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Stamping Grounds: Nostalgia as a Modality of Feeling in Art and the Picturebook

Izvorni znanstveni rad / original research paper

Primljeno / received 26. 11. 2023. Prihvaćeno / accepted 17. 11. 2024.

DOI: 10.21066/carcl.libri.13.2.7



This paper proposes historical connections or “linking phenomena” (Volkan 1999) between select examples of 21st-century children’s literature and 20th-century avant-garde collage artworks that preceded them, in relation to an aesthetics of postage stamps and the ephemera of postal imagined geographies. Shaun Tan’s aesthetics of the postage and library stamp in *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008) and *Migrations* (ICPBS et al. 2019) seen in the light of artist Kurt Schwitters’ collage *Opened by Customs* (1937–1938) powerfully suggest what Alastair Bonnet (2016) calls “migrant nostalgia” in the “persistence of loss”. By presenting them together with Jacques Derrida’s (1987) discourse of the “parergon” and imaginative geographies of “worlding”, I propose that works of art and artwork for children’s literature carry strong correlations of how the motif of the stamp is used in deliberate discontinuity as a modality of feeling for present and future community building.

Keywords: collage, migrant nostalgia, parergon, picturebook art, stamps

Though perhaps in our digital age paper mail is becoming rarer, a stamp still conveys that a letter or card sent in the post has been paid for and should be sent to its destination. Since the issue of the first postage stamp (in Britain in 1840), over 200 countries followed suit, some still using them today.¹ But stamps and postal correspondence are also so much more than the “material everyday”, perhaps akin to something *felt* (de Rijke 2024): carrying personal or symbolic meanings, glimpses of another time and another “stamping ground” or place, connections to the past and to national heritages, and as material objects collected and passed down as heirlooms.

¹ The US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, China, Japan, Australia, India and Brazil still use postage stamps, and stamps intended for collecting are still produced, such as the United Nations Postal Administration’s UN Flags, Endangered Species, Olympic Games Sports for Peace series, 2024.

In the postcard book featuring children's picturebook artists, *Migrations: Open Hearts, Open Borders* (ICPBS et al. 2019),² the Argentinian creator of children's books and pop singer Marisol Misenta, known as Isol, wrote "life is MOVEMENT" on her contribution picturing a sleeping child on a blackbird's back, flying high above a row of postage stamps (92). For Shaun Tan's contribution to the same book, both sides of his postcard are works of art: the cover an origami bird flying away from its stamps into a blue sky, and the address side a series of Australian postage stamps and hand-drawn ink stamps recalling the artist's own Malaysian heritage (Fig. 1). What are the socio-political and historical meanings of stamps and postal references in a "ready-made" world, and as visual strategies "to world" (Hudson 2019) children's literature and artwork? How can there be nostalgic sentimentality in invented stamps from make-believe countries; a homeland never lived in, an imagined childhood? How indeed (if they do at all) do children experience nostalgia? Are stamps in artworks ciphers?



Fig. 1. Shaun Tan's double-page spread for *Migrations* (ICPBS et al. 2019: 12–13).

Sl. 1. Dvostranica Shauna Tana načinjena za *Migrations* [Migracije] (ICPBS et al. 2019: 12–13)

This paper proposes historical and interpretative connections between visual examples of 21st-century children's literature and select 20th-century avant-garde collage artworks that preceded them. By presenting their miniature and imagined geographies³ together, I am proposing that selected works of fine art and artwork for children's literature carry strong correlations in how the motif of the stamp is used, in relation to a particular kind of nostalgia. One key correlation is that postage stamps and other postal or ink-stamped ephemera are miniature marks of bureaucracy that

² The publisher is the International Centre for the Picture Book in Society (ICPBS) and the contributing artists come from 28 countries. The postcards were originally created for *Migrations*, the exhibition at the Biennial of Illustration, Bratislava, in 2017, curated by the University of Worcester's International Centre for the Picture Book in Society (University of Worcester n.d.).

³ "Imaginative geographies", as termed by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), refers to familiar and unfamiliar spaces in our minds, particularly those of the East and West.

can “be had everywhere” (Trauman Steinitz 1968: 70), yet can also signify a particular time and place-specificity for work concerning migrancy. Seen in the light of artist Kurt Schwitters’ collage *Opened by Customs* (1937–1938), Tan’s aesthetics of the postage and library stamp in *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008), for example, powerfully suggest what Alistair Bonnet (2016) calls “migrant nostalgia” in the “persistence of loss”. I argue that the use of stamps in Shaun Tan’s and other picturebook artworks can be analysed for how they invoke a nostalgic modality of feeling that looks both forward and back. Tan has spoken of being “routinely attracted to ideas of belonging, difference, and the conceptual boundary between what is familiar or ‘normal’ and what is exotic, or ‘weird’” (2023). I suggest that exploring fragmented collage involving paper-layering, tickets, stamps, seals, inks and other ephemera – and nostalgic colour such as sepia – can both affect, reflect and critique the temporal and spatial turmoil of a period in its negotiation of old and new identities. Such entrapments, displacements, escapes and upheavals are motifs used in deliberate discontinuity, as a modality of feeling for present and future community building.

Examining faux postage’s role of being on the move as part of journeying forward and back in a range of artworks and children’s literature illustrations, I resist, as Svetlana Boym (2001) has argued, nostalgia as “restorative” (placing emphasis on *nostos* ‘returning home’ as a kind of prelapsarian moment which proposes to rebuild) or “reflective” (in *algia* ‘aching’, longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance) in favour of a nostalgic criticality. Thinking with the aesthetic process and materiality of stamps and small postal subversions in collage art, I draw out their metaphoric relation to migrant nostalgia of people on the move to new stamping grounds, to children’s picturebook artist/authors’ own identity and narrative positions, and finally, how stamps might “world” childhood itself.

Stamps as parergon

In the essay *The Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida (1987) discusses how the parergon challenges the traditional distinctions between what constitutes the artwork and what is considered external to it. His discourse of the “parergon” (from the Greek word meaning ‘outside work’ and a word between the *ergon* or the proper subject of painting and the *para+ergon* or subordinate miscellanea) acts as an adjunct that comes up against, beside, and in addition to the “ergon” (the work), touching it and affecting its meanings, like clothing on a statue, columns on a building or stamps on a letter, postcard or painting. The parergon connects with the world outside the work and raises questions about presence and absence, inclusion and exclusion, like a frame or border around a painting, until “the frame is in no case a background” but “a figure which comes away of its own accord” (Derrida 1987: 50). Very much like a postage stamp. As I have written elsewhere (de Rijke 2024), collage, a versatile art form that accommodates multiple texts and visuals in a single work, has been proposed as a model for a “borderlands epistemology”; one that values multiple understandings and deliberately incorporates nondominant modes of knowing. Collage uses multiple, provisional and interdependent products as the components of an inquiry whose aim above all is to

reveal its practice. This is suggestive of a readiness for emergent learning and knowing, and in the context of this study, a readiness for complex forms of nostalgia represented visually.



Fig. 2. *Cigar* (1947) by Kurt Schwitters. Collage made while living in Britain, featuring travel and postage stamps. In 1948, Schwitters received news he had been granted British citizenship. He died the following day. This image is in the public domain.

Sl. 2. *Cigara* (1947) Kurta Schwittersa. Ovaj je kolaž s temom putovanja i poštanskih maraka načinio za vrijeme boravka u Velikoj Britaniji. Godine 1948. Schwitters je primio vijest da mu je odobreno britansko državljanstvo. Umro je sljedećega dana. Slika je dostupna u javnoj domeni.

German artist Kurt Schwitters produced the collage *Opened by Customs* between 1937 and 1938, made of paper, printed paper, oil paint and graphite. The pasted-together fragments are cut and torn from parcel paper and include Nazi administrative labels and stamps. *Opened by Customs* was created in Lysaker, Norway, after Schwitters emigrated from Nazi Germany in 1937, and is expressive of an urgent need to escape ideological oppression. Here the stamps are those of rejection, as while exiled in Norway, Schwitters' work was exhibited in his homeland in the Nazi *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] exhibition of 1937. Escaping Norway for Britain in 1940 when Germany invaded, Schwitters was arrested as an "enemy alien" and interned in a prisoner of war camp on the Isle of Man (1940–1941), where, miraculously, he continued to make art. In *Cigar* (Fig. 2), made once he was free to live in Britain but not yet awarded citizenship,

Schwitters' provocative play on stamps (both postage and politically bureaucratic) is at the centre of deeply critical work on artistic freedom (or lack of it, under ideological oppression), in his present. The work's deliberate fragmentation highlights the role of the stamp as parergon and nostalgia as *resistant* by picturing cultural identity, attachment to home and continuity of self (Batcho 2018) as a *discontinuous modality of critical feeling*.

Thus, the postage stamp – as parergon in works of avant-garde art – can be an adjunct that carries associations of distance, travel or political exile, where recycled scraps of letters and stamps suggest the fragmented memory of travel or movement's nostalgia. However, this is not the nostalgia of “reviving an innocent past with sweet melancholy” as Johann Wolfgang Goethe defined it (as quoted in Santesso 2006: 13) but, because they are produced within the material genres of “found art” and anti-art, they are critical of art itself as a stamp of discontinuous modalities of representation.

Like Schwitters' work, the artist Shaun Tan's picturebooks use stamps as playfully critical motifs, pointing to the materiality and processes of book-making and publication, and perhaps shedding some insight on how the parergon stamp functions to highlight visual contextualisation as a series of substitutes: for exile or home, longing or belonging, the stamp of approval or the stamp of censorship and, finally, representation and misrepresentation, looking forward instead of into the present or backwards. If childhood “is often seen as the natural object of *nostalgic* emotion” (Hodgkin 2016: 116, emphasis in the original), and it is something of a given that children's literature (as classical works, as souvenirs of childhood, as (mis)remembered childhood imaginings), produced at an (adult) distance to a childhood, inevitably lends itself to “old world, new world, other world” imaginative territories and unconscious nostalgias (Knowles 2019: 101). Supported by the notion of nostalgia as belonging to the “precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object” (Winnicott 1990: 23), and the observation that nostalgia allows for a certain clinging to past familiarities in preference to unfamiliar and uncertain futures, Schwitters' and Tan's stamp artwork models how – as an illustrative device – the miniaturised imagined geography of stamps can point *consciously* to nostalgia as a figurative, precarious, emotive object.

Shaun Tan: stamps as paratext

Children's picturebook artist Shaun Tan's work, like that of Schwitters, uses fragmented collage involving paper-layering, tickets, stamps, seals, inks and other ephemera – and the control of nostalgic colour background such as brown packing paper or sepia – to call up other worlds: that of childhood and one's home country. For example, the Title and Contents page to Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008), using stamps as chapter headings and paratext (Fig. 3), powerfully suggests what Bonnet calls “migrant nostalgia” in the “persistence of loss” (2016: 13). Treating nostalgia as a “cultural practice, not a given content”, Kathleen Stewart has focused on what nostalgia *does* rather than what it *is*, seeing nostalgia as “a function of language that orders events temporally and dramatizes them” from a situated, individual and

cultural perspective (1988: 227). Rifts or breaks from the past have been asserted (Boym 2001) as a precondition for nostalgic “discourses of return and recovery” (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004: 491), as if searching for roots in something lost to sight. This, again, is very like looking back into childhood.

Nostalgia is one of the powerful parergon devices used by Tan for a modality of feeling inclusive of both loss and gain. The title page to *Tales from Outer Suburbia* appears as an airmail envelope with a single “Australia 2c” stamp of Eric (a foreign visitor from an unnamed country) waving from a teacup above the title itself, which, partially inked in faded red, appears cracked and worn with age. This is not nostalgia as a reactionary form of resistance against the passage of time or modernity – a “futile desire for a never-never land or more precisely, a never-never time” – but a modality of *feeling* (Tannock 1995), across collective memorial practices. Tan metafictionally alerts the reader to the allusive and illusory nature of fiction by depicting the story of Eric as a faded stamp, reminding the viewer Eric is both a fictional character and **figure**: a creative use of (both visual and textual) language to generate effect and affect. The traveller Eric as metaphor or metonymy suggests discovery, diversity and new horizons, but equally separation, alienation, perhaps westernisation; all integral parts of the experience of diaspora.

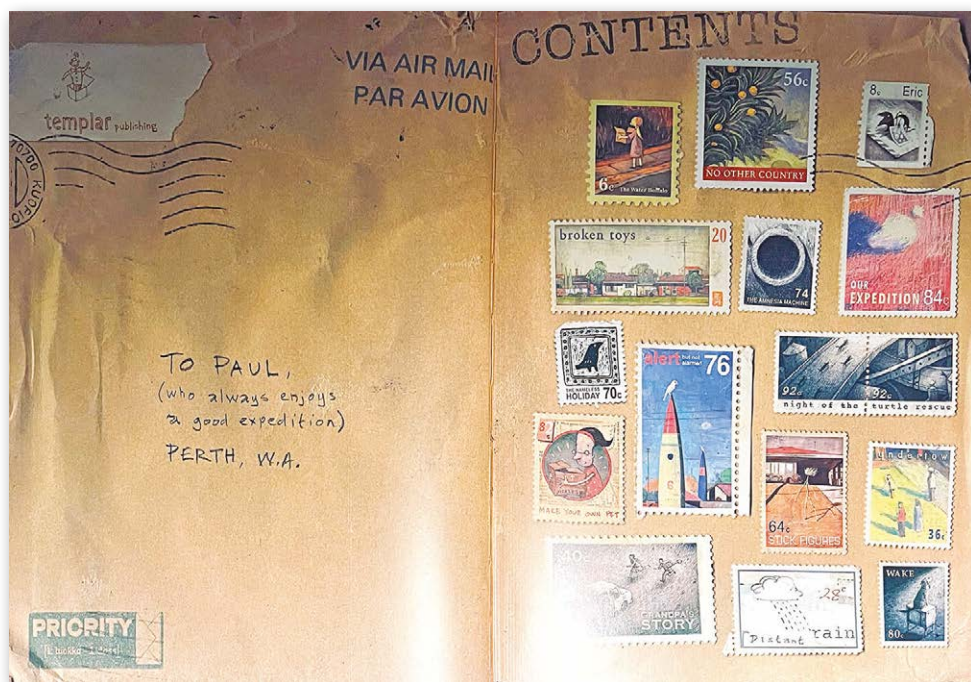


Fig. 3. Shaun Tan's Contents Page for *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008)

Sl. 3. Stranica sadržaja u djelu *Tales from Outer Suburbia* [Priče iz Vanjskoga Prigrada] Shauna Tana (2008)

The contents page (Fig. 3), again pictured as a worn envelope, includes dated official-looking stamps “VIA AIR MAIL/PAR AVION” and “PRIORITY”, plus a torn fragment “templar publishing”. As part of the new century’s posthumanist, material turn, the question has arisen, “how did language come to be more trustworthy than matter?” (Barad 2003: 801). The very word “CONTENTS” could equally apply to a parcel as a book, and in fact stamps have replaced the usual list of titles. The left page includes a dedication “TO PAUL (who always enjoys a good expedition) PERTH, W.A.” written in pencil. The right-facing page is full of stamps, irregularly placed as if by hand, and inked on the right edge, as if by postal mark. Each stamp on the right-facing page represents a chapter in the book, with a visual extract or fragment in miniature of later chapter illustrations, as a hint of what is to come in full. The paratextual works via each stamp “picturing” a chapter in the book as matter rather than language, suggesting the intertextual relationships of the author/artist and reader/viewer as fellow travellers on an expedition where the visual is to be of great importance. Just as suitcases used to have travel stamps from places visited along a journey, the book plays with outside and inside reference, with scraps from different scenes and other worlds.

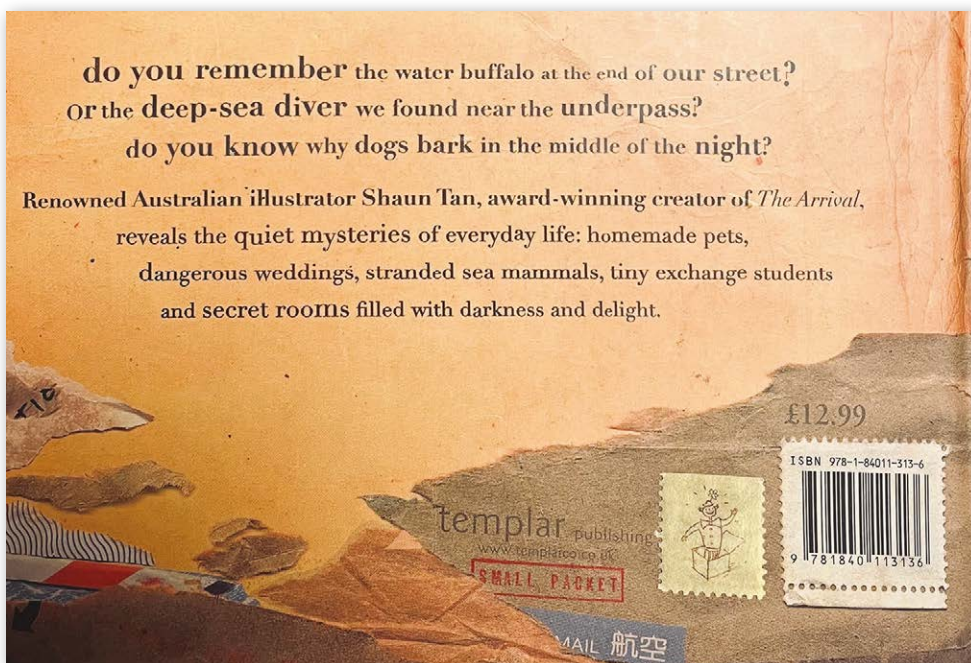


Fig. 4. Back cover of Shaun Tan’s *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008).

Sl. 4. Stražnja strana korica djela *Tales from Outer Suburbia* [Priče iz Vanjskoga Prigrada] Shauna Tana (2008)

Though the page suggests a fragmented and odd assortment of stamps, there is also a sense conveyed of the book’s promise to the reader, and of reading *as* migration:

of starting out on exciting and as-yet unknown adventures. Derrida's discourse of the *parergon* is evoked, as the use of stamps do "[...] not fall to one side", but touch and cooperate "within the operation, from a certain outside [...]. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board" (1987: 45). In visual arts, the *parergon* is almost always interpreted as the surrounds or frame of an artwork, but Derrida's play on the French words "*au bord, à bord*" suggest a feeling like that on a boat when embarking ("Il est d'abord l'à-bord" 'it is all on the bo(a)rd(er)'). In his study of the structures of artistic text, Jurij Lotman defined the frame as being constituted by two elements: the beginning and the end of a text (1977: 215) which "marks the border between the infinite world and the finite artefact as a model of the world" (Wolf and Bernhart 2006: 26). These frames may operate as metafictional narrative intrusions or be more covert accessories like tiny stamps with their white perforated edges. If the contents page stamps indicate embarking the world of the book, the back cover (Fig. 4), beneath the blurb, has what look like fragments of a "SMALL PACKET" sent by airmail, as if someone had torn it open long ago and only a few scattered pieces remain. Tan has turned the "templar publishing" logo and the ISBN barcode into well-used, journey-stained stamps affixed to the corner of the torn envelope fragment. Thus, the *parergon* stamps also allow us to disembark from the book's borders, into the world of its global production and dissemination.

Our collective understanding of how far a well-travelled envelope like this may have come sets the stage for a collection of stories based on Tan's memories of growing up in the northern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia, as embellished or imaginary childhood experiences. As Tan puts it, "each one is about a strange situation or event that occurs in an otherwise familiar suburban world; a visit from a nut-sized foreign exchange student [...]. The real subject of each story is how ordinary people react to these incidents, and how their significance is discovered, ignored or simply misunderstood" (2023). For Tan, "Outer Suburbia" is a place of arrivals and departures typical of emigration, migration or exile with all its attendant language confusions and meanings hidden to the newcomer and hosts. The foreign exchange student with an unpronounceable name who tells the family to call him "Eric" sleeps in the kitchen pantry and asks questions no one could answer. "Most of the time Eric seemed more interested in small things he discovered" reads the text (Tan 2008: 14). One of the images shows Eric lifting up the corner of a stamp on an envelope to see what is on the reverse side; a charming moment of meta-irony to question what "lies behind" stamps.

Explaining that he often uses tiny doodles or sketches for his short stories and picturebooks, Tan claims that "sketchbooks are great for discontinuity, though this also tends to make them unpublishable – crude, clumsy, incoherent, and unedited. But the fragmentary structure itself, as an idea, is interesting" (2023). In Stuart Tannock's critique (1995), a nostalgic structure of feeling with moments of discontinuity is posited across prelapsarian, lapsed and postlapsarian worlds. By miniaturising Eric in meticulous

crosshatched pencil drawings (his leaf-shaped head, his baggage peanut and walnut shells, his eventually departing on a leaf), Tan suggests Eric's culture is prelapsarian, unlike that of the lapsed humans (who carelessly drop objects Eric considers precious, such as beer-caps, sweet wrappers and buttons). An image of a plate set for Eric, empty but for a single untouched peanut, begins the feeling of his loss, as "an uncomfortable feeling hung in the air, like something unfinished, unresolved" (Tan 2008: 17), and the text and family question whether Eric even enjoyed his stay, or whether they would "ever hear from him again" (ibid.). But the glorious double-page spread of discovering his leaving present – a miraculous installation of glowing-coloured exotic flower and leaf-like lights in the dark of the pantry with a note reading "THANK YOU FOR WONDERFUL TIME" (19) – reminds us that Tan's work deals not in grief but in discontinuity juxtaposed with community building, an important distinction of the nostalgia spectrum pointed out by Howland (1962). "It must be a cultural thing," says Mum" (Tan 2008: 17), acknowledging migrant nostalgia's ambiguities and paradoxes.

In the same collection, Tan includes a chapter called "The Nameless Holiday", with a series of stamps depicting minute framed scraperboard images of a knot, crow, cup, leaf, candle, bell, pomegranate, knife and fork, orange slice, scissors and whistle. The nameless holiday is introduced as happening once a year and "is always anticipated by children and adults alike with mixed emotion". "Familiar rituals" are followed (Tan 2008: 70):

[...] laying out of one's most prized possessions on the bedroom floor, then choosing one special object – exactly the right one – and carrying it carefully up a ladder to the roof and leaving it under the TV aerial (already decorated with small shiny things such as chocolate wrappers, old CDs and the tops off tubs of yoghurt, licked clean and threaded with string, tied with special slip-knots).

A picnic in view of the roof follows, where are "born fond memories of freshly baked gingerbread crows, hot pomegranate juice as tart as a knife" (70–71), perhaps alluding to licking the crow, pomegranate and hot drink stamps on the facing title page. As with the series of paintings in which René Magritte paired (misnamed) words and images in the style of a children's reading primer, for example in his paintings *La trahison des images* [*The Treachery of Images*] (1929) and *La clef des songes* [*Key to Dreams*] (1930), what could be a teaching tool becomes an instrument of ambiguity, playing with the connections between real objects, their image and their names. For Tan, word and image reflect (2023):

[...] the interesting relationship that can exist between two independent means of expression [where] the text and illustrations could operate as narratives in isolation, but happen to react in similar ways, opening new meanings from each other's context.

In "The Nameless Holiday", "those who stay awake long enough" are eventually rewarded with the sound and sight of a blind "reindeer with no name" who takes only those objects "so loved that their loss will be like the snapping of a cord to the heart". As the reindeer chooses and readies to depart, the text reads (Tan 2008: 71):

What a remarkable, unnameable feeling it is, right at the moment of his leaping: something like sadness and regret, of suddenly wanting your gift back and held tight to your chest, knowing that you will never see it again. And then there is the letting go as your muscles release, and the backwash of longing leaves behind this one image on the shore of memory [...].

Enacting Donald Winnicott's "precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object", this extraordinary summary of what nostalgia feels like – Tan's powerfully expressed "backwash of longing" – in conclusion to the story features a tiny, scraperboard image of a stamp depicting an image falling from light into dark.

Psychoanalyst Ruth Lijtmaer's fascinating study of social trauma, nostalgia and mourning in the immigration experience (2022) takes Vamik D. Volkan's (1999) description of "linking objects" or "linking phenomena" that help mourning migrants continue to have contact with the past while adjusting to their new environment. Sensitive to the traumatic aspects of "moving on" and to the trauma that follows whenever a social system perverts the course of justice or fails to protect individuals, Lijtmaer describes it as a demanding "psychic transformation of the disappearance into something like an experience of departure" (2022: 308), which, ultimately, can encourage the important process of mourning.

In this context, linking objects and phenomena as symbols that preceded a significant loss can become what Wilson Nathaniel Howell (1999: 163) called the "poisoning of nostalgia", keeping someone in a perpetual state of mourning the loss of country, culture and origin. What is referred to as "culture shock" is, for migrants, part of a traumatic loss of their culture of origin, but fixating on linking objects can also deny substantial rootedness in either culture. Thus, linking objects can be used in maladaptive ways (by brooding, obsessing or fixating on objects to such an extent a person cannot adapt to their new situation) or adaptively, by creating ways to remember, whenever and wherever there is a need to mourn, to accept change and "move on".

Stamps are the perfect signifier of moving on, of departure and arrival, and of journeys hopeful of communication and contact with family and friends, plus new contacts of support. Resistant nostalgia is the affect that accompanies stamps in the artworks of the previously mentioned *Migrations* (ICPBS et al. 2019). Taking the migrating bird and flight as a metaphor for the human migrant, the book is divided into themes of "Departures", "Long Journeys", "Arrivals" and "Hope for the Future". The facsimile postcard text includes personal messages of hope from the illustrators, as well as quotes from writers.

Shaun Tan's contribution to the collection (Fig. 1) insists on both sides of his postcard as assemblage works of art: the main image, an origami bird torn from the corner of the letter cover, flying away from its upside-down stamps into a blue sky, literally enacting Derrida's parergon figure that "comes away of its own accord". The stamp as parergon bird peels off in front of our eyes, questioning the fixity of any image or any imaginative creation, whilst at the same time reminding us of its freedom to imagine anything via art and literature. As an artist and writer, Tan has noticed that

much of his work “ends up being about characters either traveling into another culture or receiving a strange visitor. In part, that’s an extension of a third kind of migration that is already happening the moment a person picks up a book” (2023).

The address side on the left features one of Tan’s trademark invented creatures standing upon hand-drawn ink stamps, recalling the artist’s own Malaysian origin before emigrating to Australia (the country of the flowers and fish postage stamps). In the book, Tan writes that “all migration is an act of imagination, a flight of imagination”, and how “small gestures” such as “a picture” can make a difference, as by them, “we invest back” and “help sustain the will to imagine a better world for adults and especially children, for whom the positive inspiration of art and story can never be overestimated” (2019: 8–9).



Fig. 5. Marie-Louise Gay’s image for *Migrations* (ICPBS et al. 2019: 77)

Sl. 5. Prilog Marie-Louise Gay za *Migrations* [Migracije] (ICPBS et al. 2019: 77)

Tan’s double-page spread emphasises that need for a sense of “home” or belonging gains relevance as a marker of identity, perhaps precisely when that home is presented as lost and its inhabitants are dispersed. In this way, the stamps act as metaphors for the ways that all migrants are far from home, whether voluntarily or forcibly, as with exile. A removal from where one belongs suggests also that cultural values may be lost, hence, like the other children’s illustrators in the book, Tan reminds the reader of the importance of values to “invest back” in the idea of a global collective “home”. Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko draw attention to structures of nostalgic expression

often present in similar ways, yet whose actual politics may differ radically, “depending on the context in which they unfold” (2004: 507). This would be to see stamps as imaginative landmarks, rather like that of Heather Cyr’s study (2024) of the fantasy genre enabling young readers to reject nostalgic landscapes in favour of moments of space and place criticality (cf. Flegar and Miskec 2024).

For example, Canadian artist Marie-Louise Gay features a white bird beginning its flight across a blue wash sky over a row of stamps, all featuring birds from across the globe: Uganda, Brazil, China, Poland, Japan. In this image, the stamps act as if they were buildings, cities or countries that a migrant might pass over on their journey (Fig. 5). There is a seemingly “natural” objectivity here, of depicting – through stamps – a range of countries where migration may happen for reasons unknown and unstated, yet of course each of these nation’s history and current policy on migration is specific, individual, and no doubt contentious in its own way. There is no denying that stamps represent the symbolic messages governments wish to convey to their own people and abroad, but this row of tilted and overlapping stamps suggests a somewhat rushed, discontinuous and mixed future community of birds and stamps, jostling for room, a reminder of haphazard reality for the migrant experience.

The fact that the images on the stamps are birds, too (the Aigrette [heron] for France, the woodpecker for Canada, the plovercrest for Brazil), all doubtless have national and symbolic importance. The red-crowned crane is known as a symbol of luck, longevity, and fidelity in China, for example. Gay is able to bring both a nostalgic and political modality of feeling into the address side of the postcard, with contemporary stamps of children and her handwritten text, demonstrating her belief that “imagination and knowledge, words and ideas fly over fences, barbed wire, brick walls, through prison bars, stormy skies and borders...” (ICPBS et al. 2019: 76), emphasising the optimism of children’s literature’s future worldings.

The Argentinian artist Isol placed her stamps on the picture side with the words “life is MOVEMENT”, picturing a sleeping transparent child drawn in ghostly white on an inky blackbird’s back, flying above a row of postage stamps, singing (Fig. 6). In contrast to her watercolour brushstrokes sweeping behind the flying bird, as if indicative of its movement, the stamps below are all abstract depictions of fruit: “Naranja, Cereza, Manzana, Duranzo” [orange, cherry, apple, peach], like the orchards migrating birds fly over and eat from to sustain them on their journey. Her text reads: “La Tierra y las personas no tienen dueño” [The earth and its people have no owner] (ICPBS et al. 2019: 92–93).

Coda: the stamping ground of nostalgia

Tannock’s (1995) “Nostalgia Critique” argued against its being reactionary and regressive, for more liberating and progressive possibilities. If nostalgia was seen as “the search for continuity amid threats of discontinuity” (Davis 1979: 35), why do avant-garde artists and contemporary children’s picturebook artists like Shaun Tan – in their use of stamps – deliberately seek out moments of discontinuity? I believe that Tan, like Tannock, sees discontinuity as an expressive, rhetorical practice, a modality



Fig. 6. Isol's image for *Migrations* (ICPBS et al. 2019: 93)

Sl. 6. Slika umjetnice Isol za *Migrations* [Migracije] (ICPBS et al. 2019: 93)

of feeling; not just as an effort to retrieve the past, but as resources and supports for present and future cross-border community and identity building. As he puts it, “we are all practicing members of our own cultures, subcultures, and micro-subcultures (our private imagination), each looking for suitable translations, and illustrated books are very good at crossing divides” (Tan 2023).

As Lijtmaer reminds us, “what makes the experience of loss in immigration and exile complex, are the melancholy and nostalgia felt when the past is remembered in an idealized way” (2022: 319). There is no escaping that “nostalgia, as a way of relating to a vanished past, inevitably seems to incorporate elements of distortion”; which, at its most idealised or cloaked, is what Zohar Shavit – in her study of a constructed past in German books for children depicting the Third Reich and Holocaust – has decried as “a past without shadow” (2005). Of all children’s literature cited here, Tan’s acknowledges the shadow as an intrinsic part of remembering, even when the memories are fond. His stamps, like those of Schwitters before him, are resistant to sentiment in nostalgia, reminding the viewer/reader “that was then; *this* is now”, but the shadow remains. Nostalgia may distort the past, but, as a signifier of “absence” and loss that can only be made “presence” “through memory and the creativity of reconstruction” (Lijtmaer 2022: 310), it is dependent on the creativity and feeling of its authors – and Shavit would add – their ethics, too.

It would appear that there is a peculiar mix of sadness and pleasure in nostalgic work, and Judith Broome argues that, in our desire for wholeness or coherence against a

sense of fragmentation and loss, "in other words a desire for the familiar, or home [which is] nostalgia" (2007: 22), we perform symbolic reparations. Avant-garde artworks and children's literature artwork have made their stamp on symbolic reparations. Perhaps, just as the writers and artists of this paper have stamped their losses (of country, culture, identity, language) we, adult readers, stamp the child we once were and look back – through the literary and aesthetic experiences of reading, enjoying and critiquing children's literature.

Just as we each have a real childhood, a real home, a real memory in our minds, Brad Pasanek argues that "metaphors of mind prove meaningful in their materiality, so a phenomenology of metaphor should include a discussion of material objects" (2015: 143). In this sense, the materiality of stamps lends itself to metaphors we live by, simply by their being "specimens" that are "stuck", "imprinted", "marked" (by water or post), "cancelled" and "catalogued". From "Cinderella" (not valid for postage), "Changeling" (changed in colour from the original) to "Dummy" (official fake) stamps, their names and significance teem with meaning.

As parergon, it is clear that stamps are not background trivia, but function symbolically, well beyond their functional use-value: as scraps of historical preservation, of shared history, the circulating of ideas, belief in communication systems and global movement and a complex "backwash of longing", grief, loss, fondness or love falling into memory. The sticking down and peeling off of stamps as "linking objects" or "linking phenomena" mark the complexity of immigration experience and how mourning migrants continue to have contact with the past while adjusting to their new environment, and "worlding" it. Collage involving paper-layering, tickets, stamps, seals, franks, inks and other ephemera can both critique and affect the temporal and spatial turmoil of such a period in its negotiation of old and new identities, entrapments, displacements, escapes and upheavals. The works discussed have made conscious use of the stamp as the main subject of the artwork, reversing the usual visual hierarchy of ergon to parergon.

Though difficult to imagine a world without passport stamps, it will be interesting to see which forms of stamps persist or disappear into a kind of collective amnesia of barcoded, digital futures. What stamp of future culture might replace them? The stamps I have explored speak to the visual/textual/paratextual complexity of that "third migration" we make when embarking on journeys into the imagination that picturebooks offer: assemblages of word, image, memory; all highly mobile forms. I have argued that these stamps are the quintessential stamping ground and parergon of national and political memory; used by artists, picturebook authors and illustrators as visual resistance to sentimental or grieving nostalgia, apparently "stuck down" and miniature, but also intensely felt, powerful signifiers of flights of imagination.

In *Migrations*, Tan wrote, "it's left for us to imagine what to do, to pass on the dividends of hope that have been invested in us" (ICPBS et al. 2019: 8) as these are small acts of communication. I hope the postage stamp lasts, in real terms and as motif. Not from nostalgia, but because – as markers of feeling to a sense of place and belonging

– they play a small but significant part in helping to world the creative and cultural optimism in children’s picturebooks that is necessary for building future community.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Templar (An imprint of Bonnier Books UK) and Shaun Tan for giving Victoria de Rijke permission to include images from *Tales from Outer Suburbia* and to Otter-Barry Books for giving her permission to include images from *Migrations: Open Hearts Open Borders* in her paper published in both printed and electronic versions of this issue of *Libri & Liberi*.

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Osnove štambiljanja: nostalgija kao modalitet osjećaja u likovnoj umjetnosti i slikovnici

U ovom se radu prikazuje postojanje povijesnih veza, odnosno „povezujućih fenomena“ (Volkan 1999) između odabranih primjera iz dječje književnosti u 21. stoljeću i avangardnih kolažnih umjetničkih djela iz 20. stoljeća koja su im prethodila s obzirom na estetiku poštanskih maraka i usputnih poštanskih primjera zamišljenih geografskih predjela. Estetika poštanskih maraka i knjižničnih pečata u *Tales from Outer Suburbia* [Priče iz Vanjskoga Prigrada] (2009) i priloga Shauna Tana u djelu *Migrations* [Migracije] (2019) promatranoga u svjetlu kolaža *Opened by Customs* [Otvoreno na carini] (1937–1938) umjetnika Kurta Schwittersa, snažno upućuje na ono što Alastair Bonnet (2016) naziva

„migrantskom nostalgijom“ u „trajnosti gubitka“. Interpretirajući ih u osloncu na raspravu o *parergonu* Jacquesa Derride (1987) i na pojam imaginarnih svjetskih zemljovida, nastoji se objasniti da se djela likovne umjetnosti i vizualna umjetnost uklopljena u dječju književnosti snažno podudaraju u načinu na koji se koriste motivom poštanske marke u namjernom uspostavljanju diskontinuiteta kao modaliteta osjećaja za sadašnju i buduću izgradnju zajednica.

Ključne riječi: umjetnost slikovnice, kolaž, marke, žigovi, parergon, migrantska nostalgija