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DEVELOPING MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND GENDER AWARENESS THROUGH WWI ENGLISH FICTION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

LA ADQUISICIÓN DE LA COMPETENCIA MULTICULTURAL, LA CONCIENCIA DE CLASE Y LA DE GÉNERO A TRAVÉS DE LA FICCIÓN INFANTIL Y JUVENIL ACERCA DE LA PRIMERA GUERRA MUNDIAL ESCRITA EN LENGUA INGLESA EN EL SIGLO XXI

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer an analysis of the way in which twenty-first century English books for children and young adults portray different scenes of the First World War: the trenches of the Western front, the Eastern front –represented through the Gallipoli campaign– and the home front. Though the authors selected tend to be realistic when revealing the suffering of those involved in the conflict, thus exposing young readers to a kind of material that may seem, in principle, inadequate for them, they nonetheless succeed in making it appealing by resorting to different strategies that work as a counterbalance to the more gruesome elements present in their texts. The use of animals that establish deep connections with their owners is one such strategy, as is the portrayal of various ways in which the protagonists develop skills and play roles that had been previously banned for them, engage in relationships across class and nationality boundaries, and, generally speaking, learn to become aware of cultural, class and gender differences.

Keywords: WWI, children's and young adults' literature, multicultural competence, class consciousness, gender awareness.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es ofrecer un análisis del modo en que un buen número de libros en lengua inglesa de literatura infantil y juvenil publicados o reeditados en el siglo XXI recrean los distintos escenarios de la Primera Guerra Mundial: las trincheras del frente occidental, el frente oriental –representado a través de la campaña de Gallipoli– y el frente nacional. Aunque los autores y las autoras seleccionados tienden a ser realistas en la representación del sufrimiento de todos los involucrados en el conflicto, exponiendo de este modo a los jóvenes lectores y lectoras a un material que podría parecer, en principio, inadecuado para ellos, consiguen sin embargo hacerlo atractivo gracias al uso de varias estrategias que funcionan a modo de contrapeso de los aspectos más desagradables de sus textos. El empleo de animales que establecen conexiones profundas con sus dueños es una de esas

estrategias, lo mismo que la inscripción de varias formas en las que los y las protagonistas desarrollan destrezas y representan papeles que antes les habían estado prohibidos, se involucran en relaciones con personas de otras clases sociales y nacionalidades, y, de manera más general, aprenden a ser conscientes de las diferencias culturales, de clase y de género.
Palabras clave: Primera Guerra Mundial, literatura infantil y juvenil, competencia multicultural, conciencia de clase, perspectiva de género.

1. Building up a representative corpus of WWI fiction for children and young adults of the twenty-first century

The year 2014 saw the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. In the field of Children's and Young Adults' literature this event was commemorated with the publication and reprinting of dozens of books that portrayed the Great War. Publishing houses may have had in mind the fact that today's children, unlike the children of previous generations, no longer have relatives who were alive during the early years of the twentieth century and therefore are unable to listen to the family WWI stories that their parents may have received from their own parents. Yet, in many areas of the English-speaking world children at primary, secondary, middle and high schools continue celebrating, year after year, different versions of Remembrance Day or Armistice Day on 11 November, while in New Zealand and Australia they commemorate Anzac Day on 25 April. The attempt to help those children understand the Great War may therefore have been behind the numerous books that have been reprinted or published for the first time around the centenary celebrations, just as much as the desire to obtain commercial benefits from an event that is annually recalled on Poppy Day or Anzac Day. Besides, it is no less true that many writers, when writing WWI fiction for children, have also taken the opportunity to imbue their works with principles that a large number of twenty-first century pedagogues tend to consider essential in the education of today's children, i.e. the development of multicultural values and of gender awareness. Their historical fiction, in this sense, is therefore highly politicized, which reflects John Stephens' assertion that "[o]ne of the areas of writing for young readers which can be most radically ideological is the area of historical fiction" (1992: 202).

In fact, current WWI fiction for children and young adults abounds in messages whose aim is to foster intercultural dialogue and the recognition of gender differences, thus following the trend that states, in connection with multicultural literature, that incorporating it into "the curriculum is part of a democratic educational reform that addresses issues of equality and equity in schools" (Cai, 2002: 133). As far as gender is concerned, it has been argued that learning to read critically as feminists will pave the way for modifications in the cultural arena and these, in their turn, will trigger a much needed social change (Humm, 1994: 293). As opposed to the concepts of gender and multiculturalism, after the coming down of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the disappearance of the Communist Block, the concept of social class and the need to awaken class consciousness among children seem to be of much less transcendence than in previous decades, though the tendency is not completely defunct, as the publication of *Tales for Little Rebels* (Mickenberg and Nel, 2008) proves. This anthology gathers a number of children's texts with a socialist agenda, as well as offering a brief selection of secondary sources published in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century on books for children with a Communist or, more generally speaking, radical message. Following that vanishing but still ongoing trend some writers have also taken the opportunity to combine a portrayal of the Great

War with reflections upon class, a connection that is historically relevant inasmuch as the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution took place in the same period.

All those things considered, I should now move on to say that the aim of this paper is to offer an analysis of several representative texts of the aforementioned tendency to publish or reedit children's texts that not only feature the First World War, thus helping younger generations of kids to learn basic facts about the Great War, but also enhance multicultural values and the demolishing of class and gender boundaries. Ultimately, the objective is to present a study of a variety of strategies used in several writers' ambitious attempt at simultaneously entertaining and educating young readers.

Since the number of children's books on the First World War is certainly large, it has been necessary to select a much smaller corpus. The criteria I have followed are geographical, temporal and thematic. From a geographical point of view, there is at least one text that portrays each of the war's main scenes. Chronologically speaking, I should add that all the texts selected have been recently published or reedited, and also that with them it would be possible to reconstruct the years of the War one by one. As regards thematic issues, it should be pointed out that each story works at conveying at least one of the values previously referred to, although in some cases several of them are actually being transmitted. Last but not least, I would like to conclude this introductory section by saying that the texts I have selected have been written by both some of the best-known English writers (among whom one could point out the current English Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, best-selling children's author Michael Foreman or former Children's Laureates Jacqueline Wilson and Malorie Blackman), and by others whose works have had less repercussion so far. In this way, an attempt has been made to offer a corpus which is representative of different degrees of literary success, just as it has been built to stage a variety of war theaters, to cover all the years of WWI and to exemplify three basic thematic concerns of twenty-first century pedagogues and educators, while, simultaneously, exposing their potential young readers to several literary genres: poetry, diary, novel, and short story.

Yet, many other texts have been left out or merely referred to for a number of reasons, lack of space being one of them. For other more comprehensive, if older, studies of children's books that portray the First World War, readers may examine *Women and Children First: The Fiction of Two World Wars* (Cadogan & Craig, 1979), a treatise that devotes three chapters to children's fiction, and *Children at War: From the First World War to the Gulf* (Agnew & Fox, 2001), whose first and second chapters (pp. 4-14 and pp. 55-83) are a valuable guide to WWI texts for young readers. The latter, though much more recent than the former, nevertheless fails to cover the books published in the twenty-first century. For that reason, then, the main contribution of the present paper is precisely its focus on those books that have appeared (or reappeared) around the centenary celebrations of 2014.

2. Showing the horrors of war (and its rare miracles) in the trenches of the Western front

In most people's minds, the First World War is recreated as a conflict presided over by the ignominious trenches, those ditches where the soldiers of both sides spent their days and nights immersed in mud, hit by the stink of the corpses –buried nearby if buried at all–, by the dirt of the latrines, which sometimes overflowed into the trenches, by lice, various illnesses, hunger, lack of sleep or mutilation (Fussell, 1975 [2013]: 39-81). None of these things could, in principle, be regarded as materials parents would want their children to learn about at a tender age. Yet, many authors have

taken all those elements and used them as the basis for their texts, though in order to make the stuff they are working with more acceptable for their young readers, they often combine it with instances of what might be considered "rare occurrences" of a quasi-miraculous nature.

For instance, Jamila Gavin –a British writer of Indian descent– chooses a historical figure, Khudadah Khan, as one of the leading characters in "The Man in the Red Trousers" (2014). The figure of Khan itself is certainly astonishing and unexpected, as being a member of the Duke of Connaught's 129th Baluchi Regiment, he was actually obliged to wear a most incongruous uniform made up of conspicuous red trousers and a green turban and jacket, bright clothes that seemed taken "out of the Arabian Nights" (34) but which no magic prevented from soon being covered up in mud, shrapnel and blood just like everything else on the Western front. He prays to Allah, begs him to protect him and his comrade Mohammed, another Muslim like himself, and confesses his ignorance of the reasons why they are fighting. On the contrary, he is totally conscious of the brutality of the war, its countless casualties, the terrifying proximity of his own death: "I saw the 1st Gloucesters, bayonets fixed and staring rigidly in front, racing forward, then falling, falling, falling –like sheaths of corn under the scythe. Out of eighty lads, only thirteen make it through. [...] We know we too will be cut down" (28). And yet, eventually, Khan not only manages to remain alive, but also succeeds in defending many colleagues, showing extreme valor, and in giving shelter to three orphaned kids. Thus the narrative balances the depressing elements of the story with the real case of a courageous soldier who was actually awarded the Victory Cross for bravery. Khan's heroism is even more relevant today because of his Indian origin and his religious affiliation: in the Western world, now that Islamophobia seems to be on the rampant (Allen, 2010), counterbalancing all-too-frequent media stories of Islamist terrorists with those of Muslim heroes may be considered as a form of due reward.

Black British writer Malorie Blackman, who currently holds the position of Britain's Children's Laureate (2013-2015), has likewise written a story, "The Broken Promise" (2014), that attempts to set another record straight: in her case, the rarely acknowledged presence of black soldiers among the Allied forces (Das, 2011). Hers is a totally fictive story, though, but a very poignant one. Its two main characters are a couple of English half-brothers: Danny, a white boy fighting in France, and Billy, a black fourteen-year-old teenager who desperately tries to fit into the English society that systematically discriminates against him. Willing to emulate his elder brother, and naively thinking that he will escape racism on the front, he lies to the recruiting officers about his age and enlists. When he arrives in France, he happens to be sent to the trench where his own brother is serving, only to be confronted with another instance of racism which is even more painful for him: his own brother refuses to admit that they are relatives, as he feels that would entail giving explanations about their father's two wives and being associated with a black kid. However, on the day the boys have to get out of the trench and start an assault on the Germans, Billy, being nothing but a kid, panics and tries to desert. Danny, then, chooses to help –and save– his younger brother by giving him a "Blighty One", that is, a gun wound that will not kill him but will send him back to England, and by confessing his adoration for him. Here the representation of the war reaches the crudest possible forms, including terrifying nightmares and suicidal thoughts. But, in this case, the final erasure of the racial barriers that for a while separated the two protagonists somehow compensates for the horror.

In "The Other Anzac Day" (2014), by the French-Australian writer Sophie Masson, readers get a glimpse of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, but mostly the story focuses on a battle that took place on 25 April 1918 on the Western front and that was won by the Allies, as opposed to the previously mentioned campaign. Archie, the protagonist of the story, is a young Australian boy that happens to

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be a soldier during the events that took place on that second Anzac Day. Despite the success of the Allies on that occasion, nothing seems to work right for him: first he kills a German boy, but his victim reminds him of his own brother, who had died in Gallipoli, and that physical resemblance of the two dead soldiers makes him suffer acutely; secondly, he is ordered to take care of the German prisoners, but after feeling a German prisoner is trying to mock him, he gets too excited and is therefore told to go away and calm down. The German prisoner, another boy like himself, was simply begging him to post the letter he was holding in his hands. When Archie realizes his mistake, he nevertheless refuses to help him. Eventually, though, he sees the German for what he is: "a frightened kid trying to look like a man" (248), and, nodding in acceptance, takes his letter and thus bridges the distance that had separated him from his foe.

Another instance of enemy soldiers "miraculously" coming together is presented in "The Murder Machine" (2014), a short story by Irish writer Oisín McGann. The first part of the story takes place in 1916, during the Battle of the Somme. Here the protagonist, a young Irish soldier called Jimmy Reilly who is a member of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers is confronted with the horrors of war, which he comes to see as a machine that produces "industrial slaughter" (195), with his own past and his contradictory present –his father was killed by an English soldier who had taken his old man for a rebel, and now he is part of the same army that English soldier fought and killed for– and with the complexity of the Irish situation, represented in the story through the voices of different Irish characters that fail to agree on what their country's problem is or how it should be tackled. Though he is initially relatively moderate in his views, the war, nonetheless, ends up radicalizing him, to the extent that in the second part of the short story, which takes place in 1920, during the Irish War of Independence, readers find Jimmy as an Irish rebel, leading a small squad of armed men that are trying to steal some weapons from a police barracks, and ready to use violence. However, after shooting a civilian and realizing his victim had a son who has witnessed it all –like he himself had seen an English soldier kill his own father– he abhors the kind of life he is leading and, admitting that violence only generates further violence, opts for peace. This brusque change in his life's trajectory, caused by his connection of his own assassination of a civilian with his father's murder at the hands of an English soldier and by his forgiveness of his father's murderer, is a perfect example of all those miraculous occurrences that many writers resort to in their WWI fiction for young readers.

For her part, Carol Ann Duffy, English Poet Laureate since 2009, similarly takes many of all those gruesome facts that have been part of the previously analyzed short stories to build up her poem *The Christmas Truce* (2011), a book based on the true events of the cessation of hostilities that took place on the Christmas Eve of December 1914 in the ditches of the Western front. The author plunges into a description of life in the trenches that combines instances of poetic stylization (as when we are told that there is a "soldier-poet" in the trenches –an obvious reference to all the famous English War Poets who participated in WWI– caught in the middle of writing a line which describes "a robin holding his winter ground" [7]) and examples of more realistic and heart-rendering situations: "The frozen, foreign fields were acres of pain" (12), there was "glittering rime on unburied sons" (11), men would soon "drown in mud, be gassed, or shot / or vaporized / by falling shells" (16). However, the author does not stop at that disgusting –if pertaining– description, but moves beyond it in an attempt to show that human beings' hearts may have been hardened by the war frenzy, but underneath the apparent freeze there is still hope for understanding between foes. When the Germans unexpectedly begin singing Christmas carols, "a sudden bridge / from man to man" (19) is erected, one which enables both sides to leave the trenches and "shake the hand of a foe as a friend" (27), to exchange food and to

even play a football match. The book beautifully stages this reunion by means of three strategies. First, by using both English and German in the narration of the events: "I showed him a picture of my wife" [30], says an English soldier, while a German one recalls, "Ich zeigte ihm / ein Foto meiner Frau" [30], thus using a German expression as close to the English one as possible, which symbolically represents the similar feelings both soldiers experience during the encounter as well as the parallel recollection of the event. Secondly, by means of the narrated events themselves, which always imply reciprocation: the Germans start singing carols and then the French and the English follow suit; a young Berliner leaves his ditch first and is quickly followed by a Shropshire lad, etc. Thirdly, the illustrations greatly contribute to the erasure of the gap between foes as they picture German soldiers shaking the hands of British soldiers, or even hugging them, sharing cigarettes with their "enemies", being buried together with only the helmets as proof that a corpse belongs to one side or the other. In death, too, as in the brief span of time of this truce, the Germans and the English are foes no more.

3. Portraying the inhumanity of war (and some unlikely friendships) in Gallipoli, the Eastern front

If the trenches of the Western front have come to epitomize the kind of conflict WWI was –a stagnated war, with little or no advance of the troops–, then the battle of Gallipoli can be given the benefit of representing both an opprobrious campaign for the Allies, who proved incapable of orchestrating a successful operation on the Eastern front despite their belief in their racial and military superiority in relation to the Turks, as well as the event that precipitated in a quasi-mythological sense the birth of the Australian and New Zealand national consciousness, as both countries saw the disappearance of a whole generation of young males who had optimistically and naively joined the armed corps (ANZAC) to fight for King and Country (Sheftall, 2010: 69). As in the case of the trenches, writers have here a kind of material that does not seem fitting for young readers: the stench of the ditches on the Western front must have been as nauseating as that of the Gallipoli peninsula, where approximately 100,000 men are said to have lost their lives (McLachlan, 2008 [2015]). Added to this the dishonor caused by the Allies' miscalculations in preparing the campaign and their utter failure in attaining the goals they had set themselves to –initially the control of the Dardanelles strait and ultimately the capturing of the Ottoman capital, Constantinople–, it seems unlike that any children's author should concern themselves with the Gallipoli campaign. Yet, once more, expectations that bloody and shameful events will not be favored as issues in children's literature are reversed by actual children's books.

An example of such reversal can be found in Michael Foreman's *The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha* (2013), a book that foregrounds the unlikely friendship between a young stretcher bearer and a tortoise he finds in Gallipoli. The relationship between humans and animals is likewise exploited in other WWI books for children, as for example in *Simpson and his Donkey*, by the Australian writer Mark Greenwood (2008), or in *The Donkey Man* (2004) and *Roly, the Anzac Donkey* (2004 [2015]), both by the New Zealand writer and military historian Glyn Harper. In the twentieth century, Michael Morpurgo, former British Children's Laureate (from 2003 to 2005), had similarly drawn attention to the animals that took part in the Great War in his novel *War Horse* (1982 [2007]), where he recreates the bedlam of WWI from a horse's viewpoint. In all those cases, the stories praise humans for their courage or disinterestedness, but they simultaneously highlight the invaluable contribution of animals and their immense suffering.

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Foreman's story, based like Carol Ann Duffy's (and interestingly like Greenwood's and Harper's, too) on true events, offers a complex narrative where three different narrators weave the lives of several characters at various vital moments. The frame narrator is a journalist who remembers his own boyhood years, in particular a period in the 1950s when he started working for a local newspaper for which he ran some errands. On one specific occasion he was asked to visit a Mr. Friston who owned a tortoise that had become a local star: it was not until the tortoise came out of its shell that spring was officially proclaimed in the English town of Corton. The paper boy thus becomes acquainted with the tortoise's owner and soon afterwards a friendship starts to develop between them. At this point in the narrative Mr. Friston turns into the book's inner narrator as he starts recalling himself as a young boy who had joined the British Navy right before the outbreak of WWI. His elder voice is supported by another narrating voice: that of himself in the diary he wrote in 1915, when he was sent to Gallipoli on the HMS Implacable. Through these three voices readers learn the story of how Mr. Friston came to know the horrors of Gallipoli: "it got to a point where there were thousands of unburied bodies, with the most God-awful stink (even worse than mucking out the stables on a hot summer's day), not to mention the threat of disease for those of us still alive" (58). He likewise discovers that the English are not fighting on their own against the Turks, but supported by thousands of soldiers that come from the confines of the Empire, which gives him immense pride: "It was like my world map had turned up in Gallipoli—there were Australians and New Zealanders, Sikhs, Gurkha Rifles and the Second African Regiment [...]. We weren't just the British Army any more, we were the Army of the British Empire!" (55).

But most importantly, he comes to recognize that the boys from the two sides are just the same: innocent pawns that have been sent to die in battle for no discernible reason, with more things in common –fear, a need of friendship and companionship– than he would have thought of before the conflict broke out. For that reason, when there is a ceasefire to allow the stretcher boys to carry the wounded and the dead back to secure positions, Friston, a stretcher boy himself, goes forward into no-man's land only to find out that "the men toiling away next to us were Turkish medics and stretcher boys, who looked just as wary of us as we did of them" (59). After strenuous work carrying the dead away, the stretcher boys on both sides "collapsed to the ground in exhausted groups, Turkish and Empire soldiers together", and they "sat side by side sharing [their] smokes and [their] rations" (60-61). Later on, when the fire resumed, Friston felt devastated by that previous experience of closeness to the Turks: "I tried my hardest, but I just couldn't shake the thought that our gunfire was headed straight for the Turkish lads that I'd been huddled next to only a matter of hours before" (62). The paper boy, for his part, who has been attentively listening to Mr. Friston's recollections, learns a lesson too: "As I pedaled away from Corton that afternoon, I felf a bit ashamed. It had never really occurred to me before that there wasn't so much difference between soldiers on opposite sides in a war" (63). And, by implication, the child who is reading the book and therefore playing the role of yet one more narratee for Mr. Friston's war memories, is thus encouraged to concur with Friston and the paper boy that national enmities are constructions aimed at fostering certain international power relations, not something determined by people's inherent values.

An interesting turn in Mr. Friston's narrative takes place when he remembers how he came across his tortoise in the Gallipoli peninsula. During a bombardment which caught him on X-beach, he feared for his life. Suddenly, his head was hit by something that looked like a shell but was actually a tortoise shell. Having a living creature by himself gave him courage and hope that he would not die; for that reason, he chose to keep the tortoise as a pet and named it after the ruler of the Ottoman

Empire, Ali Pasha. Friston managed to remain alive and did make it back to the Implacable. He showed his tortoise to his mates and they all decided it would be their lucky pet. The irony implied in this situation is worth commenting on: thanks to his participation in Gallipoli not only has Friston learned that he could be a pal with the Turkish rank and file, but he also accepts their ruler, symbolically represented by that small tortoise that he met on the beach and that he and his friends later on cherished and befriended. As the last pages of Foreman's book reminds its readers of by means of both a sort of epilogue illustrated with newspaper clippings and various photographs, history was yet to give an even more ironic twist to this whole story when in 1968 the *News of the World* published an article about Ali Pasha, the tortoise, and Mr. Friston. The story travelled the globe and then appeared in the *Age*, a newspaper in Melbourne, Australia. After that, the Tail-Waggers' Club of Australia made the tortoise an honorary member. Other periodical publications ran pieces of news about Ali Pasha as well, but the fact that the German paper *Die Aktuelle* featured the tortoise in 1986 is especially noteworthy. All things considered, it proves that the unusual friendship between an English boy, Friston, and a Turkish being (symbolically named after the Ottoman ruler) is ultimately the story of how unlikely friendships between so-called enemies can be more permanent than their nations' conflicts. Besides, it is endearing to realize the fact that the Australians, who mourned for so many thousands of their compatriots fallen on the beaches of the Gallipoli peninsula, can also find solace in a story of love between "foes"; finally, seeing the Germans fall for the charms of a Turkish tortoise that has been adopted by a British war veteran reconciles oneself to human nature. This is ultimately the trick by means of which Foreman makes an apparently unpalatable material not only apt for children, but engaging and charming too.

4. Representing disintegration (and endurance) on the home front

The First World War was a "total war", which means that the entire nation was called into war, not just the military (Tucker & Roberts, 2005: 510). In the case of Britain, that implied that the government took control of certain things that would have been unthinkable in peace times. For instance, the government became in charge of regulating the economy, determining what was produced and in what quantities; for that purpose, it nationalized factories and allocated manpower and resources, among other things. It also introduced conscription and used propaganda to raise money or boost the public morale. The Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), passed only four days after the War broke out, gave the government ample powers to help prevent invasion and to keep the morale at home high. In particular, some of its provisions allowed the government to use censorship, strict punishments of violations, and the requisition of goods. As the War progressed, more changes took place in British life. Rationing became necessary, as was the need for women to take over the jobs that men had left vacant, to join sewing and knitting clubs where they made scarfs and socks for the soldiers, to volunteer as nurses or drivers, and so on so forth. The bombing of parts of Britain by the Germans also meant a great upheaval in the lives of British civilians, who had never been targeted before. It is clear, then, that this total war in which civilians, labor and the economy were all affected by the conflict was not simply taking place in theaters across the globe, but also very significantly at home, in Blighty herself, as the British came to call their land.

Jackie French's *A Rose for the Anzac Boys* (2010) gives readers the perspective of all those women who worked towards the war effort, mostly as volunteers, as it tells the story of a girl from New Zealand who has been surprised by the outbreak of the War while studying at a boarding school

in England. Penelope Farmer's *Charlotte Sometimes* (1969 [2013]) also offers a depiction of the home front, focusing specifically on the year 1918. This book, however, is not a recent publication as French's, but a text that has become a classic in British children's literature. The novel is the third and best known of the books featuring the Makepeace sisters, Charlotte and Emma, sometimes known as the Aviary Hall books, after the place where both sisters live. It has never been out of print since its publication, and it remains a favorite of British children and critics. Literary critic and academic Margery Fisher, for example, stated that it "is really a study in disintegration, the study of a girl finding an identity by losing it… [It is] a book of quite exceptional distinction… a haunting, convincing story which comes close to being a masterpiece of its kind" (1969: 1408). Its influence on popular culture is far-reaching, the best proof of which is the fact that in 1981 the English band The Cure released a song entitled "Charlotte Sometimes" whose lyrics were made up of some sentences literally taken from the book and which was accompanied by a video clip that recreated some of the novel's scenes; more recently, the American singer and song-writer Jessica Charlotte Poland chose "Charlotte Sometimes" as her stage name, although she changed it to "Laces" in 2014.

Charlotte Sometimes tells the story of how Charlotte Makepeace, a student at a boarding school in the late 1950s, travels mysteriously to 1918, exchanging places with a girl called Clare every other night, until each gets stuck in the other girl's time, which happens when Charlotte and Emily (Clare's sister) are made to leave the school to stay in lodgings at Mr. Chisel Brown's house. After some time there, both girls are sent back to sleep at the school and Charlotte manages to return to her own time, and so does Clare. Throughout the book and all the time travels, Charlotte struggles to keep her own identity as Charlotte, a girl from the 1950s, but this becomes increasingly difficult as she spends more and more time in 1918 and as her empathy for Emily and the rest of the people she meets in 1918 grows. This identity question thus becomes one of the more poignant issues in the novel, and also one which can attract young readers as much as it can engage adults. Charlotte's progressively confused and to some extent erased identity is counterpointed by her effort to build up a new sense of self which incorporates elements from the 1918 girl whose position she is unwillingly occupying. When she finally returns to the 1950s, she feels her identity has been utterly transformed and is now a sort of palimpsest from which her experiences of identity usurpation and of living on the British home front in times of the First World War are indelible: "she had begun to realize that she could never entirely escape from being Clare. The memory of it, if nothing else, was rooted in her mind. What had happened to her would go on mattering, just as what had happened in the war itself would go on mattering, for ever" (Farmer, 1969 [2013]: 227). The importance of the issue of identity has been foregrounded by most readers and critics. The author herself acknowledges this on her blog *Rockpool in the Kitchen* in an entry of 9 June, 2007, entitled "The Cure(d)", when she says: "The whole book turned –though I didn't see that when I wrote it– on identity". But apart from that issue, the question of time travelling may also be especially attractive for young readers, as well as that of the possibility of talking to the spirits of the dead, which the book similarly dwells on.

Even more significantly, this novel offers a comprehensive account of what it must have been like to live on the home front in 1918. Readers get references to the pro-war literature that young boys had been exposed to in the years before the conflict, as well as to other kinds of war propaganda. As Charlotte herself becomes able to discern the difference between that propaganda and the real thing, so do readers, who learn about the war casualties being listed in the daily newspapers or see the wounded soldiers being carried to British hospitals to recover. Women are offered many more working options, even in positions previously deemed unladylike, and they perceive the chance of getting the

suffrage much closer. Yet, the undesirable "marks of war", that is "the shabbiness of things, bad food, shop queues, [...], people with worried faces, people dressed in black" (Farmer, 1969 [2013]: 145-146) are everywhere, as are the references to male characters dying on a constant and regular basis: the maid at Mr. Chisel's house, Ann, has lost her boyfriend (148); Miss Wilkin, one of the teachers at the boarding school, after being told that her fiancé has been killed at the front, is constantly shown twisting her engagement ring, thus symbolically mourning her beloved (153); Miss Agnes's brother, Mr. Chisel's son, has also been killed at the front, just as the father of one of Charlotte's class mates, Marjorie (155). Letters from and to the front keep coming and going, more often than not bringing unsettling news. For those who have stayed in Britain, sleeping is not exempt from difficulties, as there are searchlights at night to catch airplanes, and air-raid sirens that make the nights noisy, busy and very frightening. For soldiers on leave things are even worse: nightmares about life on the Western front haunt them at night, and the terror of going back has rendered them, at best, speechless, as Miss Agnes points out when she remembers the time her brother Arthur was sent home on leave. Besides, some of these young boys cannot think of returning to the trenches; even though they were brought up believing in the honorability of dying for one's country, now a number of them consider deserting the army (175). The so-called Spanish flu of 1918 soon starts to cause casualties on the home front too, sending one girl after another to the school's nursing facility. The scarcity of food, gas, water and many other necessities, combined with the omnipresence of illness and death lead a great deal of people to desperation. Lack of trust in fellow mates is widespread and affects even the school girls, who show deep dislike for a girl of German descent. Others develop signs of irrationality and susceptibility, as for instance the Chisel Browns and their maid –gullibility clearly crosses the class boundary– who attend a séance in a futile attempt to speak to the spirits of their loved ones. When the War concludes and the English take to the streets for the Armistice celebrations, the irony of war comes to the forefront: Armistice day is a "grey and gloomy Friday" (180) and many people find no reason to celebrate the end of a conflict for which their relatives seem to have died in vain (147).

The abundance of negative images connected to the First World War is such that this novel looks as an exception in comparison with the books selected to illustrate the Western and the Eastern fronts. In fact, as the latter compensated their more ominous elements with glimpses of human kindness, generosity or amicability, *Charlotte Sometimes*, on the contrary, abounds on the inescapability of shabbiness, narrow-mindedness and even tragedy in the midst of war. It nonetheless gives young readers a great opportunity to time travel in their imaginations; to relocate themselves, with Charlotte, in 1918, and to experience, if vicariously, what it is like to do without material and emotional needs, to fear for one's own life and for the lives of one's loved ones; to see one's world so altered, so upside down, that it looks like one's own world no more. The book succeeds precisely in doing this, and then in carrying readers back to their own time, thus permitting them a safe landing back home, though one which is neither uneventful nor unscathed. But inasmuch as it helps readers put themselves in other people's shoes, it definitely allows them to start developing a multicultural awareness (for example, when they have to vicariously confront themselves with that classmate of German descent), a class consciousness (let us not forget that Charlotte and her sister are taken to lodgings because their aunt cannot afford the boarding school) and a gender perspective which is highlighted in the novel, on various occasions, as for instance when one of the teachers reminds her pupils of the fact that now that "[w]omen have proved their worth [...] as doctors, soldiers, sailors, as administrators and civil servants, as drivers, postmen, shopkeepers and policewomen", the vote will no longer be denied to them nor their value "as English citizens" (180).

5. Advancing women's issues (while the body count rises) on all fronts

Charlotte Sometimes is by no means a book exclusively about women's issues, although, as it portrays the home front, it necessarily puts special emphasis on that question, given the fact that women played a prominent role on that front (Adie, 2013). Another just case would be Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Rilla of Ingleside* (1921 [2010]), the first novel that drew attention to the Canadian home front from a woman's perspective. Since its publication in the 1920s, many other WWI books for children have chosen to make women's issues their first and foremost concern regardless of the front they highlight. In that way, they introduce young readers to issues of paramount importance for the development of a feminist agenda in the early years of the twentieth century.

For example, Jacqueline Wilson, Britain's former Children's Laureate (from 2005 to 2007), has inscribed the suffragist movement in her novel *Opal Plumstead* (2014), while simultaneously showing working-class concerns in 1913, the year before WWI broke out, and in 1914. The novel's main character, Opal, is a scholarship girl who, through a number of misfortunes, sees herself forced to give up her school and take up a job at a factory that makes sweets. Mrs. Roberts, the factory owner, happens to be an outspoken defender of women's suffrage who invites her women employees to attend suffragists' meetings, though none but Opal ever attends them. In those gatherings the protagonist becomes familiarized with the suffragists' demands and with their rhetoric, which sometimes she passionately adheres to and others feels repelled by, as occasionally they border, in Opal's view, on the irrational and gratuitously violent. As the novel advances and Opal first meets and then falls in love with Mrs. Roberts' son, Morgan, class issues become more poignant, since Mrs. Roberts no longer finds Opal's company entertaining now that class boundaries are endangered. When the War finally breaks out, Morgan enlists, his mother's factory closes down –as sweets are now considered an unnecessary luxury–, and the suffragist movement enters a resting phase, following Lady Pankhurst's call for a halt to militancy and demonstrations. In this way, young readers can get acquainted with historical figures as Emmeline Pankhurst and read excerpts from some of her famous speeches; they can also learn about Britain's suffragist movement, its evolution as well as its contradictions; finally, they can become cognizant of the strict class divisions of early twentieth-century British society that would prevent the working classes from receiving even secondary education, not to speak of higher education, and from maintaining relationships with the upper classes. To sweeten it all, the novel resorts to a plot that heavily relies on the impossible love affair between Opal and Morgan, thus offering yet one more updated version of the Romeo and Juliet template.

Valerie Wilding's *My Story. A First World War Girl's Diary 1916-1917. Road to War* (2008) also focuses on women's issues, though instead of offering a working-class character, like Wilson's, presents her readers with Daphne, a tomboy from an upper-class family who has never been able to fit into her family's idea of women's acceptable roles. After seeing her father die in the war, her brother go missing on the Western front and her mother lose her mental health as a result, she tries to contribute to the war effort by joining knitting parties. Her incompetence, though, is manifest to all. Encouraged by her aunt, a suffragette, she then opts for the FANY (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) instead. She gets a driving license and takes a first-aid course, and soon afterwards is sent to the Western front. Wilding's book thus acquaints its readers with a group of volunteer women that was created in the early 1900s, had a fundamental role in both WWI and WWII, and is still very active in Britain (Popham, 2002; Lee, 2005 [2012]). Daphne has numerous difficulties to adapt to her new life of meagre resources, dirty lodgings and overwhelming suffering, but she quickly learns to carry out

many duties, which in turn boots her self-esteem: "The FANY don't just do ambulance duties, they take supplies, drive nurses to and from the boat so they can go home on leave—all sorts of things. Even collecting laundry for the hospitals! We can use army cars for driving the army nurses—much more comfortable!" (102). While back in England her family and friends had hardly acknowledged her as nothing but a "[p]retty little head" (23), which made her think she had her head "full of butterflies instead of brains" (23), her contribution now to the war effort allows her to recognize her full potential as a human being. Moreover, part of her education includes not only the command of skills that society had considered unladylike till then, like driving automobiles, but also the realization that living among women and growing friendship links with fellow FANY volunteers can give meaning to one's life, though she likewise finds solace in a love relationship she starts with a British officer. Last but not least, Daphne's education is completed with the shocking awareness that there can be just as much goodness in Germans as evilness in Britons. Said awareness, acquired on the occasion when she is asked to drive a few German prisoners, allows her to fully develop as a human being who has now learned about her own worth, friendship, love, and respect for others: "It struck me that the Germans were no different from any of our regular *blessés* [British injured soldiers]. They were injured men. Somebody's son. Somebody's brother" (141).

Effie, the protagonist and narrator of Melvin Burgess' short story "Mother and Mrs. Everington" (2014), comes to basically the same conclusion after working as an ambulance driver on the Western front. Referring to both the German and the British soldiers, she thus says: "Odd how they all look the same when their uniforms and faces are burned away" (137). This realization leads her to a total disengagement from her country: "I no longer particularly care who wins this bloody war. I no longer care, because whoever is proclaimed the victor, I am sure of only one thing—we will all have lost" (137). This short story is part of the collection *War Girls. A Collection of First World War Stories through the Eyes of Young Women* (Breslin *et al.* 2014), a compilation of texts that feature women in all kinds of roles and on all the war fronts. "Mother and Mrs. Everington", as it has been shown, features an ambulance driver in France; "Shadow and Light" (Breslin, 2014) a Red Cross nurse on the Continent, and "Sky Dancer" (Doherty, 2014) a singer who joins a party of performers who tour the camps of the Western front entertaining the soldiers; for their part, "The Marshalling of Angélique's Geese" (House, 2014) focuses on a farmer's daughter on the French home front, while "Storm in a Teashop" (Hooper, 2014), "Piercing the Veil" (Fine, 2014) and "The Green Behind the Glass" (Geras, 2014) show English girls on the British home front playing different roles.

In my view, two stories in this collection deserve special treatment: "Ghost Story" (Whyman, 2014) and "Going Spare" (Nicholls, 2014). The former takes place in 1915, during the Gallipoli campaign. However, it is not narrated by a British soldier or stretcher bearer, like *The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha* (Foreman, 2013), but by a Turkish woman who has been driven, after the Allies killed her husband and son, to become a sniper and defend her own home, in the Gallipoli peninsula, from foreign occupation. This, in fact, is another example of the bold attempt of many contemporary writers to present female characters playing all sorts of roles, even the more unlikely ones, as that of being an actual combatant. In the hours the Turkish protagonist spends occupied in the protection of her properties, she becomes acquainted with a young soldier, and fellow countryman, who keeps her company and looks up to her as both a mother and a brave warrior. Eventually, they both die in an embrace, but before that she, like the leading characters in Wilding's *My Story. A First World War Girl's Diary 1916-1917. Road to War* (2008) and in Burgess' "Mother and Mrs. Everington" (2014), learns to reconsider her relationship with the enemy: "My personal loss had made these men [the British] monsters in my mind, and yet

the individual inching towards the farmhouse, tired and drawn, is nothing like I had imagined" (51). Here once more the author is stressing the fundamental equality of all human beings, regardless of their national affiliation, and in so doing, he is contributing to the development of a multicultural sensitivity which twenty-first children can positively benefit from.

"Going Spare" (Nicholls, 2014) is also worthy of special consideration and of coming last in this analysis of a number of WWI books for children that promote gender awareness, the reason being that, rather than focusing on the years of the conflict itself, it concentrates on the aftermath of the War and, in particular, on the positive outcome that it had for women (Black, 2011: 256). As other texts that have been analyzed in this paper (Foreman's being the epitome), it is a complex text from the point of view of its narrative technique, inasmuch as there is first a frame narrator, a fourteen-year old girl who lives in London in 1977, and an inner narrator, Miss Frobisher, the girl's neighbor, who takes up the story-telling role when she is visited by the frame narrator. Miss Frobisher is now an old woman who spent the years of WWI in England. When the War finished, she was expected to find a boyfriend during or right after her coming-out ball, but there were very few boys at that party and, as she and her sister soon discovered, hardly any boys had been left in England. Her sister accepted a marriage proposal from a Scottish farmer, thus coming down the social ladder, as her family belonged to the upper class. This circumstance caused some discomfort in her parents, but they finally accepted the need to bless their daughter's union, because the scarcity of men was absolutely appalling and marriage then, for women, a priority. Miss Frobisher, for her part, found no suitor for herself and, despite her parents' opposition, decided to become a professional woman. In her retelling of her experiences to the frame narrator, she rejoices in recalling the happiness she felt when young women were given the right to vote in 1930 and in many other advances that she and the women of her generation who had gone "spare" managed to achieve: "It was an exciting time to be a woman [...]. So many firsts! The first woman to graduate from university. The first woman stockbroker. The first woman MP. A generation of pioneers" (249). She unequivocably attributes all those gains to the War: "The War changed everything, you see. Single women weren't an oddity any more. We were an organized collective" (250). When the old woman's narration comes to an end and the young girl –and frame narrator– goes back to her parents' apartment, the latter is now ready to contradict her own mother's opinion that that generation of women who had been unable to find husbands after the War had spent their lives doing nothing, as they had had neither homes nor families to look after. Now the little girl knows better than her mother: "They didn't just do nothing [...]. All those women. They changed the world" (252). Here, as in many other texts, the tragic consequences of WWI are not hidden from children's eyes; in fact, strong emphasis is placed on the huge amount of casualties suffered by the British, and the brutality of a war that almost literally wiped a whole generation of men away. But, like in previous cases, the author of "Going Spare" chooses to move beyond the tragic aspects and to put the spotlight, instead, on the positive outcome of a conflict that resulted fatal like few others. In that attempt to not forget the good aspects, one fact becomes evident: that women's issues were irrevocably advanced during the War, if at too high a price.

6. Lest we forget, lest we fail to learn a lesson

One of the main theses in *Children at War: From the First World War to the Gulf* (Agnew & Fox, 2001), is that, as the twentieth century advanced, English children's WWI literature progressively abandoned the former belief in Britain's superiority over all other nations in the world and the need to highlight

its grandeur and strength. Besides, it increasingly adopted a more critical stance towards the First World War, an attitude that was in accordance with a nation that by the end of the preceding century started to feel less at ease with itself. On top of all that, late twentieth-century writers showed a greater readiness to examine issues related to violence, endurance, or suffering, and to condemn wars and the ideology that sustains them. Throughout my paper, I hope to have proved that in the first years of the twenty-first century writers that have focused on the Great War have maintained that inclination that characterized late twentieth-century texts, although they have also added to it a deeper concern with enhancing children's awareness of cultural, class and gender differences.

Accordingly, the textual corpus that has been examined in this paper unambiguously denounces and explicitly portrays the horrors of WWI in three different theaters: the atrocities of the Western front are featured in several short stories within the collection *Stories of WW1* (Bradman, 2014) and in *The Christmas Truce* (Duffy, 2011); the Eastern front, with all its carnage, is the primary setting in *The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha* (Foreman, 2013), while *Charlotte Sometimes* (Farmer, 1969 [2013]), among other texts, puts the miseries of the home front in the foreground.

An attempt has been made to select a corpus that covered all of the years of the Great War and also the aftermath of the conflict. Thus, *Opal Plumstead* (Wilson, 2014) takes place in 1913 and 1914; *The Christmas Truce* (Duffy 2011) on the Christmas Eve of 1914; *The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha* (Foreman 2013) narrates events that happened during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915; *My Story. A First World War Girl's Diary 1916-1917. Road to War* (Wilding, 2008), as the title indicates, focuses on the years 1916 and 1917; *Charlotte Sometimes* (Farmer, 1969 [2013]) fictionalizes what life must have been like in England in 1918. Finally, the texts in the collection *Stories of WW1* (Bradman, 2014) feature fictionalized events that happen at different times during the war; among those stories, it is worth pointing out "The Murder Machine" (McGann, 2014), whose action takes place in 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, and sometime in the year 1920 during the Irish Revolutionary War (1919-1921), which is presented in the story as a bloody event that was partly fuelled by WWI. The stories in *War Girls. A Collection of First World War Stories through the Eyes of Young Women* (Breslin *et al.,* 2014) also take place in various years and phases within the War, but here it is worth highlighting "Going Spare" (Nicholls, 2014), as it portrays the aftermath of the War, leading up to the 1970s, thus helping readers realize, as in the case of "The Murder Machine", the deep shadow WWI continued to cast long after the conflict was over.

Thematically speaking, the texts that have been under scrutiny reveal twenty-first century writers' concern with multicultural, class and gender issues. *The Christmas Truce* (Duffy, 2011), *The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha* (Foreman, 2013) and "Mother and Mrs. Everington" (Burgess, 2014) could be grouped as works that make a serious attempt at awakening children's realization that the cultural differences between enemy soldiers were nothing but social constructs. For its part, *Charlotte Sometimes* (Farmer, 1969 [2013]) subtly points at that direction too, though its forte is rather shown in its recreation of processes of identity erasure and identity rebuilding in the context of war, and in its portrayal of how such processes are affected by one's experience of gender and class constrictions in specific historical moments. Gender and class also feature prominently in *My Story. A First World War Girl's Diary* (Wilding, 2008), whose main character is an upper-class girl totally uncut for Victorian gender dictates, as well as in *Opal Plumstead* (Wilson, 2014), where a factory girl comes to be confounded by the liberating yet, at times, violent and irrational messages of the suffragettes she meets, just as much as she is bewildered by the factory owner, a suffragette herself who takes the working-class girl under her wings until the lass starts unsettling class divisions by becoming the rich

woman's son's sweetheart. For its part, the short-story collection *War Girls. A Collection of First World War Stories through the Eyes of Young Women* (Breslin *et al.,* 2014) gathers nine texts that offer a varied representation of roles played by women of all classes during the Great War, including English, French and Turkish female characters, which exemplifies further imbrications between class, gender and cultural backgrounds.

The twenty-first emphasis on such imbrications is clearly related to recent pedagogical currents that underline the need to teach children to read "multiculturally", that is, "to adopt a critical approach that seeks to interpret the signs of race, gender, class and other cultural differences in literature" (Cai, 2002: 145). It is believed that the effort on the part of many contemporary writers of children's literature to promote multicultural awareness (expressed as the acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity), class consciousness (represented as sensitivity to social inequalities), and a gender perspective (articulated as the affirmation of the values and experiences of historically underrepresented groups of people, as for example women) should result in the empowerment of young readers, which eventually –or so it is hopefully assumed– will encourage transformation of the self and of society as a whole.

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