

for exploring nostalgia, both aesthetically and culturally. Children's literature suggests a valuable area for further exploration within the broader study of nostalgia.

The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia stands out as a valuable and ambitious contribution to a growing field. By bringing together a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and thematic approaches, it not only maps the current landscape of nostalgia studies but also helps to shape its future directions. Its interdisciplinary scope, critical depth, and attention to both established and emerging topics make it an essential reference for anyone engaging seriously with nostalgia. For scholars and students alike, the handbook offers both a foundation and an invitation to engage critically with nostalgia as a concept that remains as complex as it is culturally resonant.

Seeing Socialism Through GDR Picturebooks

Jörg Meibauer. 2025. *The Visual Culture of East German Picturebooks 1945–1990: Architecture, Traffic, and Design of Childhood*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. 248 pp. ISBN 9783111637075

Nikola Novaković

Jörg Meibauer's book offers the first comprehensive examination of East German (GDR) picturebooks as a key component of socialist visual culture. Moving beyond their dismissal as mere propaganda, it reveals them as complex aesthetic and ideological artifacts that visually constructed childhood, space, and citizenship in the socialist state. By tracing how picturebooks depicted architecture, reconstruction, daily life, and ideology, the author situates them within broader systems of visual education and socialisation, showing how images served to form the "socialist personality" while also expressing creativity and artistic diversity under conditions of censorship.

Chapter 1 situates East German (GDR) picturebooks within the broader framework of visual culture, arguing that they offer valuable insight into how socialist ideology, aesthetics, and everyday life were visually communicated to children. Although long dismissed as politically contaminated, these works reveal how the GDR sought to shape the "socialist personality" through visual education. The author emphasises that picturebooks formed part of a child's overall visual environment, alongside films, posters, and urban design, and therefore deserve recognition as cultural documents rather than mere propaganda.

The chapter focuses on descriptive, nonfictional picturebooks that depict real-world subjects such as architecture, reconstruction, traffic, and the designed spaces of childhood: kindergartens, playgrounds, and Pioneer institutions. These ordinary settings served as vehicles for transmitting socialist values like collective effort, pride in the homeland, and international solidarity. Drawing on theories of ideology and propaganda from John Stephens and Jason Stanley, the author shows how GDR picturebooks blended factual instruction with ideological persuasion, often by omission or emotional appeal. Censorship and party control ensured conformity, though some illustrators did achieve some autonomy.

Methodologically, the study adopts a serial-iconographic approach, comparing images across books and decades to trace continuities in socialist visual culture. The chapter

concludes by linking picturebook production to historical and architectural developments, noting that despite censorship and ideological oversight, GDR picturebooks were stylistically diverse, visually rich, and central to the socialist project of educating children through images.

Chapter 2 traces the evolution of artistic styles in GDR picturebooks from the 1950s to the 1980s. Early works emphasised Socialist Realism, depicting recognisable scenes of work, machinery, and collective labour. By the 1960s, Mid-Century Modern emerged, with graphic-realistic or expressive-naïve styles seen in the works of Schultz-Debowski, Meyer-Rey, and Gürtzig, featuring vibrant colour, abstraction, playful text integration, and childlike motifs. Later, Pop Art and Photorealism influenced GDR picturebooks, exemplified by Bofinger's *Sieben Wunder für Jim* (1984), though photorealism remained rare due to its potentially critical implications. Overall, Chapter 2 demonstrates how picturebooks balanced aesthetic education, ideology, and international stylistic trends within a socialist framework.

Chapter 3 presents postwar GDR children's literature as a reflection of the rebuilding of cities and villages after 1945. Picturebooks depicted ruins as both dangerous playgrounds and symbols of past mistakes, emphasising optimism, collective effort, and peace. Books like *Sonne, Mond und Sterne* (1947) and *Wir heben eine Last* (1951) linked children's play with reconstruction, showing cranes, excavators, and construction work as educational and ideological tools. Rural reconstruction, including new farms and Houses of Culture, was depicted in *Bauer Klaus packt an!* (1948) and *Unser Dorf* (1952), reinforcing civic responsibility, education, and socialist values, preparing children as future builders and citizens.

The next chapter investigates how GDR picturebooks shaped children's perceptions of the socialist city, emphasising East Berlin's Stalinallee and Plattenbau developments. These books combined images of wartime ruins with reconstruction, cranes, and workers, presenting socialism as progress. The Stalinallee, including the Hochhaus an der Weberwiese and Haus des Kindes, symbolised socialist ideals, while prefabricated Plattenbauten addressed housing shortages. Informational books like *4 Wände und ein Dach* (1964), *Das große Buch vom Bauen* (1976), and *Ein Dach über dem Kopf* (1983) taught children about architecture, urban planning, and social life, contrasting capitalist and socialist housing, presenting human-centred design, and linking urban development to ideology and social progress.

Chapter 5 focuses on mid-century modern architecture in East Berlin, including the World Time Clock, the TV Tower, and the Palace of the Republic. These projects symbolised socialist modernism and the GDR's contribution to the international style. Picturebooks like *Bärchens Bummelbus* (1979) and *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (1979) introduced these structures to children, blending factual information with emotional engagement. The World Time Clock emphasised internationalism, the TV Tower served as a visible landmark with symbolic references to technological progress, and the Palace of the Republic displayed modern functional design and public accessibility. Together, they illustrated the urban modernisation and ideological messaging of East Berlin.

The following chapter considers the portrayal of Moscow in East German children's literature as a model socialist city, in contrast to Western cities that were largely out of reach of

GDR citizens. *Wir fahren nach Moskau* (1953) follows Young Pioneers on a visit to Moscow, focusing on Stalin, monumental architecture, the metro, and extensive educational and recreational facilities, encouraging admiration and identification. *Mein Freund, der General* (1967) presents Soviet generals as guides, as well as Soviet wartime achievements and the growth of urban settlements. By the 1970s, *Roter Platz und ringsherum* displays Moscow as a modern city for tourists, bringing together cultural information, playful illustrations, and humour.

How GDR children were introduced to socialist consumption through picturebooks and media is the subject of Chapter 7. Postwar shortages made Konsum cooperatives and the state-owned HO central to everyday life. Picturebooks depicted shopping, self-service stores, and the interdependence of city and countryside, showing how farm products reached urban consumers and how industrial goods returned to rural areas. Books like *Brotfibel* (1952), *Frisch gefangen kommt der Fisch* (1952), and *Das Milchbächlein* (1955) explained production, transport, and hygiene. Children were familiarised with shopping routines, limited money, and family roles, while institutions like the House of the Child played a role in constructing the visual culture of the child consumer.

Chapter 8 explores children's experience of traffic in the GDR, focusing on strolling, bicycling, and public transportation. From a young age, children navigate streets, learn rules, and encounter dangers, often represented in picturebooks that combine play, education, and urban observation. Postwar reconstruction affected traffic, with all the destroyed roads, rubble trains, and crowded transport, while bicycles and scarce cars reflected limited resources. Traffic-education books taught safe behaviour, respect for the police, and proper use of play streets. Utopian city illustrations and architectural models encouraged imagination and raised interest in professional life. Children's engagement with traffic connected fascination, learning, and socialisation within the urban environment.

Chapter 9 deals with the design of childhood in the GDR, focusing on kindergartens, playgrounds, and Pioneer institutions as reflected in picturebooks. Postwar children faced hunger, disease, and displacement, prompting the rapid development of childcare facilities in repurposed buildings. Kindergartens emphasised collective work, aesthetic construction, and early polytechnic education, while picturebooks like *Brigade im Kindergarten* (1952) portrayed children participating in brigade-like activities while simultaneously introducing playful satire of the socialist press into pedagogy. Playgrounds combined modernist design, green spaces, and varied materials, sometimes featuring concrete sculptures or adventure equipment. Pioneer houses and railways offered educational and recreational experiences, introducing children to technical skills, collective responsibility, and interaction with the landscape.

The following chapter analyses photographic portraits of Young Pioneers in the GDR, focusing on the interplay between individuality, propaganda, and aesthetics. Portraits aimed at children and youth depict recognisable Pioneers, often marked by the red neckerchief, while conveying emotions, attitudes, and social bonds, such as friendship or collective activity. Although propagandistic symbols (flags, banners, or leaders) appear, many photographs maintain natural, spontaneous poses, and thus lend credibility and authenticity. Arrangements on the page, captions, and double-page spreads connect individual portraits

to broader social ideals. The “cute” Pioneer, drawing on kitsch traditions, merges aesthetic appeal with ideological messaging.

The penultimate chapter presents GDR children’s literature as a tool for military education during the Cold War. Picturebooks and photobooks introduced children to the NVA (National People’s Army), Soviet forces, and concepts of national defence, portraying soldiers as friendly, skilled, and heroic. Early military education began in kindergartens, Pioneer camps, and schools, and combined peace rhetoric, comradeship, and fascination with technology. Books like *Kleiner Bruder Staunemann* (1966) and *Panzer vorwärts* (1964) mix narrative, photography, and technical instruction to create positive impressions of soldiering. Factual details of equipment and drills were framed to engage children without revealing war’s brutal realities, and in such a way fostered loyalty, readiness to defend the GDR, and militarised socialist values.

Chapter 12 concludes by examining how East German (GDR) picturebooks reflect and enact literary change, using theoretical frameworks such as Benjamin Gittel’s model of evolving text types. It examines how ideological, social, and aesthetic transformations in the GDR shaped children’s literature from early Socialist Realism focused on reconstruction and education toward later forms emphasising emotion, fantasy, and visual “cuteness”. The author reviews multiple explanatory models of literary change (causal, intentional, functional, teleological, and structural) and argues that none alone suffices but together illuminate how GDR picturebooks balanced political function with artistic development, eventually revealing a softening of ideology and an increasing turn toward emotional and imaginative expression.

Across its twelve chapters, Jörg Meibauer’s book demonstrates how GDR picturebooks embodied the tension between ideological function and artistic experimentation. Through changing styles, subjects, and emotional tones, ranging from Socialist Realism to playful modernism, the works reveal both the state’s pedagogical ambitions and the artists’ capacity for innovation. In recognising picturebooks as vital expressions of visual culture, the study reclaims them as significant contributions to twentieth-century art and education, showing that even under political constraint, they cultivated aesthetic sensitivity and a distinctive socialist modernity.

A Literary Symbiosis That (Strangely) Works

Dana E. Lawrence, Amy L. Montz, eds. 2020. *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. 246 pp. ISBN 978-150-136-179-1

Vilda Kiaunytė

Is classical literature still relevant? Should Shakespeare’s works continue to be taught in educational institutions? *Adaptation in Young Adult Novels: Critically Engaging Past and Present* offers thought-provoking answers to these pressing questions. Across fifteen chapters, the contributors argue that while classical literature remains significant, greater critical attention should be directed toward adaptations of canonical works. Such adaptations