



Extended Abstract—IReinventing Cultural Roots: A Booklet Inspired by the Asian Minor Catastrophe

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Abstract. This study presents *Silencieux*, an immersive and interactive digital booklet that leverages historiographic metafiction and modern technologies to teach underrepresented historical narratives, with a focus on the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Utilizing deepfake videos, multilingual texts, and fractured storytelling, the booklet challenges conventional narratives and fosters an emotional connection with history. Guided by Linda Hutcheon’s theory on historiographic metafiction and Jessica Pressman’s concept of “bookishness”, this research demonstrates the potential of multimodal narratives in preserving cultural heritage. Preliminary feedback from participants highlights the booklet’s innovative design and engagement, while suggestions for methodological improvements and ethical considerations shape future iterations. This approach underscores the transformative role of interdisciplinary methods in history education.

Keywords: History Learning, Multimodal Narratives, Cultural Heritage, Historiographic Metafiction, Immersive Education.

1 Introduction

Current educational paradigms often prioritize memorization over fostering a deeper, emotional connection with historical roots. This approach overlooks the value of engaging learners with history’s cultural and human dimensions, particularly through personal narratives and underrepresented perspectives. The digital booklet *Silencieux* seeks to address these gaps by leveraging the innovative potential of multimodal and interactive storytelling methods. Historiographic metafiction, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, provides the theoretical backbone for this project. This genre challenges traditional notions of historical objectivity by blending historical facts with fictionalized elements, thereby exposing the constructed nature of historical narratives [1]. Such an approach invites readers to critically engage with history as a series of perspectives rather than immutable facts. Additionally, Jessica Pressman’s concept of “bookishness” underscores the importance of materiality in the digital age [2], emphasizing how tactile and visual elements can evoke memory and emotional resonance.

The Asian Minor Catastrophe—a significant yet often marginalized event in historical discourse—serves as the focal point of *Silencieux*. This event involving the forced displacement and suffering of Greek populations in the early 20th century, offers a powerful case for exploring themes of identity, trauma, and resilience. The author is deeply motivated to share this story with a broader audience, ensuring the sacrifices made by individuals and communities during this tragedy are not forgotten. By preserving and amplifying these voices, the project seeks to honor their memory while fostering a greater understanding of this historical event’s cultural and emotional significance.

By integrating multimedia elements such as deepfake videos, maps, and visual scrapbooks, the booklet not only preserves these narratives but also facilitates a deeper emotional connection with the past. Through this interdisciplinary lens, *Silencieux* aims to bridge the gap between history and memory, providing a transformative experience that amplifies voices often silenced in traditional historiography and teaching environments. In doing so, it reimagines how cultural heritage can not only be preserved but also taught in the digital age.

2 Methodology

The methodological framework for this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate the efficacy of *Silencieux* as an educational tool. Participants were recruited from a literature and interdisciplinary course on a post-graduate level, which focuses on exploring multimodal and interdisciplinary literary pieces.

Of the 16 enrolled students, eight engaged with the booklet, representing 50% of the class. This discrepancy arose due to time constraints and varying levels of interest among the students, which limited the number of participants who completed the experience. Additionally, the length of the booklet and the depth of its multimedia content may have impacted on the readership, as it requires a significant time commitment to explore and digest fully. On average, participants reported spending between 45 minutes and 1,5 hours engaging with the booklet, depending on their level of interaction with the embedded media. To ensure a balanced and diverse set of perspectives, participants were selected based on their willingness to engage with the booklet and provide constructive feedback. The small sample size was a limitation but provided valuable initial insights into the booklet's impact.

2.1 Booklet Design

The digital format of *Silencieux* was deliberately chosen to enhance accessibility and engagement. Designed as a browser-based experience, the booklet integrated a deepfake video (creative via HeyGen), a historical map, multilingual text, a photo collage, a pop-up game, sound effects of a gunshot and wedding bells, and a voice memo of the true ending regarding the characters' lives. One of the primary goals of designing *Silencieux* was to leverage multimedia to accommodate various learning styles and enhance emotional engagement with historical content. This multimodal approach ensured that visual, auditory, and textual elements worked in tandem to immerse readers in the historical setting, increasing the cognitive and emotional impact.

Users could navigate the narrative at their own pace, making choices that influenced their engagement with the material. The production process was completed over two weeks, with each multimedia component carefully curated to align with the booklet's themes. While this rapid development cycle demonstrated the feasibility of creating interactive history or literature education tools efficiently, it also highlighted technological constraints, such as the 30-second cap on free deepfake video generation.

Ultimately, this digital format was deliberately chosen to leverage the affordances of technology in facilitating more dynamic interaction with historical content, while its interactive design allows users to navigate the narrative at their own pace.

2.2 Procedure

Participants were given two weeks to explore the booklet independently, with no time restrictions to encourage thorough engagement. Upon completion, they completed the questionnaire, which was designed to elicit detailed feedback on their experiences. Follow-up discussions with a subset of participants provided additional qualitative insights. Feedback was collected through a structured questionnaire comprising 14 questions divided into thematic sections:

1. Engagement and Usability: Participants rated their overall experience, noting which elements (e.g. narrative style, visual components) were most engaging.
2. Narrative Integration: Questions assessed how well historical and personal narratives were integrated, with participants providing Likert-scale rating and qualitative comments
3. Multimodal Design: Respondents evaluated the impact of multimedia elements, such as deepfake videos, photographs, and multilingual text, on their understanding and emotional connection to the content.
4. Ethical and Practical Concerns: Questions probed participants' views on the use of deepfake technology and the booklet's potential scalability for broader audiences.

At this point, it is crucial to point out that the table does not include the first four survey questions as they pertain to demographic information, including participants' age, gender, educational background, and familiarity with Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*. These questions were used to contextualize the sample but are not the focus of the current analysis, which prioritizes responses related to the immersive and interactive aspect of the booklet.

Table 1. Participant's Questionnaire Results.

Survey Question	Answers	Percentages
How would you describe your overall experience reading the booklet?	Very Enjoyable	85.7%
	Enjoyable	14.3%
	Neutral	0%
	Not Enjoyable	0%
	Very Unenjoyable	0%
Which aspects of the book did you find most engaging? (Select all that apply)	Narrative style	62.5%
	Historical context	75%
	Personal stories	62.5%
	Visual elements (photographs, video)	87.5%
	Multilingual text	50%
	Thematic depth	12.5%
	Very Effective	85.7%
How effective was the book in conveying the themes of identity, memory, and resilience?	Effective	14.3%
	Neutral	0%
	Ineffective	0%
	Very Ineffective	0%
	Greatly Enhanced	50%
Did the experimental and fragmented structure of the book enhance or hinder your understanding of the narrative?	Enhanced	50%
	Neutral	0%
	Hindered	0%
	Greatly Hindered	0%
	Strongly Agree	50%
	Agree	37.5%
Were the historical and personal narratives well-integrated?	Neutral	12.5%
	Disagree	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%
	Positively	75%
	Neutrally	25%
How did the use of multiple languages impact your reading experience?	Negatively	0%
	Very Positive	75%
	Positive	25%
	Neutral	0%
What was your reaction to the booklet's interactivity?	Negative	0%
	Very Negative	0%
	Characters	62.5%
	Theme of Loss	12.5%
What themes or stories from the book resonated most deeply with you, and why?	Theme of Trauma	12.5%
	Multimodality	12.5%
	Multilingualism slowed down reading	12.5%
	Sound effects initially confusing	12.5%
Were there any parts of the book that you found particularly challenging or confusing? Please explain.	Nothing	75%
	More Stories	25%
	Add background music	12.5%
Do you have any suggestions for improving the structure, content, or presentation of the book?	Nothing	62.5%

3 Discussion

By exploring the application of multimedia in history education, this discussion underscores the potential of the booklet to make historical narratives more engaging, accessible, and impactful. Qualitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed to identify trends in participant responses.

3.1 Reader Feedback on the Booklet

Reader responses revealed a strong connection to the booklet's exploration of historical trauma and loss. From a first glance, most readers described their experience as enjoyable (Question 5). The story of Captain Vaggelis, for instance, deeply moved audiences, with many identifying themes of violated identity and displacement due to land loss as profoundly relevant. Intergenerational trauma emerged as a key theme, with Chapter 3 being especially impactful for its emotional delivery using sound and interactive gaming (Questions 6 and 12). In other words, many of them found the narrative style, historical context, and visual elements among the most engaging aspects.

The experimental and fractured structure of the book was perceived positively, as respondents stated that it "enhanced" their understanding of the narrative (Questions 7 and 8). This aligns with contemporary trends in immersive storytelling, where interactive books and VR history experiences offer multi-layered perspectives that create deeper engagement. Just as social VR platforms foster real-time interaction with historical content, fragmented narratives enable readers to experience different perspectives within a single historical event, bridging gaps between past and present [3, 4]. The challenges faced by women during conflict, such as the stark choices between survival and autonomy, further enriched the narrative's depth and universality (Question 12). The booklet's success stemmed from its innovative storytelling methods. Readers consistently praised its combination of vivid narrative, historical context, and experimental elements such as mixed media (Questions 7, 8, and 11). By integrating visual, auditory, and textual components, the booklet appealed to diverse learning styles and added layers of meaning to its content. Comparatively, VR-enhanced learning has been recognized for its ability to personalize engagement through sensory stimulation, interactivity, and non-linear exploration [5, 6]. While VR employs avatars and digital reconstructions, this booklet's fragmented approach mimics this process by encouraging readers to construct meaning from non-linear texts, reinforcing historical context in a participatory manner.

The thematic principles proposed in the booklet along with its innovative design deeply resonated with readers (Question 12). This emotional connection is a hallmark of effective immersive storytelling, mirroring research on VR history education, where experiential narratives allow individuals to engage personally with historical events. To illustrate, VR history platforms often employ interactive storytelling methods to let participants step into the roles of historical figures or experience events from different vantage points [5, 7]. This multi-perspective learning model aligns with *Silencieux's* structure, where personal and historical narratives are interwoven to provide a more intimate and layered understanding of historical trauma rather than abstract historical data. This micro-historical approach is integral in teaching sensitive events, as it fosters historical empathy, making past tragedies more relatable and emotionally impactful.

If the above is taken into account, the adoption of mixed media—combining prose, poetry, photographs, videos, sound effects, and maps—was met with positive feedback (Question 11). Research in immersive history education highlights that multi-sensory engagement enhances cognitive and emotional retention. In this sense, the booklet's approach mirrors digital immersive experiences, where combining multiple mediums enhances engagement, making historical narratives more visceral and impactful. To compare, VR museum exhibits utilize multimedia elements similar to the ones mentioned in this paper to immerse visitors in historical settings, much like how the booklet's multimodal structure does [8]. At the same time, it is crucial to point out that the incorporation of multiple languages received mixed reactions, with some readers describing their experience as neutral (27%), while others found it positive (Question 10). While multilingualism added depth to some, it may have posed a challenge for others unfamiliar with the languages used.

While the reception was positive, some readers offered constructive suggestions. These included refining sound effects, omitting the use of deepfakes, and reducing the reliance on multiple languages to streamline the narrative (Questions 13 and 14). Suggestions for expanding content without compromising brevity and pacing were also noted. This highlights a common challenge in immersive storytelling—striking a balance between artistic experimentation and accessibility.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

The adoption of deepfake technology raised ethical questions about authenticity and potential misuse. These concerns were addressed through transparent documentation of the technology's application and its role in enhancing the educational experience. While deepfakes threaten our privacy¹, they appear to be useful for ameliorating our relationship with our historical roots and demonstrating that death is not infinite since through technology we can bring back to life our memories [11]. Prior to taking part in the study, participants were

¹ For those interested in acquiring more regarding the topic of deepfakes, please see: [9, 10].

informed about the purpose of the deepfake video, and how their personal information would be used with discretion and will not be shared with third parties.

3.3 Limitations and Future Directions

The study's primary limitations included the small sample size and lack of a control group for comparative analysis. Additionally, the reliance on participant self-reports may introduce bias, particularly as the author was also a course participant. Future iterations will address these limitations by expanding the participant pool, incorporating comparative studies with other immersive learning tools, and refining the booklet's design based on participant feedback.

4 Conclusion

The overwhelmingly positive reception of *Silencieux* suggests that such an approach not only enriches the narrative but also fosters a deeper emotional connection between the reader and the historical events depicted. The integration of innovative technologies like deepfake videos further personalizes the historical account, bridging the gap between the past and present, and underscoring the importance of preserving these narratives for the generations to come.

The experimental and fragmented structure of *Silencieux* was found to be beneficial in enhancing the readers' understanding. Despite some challenges related to the use of multiple languages and multimedia elements, the overall positive reception and constructive suggestions for future development indicate a strong foundation for further exploration and refinement of this interdisciplinary approach.

In essence, the synthesis of personal and collective histories, the employment of diverse narrative techniques, and the critical engagement with historiological methods in *Silencieux* highlight the transformative power of literature in rethinking and rewriting history. The personal stories of the victims of the Asian Minor Catastrophe are just an example of the multitude of personal narratives that can be inserted in mainstream history; they are simply a steppingstone for all the stories to come and hopefully, through these innovative technologies they can withstand the passage of time and become transcultural and transhistorical. By breaking down stereotypical representations and paving new ways of metafiction, these works contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the past, ensuring that the voices of those who have been silenced are heard and remembered.

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