

# Looking Back at the Spanish Civil War

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*Source / Izvornik:* **Libri et liberi : časopis za istraživanje dječje književnosti i kulture, 2016, 5, 252 - 255**

**Journal article, Published version**

**Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

[https://doi.org/10.21066/carcl.libri.2016-05\(01\).0016](https://doi.org/10.21066/carcl.libri.2016-05(01).0016)

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:186:473347>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-12-02**



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satisfy die-hard fans, but also intrigue those who did not grow up yelling “Cowabunga!”. Both Farago’s and Rosenbaum’s prose is informed by an extensive knowledge of their subject matter and fuelled by pure, unabashed adoration of all things Ninja Turtles. This is especially notable in Rosenbaum’s case, as he often veers off into what might be termed internet comment sections territory; for instance, he calls M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village* “total bullshit” (5, n. 4) and describes the (at that time still unreleased) 2012 Michael Bay-produced *Ninja Turtles* movie a “crime against God and man. And turtle” (112). However, the fan angle and passion for the subject that permeate every sentence only heightens the overall reading pleasure. Given their lack of academic pretension and mostly informal tone, both publications succeed best as resource books, ones that will hopefully be useful and interesting for fans and researchers alike.

Offering a wealth of information within relatively short, densely packed volumes, *The Ultimate Visual History* and *Raise Some Shell* are a most welcome addition to the sparse literature on the TMNT. Combined with Kevin Eastman’s *TMNT Artobiography* (2002; reprinted by IDW in 2013) and the documentary *Turtle Power: Definitive History of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (dir. Randall Lobb, 2014), the volumes under review present a satisfying and informative read and are sure to become a valuable reference for fans, but ideally also a springboard for future scholarly ventures into this virtually unexplored, yet highly stimulating field.

Nada Kujundžić

## Looking Back at the Spanish Civil War

**Blanca Ana Roig Rechou and Veljka Ruzicka Kenfel, eds. 2014. *The Representations of the Spanish Civil War in European Children’s Literature (1975–2008)*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH. 303 pp. ISBN 978-3-631-62245-2**

DOI: 10.21066/carcl.libri.2016-05(01).0016

This year’s observation of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) will once again thrust this often romanticised conflict into the international spotlight, and cause renewed self-reflection among Spaniards about its tragic legacy that continues to polarise their society. Therefore, the publication of the edited volume *The Representations of the Spanish Civil War in European Children’s Literature (1975–2008)* is particularly timely, especially since the subject deals with books and novels about Spain’s civil war directed to younger generations on the Iberian Peninsula, as well as internationally. Despite a number of strong chapters which convincingly show how literature for children and young adults is part of the cultural remembrance of the horrors of the Spanish war and its aftermath, the lack of a stronger editorial hand to ensure a high quality for all the contributions leaves readers with a volume that resembles a hastily assembled collection of conference papers rather than a tight-knit study guided by a precise research agenda.

As the editors mention in the first of two introductory chapters, this volume is in fact the result of a research project that was divided into two parts, one dealing with children’s literature about the war produced in Spain and the other with books published in other European countries. The format of the book follows this division into two sections (eight

chapters dealing with Spanish authors and nine chapters dedicated to other countries) with a final chapter dedicated to illustrations in Spanish Civil War children's literature. The editors explain that the goal of the project was to get an overview of narrative works dealing with the Civil War aimed at children and teenagers produced from 1975 to 2008, analyse them according to literary styles and time periods, and apply various interdisciplinary theoretical tools from fields such as gender, post-colonial, and cultural studies. The first introductory chapter reads more like a final project report than an overview of the actual texts in the volume, while the second chapter offers a more systematic categorisation of how the literature about the war changed over time, from initial silence to a veritable explosion of books in the 2000s that accompanied the fervent political debates about the war after lying dormant for decades.

Already in the first chapter there seem to be some inconsistencies regarding the time period actually being analysed and what exactly is considered to be children's literature. Although it is of course relevant to discuss the development of the genre from the actual war up to the time period being focused on in the project in order to set the context, several of the chapters almost entirely focus on novels written before 1978. This is a relatively minor objection compared to the more problematic issue of defining what can be considered literature for children and young adults, particularly when the corpus of 167 books was being created. For example, Arthur Koestler's *Spanish Testament* is included as a children's book, while equally important novels of that genre (political memoirs), such as George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, are not. When discussing "Croatian books" even more problems become evident, including some factual ones, since for some reason the five-volume (not six, as mentioned in the text) *Španija* collection is included even though it is definitely not intended for children and was published in Belgrade (and therefore should be considered a Yugoslav book, not a Croatian one (13)). The rest of the chapters reflect some of these inconsistencies exposed at the beginning: the contributions vary in quality and methodological rigour, and while some authors focus intensely on a single book (one chapter is three pages long) others provide broad analyses of the literature in the specific region or country being analysed. With so many authors one can expect to have a diversity of analytical styles, but a little more rigorous intervention from the editors could have resulted in chapters that were truly focused and complementary rather than this somewhat haphazard selection.

Despite these fundamental flaws in the concept of the book, it should be emphasised that there are several excellent chapters that ultimately make it a worthy addition to scholarship on the relationship between war traumas, memory politics, and literature, especially for the younger generations. Eulalia Agrelo Costas's superb chapter on Agustín Fernández Paz's *Trilogía de la Memoria* explains the author's "aim of keeping the memory of the victims and the interminable post-war alive to help heal the brutal wounds opened up by the events" (36). Contributions by Mari Jose Olaziregi Alustiza, Blanca-Ana Roig Rechou, and Caterina Valriu Llinàs on children's literature in the Basque lands, Galicia, and Catalonia, respectively, all provide insightful overviews of how regional memories of the war, particularly those of the victims and the losing side, are expressed in a wide variety of publications after the end of the Franco dictatorship. The chapter by Llinàs is perhaps the best in its analysis of the entire corpus of children's literature in Catalonia from 1978

until 2011, in which she identifies five major themes in the forty novels being examined: Republicanism, support for the Catalan movement, feminism, anti-war progressivism, and left-wing antifascism (129). In addition to looking at the role of female authors, Llinàs focuses on the middle generation of writers who did not experience the war directly, but had “learned through the narratives of their elders, through the books and signs left in the environment”, and thus had felt the consequences of the conflict, “most particularly the imposition of Spanish Catholicism, the repressive education, and the persecution of Catalan culture” (130).

Well-written chapters in the section on international books include those about the Netherlands (Francesca Blockeel), the French-speaking world (Javier de Agustín Guijarro), and two on English literature (Ana Maria Pereira Rodriguez and Celia Vasquez Garcia). The volume also includes a chapter on German literature (nine of the twelve books being analysed were published in 1976 or earlier and it is not clear why some are considered to be for children or even young adults), three contributions about Portuguese authors, and one chapter about Croatian texts. The chapter on Croatian texts by Sanja Lovrić shows the importance of Spanish Civil War narratives and memoirs, both during the time of the actual conflict and after 1945, in socialist Yugoslavia. She provides a valuable analysis of how both left and right political forces sought to use the literature about Spain to justify their own ideological positions in Croatia, in particular narratives about the Battle of the Alcazar in 1936 that was compared to the Croatian struggle against the Ottoman Turks at Siget in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, this promising chapter is also hindered by a somewhat unclear definition of which books were intended for young adults, as well as several factual errors which weaken the author’s arguments. It is a shame Lovrić did not pursue more thoroughly the story of the dozens of Croatian/Yugoslav college students who volunteered to fight against Franco, since their exploits were recorded in a 1938 book, *Krv i život za slobodu: Slike iz života i borbe studenata iz Jugoslavije u Španiji* [*Blood and Life for Freedom: Images from the Lives and Struggles of Yugoslav Students in Spain*], which was then smuggled into Yugoslavia. The Association of Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Republican Army helped to finance several reprints of this book and made sure that it was widely distributed in schools, especially after 1978 when the veterans of Spain themselves felt their revolutionary zeal was lost on the youth of socialist Yugoslavia. Although the author notes that the collective memory of the Spanish Civil War in Croatia has been overshadowed by the tragedy of the Second World War and the war in the 1990s that accompanied Yugoslavia’s dissolution, the ideological and social divisions from this period continue to be present in contemporary Croatian society and deserve further, interdisciplinary research along the lines of this chapter.

The problems which plague edited volumes such as this unfortunately overshadow a number of truly excellent chapters which would have been able to shine under a more rigorous editorial hand. Several of the chapters suffer from bad translations, grammatical errors, typos, and mistakes which distract from the content. Rather than grouping the chapters on Portuguese or English literature together, they are scattered arbitrarily in the second section. Perhaps a shorter, more selective volume would have been more effective in highlighting the transformations in children’s literature which parallel the broader changes in Spanish society over the past few decades. Even though this volume tends to frustrate

rather than enlighten, there are definitely gems in this collection which are a valuable contribution to scholarship on the Spanish Civil War.

Vjeran Pavlaković

## Social Inequality in Children's Books

**Angela E. Hubler, ed. 2014. *Little Red Readings: Historical Materialist Perspectives on Children's Literature*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. 304 pp. ISBN 978-1-61703-987-4**

DOI: 10.21066/carcl.libri.2016-05(01).0017

Children's literature is not only not immune to traditional norms and customs of literary creation, promotion and reception, but it is at times – due to pressures from a typically white, middle-class readership – even more rigid and traditional than the mainstream. Publishers tend to produce only books that will make a profit, while editors often guide authors to devise plots and characters that correspond with common notions of a white urban readership and promote the capitalist social system and its values. Children's books are merchandise which is bought and sold, and as such cannot exist without the middle (and upper) class that purchases it. This fact, as individual authors included in the edited volume under review claim, is often neglected by literary scholars.

Volume editor Angela E. Hubler has therefore brought together thirteen contributions which examine individual aspects and themes that appear (or should appear) in children's literature through the lens of Marxist theory, with special emphasis on representations of social inequalities (in the sense of materialism, race, class or gender) and their (inter) relations with the dominant capitalist social system.

In the introductory piece, the editor provides an overview of possible approaches to children's literature from the point of view of historical materialism, with special focus on issues of ideology, idealism, feminism and forming the canon, which undermines the possibility of readers' resistance and social action.

In "Class/ic Aggression in Children's Literature", Mervyn Nicholson examines the position of children within contemporary capitalist society: on the one hand, children are perceived as "property", while, on the other hand, capitalism is "inherently hostile towards children" (3). Class relations in children's literature mirror typical capitalist relations in which those who work are seen as less worthy than those who manage.

In "Shopping Like It's 1899", Anastasia Ulanowicz discusses the series of books *Gossip Girl* (which also inspired the popular TV series of the same name) as a platform for promoting various products which the characters on the show use. In the series, the plot, the psychological development of the characters or social agendas are nowhere near as important as promoting consumerism.

In "Precious Medals", Carl F. Miller provides an overview of books which won various prestigious awards and analyses their relationship to different social problems and class (and other) inequalities.

*Mary Poppins* is the topic of Sharon Smulders' "We Are All One". The author examines the roots of the novel in old Irish folklore and Eastern philosophies and mysticism, which serve to subvert the dominant social structures and hierarchies of pre-war Britain.