Gonna Study War Much More: War in Historical Fiction for Children

—Renée Englot

Boissery, Beverley. *Sophie's Rebellion*. Toronto: Boardwalk/Dundurn, 2005. 224 pp. $12.99 pb. ISBN 1-55002-566-X.

Downey, Mary Alice. *A Pioneer ABC*. Toronto: Tundra, 2005. 32 pp. $22.99 hc. ISBN 088776-688-9.

Halsey, Jacqueline. *Peggy's Letters*. Victoria: Orca, 2005. 144 pp. $7.95 pb. ISBN 1-55143-363-X.

Heffernan, Colleen. *A Kind of Courage*. Victoria: Orca, 2005. 150 pp. $14.00 pb. ISBN 1-55143-358-3.

Hunter, Bernice Thurman. *The Girls They Left Behind*. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005. 192 pp. $12.95 pb. ISBN 1-55041-927-7.

Kogawa, Joy. *Naomi's Road*. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005. 120 pp. $9.95 pb. ISBN 1-55005-115-6.

Koldofsky, Eleanor. *Clip-Clop*. Toronto: Tundra, 2005. 24 pp. $22.99 hc. ISBN 0-88776-681-1.

Kositsky, Lynne. *Claire by Moonlight*. Toronto: Tundra, 2005. 271 pp. $14.99 pb. ISBN 0-88776-659-5.

Lawson, Julie. *No Safe Harbour: The Halifax Explosion Diary of Charlotte Blackburn*. Dear Canada. Toronto: Scholastic, 2006. 239 pp. $14.99 hc. ISBN 0-439-96930-1.

Manuel, Lynn. *Camels Always Do*. Victoria: Orca, 2004. 32 pp. $19.95 hc. ISBN 1-55143-284-6. $9.95 pb. ISBN 1-55143-470-9.

Parkinson, Curtis. *Domenic's War: A Story of the Battle of Monte Cassino*. Toronto: Tundra, 2006. 191 pp. $14.99 pb. ISBN 0-88776-751-6.

Simons, Joseph. *Under a Living Sky*. Victoria: Orca, 2005. 104 pp. $7.95 pb. ISBN 1-55143-355-9.

Sutherland, Robert. *Son of the Hounds*. Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1988. 128 pp. $10.95 pb. ISBN 1-55041-906-4.

Wilson, Budge. *Izzie, Book Two: Trongate Fury*. Our Canadian Girl. Toronto: Penguin, 2005. 100 pp. $8.99 pb. ISBN 0-14-301465-X.

Critics who have recently considered the topic of war in historical fiction for young adults (including Kate Agnew and Geoff Fox, Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair, Fiona Collins and Judith Graham, and Mitzi Myers) are unanimous in their assertion that there have been major changes in this sub-genre since approximately 1970. They are also unanimous in that these changes are positive and I tend to agree with them in general. But while these writers express stimulating ideas about what makes for excellence in children's fiction, none has concrete suggestions for the evaluation of such novels. In the following pages, I will propose a schema for evaluating historical fiction for children which is set in war times, based on ideas derived from these critics. I will then test the usefulness of this schema by considering recent releases in Canadian historical fiction for children.

Authors no longer present war as a predominantly male experience of battle: women, children, and men outside the battle lines are also gaining voices.

When identifying changes between older novels about war and more recent ones, the commentators focus on differences in whose story is told and how war is presented. Authors no longer present war as a predominantly male experience of battle: women, children, and men outside the battle lines are also gaining voices. While previously authors have portrayed war as having noble origins with clearly defined heroes and villains, they now offer a more complex depiction of it. Rather than didactically presenting patriotic moral values, today's war stories are more likely to be didactic about the questionable morality of war. As Myers notes, "boys in modern works typically learn that combat sickens; girls reveal formidable resilience and courage" (330). Finally, authors are exposing the human costs of conflicts.

Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair devote a chapter to war narratives in their book *The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*. Underlying this chapter is an unquestioned assumption that war is evil. The authors go so far as to call war "barbarous and insane" (182). While I would be hard pressed today to win an argument that war is good, I find the authors' assertions overly simplistic. In effect, one set of absolutes—that war is an opportunity for personal and national glory and one's patriotic duty—is exchanged for another —that war is evil and never solves conflict. The authors applaud the novels considered in their chapter for demonstrating "the hollowness and brutality of human beings killing each other for causes that will fade into history"

(183). I wonder if Holocaust survivors would accept having their experience downgraded to a cause that will fade into history.

If, as Brown and St. Clair seem to wish, authors present war to young readers as wholly evil, an historic reality for many Canadians is denied. Many young men in past times of war *did* see it as their patriotic duty to enlist. In fact, many still do. Many took pride in their efforts. Canadians still take pride in the efforts of Canadian troops in major battles during World War I and World War II and in their peacekeeping efforts in more recent history. If only villains are portrayed as supporting war, distortions will result. Rather than drawing for young readers the conclusion that war is wrong, good historical fiction can—and should—lead young readers to think critically about war, the reasons for it and the consequences of it.

But how does one evaluate the potential of a piece of historical fiction to incite questioning in its readers? By drawing on the comments of the aforementioned scholars, I have devised a set of questions to use in evaluating children's historical fiction set in war time.

First, in addition to its handling of the topic of war, the novel must work in more general terms. Collins and Graham identify four qualities they see as widely accepted criteria for "good" historical fiction: "an absorbing story; unclotted language; accurate research; and a concern with how ordinary people were affected by the political and social climate of the time" (10). While the last quality would seem to deny that less-than-ordinary people could be the subjects of interesting fiction, I accept this definition of good historical fiction. With that groundwork in place, the main question with regard to a specific focus on war is: how does the narrative position the reader to understand the concept of war?

1. Is the reader positioned to see war as complex? War is rarely, if ever, as simple as good versus evil. Are the reasons for the war discussed in terms accessible to the reader? Does the narrative offer different perspectives on why the war is being fought? Does it open up different experiences of the war for the reader? Do the reader and/or the focalizing character grow to political awareness?

2. How is the enemy treated? Is the enemy dehumanized or is there an acknowledgement of the common humanity of both sides? Is the sacrifice of those who die respected regardless of which side they are on?

3. Are the consequences of war examined? Does the narrative problematize the image of war as an adventure? Is war demystified with images of suffering? Is there recognition of the cost of a "win"? Does the narrative explore the consequences for those left behind?

It is unreasonable to expect all war narratives to

address all of the above questions and I would not advocate that authors write historical fiction purely with the intent of delivering a message. However, war narratives are poised, even more so than other historical narratives, to contribute to readers' civic literacy. Why offer a simplistic, limited view of war?

While I am critical of Brown and St. Clair's ideology, my evaluative schema is also written from a distinct political and ideological position. Not everyone will agree with my view that young readers should think beyond patriotic reasons to do battle. There can be little doubt that the novels I evaluate positively are most often those which grapple with what were once widely accepted notions of war. While I do not wish to endorse any particular political ideology, I do value books which encourage young people to think critically.

As the books I'm considering here reveal, many war novels now are offering revised views of history by examining previously unexamined perspectives. Tales of generals and high-ranking officials are rare. Much more common now are tales of girls and young women on the home front and tales told from the sidelines of battle. This keyhole view of history is not so much about major battles, but the impact of extraordinary events on ordinary people.

Budge Wilson's *Trongate Fury*, the second book in the Our Canadian Girl series to feature Izzie, is set in Nova Scotia during World War II. When her father announces that he's joining the Navy, Izzie reacts with dismay and then feels guilty for not being more supportive. She gives a speech to make up to her father, and her speech exemplifies a child's attempts to make sense of why war happens:

> I know why this stupid war seems to be necessary. We sure don't want Hitler to jump across the Atlantic Ocean and just *take Canada*. We don't want him to put the whole Publicover family in a concentration camp because we tell him he shouldn't be stealing countries or killing Jews. I think I know that this is a war that has to happen. . . . So I know they have to have people to fight the war. (20–21)

Although it is unlikely that Izzie would have had this knowledge of concentration camps and the treatment of Jews, the comments do allow young readers to activate their prior knowledge of World War II.

To make ends meet, Izzie's mother is forced to move the children to a shared house in Halifax, where she takes a job. Although Izzie initially has romantic dreams of being a military messenger, a nurse, or a spy, in Halifax she befriends a war guest who makes it clear war is not an adventure. Although the major episode of this relatively short novel is the fire aboard the Trongate in the Halifax harbour, and the story is more about Izzie's friendships and family life than

war, the narrative does offer glimpses of the lives of families on the home front, missing and worrying about their loved ones who are at war.

Julie Lawson's latest novel, part of the Dear Canada series, also centres on an incident in the Halifax harbour. However, in *No Safe Harbour: The Halifax Explosion Diary of Charlotte Blackburn*, the Halifax Explosion does not occur until over a third of the way into the story; the first third of the narrative is dominated by the characters' responses to the events of World War I unfolding in Europe. The girls knit socks and balaclavas for the soldiers during special-projects time at school. They go to Junior Red Cross to roll bandages. They visit touring exhibits of war items. Charlotte's family is focused on letters from Luke, an older brother in the trenches in France. Charlotte has nightmares in which she has taken her brother's place in No Man's Land. Her eldest sister is stepping out with a young soldier from Winnipeg. Charlotte and her twin brother go frequently to the harbour to check out the ships and the sailors. Lawson seems aware of how the war is overshadowing her narrative as one of the characters asks, "[w]hat did we do before the war?" (65). No one can come up with an answer. Despite the dominance of war in the narrative, there is little analysis of the reasons for war.

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Lack of clarity in historical information is a failing of many of the books in the Dear Canada series. In this case, Lawson provides a lot of detail about the reality of the home front and the role played by the Halifax harbour in World War I. But, because it is presented as the diary of a child, the narrative provides a limited view. And as a result, some details are less clear for today's child reader than they should be. For example, Charlotte mentions rationing a few times, but does not explain it. The family jokingly quotes an ad for cocoa: "[m]ore food value than a cup of bouillon" (7). At another point, Charlotte mentions that she's getting a treat because "the stores are allowed to sell canned veg again" (36). In all likelihood, young readers will not be aware of food rationing or why it happened and will pass over these pieces of information with some confusion. While historical facts are often spelled out in notes at the backs of the novels in the Dear Canada series, notes in this book pertain almost exclusively to the harbour disaster and do not contain information on the war.

The narrative brings other home-front realities more clearly to light. Charlotte's parents read the casualty list in the newspaper each weekend. Charlotte is reprimanded when the blackout cur-

tains in her room are not pulled tightly, and her father reiterates the risks, thus clarifying the purpose of blackout curtains for readers. Charlotte meets her older brother's sweetheart on the trolley one day: Jane is now the conductor. Charlotte's sister, Ruth, gets a job with the telephone company because they are desperate for workers. Charlotte's mother explains that it's only until the soldiers come back and reclaim their old jobs, but Charlotte wonders what will happen to the girls who like their new jobs and want to keep them.

Charlotte is drawn as a wonderer. Because the focal character is a child of the same age as the intended audience, readers are positioned to align themselves with Charlotte and may join in her ponderings about war. The reader will, not however, get any information on the causes of this particular war. As Charlotte struggles to make sense of the conflict, she writes in her diary:

> I wonder what makes things change. Hundreds of years ago the British and French were mortal enemies. Now they're fighting on the same side and Germany's *their* mortal enemy. Of course, it's all the Kaiser's fault, but it's hard to understand. Especially since our King George and the Kaiser are related. Cousins, I think. (22)

This commentary is reasonable as a child's attempt to make sense of war. As she rolls bandages, she wonders,

> What will happen when there's no more cloth for bandages? What if there's no more ammunition or rifles or bayonets or bombs or mines or food? What if there are no more soldiers? Then they'll *have* to end the war. But how would they decide who won? (32)

Charlotte's teacher sends her to an exhibition of war trophies to get a better understanding of the war. She writes in her diary, "How can I have a *better* understanding when I don't understand it at all? Except that the Germans are shooting and gassing and blowing up our boys and it's all the Kaiser's fault" (45). Despite the continued references to it all being the Kaiser's fault, Lawson does muddy the concept of enemy. Charlotte knows that the "Huns" are the enemy, but she struggles to understand why some people mistreat her friends Eva and Werner whose father was born in Germany.

Although there are limits because the story is focalized by a child and because the format is a diary, the reader is exposed to a few different perspectives on war. Charlotte's father supports conscription, saying, "it was high time the government did something about men shirking their duty" (43). Charlotte's friend, on the other hand, is proud of her cousin for

escaping conscription by shooting himself in the foot in a hunting "accident." Through Luke's letters, Lawson also exposes the reader to the perspective of a soldier who is suffering in the trenches and later wounded in battle. Luke describes the battle at Passchendaele as a "hellish nightmare" (84). Although it is questionable whether such comments would have made it through the censors, he does paint a picture of the reality of battle.

The narrative also makes painfully clear the human cost of war. Though the Halifax explosion is an indirect result of the war, this tragedy is made very personal for readers. Charlotte and her twin brother are both injured and hospitalized. They lose their mother, father, and two sisters. This novel, and others like it, facilitates empathy with war victims because of the youth of its central characters.

For teen readers, Bernice Thurman Hunter's *The Girls They Left Behind* is an interesting examination of life on the home front. The novel is based on the author's memories of being a teen during World War II. Beryl, or Nathalie as she renames herself, is constantly seeing boys off at Union Station. Her story is a poignant reminder of the suffering of the girlfriends, wives, sisters, and mothers who wait for and worry about their loved ones. After receiving a postcard from one of the boys, Nathalie sighs, "I'm just sick of being left all the time." Her mother replies, "I know how you feel. . . . It was the same for my generation" (62). Nathalie grows frustrated with the seemingly never-ending war: "Were we going to live forever in ration-land?" (88). On her eighteenth birthday, she recalls her party the previous year. All of the boys who were in attendance are now overseas: two killed in an air raid and one lost at sea. She laments,

> Will this terrible war ever end? Will life ever be normal again? . . . I wish I was a man, I really do. I think it's worse always being one of the girls waving good-bye. I'd rather be waving my wedge cap out the train window. (103–04)

A friend's brother comes home shell-shocked and is placed on the mental ward. He does not recognize his family. Nathalie's aunt lives in unstable isolation after receiving news that her only child is missing in action. Nathalie hears from her cousin's sweetheart in London, who writes, "There's so much death and destruction here in Britain that you'd think we'd get used to such news. But, no, the heartaches never stop" (134).

The narrative is also an examination of the gendered nature of war. Nathalie is an entirely likeable character—spunky, a little bit boy-crazy, at times a bit of an airhead—and quite believable. Many readers will find it easy to identify with her. She debates joining the Canadian Women's Army Corps,

but decides crowded, noisy barracks and bossy officers are not for her; besides, the uniform doesn't look good on her. She takes a summer job at Eaton's, but quits that job and school to work for the John Inglis company, which now makes machine guns instead of washing machines. She finds the work "positively exhilarating" (46), saying, "at last I feel like I'm an important part of the war effort" (45). She moves on to making airplanes at De Havilland and is eventually promoted to forelady. The girls who take on war work are often criticized for wearing pants and are subjected to harassment in the workplace. When one of her co-workers is injured at work, Nathalie and her brother wonder why the injury is not considered a war wound since it was incurred in the line of war-work duty. When the war ends, the women at De Havilland are fired one by one. Nathalie protests the unfairness, saying, "I know the job better than any of them. . . . You could at least let me show them the ropes" (151). She is told that the men are veterans and deserve the jobs; furthermore, they would never stand for being shown the job by a girl. Nathalie's protest that she is not a girl but a woman goes unheard. She returns to school with plans to become a history teacher, doing her part to ensure that the past will not be forgotten and that there will be no more wars.

Obviously, home-front novels are effective in considering the consequences for those left behind, adding another perspective to the consideration of war. War narratives set on the home front may also provide opportunities to critique the gendered nature of war and, as characters consider their beliefs, can provide a forum to discuss notions of patriotism and reasons for war. Unfortunately, recent releases reveal only limited consideration of the reasons for war in most war narratives intended for young audiences.

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Three novels take readers closer to the battle lines to examine the lives of those whose homelands become a war zone. Jacqueline Halsey's *Peggy's Letters* is set in London during World War II. Curtis Parkinson's *Domenic's War* also takes place during World War II, but in Italy, near Monte Cassino. Robert Sutherland's *Son of the Hounds* takes place near Stoney Creek, Ontario in 1813. These novels offer a sideline view of battle and have the opportunity to make readers aware of the consequences of war.

Peggy's Letters is a chapter book for young readers that depicts a London family coping with

the circumstances brought about by World War II. Peggy's father is gone because of the war, and her house is bombed in the opening chapter. The author convincingly portrays Peggy's fear when taking shelter during bombing, and the sorrow of seeing her home destroyed. After a brief stay at a shelter, Peggy, her mother, and baby brother go to live with the children's estranged grandfather. Peggy must cope with missing her father, going to a new school, trying to make new friends, and trying to make sure she and her brother are quiet and tidy, so as not to irritate her grandfather. She also loses mother's time and attention as her mother puts on trousers and goes out to work. The setting is wartime, but many of Peggy's problems are primarily typical kid problems, and young readers will identify with her. There is not much pondering of the reasons for war or of the concept of the enemy, but there is an examination of the cost of war and the impact on those whose homeland is under attack.

As signalled by the title, Parkinson's *Domenic's War* examines the impact of war on a personal level, but the reader does not experience World War II only through Domenic's eyes. The stories of Domenic and Antonio, Italian farm boys who come together only at the end of the narrative, each make up close to half the novel, with a single chapter from the point of view of an Royal Air Force pilot. Domenic's experience is that of a typical boy in an occupied country. He sees men go into hiding to avoid being captured as a workforce for the German army, family homes taken over as headquarters, families executed for helping escaped prisoners of war, and the loss of their food supplies to enemy soldiers. Antonio's experience takes readers closer to the front. He loses his entire family when their house is shelled. Antonio works for the Germans and then for an East Indian regiment as a muleteer, hauling supplies to the front line.

Parkinson treats the lives lost in war, both civilian and military, with respect, without regard for which side the soldiers fought on. Parkinson also highlights the common humanity of Germans and Allies. A German captain using Domenic's home as headquarters bonds with Domenic, who is the same age as his son. Later, Domenic and his family are tormented by a German corporal who bunks in their home. As the corporal leaves one day, Domenic wishes, "May the corporal never come back" (119). When the corporal's pack is returned the next day, riddled with bullet holes and stained with blood, Domenic is guilt-ridden and haunted by an image of the bloody body. One day, he listens to men recounting "bare bloodless numbers" of soldiers killed, and envisions "piles of soldier's bodies on the mountainside below . . . each belonging to a family somewhere" (63). Antonio spots four German soldiers hiding in a bush. He warns members of the

regiment he is with and they attack, killing two of the soldiers and taking the other two prisoner. Antonio feels guilty that he has caused the deaths of the two Germans and tries to convince himself that in war it is a matter of kill or be killed. Both Domenic and Antonio grow to awareness that it is not as easy as they imagined to hate the enemy.

Indeed, Antonio discovers that war itself may be more evil than any enemy. Listening to a barrage of firing, Antonio realizes that, if it is successful, the Allies will have a great advantage, resulting in quicker victory with fewer losses on their side. He is unable, however, wholly to convince himself that the barrage is good: "he couldn't shake the feeling that such a murderous barrage, from any source, was the hand of the devil himself" (162). Without being obviously didactic, Parkinson leads readers to question the morality of waging war.

There is little glory to be found in Parkinson's presentation of the battle of Monte Cassino. A scene in which Antonio finds a loved one's arm under the rubble of their home, only to discover that the arm is no longer attached to a body, quickly strips war of its mystique.

Parkinson challenges previously held stereotypes of war when a wounded Canadian sergeant describes an encounter with a teenaged German soldier: "He was sitting against the wall, his stomach split wide open. He had both his hands across it, like he thought he could hold the whole mess in, but most of his guts had spilled out on the floor" (156). The Canadian sergeant loses his anger at the enemy and is mad only "at whoever it was that got him and me into this mess in the first place" (157). In fact, Parkinson includes many critiques of generals who remain in safety and order men out to die in questionable manoeuvres.

Sutherland's *Son of the Hounds* is the only novel discussed here in which the adolescent protagonist takes an active role in battle. Few novelists take their young adult readers into the combat zones of war these days. The novel was first published in 1988; it was reissued and published for the first time in the United States in 2005. For American readers, it presents an interesting perspective on history, as it portrays American soldiers as the "bad guys" of the War of 1812. For a Canadian reader with the perspective that the right side won, the narrative does less to problematize a view of war.

Jimmy Cameron and his father are rounded up by American soldiers seeking to detain any able-bodied men who might join the British regulars. Jimmy manages to escape and is able to bring key information to the British commanding officers in the area. He becomes a member of Lieutenant FitzGibbon's Bloody Boys. As a member of this group, Jimmy works as a decoy, gives misleading information to the Americans, assists in sneak attacks, and arranges shifting headquarters.

During an initial battle, Jimmy is admonished by his friend Faith, "Pray, Jimmy. A lot of men might die tonight" (52). Jimmy has never thought of battle that way and shivers. Sutherland brings home the reality of battle for the reader with descriptors like "pandemonium" (53), "bedlam" (54), and "cacophony and confusion" (54). The teenaged pair hears "the roars of cannon and musket, the terrified neighing of horses, the frenzied bellowing of commands, the agonized moans of wounded and dying men" (53). When Jimmy and Faith go out to help the wounded after the battle, Jimmy is sickened by what he sees. Faith becomes physically ill.

Although Sutherland initially tarnishes the image of the glory of war and gives strong evidence of the consequences of war, as the novel progresses, he reduces war to an amusing game of outwitting a less clever opponent. He casually provides a body count after each skirmish, but does not acknowledge that these are human lives lost and does not create any further emotional response to the loss of life. Without further consideration of the horrors of warfare, the image of combat as adventure goes largely unchallenged.

Political awareness generally is somewhat hard to come by in this novel. In a section titled "Historical Notes," Sutherland outlines the conflict which has led to the situation with which the narrative opens, but this note is found at the end of the novel. Readers unaccustomed to hunting down such notes will be thrown into the midst of the conflict and may take some time to get their bearings. Without the note, it is very difficult to understand why the battles are being waged. Readers may come away from the novel with a bit more knowledge of the battles between the Americans and the British in 1812 and 1813, but they are unlikely to come away with much more insight into the reasons for the war.

Two narratives open up new perspectives on war for their readers by sharing stories seldom told: Joy Kogawa's *Naomi's Road* offers the perspective of a Japanese Canadian interned during World War II, and Colleen Heffernan's *A Kind of Courage* offers the perspective of a conscientious objector.

A new edition of *Naomi's Road*, published in 2005, is slightly longer than the original published in 1986 (itself a shortened, alternate version of a longer adult novel). Kogawa has changed the narrative by adding two sets of grandparents, perhaps there to reinforce the strength of the Canadian in the Japanese Canadian moniker. The publisher also chose new illustrations. Ruth Ohi's drawings are much softer and gentler than Matt Gould's in the original; but looking at the pictures, one could forget that Naomi is of Japanese descent. While Ohi may have done this intentionally to reinforce universality, the internment camp experience was not universal: it was very specific to North Americans of Japanese ancestry.

In the second edition, Kogawa blurs the conventional notion of enemy by presenting the narrative from the point of view of a child trying to determine why she is the enemy. Kogawa has moved the narrative from first to third person. This move allows the narrator to explain things outside of Naomi's experience, for example, air raid drills at Stephen's school. It allows Kogawa to include topics beyond the comprehension of the focalizer, who is only four years old at the beginning of the new edition. Unfortunately, Kogawa handles this new content, mostly about the treatment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, somewhat awkwardly. Naomi eavesdrops on a conversation between the adults, not comprehending the discussion. The text reads: "she does not understand what Aunt Emily is saying. She doesn't know that Uncle has been sent far away with hundreds of other men" (33). The added explanation and labelling in the second edition take away from the simplicity and poetry which was part of the charm of the original.

In *A Kind of Courage*, Colleen Heffernan exposes readers to multiple, and often silenced, perspectives on war. The narrative is dually focalized, with chapters alternating between the points of view of Hattie, a farm girl, and David, a young conscientious objector. Hattie's daily life is all about hard work. Since Hattie's older brother, Will, enlisted, her mother has sunk into a deep depression and spends many days in her room. Hattie's father is in poor health, deprived of the help of his eldest son, and unable to find a farm hand. Instead of imprisonment for refusing to go to war, David is assigned farm labour and comes to work for Hattie's father.

Heffernan investigates an unusual perspective through David. He struggles with whether or not it is right to kill and decides that he could not kill anyone. He knows that he could not hate Germans and is surprised by how easily some embrace hatred. His family members believe that all young men should enlist: "We are all duty bound to do our bit. It is a question of honour" (42). During David's brief imprisonment, Heffernan introduces the reader to other conscientious objectors and their reasons for objecting. Heffernan does not provide any easy answers with regard to the question of objecting. Hattie struggles with her feelings about David, simultaneously appreciating his help and being angry with him for being safe while her brother is "in some lousy trench—facing mortars and bombs and snipers that at any moment might kill him" (52). David also questions himself, wondering at times if he is just a coward.

In addition to exploring the questions of courage and cowardice, through Hattie, her younger brother, and his friends, Heffernan delves into the human capacity to hate. Hattie explains how her youngest brother's hero worship of Will turned to war play

and eventually hatred of the enemy and all things German. To him, the enemy is a nameless, and therefore dehumanized, bunch of "dirty Huns, Jerrys, Heines, Turks" (25). Using David's recollections of his German music teacher and his confusion at the man's ostracism and eventual imprisonment for no greater crime than being German, Hefferrnan complicates this notion of the enemy. At one moment Hattie wishes death on the Jerrys; the next moment she is sick that she could wish such a thing on people she does not know. When she is molested by a neighbour, Hattie struggles with the question of whether she hates him enough to wish him dead. She begins to appreciate the complexity of conflict when David risks his own life to save the molester from being beaten to death.

Like Heffernan, Lynne Kositsky problematizes notions of the enemy in *Claire by Moonlight*. Claire Richard is a fifteen-year-old girl living in Acadia in 1755. She finds herself attracted to Sam, a young British soldier serving as a French interpreter. Some members of her family consider her friendship with him to be traitorous. Claire, in turn, is bothered by Sam's hatred of the Mi'kmaq and his belief that all Indians are treacherous. After the Acadian Expulsion, Claire finds herself in Massachusetts, where her French accent makes her the object of hatred, as the citizens there still remember a massacre by the French. She is helped to escape by Atonwa, a young man of the Kanienkehaka nation, whom she has a hard time trusting because of rumours she has heard of Indian attacks. The two eventually become friends. Atonwa has vowed to seek revenge on the English because English soldiers beat and humiliated him, so he joins the Marquis de Montcalm. Atonwa and Sam, the British soldier, meet on opposite sides of the Seven Years War. Despite his hatred of British soldiers, Atonwa rescues Sam and delivers him to Claire. In the end, Sam concludes: "Atonwa was a man like any other, good and bad, heartsick in the end at the futility of war" (267). This rather confusing litany of who hates whom within the novel illustrates the novel's revealing insight into how lines of enmity form and how they reflect past hatreds.

While many of the novels I've been discussing offer readers new perspectives on war, and many are successful at demystifying war and showing its consequences, and a few will encourage readers to question simplistic notions of the enemy, most do not offer any explanation of the reasons for war. The exception is Beverley Boissery's *Sophie's Rebellion*.

Sophie's Rebellion features a wonderful exploration of the reasons for the Rebellion of 1838 in Lower Canada. Sophie is a sheltered twelve-year-old girl from Vermont who is caught up in the Rebellion while visiting the Ellices, business associates of her father. Because the focalizing character is extremely naive, and realistically so, she can make uninformed remarks and ask many questions, thus allowing

those around her to explain the situation without the author having to break the flow of the narrative for a history lesson. As Sophie wonders at the attitude of superiority from English landowners like Mrs. Ellice, Lady Theo, Sophie's soon-to-be stepmother, explains,

> It's complicated, Sophie. You've lived in England. You know most of us think we rule the world. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Ellice actually believe that they are superior. They see these people as their peasants and certainly treat them as such. (63)

Luc, a young French-Canadian rebel who comes to Sophie's aid time and again, explains to her that the Canadiens want to show the English that they have rights. When he explains to her that they have tried other methods of getting their rights acknowledged, she responds that perhaps they are not asking the right way. Luc tells her,

> Sophie, we've tried everything. We've done things the right way. Our politicians pass reforms in our parliament but then the governor vetoes them. Marc says when we win in the courts, the British appeal to London. No one has the money to go there so they win because we're poor. (117)

Sophie still does not understand why the Canadiens are rebelling, so Luc explains the landholding system and how the English are flouting the system. The English farmers held captive by the rebels also argue about the situation, with one woman stating, "They're people, Jack. People with wrongs. No one will listen to them or help them" (133). When the British troops defeat the rebels, the British troops exact revenge. The village is set aflame with no regard to whether or not the homeowner was a rebel. The Glengarries refuse to let the Canadiens salvage any goods from their burnt-out homes, keeping the loot for themselves instead. Families are forced to take shelter in the woods in winter, and Sophie sees one young woman who has frozen to death trying to protect her baby. Boissery positions readers to align themselves with Sophie and to adopt her dawning realization of the complexity of rebellion.

Sophie's Rebellion reveals both why a rebellion happened and the steep human cost that resulted. It forces the reader to consider injustice, to think about situations in which, in our own country, people were killed "because they spoke one language and not another," people's houses were burned, and their possessions stolen "not because they had done anything wrong, but because they lived in a village that had" (175), and women were attacked for coming to the aid of an injured rebel. Boissery is able to deal with very stark realities successfully without dwelling in ugliness.

Also refreshing in *Sophie's Rebellion* is the fact that in Sophie the reader finds an historical heroine who does not long to be a boy. She enjoys her new dresses and likes to feel pretty. The trials Sophie faces are of a different sort than those faced by traditional male heroes. Her horizons are expanded, her sensitivities are tried, and her naïveté is shattered. She fights the system, but not in the manner of a traditional hero. Instead of force, Sophie uses morals to reprove looting soldiers and encourage the care of an orphaned babe, uses her dress to convince others of her status, and uses the power of position to help her father. She learns about the power and influence women can have. While the majority of authors of young adult historical fiction would have readers believe all young women resented the restrictions of their gender and wished to be boys, Boissery has created a feminine protagonist who still manages to be strong and likeable.

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While *Sophie's Rebellion* is the only novel among the recent releases reviewed in this article to consider the reasons for war, Winifred Whitehead's *Old Lies Revisited* points to another lack in war narratives. While home-front and battle-side novels show the suffering of innocent people during war, this novel reminds us that it is easy to forget that innocent people of all nations suffer during war. There is no consideration in any of these novels of, for example, the suffering of German families in either world war. The only novel to show the suffering of an "enemy" family is *Naomi's War*.

In their review of changes in the genre of historical fiction in the twentieth century, Fiona Collins and Judith Graham note what they see as the major trends. One is the move "from the elevated to the everyday" (10). Although it is true that the heroes are no longer grand figures of historical import, and are, instead, ordinary adolescents in Northrop Frye's low mimetic mode—heroes greater than neither their environments nor other men—the events in which they become entangled are far from everyday. They are imprisoned, expelled from their homelands, entangled in rebellions, and caught in the midst of battles. Yes, it could be argued that these narratives explore the impact of extraordinary events on ordinary lives, but authors are focusing on the exceptional, the extreme, not the typical. This makes for more dramatic storytelling, but how stilted will the readers' view of history be? History is more than rebels and revolutions.

Given this somewhat limited study of recent

releases in Canadian historical fiction for young people, it may be premature to make conclusions, but I'll venture some. It seems that the everyday in history is considered the territory of children's books rather than young adult novels. Early chapter books, like Joseph Simon's *Under a Living Sky*, present the life of an ordinary child, not during political conflict, but during less dramatic conflicts like family struggles and struggles within nature, in this case the drought of the Great Depression. All Mary wants for Christmas is a new pair of shoes; instead she gets a crude doll cut from the horse's nosebag and stuffed with oats. The reader sees the father's tension about the dry conditions and senses the strain on the parents' marriage, the result of over-stretched finances and lost babies. It serves as a nice counterpoint to the view that families and marriages in the past were perfect.

Continuing the trend of moving from grand narratives to *petits-récits*, picture books present even smaller snapshots of history. While the kind of picture books most often published can create an intimate view of daily life in the past, there is risk that such a focused examination will leave the reader with the impression that this one child or family represents a universal experience in the past. For example, Mary Alice Downey's *A Pioneer ABC* brings pioneer life to light in the form of a picture book made by Zebediah for his two younger sisters. While the author's note identifies the characters fairly specifically as United Empire Loyalists who settled in and around Kingston, Ontario in 1784, the text itself makes no such specifications and young readers may assume that such was the life of all pioneers. The narrow scope excludes the experiences of others for whom pioneering was different from the experience pictured.

Eleanor Koldofsky's *Clip-Clop* is both more and less focused than *A Pioneer ABC*. It is more focused in that it considers daily town life at the turn of the twentieth century specifically through a study of horses. It is less focused in that it does not attempt to spell out what life was like. Consuela's life is illuminated only in her interactions with the horses that pass down her street. She visits with the milk horse, sees the tea wagon pass, gets carrots from the produce man's wagon, jumps out of the way of the fire wagon, feeds the ragman's swaybacked horse, sucks on a chip of ice brought by the iceman's Clydesdale, thinks back to the coal wagon which makes its rounds in the winter, and finally poses on the pony of the photographer. This is an unique angle for familiarizing young listeners with life at another time. Interestingly, illustrator David Parkins has drawn Consuela out of time. That is to say, her clothing and hairstyle are not specific to any one era and could be seen on a young girl today as easily as one hundred years ago. This may make it easier for

children to identify with her or it might confuse the time setting.

In *Camels Always Do*, Lynn Manuel does not attempt to take on the big picture of the Cariboo gold rush, but instead focuses on a much more specific happening. Her picture book tells the story of an attempt by businessmen to use camels to deliver supplies to miners in 1862. Although readers will not learn a great deal about the gold rush, the picture book makes for an interesting opening to learning about the past.

The more miniature view of history in books for younger readers may be an indication of a sense among authors and publishers that such readers cannot comprehend the bigger picture. The tendency to focus on personal and specific pieces of history in picture books and early chapter books may reflect a sense that major historical events are too complicated or serious to be told simply or to be told to young children at all. Perhaps the problem is that the ambiguities of war do not fit well into short explorations of history. Although none of these recent Canadian picture books tackles the big issues of war, authors have successfully done so in the past. Both Toshu Maruki's *Hiroshima No Pika* and Nichlas Debon's *A Brave Soldier* accurately describe the horrors of war. While there is disagreement about the use of these books with young children, the authors demonstrate that the limited text of a picture book need not limit the explorations of war, its causes, and consequences. For now, however, "serious history" is largely the stuff of young adult novels.

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War novels can be of the sort that advance readers' understanding of the world and their place in it. Unfortunately, war novels can also reinforce a oppressive system by showing violence as a means to solve conflict and gain power, by reinforcing a male-dominated system of war, and by marginalizing the alien or enemy. Fortunately, more and more narratives position readers to interrogate war, its causes, its consequences, and its effectiveness. Although we are now seeing more contemplative investigations of war, there are still gaps, particularly in the examination of the reasons for war. With children as protagonists and readers, there can perhaps be only limited understanding of the issues related to war, but authors can aid

their readers' comprehension by providing notes, glossaries, maps, or chronologies of events.

Though their morals are rarely explicit, the majority of these war novels are didactic. They are meant to teach readers about the world they have inherited, to prepare them for the future they confront, to stir the conscience against slaughter, and to encourage readers to question the morality of waging war. This is not to say that all war narratives should lead readers to the conclusion that war is evil. At their best, war narratives can encourage critical, historical thinking, presenting different views and multiple perspectives. This can be difficult to achieve when the novel's focalizer is a child, but if that character wonders about the nature of war or the particular war in which he or she is involved, the reader may also be more likely to do so. War narratives cannot provide the answer to the world's conflicts, but they can alert readers to the necessity of considering answers other than violence.

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