In *Children’s Literature and Culture of the First World War*, editors Lissa Paul, Rosemary R. Johnston, and Emma Short bring the experiences of children and childhood to the forefront of the study of war culture. The collection asks both how children were affected by the First World War and how the adults who participated in this war were affected by their past childhood experiences. The collection also includes several chapters examining how modern children are affected by the war, including Michael Morpurgo’s opening essay and Peter Hunt’s closing chapter, which remind readers that examinations of war remain current in contemporary children’s literature.

The editors frame the discussion in their introductory chapter by arguing that the voices in children’s “images, diaries, letters, and journals” were “mature in their engagement” with the realities of war, especially when compared to the “childlike qualities” of King George, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Czar Nicholas, who are described as “large scale children” acting immaturely and irrationally (3). This theme of young people’s maturity and rationality in wartime marks an important departure from previous studies, many of which have painted civilians as ignorant and blindly patriotic.

This volume, which brings together interdisciplinary scholars from children’s literature, war studies, and education, is the result of three conferences funded by the Leverhulme Trust that were held in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom between December 2011 and March 2013. Its nineteen chapters shed new light on the wartime experiences of children from Europe, North America, and the Global South, making it the first transnational account of children and childhood during the First World War. The collection also crosses “enemy”
lines by studying children from both Allied and Central powers, allowing contributors to examine differences and commonalities across nations. Unfortunately, the collection does not examine the experiences of underage soldiers or displaced families. The editors highlight interdisciplinary perspectives and themes common to diverse nations by grouping articles under the headings “Writing War,” “Propaganda and Experience,” “Education and Play,” and “Activism,” instead of by nation or discipline.

The first section, “Writing War,” illustrates how children living in the early twentieth century were primed for war by the literature they read. Paul Stevens’s chapter, for instance, reveals that Winston Churchill’s devotion to the “joys of war” was shaped by his childhood reading. Stevens explores the impact of Victorian adventure novels such as *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) in sustaining Churchill’s enjoyment of war even when the noble horse was replaced with tanks and planes, and trench warfare stifled the agency of individual soldiers. In contrast, Andrea McKenzie demonstrates how American girls rejected prescriptive messages in children’s literature that placed girls in the home by writing letters and stories for *St. Nicholas Magazine* that provided their fictional female characters with active and exciting wartime roles. Katharine Capshaw considers how adult authors who wrote for *The Brownies’ Book* and *Our Boys and Girls* used the First World War to encourage African American children in fighting racial prejudice at home. She further shows that the black community conceptualized African American children “as public thinkers and social activists on the subject of war” (90).

While Capshaw analyzes the ways in which some periodicals used the war to strengthen minority cultures, Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska sees shifting understandings of Otherness and Selfness in Swedish American children’s magazines as a force that strengthened Swedish American children’s “unhyphenated American identity” (102). Finally, Lindsay Myers and Francesca Orestano further diversify this section by investigating how Italian children’s authors shifted their writing from fantasy to realism to subvert socio-political pressure to glorify war. Myers analyzes Arturo Rossato’s subversion of the domestication of war and the rhetoric of Italian unification in his work *L’aeroplano di Girandolino*, and Orestano deals with Salvator Gotta’s classic text *Piccolo Alpino*, to explore the “militarization of childhood” and “childification of war” (48). Orestano also examines Italian texts that were used to create shared cultural memories before and during the war. The first section offers a broad and insightful examination of how children interacted with the literature they read.

The second section of the book, “Propaganda and Experience,” opens with a chapter in which Andrew Donson examines how wartime changes to curriculum, economics, and labour relations affected the freedom of German girls. He points out that wartime experiences
differed depending on socioeconomic status, but concludes that many German girls and young women had more “freedom of action” (109) and were less supervised during the war. Jonathan Weier examines the increasing separation of the Canadian and American branches of the YMCA during the war and the support they provided to their respective countries’ war efforts. Justin Nordstrom focuses on propaganda by examining the rhetoric and strategies that the American Committee on Public Information used to encourage children to preserve food and inspire adults to participate in the war effort. Similarly, Rosemary Ross Johnston considers how arts including poetry, novels, paintings, and posters were used to create a shared idea of home among Australians on the home front and at war. For Ross Johnston, the meaning of material culture, such as photographs, shifts with time and place. Barbara Cooke addresses the consequences that can occur when propaganda and reality do not match. Specifically, she draws on her own biography of Arnold Talbot Wilson to consider how the “imperialist legend” prescribed to him in the literature he read as a late-Victorian schoolboy at Clifton College “dogged him for the rest of life” and ultimately “led to his own destruction in an airplane above France in May 1940” (125).

The third section, “Education and Play,” focuses on schooling, games, and toys. Rosie Kennedy and Rachel Duffett demonstrate how toys can be used to explore the wartime experiences of British children and adults. Kennedy considers how the popularity of war-themed toys reflected Britain’s excitement at the outbreak of war. She then investigates how the toy industry turned away from war-themed toys as British citizens became exhausted and appalled by the conflict. She also examines the fear among many adults...
that children were finding too much joy in the “‘ghastly’ side of war” (234), especially when they re-enacted the screams and experiences of war casualties. Duffet furthers this discussion by examining how toys such as the “exploding trench,” which was pulled from shelves shortly after its release in 1915, were thought to cross “an invisible line” between the realities that children could mimic in their play and those deemed unsuitable. Both scholars discuss the challenges involved in studying toys, but ultimately demonstrate their usefulness as a primary source. Emer O’Sullivan continues the theme of play by examining how German authors created humorous war-themed texts that focused on children playing war instead of adults fighting in actual wars, while Kristine Moruzi examines children’s letters in the _Grain Growers Guide_ (a periodical published in Winnipeg and read throughout the Canadian Prairies) that reveal how children contributed to the war effort and how they understood their war work.

The book’s final section examines children’s wartime activism and the influence of childhood experiences on the wartime activism of adults. Margaret R. Higonnet demonstrates how literary narratives inspired girls’ wartime activism (such as volunteer work and nursing) by tracing stories about heroines from the American Revolution and Civil War that were recycled during the First World War. She also situates the American heroines within the larger context of European girls’ culture. Marnie Hay’s article broadens the boundaries of child activism by showing how children in the _Na Finna Éireann_ (the Irish nationalist response to the Boy Scouts) engaged or did not engage in the First World War, the Easter Revolution, and the Irish War of Independence. She concludes that most of the club’s youthful members saw their childhood training as preparation not for the First World War, but for the Irish War of Independence. Branden Little and Siân Pooley consider how adults’ activism in global conflicts can be shaped by their childhood experiences. Little argues that the Americans who served in Second World War were motivated to see America as an international power because they had been mobilized as children during the First World War in organizations such as the Junior Red Cross. While Pooley argues that the “militarist ideals and war-centered cultures” of Britain in the Edwardian period had only a “limited and contingent impact on the lives and aspirations” of children (311), therefore, she argues that soldiers in the First World War chose to enlist because they had a deep sense of duty, not because of the militaristic ideals they had been taught in childhood.

Peter Hunt concludes the collection by considering how children’s literature overtly or covertly anticipated the First World War. For instance, he points to Peter Pan’s exclamation that “To die will be an awfully big adventure” as a “premonition of terror” that demonstrates J. M. Barrie’s “strange morbidity and perfervid preoccupation with death” (324). Hunt then brings his examination to the present by asking if
the current popularity of war as a topic in children’s literature suggests that we are approaching another war, or if “perhaps covertly, and overtly, we will always be approaching war” (326).

This collection successfully examines the intersection of war and childhood. The editors have provided important context in the introductory chapter, however the articles within individual sections are often only loosely linked. Readers of Jeunesse will be especially interested in the book’s cross-disciplinary approach and transnational context, as well as the collection’s analytic focus on children’s literature, children’s writing, toys, games, and extracurricular activities. Children’s Literature and Culture of the First World War is also important as it expands the timeline of the First World War beyond 1914–1918 by asking how adults’ decisions to fight were shaped by their own childhoods and by considering how the war continued to affect the lives of its participants as they aged. Ultimately, this timely and detailed study provides an important example of why children and childhood should be foregrounded in the study of war, and the insights that can be gained by studying these themes in a transnational context.

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