



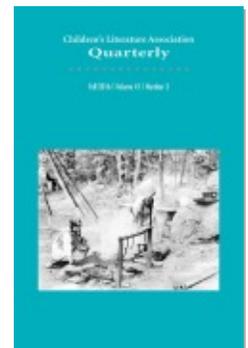
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Children's Literature and Culture of the First World War ed. by Lissa Paul,
Rosemary Ross Johnston, Emma Short (review)

Michael Joseph

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This review has barely skimmed the staggering range of ethical considerations advanced with extraordinary care and detail by Guanio-Uluru in this valuable book: discussions of resistance to consequentialism by Tolkien's hobbits who refuse to abandon friends "for the greater good" (69), as opposed to Dumbledore's openly utilitarian approach to defeating Voldemort; a reading of Eve's apple on the cover of *Twilight* through the lens of a Mormon stance on the Fall, whereby the apple "is a promise as well as a warning" (176); and so much more. In her closing sentence, Guanio-Uluru writes, "The analysis conducted in this book thus gives reason to caution against treatment of the relationship between ethics and form in fantasy narratives as formulaic, and thus predictable" (233). This is an understatement. She has shown that the relationship between ethics and form exhibits astonishing interpretive complexity, in a splendid book that will amply repay many rereadings.

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Children's Literature and Culture of the First World War. Edited by Lissa Paul, Rosemary Ross Johnston, and Emma Short. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Reviewed by Michael Joseph

Aptly, this impressive collection begins with a foreword by Michael Morpurgo, who notes that while the names of the soldiers are passing from memory, we should never forget the point of their sacrifice: "to create a world where their kind of suffering and dying is no longer necessary" (xiv). As the introduction reminds us, children are no longer noncombatants, but suicide bombers, soldiers. War is their milieu.

For the West in 1914, this was not so. For a long time, children were "situated on the fringes of war culture." In this book, "they are at the center" (6). The scholars gathered here are for the most part liminalizing the narrative, augmenting, complicating, even challenging our prevailing intellectual history: as Margaret Higonnet declares, all "narratives matter."

The nineteen essays divide into four sections, "Writing War," "Propaganda and Experience," "Education and Play," and "Activism." They originated as papers in an extended minuet: three conferences in three countries on three continents over three years, in Sydney (2011), Ontario (2012), and England (2013). The book draws to a close with an afterword by Peter Hunt, one of the conference shapers. At a hefty 347 + xviii pages, it's a substantial thing. (There's even writing on the back cover.) Readers get a lot of bang for the buck.

Children's Literature and Culture of the First World War properly begins with a magisterial example of literary criticism by Paul Stevens, who argues that Winston Churchill had an appetite for war that originated in his childhood reading of H. Rider Haggard, in whose novels a key association is forged between heroism and technology. Stevens emphasizes the hold upon Churchill of what Leo Marx called "the technological sublime," the perception of power, even miracle, in the operations of the machine. Hopkins had his Windhover, Job his War Horse; Churchill had munitions.

Two fine, engaging essays on Italian children's literature by Lindsay Myers and Francesca Orestano follow, noting that such books were meant to inculcate patriotic feelings in child readers while depicting warfare as a necessary evil. Under the pressure of war, Italian children's literature shifted from fantasy to realism, a balance that other writers reprise. Noting the near absence of the child in the documentation of war experience, Andrea McKenzie plumbs the pages of *St. Nicholas* magazine for clues to how girls aged ten through seventeen "perceived, imagined, and wrote the First World War" (61). Expounding on the formidable cultural schemata that reinforced gender roles, she nimbly argues that they persisted in asserting their individuality, struggling against the magazine's generalizing tendencies. Delineated by a similar struggle are the young black readers in Katharine Capshaw's adroit discussion of *Our Boys and Girls*, a journal that she has niftily rescued from oblivion. Here, she argues, is a "deeply ideologi-

cal and critical voice . . . articulated clearly and directly to young [black] people" without deference to "inter-racial commonalities" following the war (87, 89).

No less of a probing analysis of a children's magazine is Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieñowska's discussion of *Ungdomsvännan: Illustrerad Tidskrift för Hemmet* (The Youth's Friend: Illustrated Magazine for Home), which concerns "the experiences of the First World War as conveyed in ethnic writings of Swedish immigrant youth in the United States" (93). Stasiewicz-Bieñowska also mulls over identity construction, and her essay is an illuminating work of cultural criticism on an under-studied topic. Whereas McKenzie finds that the war influenced girls to critique dominating national narratives, according to Stasiewicz-Bieñowska it ushered Swedish-American youth toward greater "un-hyphenated American identity" (102).

The focus on the reading and writing lives of young girls is reinforced and complicated by Andrew Donson's essay on young German girls, who apparently had no problem imagining brutal military engagements or relishing the proposition that victory was predicated on military superiority (*Siegfriede*). Donson describes a (postliminal) turn toward greater self-realization among young German women in the war's aftermath, and raises the question of whether "emancipation" occurred as a result of the expanded opportunities afforded girls by the absence of men during the war, or of the policies of the Social Democratic Party. *Siegfriede* rubs

elbows with what Hannah Arendt termed the “imperialist legend” (124) in Barbara Cooke’s colorful parable of the astonishing military career of Arnold Talbot Wilson. Like Churchill, Wilson was a suggestible young reader, but it was the Keswick School’s *Cliftonian* that shaped him. Despite what one might reasonably regard as his death wish to sacrifice himself for the Empire, Wilson survived the First World War, but eventually underwent an existential crisis: he began to “see through the Empire myth of his childhood” (136). PTSD, perhaps? Also like Churchill, Wilson came under the spell of technology: he fell in love with the airplane. Commenting on his heroic end in the air war during the Second World War, Cooke adds, with some asperity, that Wilson’s death was “a tragedy that could have been avoided if he had died on schedule in 1914” (136).

The section concludes on a trip-let: three investigations of home and home-front activities. Rosemary Ross Johnston writes an elegant meditation on home: how it is constructed; how it bends culture (particularly in Australia, where she lives); how it takes root in the unconscious of those far away from home—fighting a war to protect home, whether in a real or symbolic sense—or at home, inculcated with a profound responsibility to represent home and its ritualized activities; and how ideas of home are manipulated “to show and tell not only the idea of *war* to those at home, but the idea of *home* for those at war” (139; italics in original). Jonathan Weier traces the splintering of the international YMCA, which was for many a home

away from home, into discrete Canadian and American institutions during and after the Great War, and meticulously documents how boys’ work in America and Canada “was mobilized and redirected to meet the war-related aims of the YMCA” (176). Justin Nordstrom’s image analysis of propagandized depictions of children during the war, and government manipulation of child imagery, reminds us that there’s no place like home—not even home.

Section 4 begins with Emer O’Sullivan’s discussion of German picture books. Her essay, often comic in tone, pairs nicely with Nordstrom’s, similarly engaging governmental appropriation of children’s images for war propaganda, and with Donson’s as well. The violence that the latter notes in girls’ writing reinforces O’Sullivan’s account of German children wielding deadly weapons “with great glee” (209).

Kristine Moruzi’s reading of the *Grain Grower’s Guide* is one of the most moving essays in the volume. Out on the prairie, the Young Canada Club presented farming children with an “imagined community,” and during the war years reflected their concerns (215). Oddly, after Morpurgo, there are few poignant moments in the collection. Vera C. Wendt, aged thirteen, of Edberg, Alberta, writes: “When a husband or father or brother joins the colors he is doing a good thing for country, but his family has to feel sorry all the while he is gone. When he comes back he is probably crippled and so is helpless” (220).

Rosie Kennedy and Rachel Duffett bring the fun, particularly Kennedy.

Each discusses material culture relative to British toys. It is very difficult not to be happy about toys. Kennedy tells us that by the time war broke out there were already 10 or 11 million toy soldiers available in England. (One wonders what the toddling Churchill played with.) As well as producing injured dolls, toymakers made a conscientious objector doll—"Conchie"—which attracted ferociously negative press. The *Toy and Fancy Goods Trader* complained that "we can scarcely imagine any healthy-minded child harbouring a toy of this kind" (qtd. in 233). Dolls were designed to give pleasure, not to portray what the *Trader* called the "'gloomy' side of war" (237). Toymakers were clearly out to make a shilling, as they proved once again with that most astonishing war toy, the "exploding trench." Duffett describes it as an object around thirty centimeters long, painted muddy green, in which half a dozen toy soldiers were lined up. Striking the flag at one end—"preferably with a missile from a toy cannon—activated a mechanism that fired a cap and released a spring causing the soldiers to be thrown up into the air 'in all directions'" (239). This toy, too, was soon yanked from the market.

Higonnet begins the book's final section with a survey of "how American girls' culture prepared them for the First World War" (254). Her concerns include the mythic function of narrative. Her own war cry of "narratives matter" suggests narrative as conditioning antecedent, and there is a numinous beauty in the Revolutionary and Civil War period narratives

about women cross-dressing to enlist and fight as soldiers. These (narrated) lives matter. Her own lively narrative then compares American with European stories of gender-bending girl fighters in the early twentieth century, concluding with the story of fourteen-year-old Zofia Lipowicz (Nowosińska), who joined child volunteers in Lwów to fight the Austrians, to "show the boys that it is not their exclusive privilege to fight for the freedom of their country" (264).

There are more tough girls in Marnie Hay's absorbing account of the Na Fianna Éireann, "the most significant Irish nationalist manifestation of the uniformed 'pseudo-military' youth group" (269). She makes the interesting point that many of the boys in the group cared less about the upcoming war with Germany than about the one they felt would soon be fought against England—the Anglo-Irish War (1919–21). Although the Fianna was officially for boys, girls muscled their way in (273). Ultimately, while two of the sixteen men executed for their roles in the Easter Rising were Fianna leaders in their twenties, their contemporary Constance Georgine Markiewicz was spared because of her sex.

Branden Little argues idealistically that the "mobilization of youth" in the First World War disposed America "to accept an . . . international role in the Second" (283). Little skillfully tells the political history of the strongest influence on American youth at the time, the Junior Red Cross, following it through the Great War and its aftermath, emphasizing its role in rebuilding Europe. Siân Pooley returns us to

the archives (in this archives-friendly book, we are seldom away from them), painstakingly analyzing provincial newspapers with “children’s societies,” and postal letters sent by English children to distant relatives (303). She finds that overall, children possessed “a weak enthusiasm for war” (315).

Peter Hunt’s nimble afterword answers the question of what books were on the bookshelves of children leading up to the Great War. His readings of well-worn texts are both fresh and supple: for example, he finds “premonitions of terror” in Beatrix Potter (324). Is it fair to ask whether such premonitions would not have been there if the war had never occurred? Are we seeing the shadow of creeping determinism here? I think that Hunt and the editors would say, “no.” We are seeing the landscape afresh, free of the shadow of suppression, a need to say good-bye to all that before “all that” was properly sifted through and understood. Hunt quotes Gillian Lathey’s observation that the realistic treatment of war saturates today’s children’s books to such a degree that “War is now a . . . common subject” (327). It isn’t that society wishes to cultivate a Churchillian appetite for violence in children, but that it wants to make them “aware of the evils of the past [. . . so that they may] make sense of the world they have inherited and the future they confront” (327).

“Perhaps covertly and overtly, we will always be approaching war,” Hunt concludes, one imagines with head in hands. It is a thought that would torment Morpurgo, or anyone who wishes a carefree and peaceful future for our children and the children of

our neighbors. On second thought, approaching war might be the safer choice: preferable to turning one’s back.

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Michael Joseph is the Rare Books Librarian at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, the founder/owner of the *Childlit listserv*, the North American Vice President and journal editor of the Robert Graves Society, and the founding director of The New Jersey Book Arts Symposium. He is the co-author of an essay about the Lion and the Unicorn Award for Excellence in North American Poetry in *Prizing Children’s Literature: The Cultural Politics of Children’s Book Awards*, edited by Joseph T. Thomas and Kenneth B. Kidd (Routledge, 2016), and author of “Fairy Tale Poems: The Winding Road to Illo Tempore,” a chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Fairy-Tale Cultures and Media*, edited by Pauline Greenhill, Jill Terry Rudy, and Naomi Hamer (forthcoming).



Spirituality in Young Adult Literature: The Last Taboo. By Patty Campbell with Chris Crowe. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.

Reviewed by Sarah Smedman

Patty Campbell’s book assuredly proves her wide and close reading and knowledge of young adult novels, principally of the twenty-first century, that deal with major aspects of religion. As the book progresses, though, the distinction between religious practice and spirituality per se is often cloudy or nonexistent.