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The Impact of Political and Cultural Changes in the European Landscape of the 20th and 21st Centuries on Children's and Young Adult Literature

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Abstract:

This review article discusses *Political Changes and Transformations in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Children's Literature*, edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Farriba Schulz (2023). The volume aims to consolidate international, interdisciplinary discourse on how political and cultural shifts in the European political landscape of the 20th and 21st centuries have influenced children's and young adult literature. The author of the article provides a critical overview of the volume's 17 contributions.

Key words:

child citizen, identity, ideology, migration, political issues, war

Wpływ przemian w europejskim krajobrazie polityczno-kulturowym XX i XXI wieku na literaturę dziecięcą i młodzieżową

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Abstrakt:

Niniejszy artykuł recenzyjny omawia monografię *Political Changes and Transformations in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Children's Literature* [Zmiany i trans-

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formacje polityczne w literaturze dziecięcej XX i XXI wieku] pod redakcją Bettiny Kümmerling-Meibauer i Farriby Schulz (2023). Tom ma na celu zintegrowanie międzynarodowego, interdyscyplinarnego dyskursu na temat wpływu przemian polityczno-kulturowych na literaturę dziecięcą i młodzieżową w europejskim krajobrazie XX i XXI wieku. Autorka artykułu prezentuje krytyczny przegląd 17 rozdziałów tomu.

Słowa kluczowe:
dziecięcy obywatel, tożsamość, ideologia, migracja, kwestie polityczne, wojna

Global political and economic changes bring about rapid social developments and are often associated with traumatic experiences, such as war, poverty, forced displacement, migration and asylum-seeking, identity loss, social elimination, and even death. Texts addressing political upheavals, economic downturns, wars, and expatriation – along with their consequences – whether written by witnesses or survivors, or by authors seeking to reconfigure a secondary collective memory for readers, may themselves be imbued with political ideologies.

Although children's and young adult literature has always been linked to social and political issues, such events have not always been truthfully represented in books for young readers. The tendency to omit or mitigate these contexts has been particularly noticeable during times of crisis, such as wars, political turmoil, and economic meltdowns. The reasons for such distortions can be found in the ideological attitudes, personal experiences, and background of authors and illustrators, as well as in the socio-political contexts and national narratives of their countries. Additionally, the abiding Romantic myth of innocence for and in childhood (Rose, 1984) has traditionally led adult authors, publishers, and educators to avoid addressing political and traumatic issues in children's books, believing that this would protect children from emotional traumas or prevent their cognitive capacities from overstraining (Minslow, 2017; von Wietersheim, 2019). When authors and illustrators did raise political issues in their books, they often either implicitly imposed their ideological, political, and ethnic beliefs on their immature readers, or sought to prepare children to navigate and understand the world (Shavit, 2005, p. 294).

The way national ideologies, political upheavals, and their socio-historical implications are reflected or omitted in books for young people is a serious concern for researchers in children's and young adult literature. Equally important are the effects of political changes, historical conditions, and social contexts on vernacular literary production, as well as the potential

impact of politically themed books on young people. These issues are addressed in *Political Changes and Transformations in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Children's Literature*, edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Farriba Schulz (2023a), which aims to consolidate international interdisciplinary discourse on how political and cultural shifts in the European political landscape of the 20th and 21st centuries have influenced children's and young adult literature. Building on prior international scholarship that has opened new research avenues into Europe's political transformations – such as Mitzi Myers' (2000) article "Storying War," Margaret Higonnet's (2008) chapter "Picturing Trauma in the Great War," Mary Tomsic's (2018) article "The Politics of Picture Books: Stories of Displaced Children in Twenty-First-Century Australia," and Philip Nel's (2018) introduction to the special issue of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* on displacement, "Migration, Refugees, and Diaspora in Children's Literature" – this volume examines representations of war, political conflict, and migration.

The authors of the essays explore concepts of nation and nationalism in literature for young readers and reflect on the role of memory in children's and young adult literature, particularly in relation to trauma studies. The contributors, including established children's literature scholars and emerging researchers from Montenegro, Croatia, Portugal, Poland, the UK, Norway, Germany, Russia, Greece, the US, and Ireland, analyse the political, poetic, and reception aspects of children's and young adult literary texts from their cultural and theoretical perspectives. They aim to capture how politics, ideology, memory, and identity are expressed in various forms of political children's literature and to determine the extent to which these elements shape the individual, historical, and political consciousness of children, whom the editors describe as "the next generation of decision-makers," "whose influence on the shaping of world politics should not be under-estimated" (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Schulz, 2023b, p. 10).

The volume is divided into five thematic parts, each comprising three to four chapters. Part 1, "Nation Building and the Idea of the Child Citizen," focuses on the concept of nation-building in post-war Europe and on events such as the creation of new nation states, the redrawing of borders, and the foundation of new political systems, all of which prompted revisions of the child's image as a citizen. In her chapter "The Changing Conception of the Child Citizen in Montenegrin Novels for Children," Svetlana Kalezić Radonjić (2023) explores Montenegrin children's and young adult literature. In her longitudinal analysis of five Montenegrin novel subgenres (fantasy, war novels, childhood-centred novels, animal-themed novels, and adventure novels) produced between 1953

and 2019, she highlights that the first work intended for child readers in Montenegro by a Montenegrin author appeared in 1953, explaining that the reasons behind the belated appearance of such writings were mainly political, as Montenegro's postwar historical and cultural evolution was intricately tied to the development of Yugoslavia. Radonjić connects the concept of citizenship with social responsibility and children's literature and discusses the role of school curricula and literary publishing in socialist and communist societies as formative of young people's ideology, revealing Montenegrin writers' efforts to construct the image of the child as a means of instilling social responsibility in their young readers. This objective was especially pursued when Montenegro was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but it also continued after Yugoslavia's dissolution. Radonjić's conclusions are thought-provoking and encourage further research, elucidating how Yugoslavia's breakup affected Montenegrin curricula as well as children's and young adult literature, how the characterisation of children evolved in this context, and what sparked the return of the "naive depoliticized narrative" (p. 48) of the innocent child in transitional, conservative societies like Montenegro.

In her essay "Storyworld Transformations in Mid-20th-Century Croatian Picturebooks," Smiljana Narančić Kovač (2023) examines how narrative meanings and broader implications evolve in response to shifting sociopolitical circumstances. Her starting point is the observation that children's picturebooks inevitably impose ideologies on their readers, as ideology is inherent in the very language and images from which picturebooks are made. Drawing on Marie-Laure Ryan's (2004) idea of the storyworld, Kovač (2023) examines the most prominent storyworld elements in twenty-five Croatian picturebooks across three periods: (1) from 1919 to 1940, (2) from 1941 to 1945, and (3) from 1945 to 1953. The author provides a brief overview of Croatia's prevailing political setting in each period and demonstrates how changing ideological and cultural norms influenced the selection and presentation of storyworld elements in children's picturebooks, proving that children were a key target group for propaganda and agitation in Croatia. In her compelling conclusions, Kovač argues that while the storyworlds in pre-war Croatian picturebooks conveyed "the feeling of stability and belonging" (p. 63), connecting childhood with freedom and portraying adults as powerless, post-war picturebooks (1945–1953) adopted a more idyllic tone. In these works, children were not encouraged to stand up for themselves, the war was ignored, and social stability was presented as the primary goal. The author also connects post-war political turbulence and the suppression of dissident political and ideological beliefs among many Croatians to a preference for certain literary genres, as well as to political censorship and

propaganda in Croatian children's picturebooks. Tellingly, she aptly describes these storyworlds as dystopian manifestations of the communist ideology.

In her chapter titled "Children's Literature and the Portuguese Colonial Empire (1925–1940)," Maria Teresa Cortez (2023) examines Portuguese colonial policies, including the overseas Empire's direct control over the African economy and political administration, the Portuguese military dictatorship, and the Civilising Mission in Colonial Guinea-Bissau. Subsequently, she then explains how these factors impacted Portuguese children's literature, which was considered "an excellent means of propaganda, which greatly contributed to fostering interest in colonial issues especially among young people" (p. 85). Having described how schools and cultural events (such as colonial literature competitions) were used to disseminate political ideology and agenda, Cortez offers a comparative analysis of four children's novels written by Portuguese authors between 1925 and 1940, each rooted in the political context of the Portuguese Colonial Empire during the dictatorship. Cortez employs interdiscursive analysis to highlight the interwovenness of literary, political, and educational discourses within each novel, which deal with the Colonial and Salazar Eras. Attentive to their authors' gender and ideological backgrounds, she traces how this interwovenness shapes the narrators' voice, characters' behaviour, and cultural differences, such as depicting Europeans as intellectually and culturally superior to Africans or implying that Portuguese colonial policies promoted Africa's progress. Cortez also examines whether and how the authors' different involvements with the regime translated into distinct portrayals of the Portuguese Empire, the colonisers, and the colonised.

According to Cortez's (2023) findings, this interdiscursive alliance between non-historical colonial children's fiction and official colonial discourse began to disperse in the 1950s, amid the broader international context of decolonisation. This claim is supported by Sara Reis da Silva (2023) in the chapter titled "Discourses of Identity in Portuguese Children's Literature: Shifts and Persistence." Recognising that children's literature can shape a nation's self-images and that Portuguese children's literature "has provided ample spaces for different ways of writing history" (p. 101), while also serving as a significant tool of ideological propaganda under Salazar's dictatorship, da Silva chose to analyse two historical narratives for children. Her selected texts include a narrative poem from 1931, deeply rooted in the values of the Salazarian regime, and a prose narrative from 2008, written by a democratically minded author. As both authors employed a hybrid mixture of fiction and nonfiction, da Silva examines the peritextual information, the image-text relationship, as well as the composition, style, language of the texts, and the narrative voices, to reveal

how Portugal has been represented within the frameworks of dictatorship and democracy. She also outlines the changes and continuities in identity discourse within Portuguese children's literature, concluding that while certain key themes serve as unifying myths reinforcing elements of Portuguese identity in both texts, the treatment of Portugal's historical past varies, reflecting the authors' differing pedagogical, political, ideological, and aesthetic perspectives.

Part 2 of the volume, "Dreadful War Experiences: World War II and the Impact of the Cold War," focuses on the trauma of war and its profound effects on the population, foregrounding children as victims and vulnerable bystanders. In "Make Peace, Not (the Trojan) War: Transformation and Continuity in the Mirror of the Myth of Troy – with a Focus on Polish Children's Literature," Katarzyna Marciniak (2023) shares her concerns and hopes regarding the role of children's literature in instilling universal and timeless values in children, enabling them to grow up and apply these values to live in peace. The starting point of her argument is the notion that ancient Greek myths, as timeless works adaptable to the changing needs of societies worldwide, foster reflection on transformation and continuity. With their universal cultural and moral values and concepts, such as honesty, love, empathy, reconciliation, respect for the environment, and devotion to family and country, myths serve as a means for adults to introduce critical issues to children. Likewise, the coded and symbolic language of myths allows authors to guide young readers through the process of identity-building and learning about the world.

Building on the observation that many Polish writers have long drawn parallels between the fates of the Trojans and the Poles, both longing for their homeland, and reflecting that "still today our world looks at itself in the mirror of the Trojan myth" (Marciniak, 2023, p. 133), the author examines the Trojan myth's paradoxical potential and proposes a comparative study of its contemporary reception in children's literature. She selects Polish children's and young adult books, examining the ideological backgrounds and narrative techniques of their authors to demonstrate how, driven by their personal experiences and memories of the World Wars, they depict war as a universal disaster by juxtaposing Trojan mythological characters and episodes with Polish historical figures and events. This practice invites readers to reflect on whether, and to what extent, societies have evolved since the Trojan war, what needs reform, and what is worth preserving.

In "When Rabbits Get Scared: Exploring a Cognitively Challenging Picturebook on War," Åse Marie Ommundsen and Gro Marie Stavem (2023) argue that children's picturebooks are an important tool to help young readers navigate the challenges of today's humanitarian emergencies. With this idea

in mind, they discuss a Norwegian/Danish picturebook about war, whose verbal and pictorial narrative focuses on traumatic events such as warfare, bombing, starvation, mutilation, and the loss of a loved one, all seen from a child's perspective. Ommundsen and Stavem demonstrate that the book incorporates a broad range of thematic, cognitive, and aesthetic challenges alongside educational affordances, pondering whether it can be considered 'challenging,' meaning that it invites readers to think critically and interpret the relationship between text and image. Additionally, the authors explore how the book fosters emotional and critical literacy, assessing whether it encourages children to become responsible citizens who make informed decisions about power and control while considering their own and others' feelings, ideas, and intentions.

Ommundsen and Stavem (2023) address these issues by first referencing scholars' definitions of challenging picturebooks, as well as emotional and critical literacy. They then offer a literature review on methods for improving children's emotional literacy and critical thinking. By analysing the peritext, colour symbolisms, allegorical devices, and narrative techniques of the selected book, the authors illustrate how the writer and illustrator cultivate readers' narrative imagination, encouraging reflection on life in a war zone and raising political issues. Their observations on recurring patterns in war-themed picturebooks, the ways images counterbalance the harsh truths revealed by the text (and vice versa), and the benefits and deeper understanding children can gain from reading such works are particularly pertinent.

As Victoria de Rijke (2023) notes, throughout the 20th century, the major demands of victims of totalitarian and repressive governments found expression in movements to reclaim memory. In "Hidden in Plain Sight: Explorations of the Cold War in Selected Picturebooks," de Rijke (2023, p. 174) draws on Jacques Derrida's (1972/1981) concepts of memory and absence to argue that memory "has holes in it" (p. 111) "before we come to write it up or picture it" (de Rijke, 2023, p. 174), and to assert that while hypomnesia is not memory itself, it undeniably influences our recollection. Building on these insights and acknowledging that forgetting has been used as a political strategy by democratic governments, she focuses on picturebooks that use abstract expressionism to visually depict the Cold War era, a period we typically associated with "walls, espionage, arms and space races whereas a cultural war was going on" (p. 174) as well. She compares books published in the 1980s with selected picturebooks produced between 2002 and 2014 to understand how each corpus represents the conditions and effects of the Cold War and to assess whether contemporary authors and illustrators of historical narratives for children can authentically portray this period, despite not having experienced it firsthand.

De Rijke (2023) interprets the choices of themes, colours, designs, and materials in her sample of works, decoding their underlying ideology and linking it to the backgrounds of the writers and illustrators. She identifies and analyses their postmodern narrative techniques, concluding that recent books adopt a more emotional, nostalgic, and reflective attitude. The author offers insightful explanations for why some works from the 1980s directly confront the challenges and horrors of war, while others reveal that "nostalgia has blotted out the horrors of war" (p. 166). With concern, she links this nostalgic glossing over of violence to shifting political ideologies and transformed conceptions of childhood. Additionally, the author speculates that such approaches may serve to absolve adults of responsibility.

In "Translations' Publishers and Censors: Transformations of Western Children's and Young Adult Literature in People's Poland under Stalinism (1945–1956)," Katarzyna Biernacka-Licznar and Natalia Paprocka (2023) recount a significant shift in the direction of literature imports for children and young adults in Poland under Stalinist rule (1948–1956). They depict the influence of the new political landscape on the selection of literature from behind the Iron Curtain for translation and discuss the censorship of children's books imposed by the Polish state and state-owned publishing houses. During this period, the communist Polish United Workers' Party used literature as "a guarantor of the prevailing political system, a weapon of class struggle, a collective agitator, a propagandist and an organizer of the masses" (p. 181). Polish children's literature, as Biernacka-Licznar and Paprocka note, came under strict control, especially after socialist realism was proclaimed the country's official literary programme. Since children were seen as the future builders of socialism, literature addressed to them had to be optimistic and pacifist, inspire love for the socialist homeland, harshly condemn its "internal enemies" and spread "anticlericalism, secularism, atheism, formation of a scientific vision of the world" (p. 187).

Biernacka-Licznar and Paprocka (2023) report on the activities of both full-time censors, who operated throughout Poland, as well as translators and scholars known as contract censors. They support their argument with prior research on translated children's and young adult literature published in Poland, registers of children's books ordered to be withdrawn from circulation, reviews of Western children's books by censors of the Central Office for the Control of the Press, Publications and Performances, and prefaces to books that offered interpretive guidelines aligned with the state's official ideology. To illustrate how the ruling party's interests and ideological dogmas impacted the selection of Western literature for translation, and how its final form

was negotiated by publishers and institutional censorship in Stalinist Poland, Biernacka-Licznar and Paprocka cite statistics on the origins of Polish translations for children during the Stalinist period and enumerate the methods used by Polish authorities to eliminate independent private and Catholic publishing houses. They also specify what was valued and denounced in children's books by those who evaluated them and describe the conditions under which controversial foreign books were reissued in Poland.

The significance of memory and its influence on narrative strategies in children's literature are at the core of Part 3, "Practices of (Post-)Memory." In her chapter, "'Untying the Knots' of the Past: The Representation of Traumatic Events of Soviet History in Contemporary Russian Young Adult Literature," Olga Mikhaylova (2023) points out that post-1940s Russian children's literature rarely addressed child survivors' psychological trauma or posttraumatic stress disorder; instead, it often portrayed children as emblematic heroic figures. She observes that this portrayal has compelled contemporary writers for young readers to renegotiate Russia's past and narrativise events differently, especially those previously omitted or viewed by critics and readers as collective, rather than individual, traumatic experiences. In her analysis of the recent tendency to explore the past through depictions of personal traumas and reflections, Mikhaylova examines the treatment of exile trauma in two short novels for young adults, written by two prominent contemporary Russian writers in 2014 and 2017. Both works exhibit features of the so-called traumatic narrative, centring on the experiences of their adolescent female protagonists who confront the horrors of war and exile in Soviet Russia. Their identification as ethnic and ideological Others, coupled with their exposure to various forms of social injustice, demonstrates how human personalities are shaped by historical pressures and resistance to them.

Mikhaylova (2023) explores the portrayal of the child as the Other against the backdrop of tragic episodes in contemporary Russian young adult literature, examining the literary means and nonfiction devices that help Russian writers create truthful and realistic accounts of traumatic events. Mikhaylova discusses the literary features and poetics of impressions in trauma narratives, tracing them in her selected books to demonstrate how they intertwine collective traumatic historical experiences with personal or familial ones. She also reviews the methods writers use to reveal the moral foundations of human relationships under traumatic historical circumstances, underscoring the essential continuity of human experience over time. The selected works, which revisit a tragic period in Soviet history, emphasise human dignity, feature ordinary young characters, and revolve around a moral and ethical narrative axis,

highlighting resilience in the face of traumatic conditions. Drawing on themes explored by other Russian authors in books from 1959 and 1995, which address stolen childhoods, premature adulthood in wartime, and Otherness shaped by trauma, Mikhaylova briefly examines the settings, themes, characters, narrative structures, and paratexts of these earlier works to support her argument about how children's recovery from trauma was conceptualised in the past.

In "Childhood Engaged: Polish Subjective Literary Narratives in the Face of History and Politics," Dorota Michułka (2023) explores contemporary Polish historical novels for children and young adults, with a particular focus on family stories and narratives that evoke images of the past. She argues that such narratives function as vehicles of cultural and social memory, playing an important role in historical education for young readers. This function stems from their ability to engage readers by prompting them to confront the difficult past and reflect on its relevance to the present. Besides, these novels serve as useful tools for developing children's and young adults' social skills and nurturing their existential and ethical attitudes. Michułka contends that the books set within specific socio-political and historical contexts offer an effective means both for recalling the past and assessing the extent to which political and social transformations have influenced the representation of childhood. To support her argument, she analyses two Polish historical novels for young adults, published in 1987 and 2018, respectively.

Both novels can be considered engaged literature and exemplify the literary genre of the family story, which, according to Michułka (2023, p. 229), "creates a platform for discussion between readers of all ages, provoking intergenerational dialogues" and aligns with the discourse of participatory culture. Michułka underlines that, at the turn of the millennium – a period marked by a major political breakthrough, the abolition of censorship, as well as the emergence of a new reality and social consciousness – the myth and topos of childhood as "an image of human fate" resurfaced in Polish literature (p. 216), serving as an element that helped maintain balance amid changing realities. Consequently, this unique historical moment shapes the interpretation of both novels, which employ sophisticated narrative strategies – such as frame stories and embedded micro-histories – to create a psychological and poetic narrative that evokes nostalgia for a bygone everyday childhood. Revisiting the past, the young protagonists mythologise it while simultaneously seeking the objective truth. Everyday details are integrated into broader political and socio-cultural contexts, with the action set in real locations, helping to situate the events in actual historical developments and support the historical verisimilitude of the episodes.

In their chapter titled "The Ideological (Mis)Use of the Greek Civil War and Politics in Contemporary Greek Young Adult Literature," Vassiliki Vassiloudi and Anastasia Economidou (2023) highlight the lack of scholarly consensus on historical fiction, with researchers debating its definition, typology, veracity, authenticity, and accuracy. They also question its legitimacy as a tool for historical education, its place in the social studies curriculum, and its role in shaping readers' ideology and historical consciousness. Vassiloudi and Economidou argue that fiction can serve as a middle ground between official and personal memory, offering a restorative outlet for histories marginalised due to political stakes or aiming to shield child readers from trauma. In their proposed typology, fiction that uses history as a starting point to tell a story differs from fiction based on textbook-like historical discourse and from semi-fictional works that incorporate some of the resources historians use to reconstruct the past. The authors also report that, in the aftermath of the two World Wars, young adult historical fiction writers pursued different objectives. Rather than emphasising national grandeur and homogeneity, they began to craft narratives that support the present and cultivate moral values among their readers.

Building on this perspective, Vassiloudi and Economidou (2023) examine five young adult historical novels published between 1983 and 2011, a period of democratic restoration in Greece when attempts were made across the political spectrum to restore national unity and overcome the polarisation caused by the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), a controversial event in the Greek national narrative. They briefly contextualise the historical setting of the books, categorise them according to their proposed typology of historical fiction, and emphasise that the timing of their publication is key to understanding the political connotations and the depiction of the civil conflict. Specifically, Vassiloudi and Economidou argue that the perception of the historical past in these novels aligns with the political and cultural demands of their time. The authors of the novels did not aim to represent the past as it was but rather as it should be interpreted by young adults. This treatment of historical material was shaped by their political beliefs, their efforts to take the edges off the civil conflict in the interest of national unity in the post-civil war era, and their intention to present contemporary readers with more positive models of behaviour, providing lessons in humanity, morality, and solidarity. Vassiloudi and Economidou substantiate their insights by discussing the literary portrayal of adolescent characters, narrative techniques, peritextual elements, and diction, noting how readers are invited to engage with historical truth despite their temporal distance and lack of direct experience with the depicted

past. In a self-reflective gesture, the authors also explore the factors behind their own political positioning.

Part 4, "Migration and Transnationalism," examines how migration movements shape the evolving notions of national identity. Discussions on this topic are widespread, with some calling for a revival of national virtues, while others propose innovative approaches to address this global challenge and champion transnationalism. In "The Entanglements of Polish Past and Canadian Present in Heather Kirk's *A Drop of Rain* (2004)," Mateusz Świetlicki (2023) focuses on Heather Kirk's second Polish-themed young adult novel, published in 2004, which explores the experiences of Polish Canadians in the early 2000s. The book depicts various forms of structural oppression in Canadian society, captures what it meant to be Slavic in Canada after World War Two, addresses the Holocaust, combining it with other difficult histories, and enables readers to "witness how History, directly or indirectly, influences present day reality" (p. 254).

In his textual analysis, theoretically underpinned by memory studies, particularly Michael Rothberg's (2009) concept of multidirectional memory, Świetlicki (2023) demonstrates how Kirk intertwines the complex past and present of Poland and Canada, highlighting their unexpected entanglements. Considering Kirk's ideology and the socio-political climate at the time of the book's publication, he interprets the author's choices and exaggerations, including the role of Christianity in Poland, the part Poles played in rescuing Jews during World War Two, and the notion of Poland being chosen by God to suffer for others, "particularly its oppressive neighbors" (p. 262). Świetlicki also addresses the novel's problematic aspects, such as its equation of Nazism with Communism and capitalism, the blending of various forms of victimisation, historical inaccuracies that challenge its status as historical fiction, and the adolescent protagonist's failure to come of age properly, which is at odds with the conventions of the genre.

In "Ninety Miles from Havana: Exile and Heritage in Cuban American Children's Literature," Kenneth Kidd (2023) briefly outlines Cuba's political history and its impact on children's literature, concluding that during the period when Cuba was a Spanish colonial possession until 1898, Cuban "children's literature was largely colonial, a Spanish-language project drawing on indigenous folklore and storytelling traditions" (p. 276). He notes that Cubans have long emphasised the importance of children's literature to Cuban sovereignty, describing their 19th-century efforts to promote it as a model for cosmopolitan citizenship and identity formation in the Americas. Kidd also describes the complex political and social relationship between the US and Cuba, including the reasons behind the long-standing patterns of migration and cultural

exchange between the two countries. He examines how this relationship has shaped both Cuban and Cuban American children's literature, explaining that the 1959 Revolution revitalised and reoriented Cuban children's literature, which sought to promote Cuba as an independent nation. While Cuban children's literature concentrates on Cuban themes and people, Cuban American children's literature is largely an effect of the Revolution and large-scale migrations from Cuba to the US, remaining deeply preoccupied with their fallout.

With a focus on the potential transcultural study of Cuban American children's literature, the author extends Isabel Borland's (1998) idea of Cuban American literature as "a literature of exile" to Cuban American children's literature from 1990 to the present (Kidd p. 274). He also draws on Ann Gonzalez's (2018) discussion of how Latin American children's literature has struggled with the logic of coloniality, at once affirming and contesting the assumptions of racial and cultural superiority. Kidd (2023) examines how Cuban American children's literature can be analysed transculturally, presenting the competing ideologies and commitments of Cubans who emigrated to the US in the wake of Fidel Castro's rise to power and the Revolution, and how these are reflected in Cuban American children's texts. He further distinguishes two broad categories of Cuban American literary production for children: (1) children's books within the exile narrative tradition, including memoirs and fictionalised versions of such accounts, and (2) heritage literature, that is, stories with metafictional leanings, where protagonist try to maintain their Cuban identity while navigating Americanisation. Kidd's analysis of representative works from each category reveals interesting conclusions about the ideological purposes of the two categories, the attitudes of Cuban Americans, including writers, toward the political values, aims, and ideology of the United States, as well as the achievements of the Revolution in conjunction with the potential for transnational literary dialogue.

In "Nostalgia and Empathy in Greek Picturebooks about Refugees," Angela Yannicopoulou (2023) explores the verbal and visual narratives in Greek picturebooks that address refugee themes. These works span from depictions of Greek refugees (chiefly those displaced from Smyrna after the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe, a contentious episode in Greek history) to portrayals of post-2015 refugees from the Middle East. The author points out that these picturebooks tend to avoid deeply engaging with the harsh events or the political contexts underlying refugee crises. Reductive in their treatment of the war context, these publications usually reflect refugees' perilous journeys, the difficulties they face in their adopted countries, and their painful longing for their homeland. Yannicopoulou examines why nostalgia and empathy

for the expatriates' predicaments emerge as core concepts in her picturebook sample. She offers an extensive analysis of the origins and ideological implications of these concepts, questioning whether the identities of authors and readers might influence the way these central themes are handled. Additionally, Yannicopoulou investigates how nostalgia is evoked and symbolised through intertextuality and interpictoriality, as well as how it contributes to the construction of a diasporic identity.

According to Yannicopoulou's analysis (2023), the picturebooks about Greek refugees, some of which were written by second-generation refugees, are deeply imbued with nostalgia for a lost home, a pivotal concept in their narratives. With the Greekness of Asia Minor reasserted through both illustrations and text, the refugees' fundamental identity is shaped by the geographical and cultural elements of their lost "glorified homelands" in Asia Minor (p. 294). Regarding the picturebooks that depict refugees as the Other, Yannicopoulou contends that while such works evoke empathy from readers, their authors – who have not experienced migration – and their intended non-refugee audiences contribute to a clear-cut distinction between the displaced and the non-displaced. She asserts that these publications contribute to the objectification of Middle Eastern refugees as outsiders and that the literary devices and nonverbal techniques employed in these books ultimately undermine their identity.

In Part 5, "Pursuing a Sociopolitical Agenda: Empowerment Through Narratives," the discussion revolves around the notion that narratives with political themes can empower child readers when aligned with a specific sociopolitical agenda. In "Tyrants, Dictators, and Sovereigns in Greek Children's Literature: The Case of a Greek Political Fairy Tale," Tzina Kalogirou and Myrsini Vlassopoulou (2023) examine a range of literary and visual texts that deal with modern Greek political history, discussing how myth, history, and politics intersect within these works and exploring the portrayal of tyrants, dictators, and sovereigns. Interestingly, the authors made these works part of their teaching project, arguing that literature can empower individuals to resist oppressive social and political systems – a perspective deeply rooted in Greek culture and its spirit of resistance sustained by the Greek people (and writers) from the Byzantine Empire through the two World Wars to the Junta period (1967–1974). According to the authors, Greek children's literature embodies this ethos, advocating consistently for the struggle for emancipation and highlighting the active role of youngsters as agents of freedom within society.

In their educational work, Kalogirou and Vlassopoulou (2023) attempted to encourage children to critically interpret literary texts and their accompanying images. They investigated how young readers perceived and understood

concepts such as exploitation, power, and oppression, how they responded to literary representations of these issues, and what connections they could draw between fictional and real-world oppression in contemporary societies. This formed the gist of a teaching project they launched in a Greek primary school, using a 2019 allegorical Greek fairy tale preoccupied with totalitarian regimes and the tyrant as a timeless archetype. The authors outline the project's theoretical framework, describe their teaching methods (e.g., creative and critical writing, along with creating visual and multimodal resources as forms of 'protest' against oppression), and set their primary goal as helping children identify the five facets of oppression depicted in the book while recognising literary writing as a powerful tool for subverting dictatorships.

In "Rebel Girls and Trailblazers: Women's Collective Biographies and Strategies of Meaning-Making," Hadassah Stichnothe (2023) argues that writing about women's lives is not only a political practice, but also a medium for conveying specific political notions and ideologies. Focusing on contemporary women's collective (or collected) biographies, Stichnothe defines the genre, examines its types and textual strategies, traces its history, and highlights key milestones in its development. She argues that while such texts may express different political positions, their common aim is to provide children and their adult co-readers with images of female role models. These figures are always selected within a specific socio-political context and, as Stichnothe notes, tend to be heroised in such works. Drawing on other scholars' typologies of historical collective biographies, she categorises these texts based on their functional aims and discusses their customary structural, narrative, and visual strategies. Shifting her focus to women's collective biographies and trends observable in such writings, the author analyses their ideological strategies of meaning-making, internal organisation, and effect on the perception of their subjects.

Stichnothe (2023) observes that collective biographies tend to omit women who are famous primarily for their relationships with men and that certain nationalities, occupations (e.g., children's literature authors), races, sexual preferences, and political ideologies are underrepresented in them. In her view, the neglect of women's political agendas is "demeaning" (p. 346) and problematic. Stichnothe also points to the frictions at the intersection of fiction and factual writing, where these biographies are situated, and provides insightful comments on how these works reclaim a literary discourse traditionally coded as 'male.' By forging a female community between the narrator and the narratee, these biographies a shared bond over women's life stories and their implications for the future.

In "Icarus' Fall as Suicide: The Icarus Myth Exploring Bullying and Mental Health in Children's and YA Fiction," Owen Hodkinson (2023) investigates the Icarus myth and his "rise and fall" as a recurring theme in 20th- and 21st-century English children's and young adult literature and explains why the authors of several retellings have chosen to portray Icarus-like figures as outsiders, marginalised, or bullied by peers for their differences. Hodkinson briefly outlines the components of the Icarian myth that are typically omitted in adaptations for younger audiences, stating that these retellings help children learn about the society they will inhabit as adults, including its institutions and broader political landscape. He then discusses two contemporary novels (published in 1984 and 2016, respectively) that adapt the short myth of Icarus, altering some of its key details to address psychological struggles. These books explore the mental health problems caused by childhood trauma, further exacerbated by societal mistreatment of those who are different. They are also educational, raising awareness of how adult politics affects not only the lives of parents but also their children. With narrative techniques that "tend to increase the impression of Icarus as an outsider" (p. 355), the novels suggest two possible in-group responses to outsiders and provide implicit lessons about bullying and destigmatising mental health problems. Having analysed the plots, characters, narrative techniques, and ideologies of the novels, Hodkinson argues that the young adult novel from 1984 marks a cultural shift toward greater openness and honesty in addressing trauma, bullying, mental health, and suicide in young adult literature, with the later novel being read as a retelling of its predecessor. Hodkinson surveys the similarities and differences between the two works and discusses their psychological interplay with the Icarian myth, offering insightful observations on how individuals with mental health problems (like the protagonists) and society use ancient Greek myths.

"More Lateral Than Didactic – Unobvious Controversials in the Poetics for Children of George Saunders and Matthew Sweeney Explored Through a Freirean Lens," the final contribution in the volume, was penned by Jones Irwin (2023), who advocates for the transformative potential of children's literature to shape readers' political and moral beliefs. This idea stems from Irwin's view of children's poetry as a site where poetry, art, politics, and education clash, with the very conception of children's literature at stake in this conflict. The author complains that narrow educational concerns, entangled in performance- and testing-based literacy education policies in Europe and elsewhere, have recently eclipsed a more comprehensive, Freirean vision of predominantly aesthetic and existential literacy. This trend, he contends, has fueled ideological divides in education departments.

In the Irish context, Irwin (2023) identifies a robust and more challenging existential-pedagogical and political paradigm of literacy that serves as an iconoclastic counterpoint to the increasingly reductionist literacy programmes embraced in education. Subscribing to Paulo Freire's approach to literacy and pedagogy, which can produce "a total change in society" (p. 372), Irwin explores the potential for existential literacy and performativity in children's poetry and literature that is "more lateral than didactic," highlighting its capacity to foster a socio-political critique of ideology. The author of the chapter looks at the ironic and surrealist poetry of Matthew Sweeney, who bridged the child/adult divide with his works, alongside George Saunders, whose fables engage both children and adults. Irwin argues that both Saunders and Sweeney introduce controversial topics in an "unobvious" way, seeking to bring about a reversal of power dynamics in children's literature. Specifically, their works aspire to subvert the notion that children's literature is "incapable of seriousness or of deploying a political critique of its own" (p. 375) while maintaining a strong ethical vision. He concludes that their verse and narratives encourage a deeper understanding of literature by shaping complex political messages that challenge both children and adults, thus promoting a critical engagement with literature.

The ways in which political issues are addressed in children's and young adult books – whose influence on world politics should not be underestimated – are of prime interest in the study of children's and young adult literature. *Political Changes and Transformations in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Children's Literature,* edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Farriba Schulz, explores various forms of political children's literature, examining their presentation of political topics to a young readership, their impact on recipients, and the political knowledge they impart from both historical and contemporary perspectives. This volume has broad appeal and immediate relevance, filling a significant gap in international children's literature studies. By crossing geographical and disciplinary boundaries, the contributors provide a dense and valuable examination of an under-researched field. Equally importantly, they encourage other scholars of children's literature to pursue this line of research, thereby advancing and consolidating the international interdisciplinary discourse on children's and young adult literature. Hence, in conclusion, I recommend this volume as an excellent resource to consult when investigating how socio-political shifts have shaped literature for young readers.

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