's *O meu amigo pintor*. It will briefly discuss various views on suicide from different perspectives: historical, religious, literary and sociological, as well as its inclusion in children's literature. The second part will introduce the readers to the life and literary activities of the author as well as the novel, *O*

meu amigo pintor. The third will analyse the place of suicide and colours in the text, through elements of the verbal and visual texts, highlighting the way it is approached and presented to the target audience. The essay will raise some theoretical questions: (i). Is it permissible and sane to talk about suicide in children's literature; (ii) Is it right to deprive children of the real experience of death which is present in human history? (iii) Why is it important for Lygia Bujunga to discuss it in her texts? Based on this methodological approach, the essay will highlight how death affects the main character (child), even if it is in an allegorical or inferential manner, without depriving them of understanding the phases of life that every individual must go through. Death will continue to be part of human nature: there is no way to avoid it, but there is a way to discuss it through imagination and fantasy in light approach and with appropriate language.

A Cross-Perspective Analysis of Suicide: Approaches from Sociology, Religion, History, and Literature Understanding Suicide: Delineating Its Conceptual Boundaries

From time immemorial, Self-Inflicted Death with undetermined intent or suicide has never been an easy subject to discuss and it has been a source of concerns and controversy in society because it left many questions unanswered. Being a controversial and delicate area, suicide has been defined from different perspectives (medical, legal, philosophical, socio-cultural, religious, administrative) based on the aims and objectives of such definitions. O'Carroll et al. (1996), Silverman MM, Berman AL, Sanddal ND, et.al. 2007, Posner K, Oquendo MA, Gould M, et.al. (2007). Due to a lack of acceptable working definitions, it becomes difficult to understand this terminology. Suicide is 'an act of deliberating terminating one's life' (Edubirdie.com 2022) and it is one of the most challenging and agonizing subjects. To Fairbairn, Gavin J (1995, p. 34.) and Selby et al 2014 Self-Inflicted death with undetermined intent is self-injurious behaviour that has resulted in fatal injury and for which intent is either equivocal or unknown. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2009) stressed that suicide is any deliberate action that has life-threatening effects, which consequently results in death. This is a detailed and comprehensive definition that underscores foreseeable preconditions and deadly outcomes. Based on this, suicide can be considered as 'any action taken to provoke a self-motivated death' or a self-inflicted death with evidence of intent to die. According to ERLC (2014) the term 'suicide' was invented in 1651 to mean 'self (sui) and to kill (cide). It can be viewed from two angles: (i) Active suicide and (ii) passive suicide. The former is when a person willingly takes their own life through the use of guns, knives, poison, jumping in fire, provocation mortal accidents etc.,, while the latter is an

act of refraining oneself from striving to be living. For example, embarking on hunger, not using medicine prescribed by doctors, trying to drown oneself, intentionally staying instead of running from danger, for instance from fire outbreak. Since it is considered taboo in different communities, not a lot has been done by literary and creative writers, critics, academicians and non-academicians on suicide. So it is an area that is avoided by all and sundry, despite its importance and its omnipresent nature in human existence. As a theme, it is considered an act expressing human feelings. Suicide-related communications are used to convey their desires, justify their actions and/or ask for pardon from those who are likely to mourn their death.

It is a tragic reaction to stressful life situations - suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment (cf. Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). WHO regards suicide as a major health issue facing humanity (WHO, 2009). This is because about 720 000 people die every year and it has a negative effect on friends and families, communities and societies who lost their loved ones due to this unfortunate act. Some of the factors that contribute to suicide are sociocultural, religious, psychological, health and mental. Many philosophers, scholars, scientists and religious figures have long considered it.

Narrating Suicide: Literary Constructions and Context

Through the use of different literary styles, images and symbols, literature has been able to portray fear-provoking and realistic stories of different characters who committed suicide, but written exclusively for adult readers. Some notable classical texts which treated this topic are William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo the protagonist killed himself. In the former (William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*), Brutus commits suicide to avoid the shame of being paraded as a prisoner through Rome, maintaining his honour even in defeat and Cassius, thinking that his friend, Titinius was captured by the opposing forces, voluntarily terminated his own life. Shakespeare. (2001). In the latter, (Tolstoy, 1995) the female character, Anna Karenina grieves and kills herself due to the shame of her extramarital affair and the fear of losing her social status and above all, fear of losing Vronsky, her husband. (Todd, William M. III (2003). The most emblematic book is perhaps *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, by Goethe. The fate of the protagonist provoked a wave of suicides in 18th-century Europe, the era of Romanticism, when, according to Alvarez (1999)., 'Suicide' became a literary act,

a hysterical gesture of solidarity, towards any fictional hero who was the rage of the moment 'Alvarez (1999).

Theological Discourses on Suicide: Insights from Biblical and Islamic Traditions

Biblical Perspective

According to Edubirdie (2022), some of the prominent personalities who committed suicide in the old Testament Bible are Samson, Abimelech, King Saul and his bodyguard, Ahithophel ([1 Samuel 31:1-6](#) and [1 Chronicles 10:1-7](#)).and, Zimri, (**1 Kings 16**), while in the new testament, Judas Iscariot was the only one who attempted and completed suicide. Moses, Job, Jeremiah, Paul and Silas were individuals who ineffectively contemplated or attempted to take their own life. However, it is important to stress that Genesis 9: 5, Exodus 20; 13 and Deuteronomy 4:15, are not in support of murder or suicide because it is regarded as a sin against God. These verses categorically enjoin human beings to cherish the living and forsake suicide that has no forgiveness.

Quranic and Islamic Perspective

Muslim and Islamic specialists, scholars and clerics condemn suicide, especially suicide bombings (Martyrdom operations) and regarded it as a despicable inexcusable and condemnable act. This is the opinion of Intelligence, I (2005) who posits that suicide was never considered a holy war in the Quran. From the Islamic point of view, suicide is regarded as one of the highest forms of sin which, according to Shah, A. & Chandra, M. (2010) is considered a rebellious act against the will of Allah and anyone guilty of such will be punished severely on earth and in paradise. Given this, Surat Luqman teaches in chapter 31 of the Quran that it is only the omniscient Allah, the all-knowing, who has the knowledge of our conception from the wombs as well as the time and place of our demise (31:34). Similarly, An-Nisa and Muhammad's Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari, 2:23:446 warns that anyone who completes suicide will go to hell fire and as such the Sunnah-advises Muslims against committing suicide (4:29-30).

The Social Roots of Suicide: An Examination of Durkheim's Theoretical Framework

In his book titled *La Suicide* published in 1897, Durkheim posits that social factors and not necessarily individual personalities are the major causes of suicide Anderson and Taylor, (2009:1). Based on their belief that (i) the rate of suicide varies with time and place and (ii) the degree to which people are integrated into

the societal structures and their social environments as social factors are the major causes of suicide,. Durkheim argues that suicide rates are often affected by the different social contexts within which they emerged. In this regard, he attempts to examine social and emotional stress which can lead to suicide. He was able to conceptualise the effect of social influences as well as a detailed hypothetical justification to account for individuals' actions or inaction. Before its publication, suicide was viewed basically as a wholly individual act, which limits its scope to psychology. Taylor, (1982) stresses that interpersonal relationships and occurrences were not considered as vital in the evaluation of suicide. Lukes (1985) is however of the opinion that Durkheim's investigation set up a sociological theoretical background which accounts for the suicide rate in European countries because he put across the conventional understanding of suicide, which he regards as an individual act that influence the affected individual, and as such, depends solely on individual factors.

Durkheim's study established both social theoretical frameworks and conventional views on suicide. He identifies four different forms of suicide: (i). Egoistic suicide (ii) Altruistic suicide, (iii) Anomic suicide, (Fatalistic suicide), which are results of direct effects of social factors which are classified into two major groups, namely social integration and moral regulation. The former consists of egoistic and altruistic suicide while the latter embraces anomic and fatalistic suicides. Based on this, Marcoux (2013: 23) posits that Durkheim submitted that the rate of suicide in the community is determined by the degree to which people are tied to or linked together, inter-relate and socialised in a social setting (social attachment to other individuals within the society) as well as the rate in which their desires and emotions are controlled by social practice and traditions (social regulation or social attachment to society's norms).

There is no doubt that Durkheim's work on suicide has a significant influence on the literary and sociological study on suicide. According to Gianfranco, (2000:10) and Pope (1978), *La Suicide* has greatly influenced modern social research and contributed immensely by differentiating social sciences from political philosophy and psychology. Breault and Barkley (1982) are of the view that it may be difficult to know the exact causes of suicide, however, Emil Durkheim's insightful work serves as a theoretical foundation for this academic endeavour because the different categories of suicide he examined are in line with the possible causes and effects of suicide. It also agreed that "suicide" is regarded as a societal problem greater than individuals that are directly involved. As a result,

it transcends socio-cultural sensitivity because other factors such as philosophy, religion, and culture play vital roles to articulate the causes and problems of suicide.

Lygia Bujunga: a writer, spoken person and defender of children in the adult world

The legendary and renowned Brazilian writer, Lygia Bojunga Nunes, who was born on August 26, 1932, in the city of Pelotas, in Rio Grande do Sul, is one of the main Brazilian writers of children's and young adult literature.. Her novels have been translated into several languages and adapted for the theatre, having received numerous awards. The author has received accolades and criticisms from admirers and critics in Brazil and abroad. In Brazil, she has been considered the successor of Monteiro Lobato, for establishing a space for freedom of imagination. On the international scene, she is compared to Saint Exupéry and Maurice Druon, with the sensitivity of her writing in “The Little Prince” and “The Boy with the Green Thumb”, mixing the real and the fantastic, achieving a fluent dialogue and total interaction with the reader. Conscious of the communicative and educative roles of literature, Lygia is not intimidated in addressing themes considered problematic, such as suicide in *O meu amigo pintor*; murder in “Nós três” (1987), and the abandonment of children by their mother, in the short story Tchau, from the book of the same name (1985). Lygia Bojunga is considered one of the biggest names in Brazilian children's literature due to the excellent quality of her works and her portrayal of children within and outside their family circles. Some of her books were recommended by European critics and she broadcasted on the radio in several countries.

A preliminary Review of *O Meu Amigo Pintor*

The book, *Meu Amigo Pintor*, published for the first time in 1984, with the original title: “Seven Letters and Two Dreams” was written on request to be part of the collection Art for Children, which combined literature and visual arts. This was based on paintings done by different Brazilian artists, a situation in which invited authors create a text. In this case, paintings in honour of Tomie Ohtake, the Japanese born Brazilian visual and plastic artist. It is structured into eight chapters which were designed like a diary or like cards that illustrate the friendship between an old painter and a boy. It reflects on the reasons for his friend’s death as well as everything he learned from him. Bojunga’s *Meu Amigo Pinto* falls into the category of children’s literature, targeting children and young people, but it also reaches adults with its sensitive language and deep themes. In

many of her works, Bojunga (2004) offers the reader – through language, symbols and characters – the opportunity to experience various experiences which are vividly elaborated in her texts through a highly symbolic language capable of involving the reader – whether adult or child, and also evokes feelings and existential conflicts that permeate the reflections of every human being.

The plot centres on images and colours, comparing them to the narrator's emotions and state of mind. While the boy is dazzled by the discoveries he makes about the world of art and colours, the painter finds comfort in the presence of an enthusiastic and sensitive child. Yes, we can see two different characters who belong to different age groups but they are extremely close emotionally, and sensibly connected. After all, for them the meaning of life is significantly typified in the beautiful and colourful images of the rainbow.

Few authors of children's literature have had the audacity to write about such a controversial and delicate subject as death. Bojunga takes an even greater risk by writing about suicide in this work. Since most people are unable to deal with this subject naturally, the writer also presents the difficulty adults have in talking about the painter's death in the presence of their children. Due to the controversial and polemic nature of death – voluntary or involuntary, writing about death has always been a delicate and sentimental issue that a lot of writers try to avoid. Yet, some writers have in recent past gotten involved. One of such writers is Bojunga who takes the risk of writing about it. Since it is difficult for adults to deal with the loss of a loved one naturally, the author presents to us, the agony of a child who loses someone very dear to him as such, wanted to understand why his friend killed himself.

Suicide and Colour of Death in Bojunga's *O Meu Amigo Pintor*

Understanding the demise of his friend was a dilemma and uphill task for Claudio, in his confusion he affirms: 'I think that's why I look so much at the red he painted here in the album. To see if I understand (...) why some people kill themselves' (Bojunga, 2004, p.13). Claudio mentions three likely reasons: problematic amorous relationship, political oppression and occupational failure as an artist. The painter who was unappreciative of his creative activities was formerly confined and constricted by the negative self-criticism of his own work was liberated through the affective relationship that developed between the two of them. For illustration, he affirms despite his natural skill and capacity, dedication and hardwork, he was not recognised by the society and was a failure: 'I know

very well how to paint; I have technique; I work and work to see if I can give life to my paintings. But it's no use: they are dead canvases (Bojunga, 2004, p. 60). According to Laura Sandroni (1987, p.138), this dissatisfaction with the work performed generates depression that can explain suicide.

For Cláudio, his friend's death would be easier to understand if it had been caused by an accident or illness. Suicide leads to endless questioning. In his confusion and unwillingness to accept the fate of his friend, he thinks that it would be easier and logical to comprehend if his death was caused by accident, illness or old-age (Bojunga, 2004p.20-1).

Claudio's unwillingness and predicament to understanding his friend's death is linked to his inability to accept that any sane person can determine if they want to live or die. He could not fathom why a man decides to terminate his life, and by abusively making use of his freedom of choice in a radical way. The bewilderment and confusion of this unfortunate action leaves many questions unanswered. Despite the fact that suicide is directly a self-harm, it is indirectly a way of harming others because of the psychological and emotional trauma such action will have on the people left behind. Depression is characterized as a very strong fog, so strong that the friend the painter thought it would never pass, a fog that covered all colour and caused "a little desire to die." (Bojunga, 2004, p. 27). For Alvarez (1999), "suicidal depression is a kind of spiritual winter, cold, sterile, immobile. The richer, milder and more pleasant nature becomes, the more intense this winter seems inside, and the deeper and more intolerable the abyss that separates the internal world from the external." The association of fog with death is also evidenced by the colour.

Depression is depicted as a thick fog, an overwhelming force The Painter believed would never lift, provoking in him "a little desire to die" (Bojunga, 2004, p. 27). This aligns with Alvarez (1999), "suicidal depression is a kind of spiritual winter, cold, sterile, immobile. The richer, milder and more pleasant nature becomes, the more intense this winter seems inside, and the deeper and more intolerable the abyss that separates the internal world from the external." This literary connotation of fog or turbulence with death is also vividly illustrated by the colour:

For he, the thing what he had more death-colour was fog(...).

And then, one of those days, there was a heavy fog that had been there all his life. The Painter looked out the window of his apartment, and all he could see was that fog covering everything that was coloured, and he said as he used to say: today it's making me want to die a little. Fog like that almost always passes quickly. But this time it didn't (...). The Painter looked out the window all the time. And the desire to die never went away. That's why he was wrong: he thought the desire would never go away, so he decided to kill the desire. (Bojunga, 2004, p. 27).

Bojunga uses colour as narrative elements to represent the feelings and states of mind of the characters which gives the narrative a universalising and engaging tone. Each dream, each discovery and anguish of Cláudio and his painter friend is associated with a colour. Our soul and heart as readers while reading the text reach almost all the dimensions that these colours want to emphasize. The relationship between feelings and colours in this work is quite explicit. We see how much Cláudio's understanding of the world and himself is associated with colours. The narrator adds this symbolism to his inner conflicts. At the beginning of the text, a critical view of the visual arts is shown, as seen in the excerpt below:

I don't know if I was born this way or if I became this way because of my painter friend, but when I look at something I immediately notice the colour (Bojunga, 2004: 8).

Based on the above, one can say that the painter's influence on Cláudio's vision of the world through a colourful universe is clear in the text and should not be underestimated. This is buttressed in Cláudio's words where he informs the readers about his dialogue with his friend, the painter who told the boy that he was a boy with the soul of an artist and that he has arranged his artistic works in his album in order to help Cláudio have a better understanding of his profession: 'My friend told me that I was a boy with the soul of an artist.' He said that he had arranged the works in the album so that I could better understand this colour business. (Bojunga, 2004: 8).

This passion and identification with colours are triggered in Cláudio through the time spent with his friend and backgammon partner. This character's personality is so ingrained in his art that he is not even named during the story: 'I went upstairs and told my painter friend (I think it's better to write my friend with a

capital letter) everything that had happened” (Bojunga, 2004, p. 13) (my emphasis).

Throughout the entire statement, we only notice the designation my painter friend to refer to this character. The fact that Claudio adds and links different colours to his own feelings clearly shows the painter's impact on his life and his desire to become a visual artist. This relationship between colours and feelings presents a process of maturation of the character. To Claudio, the presence of yellow is tantamount to joyful moments. Colours serve different purposes in Lygia Bojunga's *O Meu Amigo Pintor*. The author used it to explore and illustrate the theme of bereavement, grief and vanity of human's life as seen by the child character. It serves as psychological symbol of optimism during a period of hopelessness in this children short story. Colour white is linked closely to death you, which is represented by fog which covers the boy's emotion (Bojunga, 2004, p. 13). Colour Red depicts the mental confusion and psychological uproar of the boy's inability to understand his friend's death while the yellow colour is closely linked with Clarice, the painter's former sweetheart and lover, who abandoned in when he was down. (Bojunga, 2004, p. 11). This colour portrays a state of contradiction between loyalty of unconditional love and disloyalty of betrayal. It is possible to affirm that his passionate obsession exposes the painter's emotional entanglement and his fruitless efforts, as a technically experienced and skilled printer, to make a living because his creativity echoes his innermost desolation. In a simple and emotive language, the author stylistically used colours imaginatively to elucidate reader's understanding of death. Red also appears in a cathartic, purifying and therapeutic moments for the narrator character, because he was able to manage his physical and inner conflict caused by the death of his friend, saying: “But today, without expecting it or anything, something happened that changed the red way I was feeling inside” (p. 21). From this moment, Claudio begins to understand the conflicts that surrounds him and consequently begins to have a broader vision of his feelings thus: “And then something happened that I thought was really cool: a yellow started to grow inside my red” (Bojunga, 2004, p 23). In “My painter friend” the reference to colour is accentuated, becoming more important in the narrative.

Within this conflicting process of trying to understand his friend's suicidal death, we see Cláudio going through a process of maturation and self-knowledge. He

then comes into contact with some feelings such as passion – a feeling that for him was red, the colour of something he did not understand.

At the beginning of the narrative, we can see the painter's influence, guidance and orientation in the boy's sentimental development, and the need for the presence of his intelligence and wisdom for the boy to understand the world: “And suddenly I understood exactly what he had said! I felt like going up there and saying it” (Bojunga, 2004: 9). Between them, there was a deep, unspoken bond a healthy and meaningful connection. For both the painter and the boy, they complemented each other. The author also depicted a sort of complicity of a healthy feeling and mutual respect that is beyond comprehension between the two characters, who were seen talking together, eating, playing backgammon card games and doing most of their activities in common:

I would play backgammon with him, we would talk... “(Bojunga, 2004: 10). Once he told my mother that playing backgammon with me was good for his head” (Bojunga, 2004, p 18). I only know that when he spoke of love my heart jumped like that: could it be that we liked each other equally? (Bojunga, 2004: 55).

Bojunga metaphorically fits the figure of the clock, representing the link between the two characters. The ticking of the clock is linked to the presence of the painter, who brings a sense of security to the boy. Metaphorically, the clock was used to serve as a bond and link between these two characters. Its ticking is closely related to the presence of the painter, who brings a sense of joy, peace of mind and security to the boy thus: Each time the clock struck, it seemed more and more like everyone had been mistaken and that my friend was still alive and well up there (Bojunga, 2004, p. 12). For me, hearing the clock was like hearing my friend walking. Or talking. Or laughing. Do you understand what I mean? Because he was a very quiet guy, he had a habit of only doing things that didn't make noise: smoking a pipe, thinking, and painting; if it weren't for the clock ticking, gosh! It would seem like he didn't even live there (Bojunga, 2004, p. 11).

In this work, friendship appears as the main theme. It is interesting to note that this friend has no name. He is always referred to as friend Pintor and, even so, it shows his importance in Cláudio's life. Friendship takes the centre stage in the novel and it helps in the transformation of the boy's life. The reader observes that Cláudio's friend has no name or means of identification. He is simply known and

referred to as my friend the painter. This friend not only guards and guides, but also advises and teaches the boy into becoming useful not only to himself but to the society at large. The painter, in turn, feels imprisoned by the negative self-criticism of his own work and vents his frustration to his friend, showing that there is no barrier between the two in their friendship.

Colours play a fundamental role in Bojunga's *O Meu Amigo Pintor* because they can convey emotions, create atmospheres and add layers of meaning to the story. By associating certain colours to characters, scenarios or events, Lygia Bojunga was able to convey subtle messages to the readers, enriching their reading experience. Each colour has a unique symbolic association, which can vary according to culture and historical context. For example, red is usually related to love, passion and violence, while blue refers to tranquillity and serenity. By using these symbolic associations, writers can express emotions and feelings in a visually impactful way.

For Cláudio, red is a difficult colour to understand. Limerce Ferreira Lopes (2002), in her article titled "Red Colour Psychology, Meaning, and Symbolism" Isabella (2022) considers red as a primary visible colour with a "powerful emotion, conjuring images of blood and fire," which is full of passion, adventure, danger, and violence. This complication occurs because the colour red is linked to feelings such as passion, which the boy does not understand. His passion for Janaína was something he could not explain; he only knew that it was something red – a colour he associated with the dress Janaína was wearing when he first saw her. For Chevalier and Gheerbrant (2001, p. 945), red is closely linked to the deepest human impulses: action, passion, liberation and oppression. Both Claudio and his Painter Friend feel ambiguous when faced with this colour: "I think that's why I look so much at the red he painted here in the album. To see if I understand. To see if I understand. To see if I understand why there are people who kill themselves." (Bojunga, 2004: 13).

Throughout the narrative we perceive a profusion of colours: yellow; white; red; purple; orange; blue and others such as yellow-saudade and yellow-síndico that the boy invents to express his feelings and sensations in the face of the facts of life. Cláudio tries to understand the death of his Painter Friend. He experiences doubts, uncertainties and fears. Until, he is confronted with an incredible blue that invades his bedroom window and his interior. From that moment on, Cláudio begins to understand the situation as a whole, and not trying to understand each of

its reasons separately. He accepts his longing, confronts his own self and ends up getting to know himself.

As shown in the work, through various symbolic and inter-semiotic resources that language can express, Bojunga constructs a narrative that touches our souls deeply whether as adults or children. There is no age to face our conflicts, just as there is no age to get to know ourselves and overcome the loss of people who are so important to us and whom we love “too much”. In this regard, Maria Luiza Bretas Vasconcelos (2001), when analysing the work of Lygia Bojunga Nunes in her Masters’ Dissertation, states that the author's works can be divided into three phases: “Time of Fantasy”, “Time of Anguish,” and “Time of Memory”. Vera Maria Tietzmann Silva (1994) tells us that Bojunga’s work can be divided into two moments: the “Luminous” and the “Gray”.

In Bojunga's work, as in many situations in life, there is no answer to suicide. Cláudio, unable to separate the good memories he carries with him from the constant questions, begins to think of his Painter Friend as everything well mixed together?’ (Bojunga, 2004, p. 55). Thus, who knows, his friend's colours and art may help him to understand, little by little, each reason. This is illustrated through this quotation: ‘I kept looking and looking at the way he had joined the two sheets. I looked so much that I ended up knowing that there is nothing that will separate me from my Friend even after his death. What I had to do was what he did with the leaves and the blue sky’ (Bojunga, 2004: 55). Similarly, he cannot afford not to think about their relationships, his daily activities such as painting, smoking, for example: ‘Now, when I think of my Friend (and I keep thinking about him so much!) I think of him as a whole, that is to say: cachimbo, pipe, paint, why? Backgammon, flower that he liked, death on purpose, why? Clock ticking, yellow, why, green jacket: everything well blended and mixed together (...) I even think that if I continue to like every why that appears, I end up understanding one by one’. (Bojunga, 2004: 51).

The search for answers is a continuing and an on-going process, but thinking about everything mixed together, as life is mixed together, with painful sorrow and colours, with life and death, helps us understand that everything is part of the same cycle. Even though Cláudio (the boy) does not understand his friend's suicide, but the tension remains. He learns to think without separating, without excluding, without a desire to order or understand a very complex situation. Based

on the painter's teachings, the boy becomes aware of the importance of colours to express what he feels and seeks, in arts, as well as find answers or solutions to his fears and doubts. By incorporating the knowledge/taste of art, this little boy learns that there are no easy or definite answers arts does not even proffer solution because the colours of life are also the colours of death.

Conclusion

This essay affirms the significance of children's literature as a dynamic field encompassing works for both children and young adults—capable of addressing complex emotional, psychological, and social issues relevant to readers of all ages. Through an analysis of Lygia Bojunga's *O meu amigo pintor* (2004), the study explored the traumatic journey of Cláudio, a young boy grappling with the suicide of his Painter Friend. The narrative follows Cláudio's struggle to comprehend the loss and his gradual process of emotional maturation. Central to this transformation is the symbolism of colours, which serve as emotional anchors, each linked to memories and moments shared with the deceased. By interpreting these colours and confronting grief, Cláudio undergoes a profound evolution. Bojunga's text invites readers to empathise deeply with the bereaved child, shedding light on the agony of loss while affirming the healing potential of introspection, memory, and emotional expression. Ultimately, *O meu amigo pintor* demonstrates the power of children's literature to illuminate the darker contours of human experience with sensitivity and nuance.

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