

Reading the Holocaust Through Picturebooks:
Analysis of *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop's* visual storytelling¹
In Memoriam Francesco Tirelli (1898-1954)

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Abstract

This paper offers a focused analysis of the picturebook *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* by Tamar Meir (b. 1976) illustrated by Yael Albert (b. 1984) and explores how its illustrations and narrative structure introduce Holocaust history to children. Through a detailed page-by-page analysis, I focus on several key aspects such as historical accuracy, a child-centered perspective, horizontal flipping in translations, the use of static visual elements, and how movement is represented throughout the story. Set in Budapest, the illustrations combine historical authenticity with appealing storytelling, making the story accessible and meaningful for children. By examining how the city, characters, and motion are visually realized, this paper illustrates how these aspects create a compelling story of resilience, and hope.

Keywords

Francesco Tirelli; pertextuality; picturebooks; visual storytelling; Yael Albert

¹ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the draft of this paper, their comments, and constructive remarks. I wish to express my appreciation to Yael Albert (illustrator) and Keter Books, an imprint of Modan Publishing House Ltd., for generously granting permission to include the illustrations in this article.



1. Holocaust picturebooks¹

In the field of historical education and remembrance, the power of visual storytelling transcends mere words, reaching deep into the emotions and collective memory of society. Holocaust picturebooks for children and young readers are considered as important reminders of the brutalities committed during one of the darkest chapters in human history. These historical fiction picturebooks make a consistent contribution to preserving the memory of both the individual and collective traumas caused by the Holocaust and they also teach younger generations to important values such as empathy, tolerance, and the need for remembrance, so that the lessons of the past are not lost. This paper investigates the importance of this non-fiction Holocaust picturebook ילריט וקס'צנרפ לש הדילגה תונה (2017, *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, 2019), exploring how it manages to convey the complexities of this tragic period and its impact on how the generations to come understand and remember the Holocaust.

Through an analysis of this picturebook, I would like to unravel the subtle, indirect, and multifaceted strategies used in *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* in addressing Holocaust, fostering a deeper understanding of the past while navigating the challenges of conveying such profound historical truths through the medium of visual (or pictorial) storytelling/narration (a process of conveying a narrative primarily through visual elements). Instead of approaching the subject in a direct or overt manner, this picturebook integrates a variety of storytelling techniques to convey the complexity of the subject [cf. Hamer, Perry, Mavis 2017, Kiefer 1995, 2008, Kress, van Leeuwen (1996) 2021, Kümmerling-Meibauer 2014, 2022, Moebius 1986, 2018, Nodelman 1988, Nikolajeva 2003, Nikolajeva, Scott 2001, Sipe 1998, 2012].

While visual/pictorial storytelling can be traced back to ancient cave paintings, the modern picturebook as we know it began just over 130 years

¹ On this category of historical fiction or nonfiction picturebooks see Papp (2023) and the works cited there.

ago. It was Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886)², a British artist and illustrator, who transformed illustrations from mere decorative elements into essential components of narrative storytelling. Maurice Sendak (1928-2012), widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in visual literature, praised Caldecott's innovative approach which has left a lasting influence on picturebook art.

Caldecott's work heralds the beginning of the modern picture book. He devised an ingenious juxtaposition of picture and word, a counter pint that never happened before. Words are left out – but the picture says it. Pictures are left out – but the words say it. In short, it is the invention of the picture book. (Sendak 1988, 21)

Bosmajian highlights the contradictory nature of Holocaust picturebooks as they do not meet the expectations of young readers, «the expectations inherent in convention and genre as well as the rudimentary skills in interpretation» (2001, 216). Picturebooks, except the so-called challenging and controversial ones (those that deal with taboo topics such as death, diseases, the atrocities of war, migration, etc., cf. Evans 2015, Neraas 2021) tend to represent – through words and images – the child's familiar world.

Nevertheless, for the sake of memory and witnessing, the medium of the picture books has been used to introduce and instruct the child about this difficult subject. (Bosmajian 2001, 216)

In my analyses I explore various aspects *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, including its historical accuracy, the portrayal of Budapest as a setting, and its child-centric approach – specifically, how the content is adapted for children, a central characteristic of Holocaust picturebooks. I focus on the phenomenon of horizontal flipping as a visual adaptation strategy (cf.

² His innovative style influenced future generations of artists and illustrators and is commemorated through the prestigious Caldecott Medal, one of the most prestigious awards in children's literature, established in 1938, which is given annually by the American Library Association to the artist of the most distinguished picturebook for children in the United States. The medal recognizes excellence in picturebook illustration, celebrating the ability of images to enhance storytelling and engage young readers. While the Caldecott Medal goes to the top winner of the year, the Caldecott Honor books represent other notable works that merit recognition.

Jüngst 2008, Rota 2008, Zanettin 2008b, 2014, Zitawi 2008), which significantly affects how the picturebook is read and interpreted. Additionally, I analyze the occurrences of pertextuality (the synergy between the visual and textual elements) in the illustrations (cf. Manco). Regarding the subtle, indirect, and multifaceted visual strategies used in *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, I pay particular attention to static visual elements such as the use of light, shadow, darkness, and color. As a natural extension of this discussion, I analyze the use of seasonal symbolism. When considering dynamic elements, such as movement, action, speed, etc.), I study how motion is visually depicted, including the directionality of movement and the representation of time passing.

The analysis is grounded in thorough research on picturebooks, including a comparative study of over 50 Holocaust-themed picturebooks, which provides a solid foundation for understanding the visual and narrative strategies employed in *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*.

2. *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*

The original Hebrew picturebook is authored by Tamar Meir and brought to life through the delicately rendered illustrations of Yael Albert³. The book was published in 2017, and according to the publisher, it is targeted at children aged 8 and above. Tamar Meir is the daughter-in-law of Yitzchak (Peter) Mayer (1927-2018, his original name in Hungary was Péter Iván György Mayer), who in the picturebook is Peter, the Jewish boy saved by Tirelli with other Jewish persons. To write the story, Tamar Meir used the memoirs of his father-in-law registered in 2008. After the war, he immigrated to Israel and became a chemistry professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (cf. Dombi 2020a, 2020b, 2021).

It is Meir's first children's book, and in 2017, it was awarded the Yad Vashem Prize and the Devorah Omer Prize for Children's Literature. It is translated into many languages and published by arrangement with the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature: in Italian by Gallucci

³ A special thank goes to Yael Albert for her kind availability and willingness to answer my questions as well as for so graciously granting permission to publish her illustrations.

(2018, translation by Cesara Buonamici and Joshua Kalman), in English by Lerner Publishing Group (2019, translation by Noga Applebaum), in Hungarian by Infopoly Alapítvány [Budapest 2020, translated from Hebrew under the guide of Erzsébet Szilágyi (professor of Hebrew) by Ben Mazza, Ráchel Oláh-Grosz, Panna Petróczy, and Benedek Zentai, students of the Javne Lauder Jewish Community Schools and of the Scheiber Sándor Jewish Elementary and High School (Budapest), with the support of Krisztina Papp-Kovács (teacher), thanks to the Infopoly Alapítvány whose curator is Gábor Dombi], in Czech by Prah (Prague 2020, translation by Lenka Bukovská) and in Russian by Knizhniki (Moscow 2020, translation by Ksenia Tserkovskaya).

In the field of picturebooks centered on the Holocaust and specifically designed for children (from 6 to 10 years old), *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* juxtaposes the comforting delight of ice cream with the theme of friendship, presenting a compelling story of courage, compassion, and resilience. The historical events are introduced – both by Tamar Meir (textual level) and Yael Albert (visual level) – to young readers with great sensitivity and an acute awareness of the subject's complexity, providing them with an opportunity to understand this challenging period in our history in a gentle yet meaningful manner.

Francesco Tirelli (1898-1954), who operates an ice cream shop in Budapest during World War II, emerges as a hidden hero as we read the story and explore the illustrations of this picturebook – that uses a whimsical and imaginative style with a child-centric approach to tell a poignant and hopeful story of bravery and compassion during the Holocaust – and discover how, after Hitler invades Hungary in 1944, he transforms the back of his shop into a refuge for his Jewish friends (including Peter, his parents Haim and Lili Golde, and 15 other Jews) seeking shelter from the horrors of persecution.

In the heart of this Hebrew picturebook, Tirelli's actions illuminate the resilience of the human spirit against the backdrop of historical darkness. The ice cream shop transforms into a clandestine shelter, where friendship transcends religious and cultural boundaries, standing as a testament to the extraordinary acts of kindness that defied the prevailing climate of hatred.

Tirelli's secret put him in danger more than once, but, despite huge risks, he never abandoned the Jewish people that he protected. For months, until the Germans were defeated, he hid Jews and assisted them in the back of his shop and in other locations throughout Budapest. A modest man, he did not speak about his acts of heroism. In 2008, his name was enshrined «Righteous Among the Nations» at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Peter, the Hungarian boy, changed his name in Yitzchak when he immigrated to Israel, built a career, had his own family, and became a leader in B'nai B'rith International (the Global Voice of the Jewish Community), one of the world's oldest and most prominent Jewish service organizations founded in 1843 in New York City by a group of German-Jewish immigrants⁴.

Central themes – that make *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* particularly suitable for children aged 6 and older and that educators may also explore in classroom settings – include heroism, bravery, compassion, friendship, and resilience. Within the story readers will see Tirelli engaged in fearless humanitarian efforts to help Jewish families of his acquaintance escape persecution: His example demonstrates how the power of individual actions, even in times of immense danger, can make a significant difference.

As a result, Tamar Meir's story sheds light on the extraordinary deeds of those very ordinary people who risked their lives to save others during the Holocaust (cf. also *Jars of hope* by Jennifer Roy and Meg Owenson, 2016; *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elvgren and Fabio Santomauro, 2014; *La portinaia Apollonia* by Lia Levi and Emanuela Orciari, 2005; etc.). After years of activity – Tirelli opened the shop in 1929 –, Francesco's ice cream shop turns into a shelter, a place of hope for the Jewish persons (children and adults) he helps during the persecution. His example demonstrates how individual acts of humanity and compassion can make a difference and inspire others to act with empathy. The story also explores moral dilemmas between self-preservation and the protection of others, and in fact, Albert shows us Francesco through a rapid sequence of images while he moves through the dangerous streets of wartime Budapest and constantly faces the

⁴ URL: <<https://www.bnaibrith.org/>> (10/2024).

risk of being discovered. The ethical choices he makes offer opportunities to reason together with young readers about what is right and what is wrong.

Lezzi already focused on the question of figurations of childhood in Holocaust picturebooks:

[F]igurations of childhood are not only found explicitly in the portrayal of mainly child protagonists in both text and illustration, but also implicitly in the ideas which the authors and illustrators apparently have of their young readers. (2009, 31)

In these books, the representation of childhood offers a moving exploration of innocence amidst the backdrop of unspeakable atrocities. The two main communicative codes (verbal and iconic), offering a complex dual perspective, frequently portray children as both witnesses and victims of the Holocaust, highlighting the deep rupture of their once untroubled childhood⁵. Through wisely realized illustrations and texts, these works effectively capture the harsh contrast between the innocence of childhood/youth and the brutal realities of persecution. The representations of childhood go beyond mere victimization and become a significant means of remembering the devastating effects and human cost (suffering, loss, and the emotional and psychological toll) of war and genocide. They urge readers to confront the vulnerability and fragility of innocence in the face of historical brutality. By focusing on the experiences of the youngest victims, collocating them at the center of these stories, these picturebooks aim to

⁵ For instance, a few notable examples include *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti, 1985; *The Lily Cupboard* by Shulamith Levey Oppenheim and Ronald Himler, 1992; *Nine Spoons. A Chanukah Story* by Marci Stillerman and Pesach Gerber, 1998; *Anne Frank* by Josephine Poole and Angela Barrett, 2004; *La portinaia Apollonia* by Lia Levi and Emanuela Orciari, 2005; *Les arbres pleurent aussi* by Irène Cohen-Janca and Maurizio C. Quarello, 2009; *La bambina del treno* by Lorenza Farina and Manuela Simoncelli, 2010; *Il volo di Sara* by Lorenza Farina and Sonia Possentini, 2011; *Erika's Story* by Ruth Vander Zee and Roberto Innocenti, 2013; *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elvgren and Fabio Santomauro, 2014; *Le dernier voyage: le docteur Korczak et ses enfants* by Irène Cohen-Janca and Maurizio C. Quarello, 2015; *Ha-Dubi Shel Fred* (לש ידבה) by Iris Argaman and Avi Ofer, 2016 (*Bear and Fred. A World War II Story*, translated by Annette Appel, 2020); *Il ciliegio di Isaac* by Lorenza Farina and Anna Perdon, 2017; *Come ali di gabbiano* by Lorenza Farina and Anna Pedron, 2019; *Storia di Vera* by Gabriele Clima, 2020; etc.

bring historical events closer to readers, both young and adult, arousing empathy as they represent the Holocaust from children's perspective.

The visual storytelling in picturebooks may rely heavily on these elements to convey depth and meaning (cf. Cohn 2013, Kress, van Leeuwen (1996) 2021, Kümmerling-Meibauer 2014, Nikolajeva 2014, Nikolajeva, Scott 2001, Moebius 1986, Nodelman 1988, Oittinen, Pitkäsalo 2018, Prior, Willson, Martinez 2012, etc.). Analyzing the story, what usually we can 'read' and interpret from the illustrations are the direction, size, and shape of the eyes, the shape and the position of the mouth, the details of eyebrows, the way hands or fists are illustrated, the posture, gestures like leaning forward or back, the distance between characters, and contextual elements such as background details, color choices, movements and actions (in mid-action or in still position) (see Figure 1). Also, in some picturebooks, as in this one, a series of illustrations may depict a character's emotional journey, showing progression through various facial expressions and gestures. Analyzing the illustrations in *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* I demonstrate in which way Yael Albert follows a sequential art style to complement the story's narrative flow, with each illustration connecting seamlessly to the next. She complements Tamar Meir's text in a harmonious way, adds emotions, and hidden, allusive elements to the story, while creating various atmospheres within it. Through an excellent synergy between text and images, the whole project represents a useful tool in helping young readers better understand both the protagonists and the settings in which the events take place. Page after page we can appreciate how Albert paid significant attention to designing the illustrations to be visually eye-catching and approachable for children, all while respecting the complexities of the topic. She carefully brings the characters – Francesco Tirelli, Peter, his parents and others – to life, with distinctive facial expressions and detailed body language. The attention to details ensures that the characters' emotions and personalities are communicated clearly to the reader, minimizing the need for lengthy descriptions.



Figure 1 – Details from the illustrations with distinctive facial expressions, gestures, body language, and postures to communicate emotions, e.g. a) joy and trust, b) sorrow, sadness and fear, c) anger and intimidation d) fear, worry, terror.

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Another aspect to consider is that in the countries where a translation of *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* is available, the book can serve as an educational resource for introducing children to the sensitive topic of the Holocaust in an age-appropriate way. Specifically, in a sensitive manner, it provides enough information and context to help children to begin to understand the gravity of these events yet carefully avoids overwhelming them with stressful descriptions or pictures. When it is used in classroom settings, teachers and schoolchildren are encouraged to talk – in an age-appropriate way according to the audience – about themes like empathy, tolerance, and the importance of standing up for justice. To one of my questions Yael Albert replied (personal communication, November 16, 2023) that while this book is primarily tailored to suit children aged 6 to 8, its appropriateness may vary depending on the individual child and the discretion of parents, as it deals with challenging, controversial themes despite its hopeful message and happy ending. Tamar Meir's story embellished by Albert's rich and layered illustrations explore principal emotions and values that children can relate to, such as friendship, fear, love, empathy, resilience, and hope. Together, they capture children's imagination and engage them in the story.

3. Historical accuracy and cultural setting in Yael Albert's illustrations

Ensuring historical accuracy and pedagogically sound manner in these Holocaust picturebooks for young audiences is very important, errors in

fact and misconceptions distort the historical record and misinform rather than educate our students (cf. Totten, Feinberg 2000, 64, Kokkola 2002).

When the Holocaust is taught, it must be done in a way that is historically accurate and pedagogically sound. Understandably, the antecedents of the Holocaust and answers to why and how the Holocaust was perpetrated are numerous and complex. To even begin to understand the history of the Holocaust, teachers and students need to probe deeply into the whos, whys, whens, and wheres, before digging into the hows. Not to do so is both pedagogically unsound and likely to lead to major misunderstandings of the history. (Totten, Feinberg 2016, 1)

It is manifest that, before crafting the illustrations, honoring the memory of the victims, Yael Albert conducted extensive research on the topic. In her illustrations, she includes several elements that evoke the historical period and depict the Hungarian capital Budapest. As we will see from the analysis provided in the appendix, sometimes she employs an artistic license to engage young readers and convey the gravity of that period.

Picturebooks are a very useful tool for drawing readers' attention to the time-space of a particular period, including that of the Holocaust as well, thanks to «visually displaying points of difference between the time past and the present moment» (Kokkola 2002, 66). *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* introduces readers to the Hungarian context and culture during the war. Key details (its sunshade and its sign) of the ice cream shop, major landmarks like the Parliament, and the iconic Elizabeth Bridge, are shown with attention, effectively contextualizing the story within its historical setting.

Through the presence of Hungarian pastries (*zserbó*, *kürtőskalács*) in her illustrations, Albert not only stimulates the reader's senses but also creates a sensory and cultural bridge to the culinary traditions deeply embedded in Budapest's local history.

The real building of the Parliament (opened in 1902) and the Elisabeth Bridge (built between 1897 and 1903 and bombed during World War II) take center stage in Albert's visual storytelling, offering a tangible connection to Budapest's architectural landscape. By recreating in an easily recognizable way these iconic structures, Albert enables readers to identify the urban context and adds more realism to the story. Her attention to balancing artistic expression with architectural accuracy contains a message: The city's landmarks and structures carry the weight of history and serve as a

living reminder of its past. *Lövölde tér* (this is the name of the square a few steps away from which the Tirelli's shop was located) holds a significant historical significance, anchoring the story in a real and meaningful place in the central, 7th district of Budapest, known also as *Erzsébetváros* (Elizabethtown). It should be remembered that the inner half of the district was the historic Jewish quarter of Pest.

The illustrations may contain examples of 'pertextuality' – a text produced with specific support perspicuously represented in a figurative text (cf. Manco 2015, 2016 [2017], 2018, 2021).

As regards specifically pertextuality, it must first of all be said that if the representation in a figurative text of a text written on a specific support can be defined as 'pertextuality', then the text represented is defined as 'pertext', the object in which it is represented, for example a notebook, is defined as 'textual object', while the object on which it is represented, for example a comic strip, can be defined as 'textual context'. (2016 [2017], 87)

By representing recognizable landmarks and incorporating Hungarian pertexts, Yael Albert's representation of Budapest maintains key iconic details from the city's architectural and cultural landscape, that readers may identify on their own, depending on their cultural background, age, and personal experiences, or with the help of an adult, thereby making the story more accessible. Thus, the book again represents a useful educational resource, immersing readers in the historical context of a specific place. In this way picturebooks may help readers to develop a deeper understanding of how the Holocaust affected specific places and communities in different countries (e.g. *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elvgren and Fabio Santomauro, 2014; *Hidden Hope. How a Hidden Toy and a Hero Saved Lives During the Holocaust* by Elisa Boxer and Amy June Bates, 2023; *The Edelweiss Pirates* by Jennifer Elvgren and Daniela Stamatidi, 2018; etc.).

At the end of this picturebook, Yael Albert's illustration masterfully capture the essence of Budapest, including in her visual narrative the somber memorial known as «The Shoes on the Danube Bank», in Hungarian *Cipők a Duna-parton*, a tribute to the tragic events of the past, commemorating the 3,500 people, 800 of them were Jews, who were shot into the river by fascist Hungarian militia associated with the Arrow Cross Party in Bu-

dapest during World War II. The illustration, echoing the real memorial, becomes an important stimulus for readers to keep the collective memory of the Holocaust alive.

4. Main visual elements in *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*

4.1 Horizontal flipping of the illustrations

The phenomenon of horizontal flipping in translations from Hebrew to other languages (e.g. the English and Russian front covers and different inner illustrations in the English, Italian and Hungarian translations) introduces a specific dimension to the visual representation of texts. This occurs due to the right-to-left script inherent in Hebrew, this linguistic idiosyncrasy requires a reorientation of the entire visual narrative when adapted for languages that conventionally read from left to right. When a Hebrew book undergoes translation into languages like English, Italian, Hungarian etc., the decision to maintain the original right-to-left orientation or to horizontally flip the pages can significantly impact the reader's engagement. Flipping certain or all pages containing images or double spread illustrations necessitates a broader consideration of cultural and visual norms and reflection on how visual and linguistic elements intersect. Furthermore, this phenomenon invites readers to learn about and explore the cultural nuances embedded in the script itself. In the case of *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, flipping from the Hebrew right-to-left reading flow to the conventional left-to-right orientation not only highlights the contrast between these reading styles, but also employs layout changes that reflect this shift.

4.2 Static visual elements

Given the backdrop of World War II and the Holocaust, throughout the book, the illustrations deliberately employ a balance of light and dark elements to capture the contrast between hope and despair, life and death, prewar and postwar periods and the Holocaust, the innocence of childhood and the harsh realities of the time. The climax of the story takes place in the light of the Menorah, Yael Albert chose light as a symbol of hope in the illustrations. The beams of light that unfold in the story usually come

to express hope and illuminate the heroes of the story. Beyond that, the colors go from dim and dark, which expresses sorrow and fear, into happy and bright colors, which express hope and renewal at the end of the story.

Based on my research on Holocaust picture books, the use of light and dark frequently goes beyond simple aesthetic decisions. It functions as a nuanced form of visual communication and serves as a powerful metaphor, conveying deeper emotional and thematic layers within the narrative (e.g. *Nine Spoons. A Chanukah Story* by Marci Stillerman and Pesach Gerber, 1998; *The Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco, 2000; *Luba: the Angel of Bergen-Belsen*, as told to Michelle Roehm McCann by Luba Tryszynska-Frederick, illustrations by Ann Marshall, 2003; *Anne Frank* by Josephine Poole and Angela Barrett, 2004; *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* by Meg Wiviott and Josée Bisailon, 2010; *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elvgren and Fabio Santomauro, 2014; *Le dernier voyage: le docteur Korczak et ses enfants* by Irène Cohen-Janca and Maurizio C. Quarello, 2015; the same *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* originally published in 2017; etc.).

The careful manipulation of light and shadow within the illustrations becomes a poignant narrative tool, reflecting the historical realities of the Holocaust. In moments of profound darkness, through the power of colors and color schemes, the artists often convey the weight of tragedy, depicting the atrocities and the profound loss experienced during this dark period in human history. In contrast, beams of light within the visual narratives usually symbolize resilience, humanity, and the spirit of hope that persisted despite unimaginable adversity (cf. also *The Whispering Town* by Jennifer Elvgren and Fabio Santomauro, 2014; *Martin & Anne: The kindred spirits of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Anne Frank*, by Nancy Churnin and Yevgenia Nayberg, 2019). The stark contrasts between light and shadow, not only evokes a sense of realism but also emphasizes the moral and ethical dilemmas inherent in Holocaust narratives. In the above-mentioned examples black symbolizes the moral dilemma, exposure, vulnerability, and the constant threat of being discovered. Hidden heroes had to keep their activities secret, lie about the identity of the persons they were hiding, and faced the constant threat of discovery, arrest, and even death for themselves and their loved ones. They often faced difficult choices about whom to shelter, and obviously had to deal with external factors such as available resources, the

capacity of their hiding places, the risk of being discovered, etc. In Holocaust picturebooks, the intentional use of light, shadow, and color contributes to their emotional effect on readers. For example, by strategically illuminating certain aspects of the narrative while shrouding others in shadows, readers are invited on a reflective journey that encourage them to explore the moral complexities of the Holocaust.

In several Hebrew Holocaust picturebooks, the yellow color emerges as a poignant visual pattern, loaded with historical and symbolic significance (cf. *Nine Spoons. A Chanukah Story* by Marci Stillerman and Pesach Gerber, 1998; *Anne Frank* by Josephine Poole and Angela Barrett, 2004; *Erika's Story* by Ruth Vander Zee and Roberto Innocenti, 2013⁶; *The tree in the courtyard: looking through Anne Frank's window* by Jeff Gottesfeld, illustrated by Peter McCarty, 2016; *Come ali di gabbiano* by Lorenza Farina and Anna Pedron, 2019; *Storia di Vera* by Gabriele Clima, 2020; etc.). Often associated with the yellow Star of David badges that Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust, yellow becomes a strong visual symbol of persecution, discrimination, and the systematic dehumanization inflicted upon them. However, in the context of Hebrew Holocaust picturebooks, yellow carries additional, layered, positive meanings, such as resilience and hope, reflecting the determination of Jewish people to maintain their identity and humanity in the face of adversity, not only in the shelters, but even in the barracks. The same color corresponds to the light of the Menorah, a powerful emblem of Jewish identity and faith. The seven-branched candelabrum that signifies light, wisdom, and divine presence, not rarely illuminates the faces of the characters. It differs from the nine-branched Hanukkah menorah, used specifically during the festival of Hanukkah to commemorate the miracle of the oil lasting eight days. For instance, in *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop* the small protagonist Peter realizes a Menorah with eight 'branches', while in *The Feather-bed Journey* by Paula Kurzband Feder and Stacey Schuett (1995) readers encounter a Hanukkah menorah. Similarly, the same object plays a central role in *Nine Spoons. A Chanukah Story*. In *Remember Not to*

⁶ This picturebook features a five-pointed die-cut star on the cover, which creates a window revealing the yellow page beneath. This design element immediately evokes the symbolism of the yellow star, drawing the reader into the narrative before the story even begins.

Forget. A Memory of the Holocaust by Norman H. Finkelstein and Lois and Lars Hokanson (1985) powerful black-and-white illustrations include also a tattooed arm (183486) holding a Hanukkah menorah. In *Keeping the Promise: A Torah's Journey* by Tami Lehman-Wilzig and Craig Orback (2003) the yellow flames of four candles illuminates the faces of a rabbi, a Bar Mitzvah boy and other men celebrating the service within the barracks. The deliberate use of yellow (beams of light, candles, menorahs, butterflies, yellow induments and objects, Stars of David, etc.) in the illustrations becomes a thoughtful exploration of the multifaceted experiences faced by Jewish individuals during the Holocaust, inviting readers to engage with the complexities of history through a visual language that transcends words.

4.3 Seasonal symbolism

In Holocaust picturebooks, the symbolism of seasons usually functions as a nuanced lens through which the story and the passage of time is presented, reflecting not only the cyclical nature of life, but also the brutal impact of historical events. For instance, in analyzing *Rose Blanche* by Innocenti (1985) Lapeña-Gallego and Hidalgo-Rodríguez affirm that «[t]he evolution of the psychological situation of the characters is also shown as seasons pass, from spring-summer to winter» (2017, 73). This transition from one season to the next (typically from summer to autumn and winter, before eventually turning to spring with its message of hope) parallels the worsening conditions of the Holocaust, and highlights the connection among the changing seasons, the external environment, and the characters' inner experiences and emotional states. Other significant examples of seasonal symbolism include *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass* by Meg Wiviott and Josée Bisaillon (2010), which evokes the impact of the Kristallnacht pogrom with autumn environment as the backdrop, and *Terrible Things. An Allegory of the Holocaust* by Eve Bunting and Stephen Gammel (1980) where shifting seasons emphasize the passage of time and its consequences on the characters. Additionally, *Il ciliegio di Isaac* by Lorenza Farina and Anna Perdon (2017) and *Storia di Vera* by Gabriele Clima (2020) utilize seasonal imagery to reflect the experiences of their characters during wartime. In *Ha-Dubi Shel Fred* (2016, *Bear and Fred. A World War II Story*, translated by

Annette Appel, 2020) the seasons play a crucial role in conveying themes of resilience amid despair, illustrating how the cycles of nature can mirror human endurance. In *Les arbres pleurent aussi* by Irène Cohen-Janca and Maurizio C. Quarello (2009) and *Erika's Story* by Ruth Vander Zee and Roberto Innocenti (2013) the impact of trauma and memory over time is movingly illustrated, with the changing seasons serving to enhance this portrayal. Lastly, *Luba: the Angel of Bergen-Belsen* by Michelle Roehm McCann and Ann Marshall (2003) also weaves seasonal imagery into its narrative, illustrating the stark contrasts between hope and despair in the historical context. All these examples reveal how seasonal symbolism may enrich the emotional impact and thematic richness of Holocaust narratives.

Spring, usually associated with renewal and rebirth – due to the natural cycles of growth and regeneration following the winter months [cf. «For see, the winter is past, / the rains are over and gone. // The flowers appear on the earth, / the time of pruning the vines has come, / and the song of the dove is heard in our land.⁷» (Sg 2:11-12)] –, here symbolizes the resilience of the human spirit and the hope for a better future. Seasons are visually represented also in Yael Albert's illustrations, where spring serves as a framing element at both the beginning and end of the story. Blossoming flowers and lush landscapes captured in illustrations evoke a sense of optimism, portraying the strength of individuals to endure and rebuild in the aftermath of tragedy (one of the most touching examples we can find in *Rose Blanche*). Winter in Holocaust picturebooks, including *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, means much more than a mere illustration of season and landscape: It mirrors the harsh realities of the Holocaust and convey the starkness of suffering and loss (cf. *Nine Spoons. A Chanukah Story* by Marci Stillerman and Pesach Gerber, 1998; *The Harmonica* by Tony Johnston and Ron Mazellan, 2008; *Eli Remembers* by Ruth Vander Zee, Marian Sneider, and Bill Farnsworth, 2007; etc.).

⁷ Cf. the official website of the Holy See. *The New American Bible*. URL: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_PLA.HTM> (11/2024).

4.4 Dynamic components and the chronological flow of the narrative

The dynamic, expressive components of the illustrations, which suggest movement or action, take on profound significance as they convey other important aspects of the historical events: their tumultuous and chaotic nature. These elements – such as the beams of light that guide the viewer's eye through a composition, dynamic poses, gestures, multiple images of a character in different stages of an action, action lines, etc. – create a sense of energy and fluidity, and immerse readers in the chronological flow of the narrative, providing both a visual and textual journey through the harrowing experiences of the Holocaust. Whether depicting moments of destruction, threat, resistance, escape, or profound loss, these visual elements that suggest progression, movement, rapid change in scenery or speed in Holocaust picturebooks act as linguistic brushstrokes, capturing the emotional intensity and gravity of the depicted scenes (cf. e.g. *Luba: the Angel of Bergen-Belsen*, 2003; *The Cats in Krasinski Square* by Karenn Hesse and Wendy Watson, 2004 etc.). This usage of visual storytelling also emphasizes the interactive nature of the medium, immersing readers in a multisensory experience, involving multiple senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell – in a synesthetic way that transcends language barriers. A powerful comparison can be made with wordless picturebooks such as the influential and widely recognized *Wave* by Suzy Lee (2008), where the absence of words invites readers to interpret the developing story without relying on text, only through dynamic movement and evocative imagery. Similarly, in Holocaust picturebooks like *The Tree in the Courtyard* by Jeff Gottesfeld, illustrated by Peter McCarty (2016), the subtle use of delicate illustrations and implied movement – like the gentle sway of the tree as it witnesses unfolding events – adds emotional depth and layers of meaning. In our case, as readers navigate the right-to-left progression of the original Hebrew edition of *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, the pictorial, expressive elements suggesting motion guide their visual exploration, creating a harmonious fusion of language and imagery. Through the skillful integration of these expressive elements, Holocaust picturebooks convey emotions, urgency, tension, highlights the direction of movements, and depicts the

physicality of objects and characters, establishing a deep connection between language, history, and the visual representation of collective memory.

5. Detailed analyses of the picturebook with all the fourteen double spread illustrations.

The front cover



Figure 2 – The original front cover⁸.

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By taking a closer look at the front cover of the various translations – showing Francesco and Peter walking together, happily enjoying ice cream, with the shadows of impending war planes in the background – we note how respect has been paid to both the original and the translated versions. In the English and the Russian editions, the front cover is horizontally flipped (see Figure 3). In fact, in the original Hebrew version, Yael Albert portrayed the characters walking from right to left, aligning with the right-to-left

⁸ Cf. on *Yael Albert Illustration* website: URL: <<https://www.yaelalbert.com/francesco-tirellis-ice-cream-shop/6e4d2e4d9u3o6cnyaxgyux1197v878>> (11/2024).

direction of Hebrew script. This right-to-left orientation also reflects the direction in which the book opens. Therefore, the illustrator considers both the reading direction and the reader's gaze as they move from right to left.



Figure 3 – The original front cover and the English and the Russian versions, horizontally flipped.

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The front cover artfully captures a heartfelt moment that transcends the simple, ordinary joys of friendship and indulgence. As readers immerse themselves in the imagery of the front cover, the juxtaposition of the lighthearted scene against the harsh backdrop of the Holocaust creates a tension, raises intriguing questions, and invites reflection. This apparently innocent moment of friendly interaction – in the context of the Holocaust – becomes a powerful symbol of resilience and humanity. It turns out to be a reminder of what was lost during persecution and war. If we observe their facial expressions and dynamic body language, we note that Francesco and Peter transmit a true sense of shared happiness and friendship that existed before the onset of persecution.

What we immediately discern is the main title in red and Tirelli holding an ice cream in one hand and patting Peter's shoulder with his other hand. His gesture not only conveys a paternal warmth but also alludes to a deeper connection that transcends the simple act of savoring ice cream. Peter is enjoying a colorful ice cream too while they are walking happily. Albert placed Tirelli's oversized ice cream with four distinct flavors/colors

– almost at the precise center of the whole illustration. This is a symbolic object, a metaphor, carrying a deeper meaning beyond its simple physical presence. The different flavors of the scoops may allude to different experiences, emotions, or facets of life.

Albert's decision to present Tirelli as an elderly figure (rather than a man in his forties, as he was in reality, having been born in 1898) with white hair and a mustache – wearing a white waiter shirt – adds a nostalgic and timeless quality to the scene. This characterization connects Tirelli to a longstanding tradition of ice cream craftsmanship handed down by his uncle. The chilling winter landscape in the background is marked by falling leaves, a recurring motif throughout the picturebook, that creates a unifying visual thread. The tension between the routine pleasure of enjoying ice cream and normalcy and the harshness of the winter alludes to the stark realities the characters encountered during persecution. The composition skillfully integrates other subtle yet powerful details. The juxtaposition of the iconic structure of the Hungarian Parliament, the threatening black sky with snow and bombers hovering ominously, and bombed buildings with broken windows adds a further layer of tension, and immediately hints at the historical context. Among the buildings we also recognize Tirelli's shop with its red sunshade. All serve to emphasize the pervasive threat of war, while also grounding the narrative in a specific time and place. These elements bear silent testimony to the flow of events in the story. The purposeful inclusion of the Hungarian Parliament in the background enriches the visual storytelling, firmly anchoring the narrative in the specific location of the Hungarian capital. In the context of Budapest, also Tirelli's ice cream shop stands out as a central focal point, symbolizing the quiet heroism that occurred within its walls.

Yael Albert paid careful attention to include many details in her illustration for the front cover that gently invites readers into Francesco Tirelli's and Peter's world. She managed to transform her creation into a kind of visual tapestry that merges elements of ordinary life, architectural landmarks, and impending darkness, serving as a visual prelude to the complex historical narrative inside. It also masterfully captures the essence of the title, intertwining sweetness and sorrow, resilience, and remembrance.

The symbolic significance of the endpaper

The endpaper is red, adorned with delicate, very light pink blooms (see Figure 4). The motif serves as a visual thread creating an interesting connection between the endpapers and the interior of the book. The choice of red carries symbolic significance, suggesting warmth but also the emotional intensity associated with the narrative's exploration of historical events.



Figure 4 – Detail from the original endpaper.

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Visual and cultural elements in the first double spread illustration

In the first double spread illustration, that spreads a sense of joy and relaxation, we can see Francesco Tirelli as a child on a sunny day in Venice,

eating ice cream made by his uncle Carlo, still unaware of the historical turmoil that will later shape his journey. The enchanting city of Venice reveals itself to the young readers and comes to life evoking a gondola ride along the Grand Canal. The illustration also offers a glimpse into the early years of Francesco Tirelli's (born in 1898) life in the very early years of the twentieth century. The idyllic scene captures the harmonious blend of familial warmth, cultural richness, and the essence of a carefree summer day, where the vibrant atmosphere is accentuated by the presence of an elegant lady eating ice cream while leisurely seated in a gondola. So, the first pages remind us of the crucial role of social interaction.



Figure 5 – Double spread illustration no. 1.

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To this picturesque Venetian scene Albert adds green leaves that sway on the surface of the water and float in the air, suggesting the caress of a gentle breeze, that is, a dynamic feel. These leaves are not only decorative elements, but they also represent an idea of evolution (e.g. how they grow and change over time) and vitality (reminding us of the dynamic nature of

life). Being summer, they emphasize the vibrant energy of the season and the joyous spirit of the characters. However, the motion of the leaves subtly hints us also at the passage of time – everything is constantly moving – and implicitly refers to the fleeting nature of carefree moments, foreshadowing the inevitable changes that will occur in Tirelli's life.

Portrayed with his cart, Francesco's uncle, a cheerful ice cream maker, represents a long-standing tradition that brings joy to children and adults alike. In this cheerful visual setting, the cart functions as a symbol of shared happiness, while in the arc of the story ice cream takes on deeper meaning, symbolizing familial and human ties and shared traditions, foreshadowing its significance in Francesco's later life.

This illustration also contains the first occurrence of 'pertextuality'. The use of the word GELATI on the cart provides additional detail and an authentic touch to the illustration and that enhances the reader's understanding of the environment. It immediately establishes the opening cultural context of the story. *Gelati* is the plural Italian word for ice cream, and by presenting it prominently, the illustration signals to the readers that the characters (Carlo and the small Francesco) are linked to the Italian culture. This cultural reference in particular is important to understand Francesco's background. Small details like this create a more immersive experience for readers. It reflects the meticulous attention to detail by the illustrator Yael Albert in capturing specific elements of the environment – as we will see – throughout the entire picturebook. For readers who may not be familiar with the Italian language, the inclusion of the word GELATI has an alienating effect, while introducing them to a foreign language. In classroom settings it also could be used as a possible educational component. It encourages curiosity and exploration, inviting readers to learn about different cultures and languages. From an overall point of view, this opening illustration is a captivating introduction that draws readers in and invites them to follow Francesco Tirelli on his journey and learn about his experiences.

In the original Hebrew double spread illustration the visual narrative evolves vertically, moving from the bottom right corner to the top left corner. This development perfectly aligns with the traditional Hebrew script direction and cultural reading orientation. The canal's flow here is

also a guiding element, creating a natural visual pathway that leads the reader's gaze in a specific direction, toward the culminating figure of the small Francesco. The succession of the various elements adds dynamism to the scene and suggests a sense of movement and progression. The oblique upward movement symbolizes optimism, growth, joy, and other comparable positive feelings. This visual trajectory is reinforced by the uncle lifting Francesco toward the sky. Placing Francesco and his uncle at the top left quadrant draws attention to these characters. By guiding our gaze in a deliberate manner (by the canal's flow and the green leaves), Yael Albert invites us to actively 'enter' the illustration, following the visual cues and discovering the details of the narrative as they traverse the image. First, we witness a heartwarming moment. This joyful gesture, combined with the global body language of the two, reminds us of the wonder or innocence of childhood. In fact, we can focus on the uncle's raised arms and wide-open eyes, their smiling faces, and slightly raised eyebrows that spread a sense of joy and lightheartedness. Francesco's tightly shut eyes tell us that he feels safe and secure in his uncle's embrace. He is completely immersed in this carefree moment, experiencing the exhilaration of being lifted. His relaxed body, slightly tilted head, and freely dangling legs further emphasize his trust and delight.

In addition, Tirelli and his uncle introduce another chromatic element, that creates a common visual signature. The warm hue of their hair perfectly matches with the whole summery and joyful atmosphere of the illustration. The shared red hair between uncle and nephew, and subsequently Francesco's mother adds a distinctive and symbolic layer to the narrative, further strengthens the visual connection, suggesting a familial bond that transcends the specific moment captured in the illustration and a deliberate artistic decision to convey uniqueness and individuality. As for the young Francesco, his red hair is essentially a visual marker, emphasizing his distinct identity and presence. Also, this recurring motif subtly ties together the characters (Francesco, his mother and his uncle) and invites readers to consider the intergenerational bonds and the passage of distinct traits through family lineage. This meticulous use of red across various elements, including the lady's dress, her hat, details of the gondolier's outfit, the endpaper, the sunshade of Tirelli's future ice cream shop, etc.

functions as a cohesive thread in the narrative. It not only generates a sense of esthetic harmony but also challenges readers to recognize and connect key elements throughout the story as they move back and forth between the pages. That is why the lady in the gondola becomes a focal point with her vibrant red attire, capturing the reader's gaze. She is enjoying a colorful, three scoops of ice cream which adds a playful, visual touch to the scene. Once again – as seen on the front cover – this detail reminds us of the diversity of experiences and flavors in life, subtly reflecting the broader themes explored in the narrative.

As outlined in the theoretical part of this study (cf. Chapter 4. Horizontal flipping), flipping the illustration horizontally urges reflection on cultural nuances and the intricate relationship between language and visual storytelling. The English, Italian, and Hungarian publishers preserved the original right-to-left illustration orientation, while the decision to horizontally flip the illustration in the Russian translation introduces an interesting dynamic and an example of adaptation. Typically, decisions regarding illustration orientation involve collaboration among the author, illustrator, and publishing team; however, this was not the case for this picturebook. In our personal communications, Yael Albert mentioned e.g. that the Hungarian publisher reached out to her team, requesting several modifications related only to certain handwritten (per)texts they wanted to translate into Hungarian, rather than changes to the illustrations themselves. Consequently, the decisions about flipping the cover and the inner illustrations were made solely by the publisher, reflecting their adaptation to the reading conventions of the target audience.

Childhood innocence and the foreshadowing of war

In the next illustration (see Figure 6), we see other scenes of Francesco Tirelli's childhood in Italy.



Figure 6 – Double spread illustration no. 2.

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Against the backdrop of a sun-soaked summer, young Tirelli is eating his dripping ice cream just made by his uncle. He is talking to his mother, while his uncle greets them. Respecting the previous illustration, he is on the bank of the canal, but we can see a detail of the stairs of the small bridge in the background and he is wearing the same clothes.

On the left side of the original illustration, Francesco – now a few years older – engages in imaginative play on a map, which is undoubtedly a reflection of the innocence and simplicity of pre-war times. The geographical details represented on the map showing Europe, including Italy and its islands such as Sicily, provide a contextual anchor, emphasizing the idyllic setting before the ravages of World War II. The composition of this scene

introduces several key elements that layer meaning onto the narrative. Francesco Tirelli, still seen as a boy, playfully interacts with a small ice cream cart, symbolizing the innocence of childhood joy. However, on the ground we can see also two lead soldiers: one is strategically placed on the map while pointing a rifle directly at the toy ice cream cart, introducing a disturbing undertone. Kneeling beside him, the second soldier scans the horizon, his back turned to the cart. The list of symbolic elements extends further with a yellow duck toy [a tribute to Judith Geller (1925-2019) or as she was known by her pseudonym – Jacqueline Gauthier]⁹, cf. *Hidden Hope. How a Hidden Toy and a Hero Saved Lives During the Holocaust* by Elisa Boxer and Amy June Bates, 2023), binoculars, a toy airplane, and what appear to be snowballs. These intentionally selected and thoughtfully placed details hint at the ominous specter of war infringing upon the serene landscape, foreshadowing the challenges that Tirelli will later face. The interaction among these items and the delicate green leaves fluttering in the air suggests a complex blend of childhood whimsy and the looming realities of conflict.

In the Italian version, this double spread illustration is horizontally flipped. This alteration can be seen as an adaptation to the left-to-right reading orientation typical of the Italian language as well, but it was carried out superficially introducing an unintentional error that disrupts the accuracy of the representation, resulting in a reversal of the continent and Italy on the map.

Cross-cultural elements and translation challenges

In this illustration, readers see Francesco Tirelli in another context, in a different setting. He is already a man, he has red hair and a red mustache, and he is already living in Budapest. In the original right-to-left edition, the first figure who catches the reader's gaze is a waiter of a Hungarian *kávészó* 'café', arrogant and condescending. Tirelli decided to open a *gelateria*

⁹ Cf. «Wooden Duck Used by the French Underground for Smuggling Documents», URL: <<https://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/museum/wooden-duck.html>> and the file dedicated to her on the *Musée de la Résistance en ligne 1940-1945* website, URL: <<https://museedelaresistanceenligne.org/media11069-Judith-Geller-pouse-Marcus>> (11/2024).

in Budapest, but Hungarians looked down on his idea, saying «this is not Italy». Therefore, through his character, Yael Albert wanted to express a kind of disdain for the thought of opening an ice cream shop as if it were a ridiculous idea. The guests of the cafe are tasting typical Hungarian pastries, such as *kürtőskalács*, *zserbó*...while Francesco is looking inside from the street through the big window. Again, we can see the meticulous attention to detail by the illustrator Yael Albert. On the large window, she also added the Hungarian word *KÁVÉZO* [sic]. In the illustration, there is a small error as the last vowel is supposed to be long (Hun. *kávészó*). Again, for readers who may not be familiar with Hungarian, the inclusion of the word *kávészó* introduces them to a foreign language, adding an educational component to the story.



Figure 7 – Double spread illustration no. 3.

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The Italian translation seems to be quite superficial concerning the spelling of the Hungarian words referring to the Hungarian culinary tradition:

Siamo a Budapest. Puoi aprire un negozio che vende plăcintă, körözött o zserbó. Puoi vendere rakott krumpli, gomboc ripieni o kürtőskalács, ma il gelato? Chi comprerà il tuo gelato? (Meir 2018)

This is Budapest. Here you can open a *Palacsinta* shop, or a *Körözött* shop, a *Zserbó* cake shop, a shop selling *Rakott Krumpli*, or stuffed *Gombóc*, or *Kürtőskalács*. (2019)

Itt lehet palacsintázót nyitni,
körözöttest, zserbóüzletet,
rakott krumpli boltot,
lehet árulni kürtőskalácsot vagy gombócot,
de fagyaltot?
Ki venne tőled fagyaltot? (2020a)

These errors in the Italian translation could be attributed to a lack of expertise in Hungarian language nuances by the translators and a misunderstanding of the linguistic intricacies associated with these specific culinary terms. Preserving the correct spelling of cultural terms is essential not only for linguistic accuracy but also for respecting and representing the cultural context faithfully [Hun. *gombóc* and not **gomboc*, and especially Hun. *palacsinta* (Italian *crespella* and French *crêpe*) and not Romanian *plăcintă*]. When translating texts that involve specific cultural references, especially related to cuisine, it is vital for the translator to have a deep understanding of the source and target languages as well as the cultural background. When this picturebook is read to children by adult readers who are familiar with the Hungarian language and culinary traditions, these inaccuracies in the Italian translation are apparent. As a result, they could potentially negatively impact their engagement with the text. That is why, ideally, translations should undergo thorough review and editing processes to ensure linguistic precision and cultural authenticity. Transparent communication and fruitful collaboration between translators, editors, and cultural experts is essential not only to mitigate such undesirable discrepancies but also to enhance the quality of translated works.

Intergenerational resilience and the foreboding of history

The narrative unfolds into Francesco Tirelli's later years as the owner of an ice cream shop in Budapest. The scene exudes a sense of warmth and humanity as Tirelli, now an elderly man, serves customers with a genuine smile. He has white hair, even though in reality he was approx. 40 years old before the war started. Yael Albert decided to depict him as some who is elderly in such a way that his character can arouse even more sympathy in young readers. The three children in the company of an elderly woman represent the continuity of life, intergenerational relationships, and the transmission of values, hinting at resilience and hope in the historical scenario of the Holocaust. Interestingly, the elderly woman is the same one we have already met in the previous illustration: Following the opening of the ice cream shop, Hungarians, despite negative predictions, became Tirelli's customers and loved the ice cream.

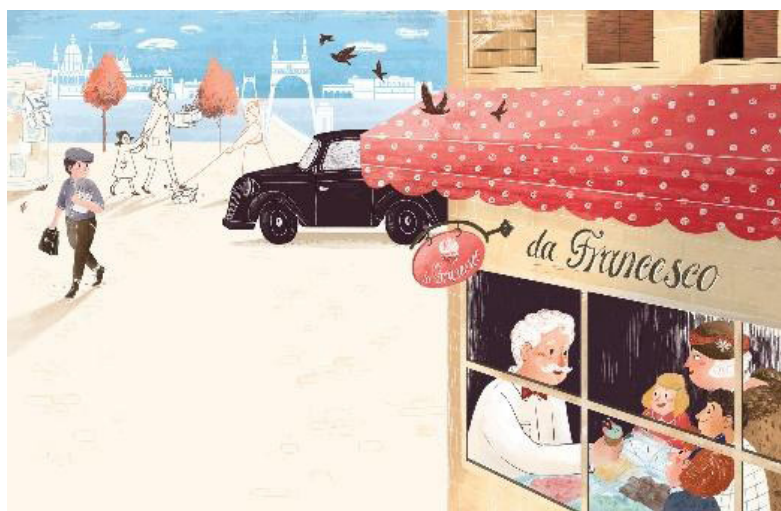


Figure 8 – Double spread illustration no. 4.

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The visual details in this composition weave a tapestry of both ordinary life and historical context. The big black car and five black birds in the sky introduce an element of foreboding, suggesting that the specter of history looms even in moments of everyday joy.

As set out in the theoretical part of this study (cf. Chapter 3. Historical accuracy and cultural setting), the inclusion of iconic Budapest landmarks, such as the Danube, the Hungarian Parliament, and the Elisabeth Bridge, grounds the narrative in a specific time and place. Autumn, marked by two trees with orange leaves, mirrors the broader changes in Tirelli's life and the world around him, alluding to the inevitable march of time.

In the background, on the bank of the Danube in the upper right corner, next to the Parliament, there is an advertising column featuring a poster of a man holding a flag with a swastika. This striking detail refers to the ominous political climate in Hungary and highlights the difficulties Tirelli had to face in maintaining his ice cream shop. The impact of anti-Semitic politics and ideology began to be felt in Hungary already in 1920, and by 1938, the complete exclusion of Jews from society began: racial laws and decrees multiplied, followed by deprivation of rights and confiscation of property. Therefore, the fact that Albert placed the poster next to the Parliament, the house of democracy, creates a stark contrast and conceals a criticism of the Hungarian politics that failed to uphold democratic values and protect its citizens from oppressive ideologies.

Along the Danube three figures representing three generations – a grandmother, mother, and daughter – are walking quietly. Interestingly, they are not fully characterized, but silhouettes representing archetypes. While communicating their essence, this artistic choice allows us to project our own interpretations and experiences onto the figures. One of the two ladies walking in the background takes a small dog for a walk on a red leash. It is worth noting the continuity between the red leash with the same color as the lady's silhouette. This detail – three illustrations later – enters in a powerful and poignant contrast with an aggressive black dog on a red, apparently thicker leash with Nazi soldiers (see Figure 9).

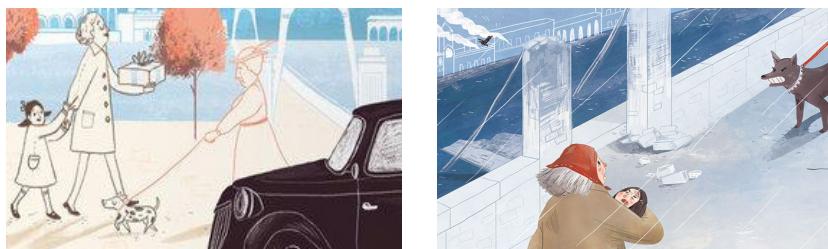


Figure 9 – Details of the two dogs in poignant contrast.

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The contrast between these two portions highlights a strong dichotomy between 1) a period still relatively calm but foreboding and 2) the subsequent violence of aggression. The lady with the small dog represents a peaceful, everyday moment, while the small, friendly dog symbolizes innocence, company, and joyful aspects of domestic life.

In addition, for the first time, we meet Peter, the young Jewish protagonist of the story. He is peacefully walking on the street. In the original Hebrew version, the reader's gaze goes from the bottom right quadrant to the top left quadrant, focusing precisely on his figure.

Tirelli's shop has a big red sunshade with small white dots and a protruding advertising sign. In the original Hebrew edition and in the English one, on the façade there is the name of the shop *Francesco's Gelato* and on the protruding advertising sign, readers can see the word *Francesco's*. Both are peritexts and refer to the Italian origins of Francesco. In the Italian edition, these writings become *da Francesco* in both cases, while in Hungarian, respectively, *Tirelli fagylalt* and *Fagylalt*.

Finally, two falling brown leaves guide the reader's gaze toward the next double-page illustration.

Tender moments and the passage of time

If we immerse ourselves in the original, Hebrew reading direction, we can see Tirelli in the company of his young client and friend, Peter. Inside the shop, Tirelli lovingly is placing a cherry on top of Peter's colorful ice

cream – a gesture filled with affection that creates a tender moment. This scene not only emphasizes Tirelli's caring character but also reinforces the theme of joy and simplicity that the ice cream shop represents. In fact, Peter is smiling and looking Francesco straight in the eyes, while his body language clearly shows that he is fully enjoying the situation. The boy's colorful ice cream and the large red sunshade with small white dots on a black background contribute to the overall colorful imagery of the scene.

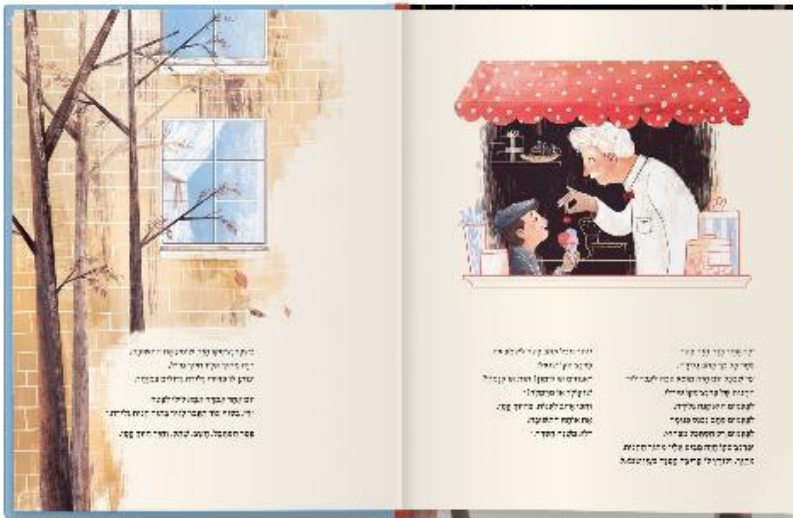


Figure 10 – Double spread illustration no. 5.

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In the other half of the illustration, as we zoom out to transition to the exterior, we can see the shop in a fall backdrop. The bare trees and brown falling leaves evoke a sense of seasonal change and the visual contrast in comparison with the previous scenes adds depth to the narrative and underscores the passage of time.

In the English and Italian editions, the original illustration is horizontally flipped.

Visual storytelling and historical sensitivity in Yael Albert's illustrations

On the right side (no. 6b), readers can see the entrance of the shop with Tirelli and Peter from behind. The shop is identified by its protruding advertising sign *Francesco's* and its real street name: *Lövölde tér 7*. On the door, there is a sign with the word *closed*. (In Hungarian *zárva*, in Italian *chiuso*). According to the research conducted by Dombi (2020b, 469-474; 2021, 75), Tirelli's ice cream shop was in Rottenbiller utca 66, which is adjacent to Lövölde tér 7.



Figure 11 – Illustrations no. 6a and 6b.

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In the original Hebrew, the building is identified as *Lövölde tér 1*, while in the Italian and in the English editions (together with the Hungarian one), it is corrected to *Lövölde tér 7*.

The «closed» sign on the door (rendered as «zárva» in the Hungarian edition and «chiuso» in the Italian editions), serves as a symbolic marker of transition and closure. Beyond signaling the end of business hours, it subtly alludes to broader closures and the challenges faced by the characters. Francesco is shown closing his shop, while Peter stands beside him, watching with a sense of disappointment and sad resignation. The cold winter, causing also Peter's shivering posture, mirrors their emotions while they both share an expression of quiet sorrow.

Tirelli's red scarf here is a deliberate choice (personal communication, November 27, 2023). Since the story covers several decades of Francesco's life, Yael Albert aimed to create a consistent visual detail that would contradict distinguish his character throughout the book across different stages of his life. Early on, as a child, Francesco is depicted wearing a red bow tie, and as he grows older, she turns it into a red scarf. This change also reflects the increasingly somber tone of the narrative.

Following the motion of the brown leaves, we get to the left side of the illustration (no. 6a), where Yael Albert begins to use shades of blue. This page introduces a powerful shift in tone and atmosphere, signaling the challenges, dangers, and conflicts that people, including Francesco, had to face. We see a wintry Budapest with Nazi flags and Jewish pedestrians walking fearfully alongside armed soldiers and tanks patrolling the streets. The use of blue symbolizes the cold and harsh realities that the characters are facing, while body language and facial expressions become crucial in conveying tension, worry, fear, and uncertainty in this context. Pedestrians – a man and an elder lady –, feeling the weight of the oppressive atmosphere, walk with their heads down, avoiding eye contact. Their faces are tense, marked by furrowed brows and tightly pressed lips or parted as if in a sigh. Both persons are wearing the yellow Star of David, which is the symbol imposed on Jewish individuals during the Holocaust as a means of identification and segregation.

It is worth focusing on the issue of pertextuality as the Hungarian editor introduced a couple of important changes: The original unreadable shop names are changed in Hungarian: *Virág* 'Flowers (shop)', *Könyvek* 'Books', and *Ékszer* 'Jewelry' (see Figure 12). This alteration not only adds readable names but also introduces a cultural context that resonates with Hungarian

readers. It reflects the editor's decision to enhance accessibility and cultural relevance for the target audience.



Figure 12 – Details from the illustration no. 6a, Hungarian edition.

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Originally, Yael Albert also depicted a handwritten inscription on the wall of the building: JUDEN with the Star of David. The Hungarian editor brought to her attention that, in 1944 (the year in which the story takes place), there could not have been such an inscription on a wall in Budapest because, after 1943, all Jewish-owned shops had already been taken over by Christian Hungarians. That is why the publisher asked to make this correction. Albert agrees that, when illustrating books based on historical stories, accuracy is very important, but sometimes to create feelings relevant to the story through visual means, she allows herself a number of minor inaccuracies. That is why she added that visual detail that evokes a broader story on the experiences of the Jews in European countries at that time. The yellow star, inscribed with the German word *Jude* 'Jew', serves as a haunting reminder of the persecution. Since it was historically very important to the Hungarian publisher, Yael Albert did not mind deleting it for the Hungarian edition (personal communication, November 16, 2023). The recognition that Jewish-owned shops had already been taken over by Christian Hungarians by 1944 is a crucial historical context. The request and the following decision to delete the original drawing and inscription for the Hungarian edition attests remarkable cultural sensitivity, accuracy and an understanding of Hungary's specific historical context. It reflects the publisher's commitment to providing Hungarian readers with an authentic

representation of historical events. Yael Albert is aware of the importance of accuracy in historical stories, however, her willingness to allow minor 'inaccuracies' or 'additional details' to convey broader emotions through visual elements is an interesting aspect. It reflects her desire to balance historical accuracy and the emotional impact of visual storytelling.

The original version follows the right-to-left direction and, therefore, the first illustration is that of Tirelli and Peter and the second one is the gloomy street view. Between the two parts, there are falling leaves that add movement and dynamism to the visual experience and signal the flow of the story. The two parts can easily be inverted to adapt the illustrations to the left-to-right reading directions, but the falling leaves need to be redesigned. This is the case of the Italian edition.

Fear and resilience: depicting war's chaos and human vulnerability

This double spread illustration shows an elderly Jewish lady with two girls walking fearfully in front of armed soldiers and a vicious dog patrolling the street. One of the girls is too small to walk, so she is in the lady's arms and crying, the other small girl is walking hand in hand with the elder lady. The girl is also wearing the yellow Star of David on her coat (see Figure 13).



Figure 13 – Double spread illustration no. 7.

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In the background, we can see again the Danube, the Parliament, and the Elisabeth bridge during icy weather. The bridge has collapsed, and the buildings are being bombed. In fact, Albert recalls that the real (old) Elisabeth bridge was blown up by retreating German troops in January 1945. In the sky, we can see again the ominous flock of black birds and a lot of smoke, representing destruction and the chaos of war. Birds in literature and art are often associated with omens or messengers, and their presence here suggests impending danger and tragedy. The landscape is frozen, wintery. Nazi soldiers are represented solely by their legs, by threatening black boots (synecdoche) and their dog on a red leash with a fierce grimace. This representation dehumanizes the soldiers, emphasizing their menacing presence while focusing attention solely on the threat they impose.

The aggressive dog suggests threat and violence. The dog and the Nazi soldiers together symbolize control, intimidation, and the harsh realities of war. As anticipated regarding the double spread illustration no. 4, the contrast between the two scenes with dogs contributes to the overall narrative arc of the picturebook. These contrasting details built on similar visual elements effectively communicate complex emotions and themes.

The whole illustration is dominated by oblique lines that simultaneously evoke the falling freezing rain, the falling bombs and very menacing kinetic lines that add dynamism to the scene. On the ground, we can see the shadow of the bombers that loom over the ground and that heightens the sense of vulnerability in the scene. The original direction is from right to left, and the kinetic lines go from the top right corner – from the branches of a bare tree – to the bottom left corner where we can see the bust figure of Tirelli – with his red scarf and very worried facial expression in the foreground. The red leash, the lady's red hair, and Tirelli's red scarf are collocated along a straight oblique line from the top right corner to the bottom left corner: this deliberate pattern of red elements creates a strong visual cohesion.

The illustration is horizontally flipped in the English and Italian editions.

Francesco's decision and the bond with Peter's family

Figure 14 – Double spread illustration no. 8.

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This is the book's pivotal moment: Francesco decides to put his plan into motion, and at the same time, the moon shines through his window, forging a path of blue light that leads to Peter, and his mother and father (see Figure 14). As it snows outside, a band of ethereal blue light – that of the moon – inundates the scene and connects the two dwellings, emphasizing not only an existing bond between Tirelli and Peter's family, but also the transformative nature of the moment. Francesco is shown sitting at his desk – wearing a red bow tie – thinking with concern about how he could help his friends. The rest of his study is not shown; instead, readers are invited to focus on his inner struggle and thoughts. Meanwhile, Peter's home features many details. The three are hugging each other tightly in their kitchen: This gesture conveys a sense of warmth, love, and hope in the face of adversity. They are surrounded by several significant elements: on the wall, we can see the wedding photo of Peter's parents, a nine-branched Hanukkah menorah, an overturned chair, a red bag, and two suitcases. For the first time, the readers see Peter wearing the yellow Star of David.

As the floral motif of the endpaper (see Figure 4) reemerges within this illustration, a deeper layer of meaning unfolds. The beige background of the

wallpaper serves as a canvas for these gentle flowers, creating an intimate and domestic atmosphere. The design choice not only contributes to the visual esthetics of the book, to its global cohesion, but also reinforces the connection between personal spaces and the broader historical context.

The illustration is horizontally flipped in the Italian edition. In this case, the wall clock is also flipped so that it shows a different time.

Clandestine Courage. Tirelli's actions to protect his friends

The illustration shows four scenes in sequence that provides a dynamic visual storytelling approach. The winter landscape with snow, soldiers, and bombed buildings creates an atmosphere that is both oppressive and filled with tension and danger. Against a black background we see Tirelli – visibly worried, hoping not to be discovered – delivering his written notes to a trusted friend: a crucial moment of clandestine communication. The notes contain instructions for his Jewish friends on how to reach his shop transformed in shelter. The fear, evident in their facial expressions and global body language, emphasizes the clandestine nature of their exchange, the gravity of the situation, and the risks involved in their actions. We should note that Tirelli no longer wears his red tie or red scarf, probably from this point on Albert wanted to authentically portray him as a person eager to remain invisible. The use of a black background with white text intensifies the contrast between the two characters and the surrounding elements, while enhances the focus on the characters' actions, expressions, and the unfolding narrative (cf. also *The Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco, 2000; *The Harmonica* by Tony Johnston and Ron Mazellan, 2008; etc.).



Figure 15 – Double spread illustration no. 9.

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The second moment shows Tirelli's friend on a bicycle and the third shows him walking toward Peter's building. This fragment builds suspense and heightens the tension. The fourth and last shows him inside Peter's home while he delivers Tirelli's letter with the instructions to Peter's parents. This is a culmination of the clandestine operation. Throughout the sequence, the expressions of fear underscore the danger faced by the characters in their attempts to communicate and coordinate actions.

The illustration is horizontally flipped only in the Italian edition.

A Path to Refuge

The illustration is realized mostly with blue and white colors and shows Peter's family and the same Tirelli (here without his red scarf) entering the back of Tirelli's ice cream shop. It represents a highly symbolic and central place throughout the narrative, a place of protection and salvation, of connection and solidarity, and of indelible memories.

From the door, a white path of light – from top to bottom and right to left, in keeping with the directionality of reading in Hebrew – invites the protagonists into the room. The exact moment of entering the shop signifies a moment of refuge, safety, and an important turning point in the story. The

white beam of light, like a path, symbolizes a comforting and transformative moment of hope, guiding Peter's family in a safe shelter.



Figure 16 – Double spread illustration no. 10.

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Light in the Darkness: hope, resistance, and Hanukkah in Tirelli's shelter

The illustration shows the back of the shop with the Jewish persons hidden by Tirelli. [According to Yad Vashem «Tirelli organized a number of safe houses for the refugees. Some – between 15 and 20 people – were hidden in the warehouse of his store, sleeping on the shelves in the warehouse; others found shelter elsewhere»¹⁰. The scene is a powerful representation of resistance, compassion, and courage, with a very deliberate use of light and shadow and particular colors, since the climax of the story takes place in the light of the Hanukkah menorah skillfully crafted by Peter. Yael Albert chose light as a symbol of hope in the illustrations. The beams of light that unfold in the story usually come to express hope and illuminate the heroes of the story.

¹⁰ Cf. <https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=tirelli&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=5659942&ind=0> (11/2024).

Beyond that, the colors go from dim and dark, which expresses sorrow and fear, into happy and bright colors, which express hope and renewal at the end of the story. Light, in this context, becomes a symbol of hope, resilience, and the illumination of 'heroic' actions. The beams of light that illuminate those persons' faces in the shelter represent a sense of optimism and triumph over darkness. As affirmed by Yael Albert (personal communication, November 16, 2023), in the darker, central parts of the book, she preferred to use blue rather than opaque black to allow for a richer and more nuanced color palette. Blue marks a salient shift in the story, adds a sense of depth, mystery, and melancholy to the atmosphere while still allowing for variations in tone.

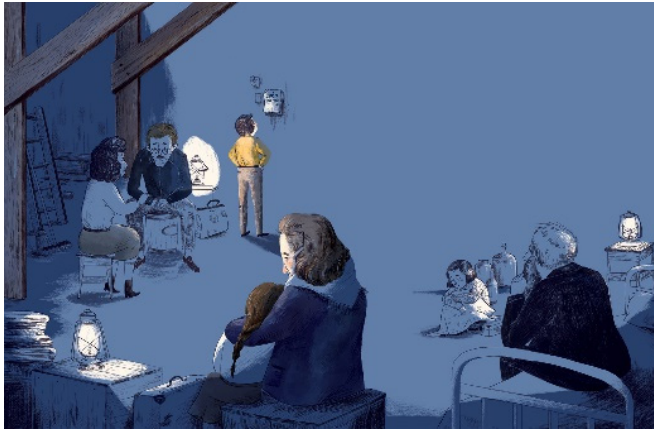


Figure 17 – Double spread illustration no. 11.

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Also, Peter's yellow shirt serves a dual purpose. First, it makes him stand out against the dark background, drawing attention to his figure. Second, as discussed previously, yellow symbolizes light and hope, combining well with the broader thematic use of color to convey the story's emotional nuances.

Peter is standing in front of a handwritten Jewish calendar which shows the ninth month of the year on the Hebrew calendar: *Kislev* (Hebrew: כִּסְלֵב). The calendar serves not only as a practical tool for counting days but also as a reminder of holidays in the shelter. Hanukkah, a Jewish festival that

celebrates the miracle of the oil lasting eight days, starts on the 25th day of *Kislev*¹¹. It is often associated with the triumph of light over darkness. While Hanukkah traditionally represents the spreading of light, the characters find themselves in a situation where they are hidden and unable to celebrate as usual. The inclusion of Hanukkah in the narrative obviously aligns with the cultural and religious context of the characters and adds historical and cultural authenticity to the story. It should be remembered that during the periods of persecution, the celebration of Jewish cultural and religious festivals was often hindered.

The illustration is horizontally flipped in Italian, and the calendar is reproduced correctly.

Creating light: Peter's Menorah as a symbol of hope and unity



Figure 18 – Double spread illustration no. 12.

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The illustration shows Peter finding a chocolate tray in a cupboard (see Figure 18). Suddenly, he has an idea and transforms it into a Menorah, bringing light into the hidden space Peter's Menorah becomes a powerful

¹¹ Other Hanukkah festivities include singing Hanukkah songs, playing the game of *dreidel* and eating oil-based foods, such as *latkes*, etc. (cf. *Nine Spoons. A Chanukah Story* by Marci Stillerman and Pesach Gerber, 1998).

symbol of hope, unity, the triumph of light over darkness and an important source of inspiration for people.

The beam of light that seems to emerge from the cabinet leads us to the next page where all the Jewish families hiding in the ice cream shop hug and together enjoy the light of the Menorah he made. The light also serves to illuminate their figures.

The act of coming together in the light of the Menorah becomes a transformative moment for the characters, a communal celebration that creates or maintains a sense of community.

The illustration is horizontally flipped in the English and Italian editions.

Symbolism of remembrance and renewal: The Shoes on the Danube

At this point, Yael Albert's illustration artfully captures the essence of Budapest, weaving a visual narrative that includes the somber memorial standing on the east bank of the Danube called «The Shoes on the Danube Bank», in Hungarian *Cipők a Duna-parton*. It was realized by the sculptor Gyula Pauer (1941-2012) and erected on April 16, 2005. By skillfully connecting the story to this specific, tangible historical monument, the picturebook becomes a means of fostering awareness, empathy, and a profound connection to the historical legacies etched into the landscapes of Budapest and the Danube. This illustration again prompts readers to confront the stark realities of the Holocaust and to reflect on the human stories embedded in the broader historical context. The picturebook becomes a catalyst for dialogue, remembrance, and a commitment to ensuring that the lessons of history are not forgotten but are carried forward into the future.



Figure 19 – Illustrations no. 13a and 13b.

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According to the original reading direction, the next image is the one that shows Tirelli, already in the aftermath of the war, offering a colorful ice cream to a young girl with a red dress, shoes and bow in the hair. Tirelli – with his red bow tie – is on one knee, in the grass, while both are enclosed in a circle drawn by green leaves. The scene signals a sense of renewal and hope, a departure from the somber tones associated with the wartime events. The introduction of vibrant colors reflects a shift from sorrow to a more optimistic and joyful atmosphere. The composition – framed on the top again by green leaves – symbolizes unity and the cyclical nature of history, while suggesting a sense of closure. Visually it completes the narrative arc, indicating a resolution and a new beginning after the tumultuous events depicted in the book.

The illustrations are inverted and horizontally flipped in the Italian edition moving the Parliament to the other side of the bridge.

Continuity and memory: Peter's post-war life and generational connection

The original illustration is from right to left, first Hebrew readers see Peter – already an elderly man with white hair – walking with his gran-

dchildren eating ice cream and on the left side there is the illustration of his study in Jerusalem.

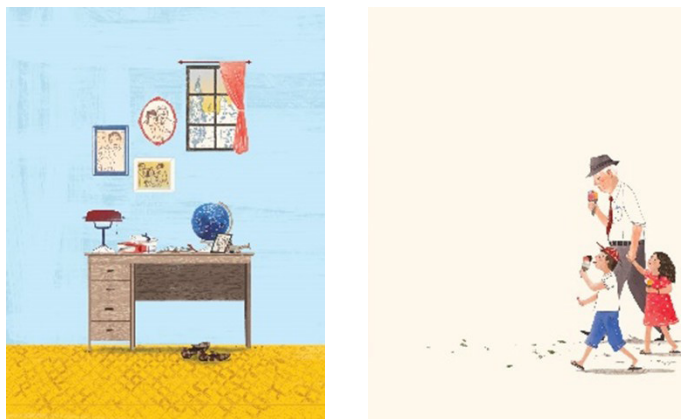


Figure 20 – Illustrations no. 14a and 14b.

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The scene conveys a sense of continuity between past and the present and the passage of time from pre-war era to the post-war period. The act of eating ice cream, reminiscent not only of Tirelli's ice cream shop, but of the whole family tradition, becomes a symbol of shared experiences and memories. On the ground, there are leaves and shadows that give dynamics to the scene. His granddaughter is wearing a red dress with the same motif we have seen on the sunshade of the ice cream shop, creating a visual link between generations – interestingly (and here I refer to the framework of trauma studies) between first and third generations. In addition, Peter's study in Jerusalem provides a glimpse into his personal sphere and post-traumatic life years after the war. If we take a close look at the details, we note that several salient elements contribute to the richness of the scene:

- on Peter's (already Yitzchak Mayer) – desk, we can see his father's photo: a strong reminder of family, heritage, and remembrance. It links the current moment to the past, emphasizing a sense of continuity and the importance of family ties;

- the toy airplane, the same we have seen at the beginning of the story in the Venetian scene, when Tirelli was a child (cf. Figure 6), is a subtle yet powerful symbol. It represents the passage of time, the resilience of the human spirit, and the deep impact of the trauma endured;
- a desktop globe: It suggests the necessity of a broader perspective and the importance of global awareness in accurately conveying the events of the Holocaust. Therefore, the globe – such as the European map we have seen at the beginning of the story (cf. Figure 6) – serves as a reminder that the Holocaust was not just a localized tragedy but a catastrophic event with far-reaching implications that affected countless lives across various countries and cultures;
- on the wall, we can see the wedding photo of Peter's parents (previously seen in their home in Budapest, cf. Figure 14) and two other family photos: They contribute to the sense of personal history and connection, anchoring the narrative in a familial context;
- from the window, we can see a view of Jerusalem: It adds a specific geographical and cultural context and symbolizes the significance of place in shaping Peter's postwar life and experiences. The red curtain framing the window adds a touch of warmth and visual interest. Red, consistent with earlier motifs, may also symbolize connection.

In the English edition, first, the two pages are simply inverted and then, only the image depicting Tirelli with the girl is horizontally flipped. This is motivated by the reading direction: It seems more natural to the English-speaking readers that the characters are walking from left to right.

In the Italian edition, the illustration is horizontally flipped, thereby introducing another error in the picturebook: The image of the continents of the desktop globe is also horizontally flipped...

6. Conclusion

In light of the detailed examination of the historical accuracy and the key visual aspects of *Francesco Tirelli's Ice Cream Shop*, it is possible to conclude that this is a picturebook that effectively balances storytelling and historical education, presenting – with the guidance of an adult – the Holocaust

to young readers through a story of bravery, compassion, and resilience, enriched by thoughtfully designed illustrations. It offers an age-appropriate introduction to the complex aspects of the topic while celebrating the humanity and kindness of ordinary individuals during extraordinary times. Within the pages of the picturebook, the portrayal of Francesco Tirelli conceals layers of bravery as he risks his own safety to protect his Jewish friends. The narrative weaves a tapestry of trust and camaraderie amid the pervasive fear and uncertainty of the Holocaust era. Tirelli's ice cream shop becomes not only a symbol of sweetness in the face of bitterness but also a shelter where the shared love for ice cream becomes a metaphor for shared humanity. The story serves as a reminder that even in the darkest times, acts of compassion and solidarity can emerge, transcending the boundaries of prejudice and hate, and leaving an indelible mark on the collective memory of survival and resilience.

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