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Nostalgia in Historical Picturebooks about People on the Move: An Introduction¹

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Although nostalgia is more typically associated with older audiences than children, picturebooks are not without nostalgic themes. Narratives that feature objects and events connected to childhood have the ability to evoke nostalgia in readers. This effect is particularly evident among adults who mediate the reading experience to young children, as they often undergo “internal nostalgia”, in which the nostalgic individual reflects on her own past (Salmose 2012: 128–136). When picturebooks reconstruct and present past eras, such as depictions of life in classical antiquity, they evoke “historical nostalgia”, which, in contrast to “cultural nostalgia” for utopian spaces (Santesso 2006: 81), is reserved for historical spaces and times (95–96). This form of “external nostalgia” that pertains to a longing not tied to one’s personal past (Salmose 2012: 137–143) is often referred to as the “armchair nostalgia” (Appadurai 1996), because it emerges as people, seated comfortably in their armchairs, reflect on the past without actively engaging with it or having lived through it.

The most profound form of nostalgia in picturebooks is often rooted in forced displacement from one’s homeland. It is well established that nostalgia, characterised by a deep longing for a place, an ever-desired Ithaca, has traditionally been associated with displaced individuals (Nel 2018: 358). Those displaced out of necessity, such as refugees, experience a more intense sense of pain and nostalgia compared to those who voluntarily choose exile, such as travellers, adventurers, or emigrants (Salmose 2012: 133). This heightened nostalgia arises from a profound sense of loss, encompassing not

¹ The theme of this special issue of *Libri & Liberi* was the topic of the conference *People on the Move and Nostalgia in Historical Picturebooks*, organised by the Department of Early Childhood Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, from 24 to 25 September 2022, in Agios Nikolaos, Crete. The editors of this special issue, Smiljana Narančić Kovač, Angela Yannicopoulou and Vassiliki Vassiloudi, would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to various people that made this ambitious research venture possible: Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer whose mentorship inspired the process; the municipality of Agios Nikolaos that generously supported the organising of the conference; the various reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions during the reviewing process; and the publisher and illustrators for giving permission for the reprinting of images from their books.

only familiar surroundings but also cultural identity and the sense of belonging. For displaced persons, the acute and painful longing for their homeland is often intertwined with trauma. As they navigate between their past and present, they must continuously reconcile memories of what once was with the harsh realities of their new circumstances.

Nostalgia is not inherently tied to individuals who are on the move, as not all people living away from home experience it. As Svetlana Boym notes, nostalgia was once taboo, particularly among Soviet immigrants (2001: xv):

[I]t was the predicament of Lot's wife, a fear that looking back might paralyse you forever, turning you into a pillar of salt, a pitiful monument to your own grief and the futility of departure. First-wave immigrants are often notoriously unsentimental, leaving the search for roots to their children and grandchildren [...].

On the other hand, even those who do not migrate can experience nostalgia, particularly in a rapidly changing world where not only newcomers but also long-term residents may feel "out of place": "[i]n such neighbourhoods, new immigrants often become *homesick* for their places of origin, while native residents become *nostalgic* for the good old days" (Duyvendak 2011: 25, emphasis in the original).

Historical picturebooks that depict individuals on the move often delve into the emotional complexities of displacement, portraying those who experience profound nostalgia for lost homes. These books not only explore historical events, eras, and prominent figures but also the lives of ordinary, often anonymous individuals, whether real or fictional, whose experiences are intricately shaped by significant historical upheavals. By emphasising their personal journeys and conveying their deep emotional responses, picturebooks humanise historical moments, providing both a historical perspective and insight into the profound impact of historical events on individual lives.

In historical picturebooks, nostalgia is intrinsically connected to memory. However, while nostalgia is an emotion that encompasses both positive and negative sentiments, memory is a cognitive process involving the recall of past experiences, which may be neutral, positive, or negative. In addition, in our time, and with the advancement of technology, nostalgia does not rely exclusively on memory, due to the huge possibility for quick access to "an infinitely recyclable past" (Hutcheon 2000: 196). Nevertheless, although memory does not necessarily involve nostalgia, as it may be rooted in painful or traumatic experiences, nostalgia, understood as a fusion of remembered objects and events and the desire for them (Howard 2012: 641), is intrinsically based on it. In other words, one can remember without being nostalgic, but "one cannot be nostalgic without remembering" (Batcho 2009: 362). Additionally, nostalgia may be mediated by "postmemory", a term coined by Marianne Hirsch (1997, 2012) to describe a form of memory filtered through the experiences of a preceding generation, leading to "genealogical nostalgia", a longing for the times and places of one's ancestral past (Delisle 2012).

Defining nostalgia

The term "nostalgia", derived from the Greek words "*nostos*" 'return home', and "*algos*" 'pain' or 'suffering', "is *not* a simple, straightforward or one-dimensional human

emotion. Its meaning is *not* fixed once and for all. It is *not* experienced in the same way by everybody. Its meaning does not stand still and is *not* uncontested” (Jacobsen 2022: 15, emphasis in the original).

The deep yearning for home, often idealised, is central to the concept of nostalgia, which emphasises the creation of a distant home as a remedy for current circumstances (Hemmings 2007: 76). The concept of home serves as a catalyst for nostalgia even when not viewed as a specific location, but is perceived as a way of life, a mode of being-in-the-world (Casey 1987: 363) or, when associated with a nation, perceived as a unified, peaceful, and secure past (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 31). Nostalgia, often described as “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” (Boym 2001: xiii), blurs the line between the real home and an imagined version of it. It becomes “the desire to recreate something that has never existed before, to return to some place we’ve never been, and to reclaim a lost object we’ve never possessed. In short, nostalgia takes us to never-never-land” (Jenkins 1998: 4). Home is transformed into an imaginary construct, and, in extreme cases, it evolves into a phantom homeland for which individuals may be willing to die or kill (Boym 2001: xvi).

In addition to its spatial dimension, in the mid- to late 20th century (Dwyer 2015: 9) nostalgia also assumed a temporal one, representing a longing for a different time, a period that had already passed. Nostalgic time becomes idealised, as its negative aspects fade, with the past being “remembered” in a way that emphasises its more favourable elements. As Leo Spitzer (1999: 153) notes, nostalgic memory always highlights “what was positive in the past”. Even in contexts of poverty and deprivation, memory tends to focus not on economic hardships, but on social solidarity, exemplified by the notion of “open doors” (Bourke 1994: 13). The past undergoes an idealisation process that enhances its appeal, leading to what has been termed a “nostalgia trap” (Coontz 2016). However, unlike space, nostalgic time cannot be revisited, as its passage is irreversible (Hutcheon 2000: 194). Therefore, the desire to return to the past becomes an “impossible mission” (Salmose 2012: 121) and nostalgia is transformed into an incurable phenomenon.

Another important aspect of nostalgia is its connection with the interplay between personal and collective memory (Boym 2001: xvi). Even when nostalgia appears to be a private experience, centred on personal memories which individualise the past, framing it in existential rather than social or political terms (Wright 1985: 21–22), it is fundamentally a “social emotion” (Davis 1979; Wildschut et al. 2006), reflecting the idea that “the mind is ‘peopled’” (Hertz 1990: 195). Even personal or private nostalgia carries a collective dimension, creating the coherence, consistency, and sense of identity that individuals profoundly require (Wilson 2005), fostering social connections and promoting social bonds (Erben and Dickinson 2006). On the other hand, nostalgia, as an antidote for comfort, is triggered by social circumstances such as social exclusion (Seehusen et al. 2013) and, particularly, loneliness (Wildschut et al. 2010).

Nostalgia is often described as a “bittersweet” emotion (Niemeyer 2014: 1), as it encompasses a mixture of both positive and negative feelings. On the positive side, nostalgia is characterised by emotions such as warmth, affection, joy, elation, tenderness,

serenity, innocence, gratitude, and motivational implications (Sedikides et al. 2015). Nostalgic individuals draw on the positive experiences of their past to enhance their current self-esteem, which in turn fosters optimism about their future (Davis 1979: 420). Nostalgia is thought to strengthen motivation, enhance perceptions of life's meaning (Sedikides et al. 2015), and, by boosting self-esteem (Wildschut et al. 2006), has been linked to the concept of the "ego ideal" (Kaplan 1987: 471). On the other hand, nostalgia can also evoke negative emotions such as sadness, melancholy, irritation, loss, and fear (Holak and Havlena 1998). In sum, nostalgia represents "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (Boym 2001: xiii).

Childhood nostalgia and picturebooks

Nostalgia is deeply connected to picturebooks because they, as an object of children's material culture, go back to early childhood memories and evoke a sense of longing or sentimentality for the past. As people grow older, they reflect on picturebooks, longing for the child they once were and experiencing childhood nostalgia. Childhood nostalgia refers to the emotional yearning for events, people, and circumstances from one's early years, as it is nearly impossible to think about childhood without nostalgia (Wesseling 2018: 15).

Whether evoked by the scent of a cherished meal, the sound of a familiar voice, or the rereading of a beloved story, these fleeting moments serve as conduits to our past selves, offering both comfort and a deeper understanding of our identity. Sensory experiences, non-physical and non-visual stimuli that captivate the senses, such as smells (Reid et al. 2014), tastes (Supski 2013) and touch, play a significant role in triggering nostalgic feelings (Salmose 2012: 113) for a lost childhood. Additionally, sounds, particularly music and songs, are extremely potent in rekindling memories of the past (Nash 2012; Barrett et al. 2010), while situational cues (Salmose 2012: 115), such as summer vacations or traditional events, like Christmas dinners, come to symbolise treasured nostalgic recollections of childhood. These memories reflect a profound desire for connection and comfort in an increasingly fast-paced and unpredictable world.

The profound nostalgia for a lost childhood arises from the contemporary conception of childhood, which, in contrast to earlier views (cf. Ariès 1962), places significant emphasis on the happy and innocent days that precede the anxieties and challenges of adult life. Childhood nostalgia is often understood as a "naïveté requirement" (Howard 2012: 642), referencing a period when innocence prevailed. The notion of the innocent child is invoked through the idealisation of childhood, which serves as a vehicle for various social meanings and desires (Rose 1993: xii).

Childhood nostalgia is frequently viewed through a lens of idealisation, wherein positive past experiences are recalled with affection and warmth. This selective memory is not necessarily an attempt to distort reality but rather reflects a natural yearning for a less complex and more innocent phase of life. Childhood, as the elusive object of nostalgic longing (Starobinski 1966: 94), is portrayed with an inauthentic and distinctly

utopian quality “that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality” (Stewart 1993: 23). As childhood is increasingly understood as a cultural construct rather than an inherent characteristic (Stańczyk 2018: 146), it is often idealised as an earthly paradise.

In modern society and culture, the idyllic image of a joyful childhood is both powerful and pervasive. Photographic representations of smiling, innocent children (Higonnet 1998: 89–90; Holland 1991: 7) have become cherished symbols of a carefree and nurturing childhood to which every adult longs to return. In well-kept diaries, scrapbooks and photo albums, images of children serve as records of past years and personal childhood narratives that preserve personal time (Day-Good 2013; Himmesoëte 2011; Tinkler 2008). However, although photo albums revitalise memories of a happy childhood, they are marked by a tension between this nostalgic portrayal, which idealises childhood, and the construction of their somewhat “exotic” nature as they translocate the distant past into the present-day reality (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2018: 162).

Within this cultural context, nostalgia objects (Parkin 1999; Radley 1990), as tangible remnants of formative experiences, milestones, and relationships, carry substantial emotional significance in the realm of childhood nostalgia. Apart from toys, clothing, photographs, and keepsakes, which emerge from daily routines or special moments in one’s childhood, picturebooks become deeply imbued with nostalgia. Thus, picturebooks become kinds of childhood “souvenirs”, in other words quintessential objects embodying a profound longing for irreplaceable events and an idealised, utopian desire to revisit a time-space that can never be recaptured (Stewart 1993: 135). Souvenirs, especially “homomaterial” ones (136), which are part of something real from the past, e.g. a favourite picturebook, and private (internal), which are meaningful only for certain individuals (139), stir wistful remembrance of moments long gone, encapsulating the essence of a bygone era and the innocence of early life. As objects connected to a lost childhood function as vessels of personal history, and, as remnants of a cherished past, they fortify memories and elicit feelings of nostalgia.

Children’s picturebooks often evoke nostalgia in adults, particularly when they encounter those they had read during their own childhood (Buzbee 2006: 36–37):

The books of our childhood offer a vivid door to our own pasts, and not necessarily for the stories we read there, but for the memories of where we were and who we were when we were reading them; to remember a book is to remember the child who read that book.

Both old and reissued children’s books, as well as related merchandise, such as hero miniatures, T-shirts, mugs, and pencils, are purchased by nostalgic adults as a means of reconnecting with the past and recapturing cherished memories of a happy childhood (Cassidy 2008: 148–156).

If, as has been argued (Salmoose and Sandberg 2022: 191–192), writing and literature are essentially nostalgic, since they, closely tied to the past, record for future generations what would otherwise be ephemeral and forever lost, children’s literature,

by definition, evokes strong feelings of nostalgia in today's adults, since it reminds them of their childhood years that are irretrievably gone (Salmose 2018a: 334). Picturebooks, particularly as objects inherently associated with early years, evoke a sense of childhood nostalgia (Thomas 2017: 258), functioning as commodities "imbued with built-in nostalgia" (Op de Beeck 2010: 6).

The aesthetics of nostalgia: verbal and visual modalities

Literary texts convey nostalgia through various means, including content, such as narratives about refugees, structural elements, such as flashbacks, and stylistic choices, such as intertextuality. In multimodal texts, like picturebooks, nostalgia can be conveyed through both verbal and visual components. Additionally, the material aspects of the book itself, such as its resemblance to an old-fashioned photograph album (as seen in *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, 2007), may further amplify the nostalgic atmosphere. A text may be profoundly nostalgic, producing a nostalgic effect on the reader through the interplay of multiple factors, as a holistic outcome of various elements and modalities (Busi Rizzi 2021: 650).

According to Niklas Salmose, the most common narrative technique employed to evoke nostalgia in literature is the "analeptic structure" (2012: 288), which involves an interruption of the chronological flow of the narrative to represent past events or memories. In texts where an interjected narrative recounts past events, the revelation of memories and emotions serves to amplify feelings of sentimentality and longing, thereby manifesting nostalgia.

Additionally, internal focalisation through a nostalgia-experiencing character encourages the reader to empathise with her emotional state, thereby imbuing the text with a nostalgic aura. This subjective perspective highlights the selective nature of memory, where certain moments or periods are infused with nostalgic significance. Beyond the use of a nostalgic character, focalisation through a child, characterised by limitations in perception, cognitive abilities, language and temporality, as well as an emphasis on sensory experiences (Salmose 2018a), constructs an innocent portrayal of childhood that elicits nostalgia particularly in adult (co)-readers.

Moreover, the loose structure of a narrative composed of a series of incidents and experiences, often segmented into distinct units, such as chapters, mirrors the fragmentary nature of memory, which typically focuses on select, memorable moments that reflect the essence of a time now past (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2010: 210). The use of asyndeton and polysyndeton, which "have the ability to emphasize or create a movement, energy, impressions, pathos and rhythms" (Salmose 2012: 191), further imitates the operation of memory. Since nostalgia is inherently linked to a fragmented and gap-filled memory, the loose connections between different parts of the story and the narrative gaps (Busi Rizzi 2021: 659), by inviting readers to fill in the blanks with their own memories or emotional associations, contribute to the aesthetics of nostalgia and foster a personal engagement with the text.

In addition to larger structural designs, many other strategies can invoke nostalgia: the incorporation of flashbacks effectively bridges the past and the present, creating a pronounced sense of nostalgia. Besides, the use of the present tense for past events (Salmose 2012: 184–186), which brings the past into the present, thereby enhances the nostalgic effect. Another narrative technique is literary iteration, wherein the repetition of narrated events mirrors the vagueness of the nostalgic memory as a series of events and moods (Salmose and Sandberg 2022: 204). Free indirect speech can also establish a particularly nostalgic tone due to its aptness to mix the real and the unreal, reality and dreams, present and past (ibid.). Moreover, linguistic strategies, such as the use of dated words, particular terms, colloquialisms, idioms and an old-fashioned style evoke nostalgia (Joosen 2018), since language that has fallen out of common usage can highlight the passage of time, further intensifying nostalgic feelings for former ways of speaking.

Nostalgia is conveyed not only through words but also through images. By visually capturing specific moments from a much-beloved past, images can evoke a flood of memories and emotions that activate nostalgia. A focus on the past, real and imaginary, such as images of Arcadian, idyllic and utopian settings, rural landscapes, traditional cottages and old-fashioned clothing (Morrow 2003), as well as the adoption of classic artistic styles and techniques, connect the viewer-reader to the past and trigger nostalgia. Additionally, stylistic elements of images, such as vagueness, sepia tones, or a black-and-white palette, communicate a sense of pastness and contribute to the establishment of a nostalgic mood (Busi Rizzi 2021).

Pastiche has also emerged as an effective stylistic choice for conveying a sense of the past (Busi Rizzi 2021: 656), by invoking familiarity and eliciting longing for past cultural moments. This process engages collective memories, reviving earlier works and generating a sense of sentimentality or temporal distance. Pastiche does not mock or undermine the original work or style but rather celebrates it, paying homage to its influence. Even when the reader-viewer is unfamiliar with the referenced work, pastiche, through its light-hearted imitation of a particular style and incorporation of elements from various artists, subtly infuses the narrative with a nostalgic aura.

In many images, a nostalgic atmosphere is created through vagueness and obscurity, reflecting the inherent blurriness and dimness of memory. Faded images with subtle blurring evoke a sense of bygone times mirroring distant memories that, while unclear, retain an emotional intensity. This visual softness or ambiguity shows the elusive nature of memory, where details fade over time, but the emotional resonance remains vivid. In contrast, other images may establish nostalgia through sharply defined outlines, emphasising how certain memories stand out more prominently in recollection; perhaps even more clearly than at the time of their occurrence (Davis 1979: 83). Extending this tendency to its extreme, nostalgia may forgo blurriness in favour of a hyper-realistic level of detail, as seen in the picture of the nostalgic *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, which underscores the vividness of nostalgic recollections (Busi Rizzi 2021: 664).

If nostalgia were to be associated with a colour, it would likely be the black-and-white hue spectrum, due to the historical roots of photography, which was originally monochrome. Nostalgia is often conveyed through monochrome and sepia-toned images, irrespective of the content or subject matter being depicted (Grainge 2000). The lack of colour removes the distractions of the present, thereby enhancing the sense of timelessness.

However, the aesthetics of nostalgia in multimodal texts, like picturebooks, are mainly served by photography, which has become the visible remnants of the past (Hirsch 2012: 36). By freezing moments in time and preserving them as static representations, photographs are particularly closely linked to what Svetlana Boym defines as “restorative nostalgia”. This form of nostalgia, with the emphasis on “*nostos*”, focuses on the desire to return to a past that, devoid of signs of decay, is conceived as a “perfect snapshot” and remains eternally youthful (Boym 2001: 49).

The connection between photography and nostalgia seems indisputable, as nostalgia is frequently the dominant emotion evoked by photographs. Photographs, as Susan Sontag suggests, “potentially promote nostalgia” (2005: 11), shielding people, landscapes, and events from the overwhelming force of oblivion, thus preserving forever what has been. The photograph, as Roland Barthes claims (1981: 4), functions as a permanent remnant of a past that will never fade, participating in a peculiar form of resurrection by bringing back those who have departed. By repeating, in perpetuity, what occurred only once, photographs, much like nostalgia, continually affirm the presence of the absent.

In addition to black-and-white photographs as a means of evoking nostalgia in picturebooks, analogue photographs, when contrasted with modern digital images, are intrinsically linked to the past and serve the aesthetic of nostalgia. In this context, it is the medium itself, rather than the subject matter depicted, that triggers nostalgia. Furthermore, visual effects such as aging, creasing, specific finishes, or sepia tones contribute to a vintage aesthetic and foster a sense of retro nostalgia (retromania). As these photographs appear aged, they inherently obscure the present, transforming it into a nostalgic past and generating a self-induced sense of nostalgia (Bartholeyns 2014: 60).

Themes and papers

Since picturebooks can focus on nostalgia, or evoke nostalgia in readers, literary texts “about nostalgia” may be differentiated from “nostalgic literature”, which triggers nostalgia in readers on multiple affective and cognitive levels (Salmose 2018b: 129). Historical picturebooks about people on the move often intertwine nostalgia for lost homelands with its cultivation in readers, creating a poignant emotional experience that bridges past and present. Representing historical events such as refugee crises, forced migration, or voluntary emigration, and depicting the experiences of migration, displacement, and exile, historical picturebooks invite deep reflection on loss and longing.

This special issue of *Liber & Liberi* features eight contributions examining various aspects of nostalgia in historical picturebooks about people on the move. Eleven scholars explore different forms of nostalgia associated with a wide range of historical events, and in a variety of genres, spanning from auto-fictional and autobiographical picturebooks to fictionalised historical narratives. The papers illuminate the broader implications for understanding nostalgia within a historical context. By focusing on themes such as memory, loss, identity, ideology and different types and aesthetic modes of nostalgia, this issue investigates how historical picturebooks recount pivotal moments in history and convey the emotional realities of those who lived through them, highlighting the profound impact of nostalgia on their lives.

The paper “Intergenerational Transmission of Historical Events: The Duty to Remember and Nostalgia in French Picturebooks about Refugees of 20th-Century Conflicts” by Marianna Missiou explores how French picturebooks communicate traumatic historical events to young and adult readers through intergenerational storytelling. Focusing on underrepresented themes in children’s literature, such as the Armenian Genocide, the Nazi persecution of the Roma, and Italian fascism, those picturebooks do not aim at providing comprehensive historical accounts but rather use fictional narratives to preserve and convey the emotional essence of these events, including nostalgia. The author demonstrates the power of picturebooks in safeguarding and transmitting collective memory. The paper also emphasises Ricoeur’s notion of the “duty to remember” and the role of intergenerational transmission in sustaining historical consciousness.

Petros Panaou, in “The *Nostoi* of Two Acclaimed Immigrant Picturebook Creators: Allen Say and Peter Sís Negotiate the Paradoxes of Nostalgia and Find ‘Home’ in Art”, examines the paradoxes of immigrant nostalgia as a common *topos* in the work of two highly acclaimed immigrant picturebook artists. Peter Sís’s and Allen Say’s traumatic experiences in their home countries inform their ambivalent and paradoxical relationships with immigrant nostalgia. Even though they come from different cultures, geographies, generations, and emigration experiences, both immigrant artists found refuge in Art through their highly autobiographical picturebooks, negotiating their yearning for *nostos* (i.e., returning home), solace, and identity. Panaou claims that their negotiation of the paradoxes of nostalgia led them on similar paths: valuing the imagined, re-constructing their homelands and childhoods through and within Art, and forming their identity by building on their self-image as artists.

In their paper “Nostalgia, Diaspora, Memory and History in Peter Sís’s Picturebooks”, Alexandra Zervou and Vassiliki Vassiloudi focus on *The Three Golden Keys* (1994) and *The Wall* (2007) to explore how Sís uses nostalgia to reflect on revisiting one’s past that was shaped by the Cold War era in the historic city of Prague. The study analyses how nostalgia and counter-nostalgia, which refers to a critical or oppositional form of nostalgia that critiques the notion of the past as something to be glorified, function to preserve cultural memory, critique totalitarianism, and pass on a legacy for future generations. Additionally, the authors examine the narrative and artistic techniques

Sís employs to represent nostalgia, memory, and history as essential components of a cosmopolitan identity.

In “Nostalgia and Propaganda in Picturebooks about German History: Flight from the Nazi Dictatorship, the Idea of Reconstruction, and the Berlin Wall”, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer examine the multifaceted dimensions of picturebooks depicting flight. By analysing picturebooks that focus on Germany either as a destination or context for flight, they establish a general framework for understanding flight narratives and investigate the methods these works employ to elicit empathy from readers. In the selected picturebooks, three distinct refugee movements are identified: flight from the National Socialist regime, postwar refugee movements from Eastern Europe to Germany, and escapes from East to West Germany after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. It becomes clear that nostalgia is combined with propaganda even in picturebooks.

In “Political Dimensions of Nostalgia in Picturebooks: The Displaced Sixth Caryatid”, Angela Yannicopoulou, taking the example of the statue once part of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis, explores the complex relationship between nostalgia and displacement in picturebooks with political undertones. Through literary techniques such as first-person narration and focalisation through the personified Caryatid, the verbal and the visual texts invite readers to empathise deeply with her as a symbol of loss and longing. Peritextual elements (such as appendices) provide information about the historical context behind the narrative and reveal that nostalgia is not merely a sentimental feeling, but evokes both emotional and intellectual responses, eliciting awareness and advocacy of political issues. Peritexts that are mainly addressed to adult readers and epitexts that carefully guide the reading experience show that when nostalgia acquires political implications, adults mediate the reading to children, supervising the entire process and ensuring its “right” perception.

In her paper “Stamping Grounds: Nostalgia as a Modality of Feeling in Art and the Picturebook”, Victoria de Rijke examines the motif of postage stamps in children’s picturebooks and avant-garde collage art as a modality of feeling rooted in nostalgia and migration. Drawing on Shaun Tan’s *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2009) and his contribution to *Migrations* (ICPBS et al. 2019), a picturebook created jointly by many artists, alongside Kurt Schwitters’ *Opened by Customs* (1937–1938), she explores the concept of stamps as “parergon” – in other words, objects at the periphery of artistic works that challenge traditional distinctions. Stamps, as miniature geographies and symbols of displacement, evoke nostalgia, embodying loss, identity, and community building.

In “Unpacking Nostalgia: Suitcases as Symbols of Nostalgia in Picturebooks about Refugees”, Chryssa Kouraki explores how suitcases act as powerful symbols of nostalgia in refugee-themed Greek and translated-into-Greek picturebooks on the recent refugee crisis in Europe. Through aesthetic strategies such as imagery, metaphors, and recurring motifs, the suitcase, which is always depicted in an old-fashioned style, embodies the emotional weight of displacement and becomes a miniature version of a lost homeland. Besides, a suitcase is a container of objects-souvenirs of a lost home, which have become

the biographical artifacts of a life left behind. Placed within the suitcase, these items are recontextualised, forming a highly emotional collection that functions both as roots connecting refugees to their past, and wings for a new beginning.

“Verbal and Visual Representations of Nostalgia in Two Contemporary Cypriot Picturebooks” by Marina Rodosthenous-Balafa and Louiza Mallouri examines the verbal and visual representations of nostalgia in two picturebooks, *Savel’s Red Dress* (2014) and *White Uniform* (2017), through the lens of Svetlana Boym’s distinction between “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia. In *Savel’s Red Dress*, Savel experiences restorative nostalgia as her deep attachment to a dress, which is the only possession she could bring with her and which symbolises her emotional ties to a past home. Conversely, *White Uniform* presents reflective nostalgia, which, more concerned with the irrevocability of the past, brings awareness to the selective mechanisms of memory. Both Cypriot picturebooks, through verbal and visual modalities, enrich the nostalgic experience.

This special issue of *Liber & Liberi* explores various facets of nostalgia in historical picturebooks, bringing together scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds. It examines the intricate ways in which the past is presented to young audiences, and, through personal narratives, highlights the emotional significance of history. Besides, by applying the widely studied concept of nostalgia in picturebooks, this issue contributes to expanding the study of nostalgia, viewing it from a different perspective. These studies also enrich the field of picturebook research by revealing not only how historical picturebooks employ aesthetic techniques to express and evoke complex emotions like nostalgia, but also by showing how picturebooks manifest what societies choose to remember and how they transmit history to future generations.

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