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The School Story as a Literary Genre

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ABSTRACT
The present study is fuelled by the possibility to explore one of the most traditional genres in literature and seek answers in relation to its emergence, generic patterns and, last but not least, its remarkable popularity across time and space. The first part of the research intends to provide a survey of scholarly sources that represent some of the most significant contributions to the study of the school story genre. The study aims to cover the evolution of the school story as a literary genre (definitions, categories, major writers), but prior to this goal, we intend to offer a diachronic perspective of this form of education in real life. Afterwards, the analysis is based on its reflection in children's fiction, as well. This angle is intentionally set in order to link the fictional field with the main targeted audience – the young readers – and attempt to provide an explanation for them being so fond of novels that incorporate tropes which pertain to this particular eccentric genre. Thus, the last part of our research focuses on investigating the conventional features and key elements of this genre, as well as examining if there are other levels of categorisation and subgenres that have emerged as a result of the writers' ingeniousness or adaptation to prescribed societal norms.

Keywords: *Literary genres; the school story tradition; scholarly works; generic patterns; categorisation; education; society.*

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INTRODUCTION

There are many convincing arguments about the writer of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), Thomas Hughes, who is commonly identified as the founder of the school story genre. However, critics have also suggested that earlier manifestations of the genre can be traced in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess: or Little Female Academy* (1749) or Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1802), albeit their appeal certainly did not match Hughes's ardent supporters. Thus, in order to provide a carefully devised chronological survey of some of the best scholarly works on the history of the school story as a distinct genre, the following critical guides prove to be essential. With the English public schools leading the way (although they were, in fact, private and Latin was taught in some of them), promoting a liberal education based on high ideals and massive purposes and encouraging intellectual growth, independence and moral virtues, John R. Reed counterbalances this perfect image with views expressed by leading intellectuals (poets and novelists especially) who proved to be contradictory to the valuable envisaged model of education. In *Old School Ties: The Public School in British Literature* (1964), Reed signals that there are paradoxes that portray this typically British institution and endeavours to offer a comprehensive treatment of the opinions expressed by prominent British writers such as Charles Dickens, Alec Waugh, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley or W. H. Auden [1]. Thus, Reed identifies with this important segment of writers who exercise their social and cultural critique against the distorted values that once characterised British life and thought.

Literature review

The first notable survey based on Angela Brazil's hearty school stories and her most capable successors can be found in *You're a Brick, Angela! A New Look at Girls' Fiction from 1839-1975* (1976) by Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig. The two writers provide an overview of both British and American books, based on popular and "literary" fiction from the early Victorian years up to the second half of the twentieth century. Critical analysis is focused on issues that arise when girls begin to mature, thus allowing the readers to experience in the formulaic school stories the inherent development to adulthood, although escaping the masculine sphere. Concentrating only on the British public schools, Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy offers an extensive (almost five hundred pages) but entertaining guide to the history of the English public school in *The Old School Tie: The Phenomenon of the English Public School* (1977) [2]. Gathorne-Hardy's book scrutinises an entire chronicle starting with the Dark Ages, continuing with the formative nineteenth-century versions and finishing with the stories set in girls' and progressive schools of the modern era.

Five years later, Isabel Quigly endeavours to examine the connection between the popularity of English public schools and the variety of fictional images that they generated in novels and stories about school life. Quigly selects writers and discusses them based on a recurrence of themes that she notices they have in common, including the emphasis on sports or schoolboy heroics. Thus, *The Heirs of Tom Brown* (1982) is a highly engaging analysis on the social, cultural and literary history of this interesting genre, the English school story, comprising a vast array of some of the most influential writers identified as "the heirs" of Tom Brown such as: Rudyard Kipling (*Stalky & Co.*, 1899), F. Anstey (*Vice Versa: A Lesson to Fathers*, 1882), P. G. Wodehouse (*The Pothunters and Other School Stories*, 1902), Angela Brazil (*The Fortunes of Philippa*, 1906) or Alec Waugh (*Public School Life: Boys, Parents, Masters*, 1922) [3].

On the other hand, P. W. Musgrave considered that further critical attention should be given to the boys' school story only. In 1985, *From Brown to Bunter: The Life and Death of the School Story* provides a wonderful historical background of this minor literary genre, starting from the early nineteenth-century representatives of the genre and continues to illustrate its development in Hughes's and Farrar's novels. Thus, the author believes that a genuine historical view should begin with didactic works such as *The Parents' Assistant*[1] by Maria Edgeworth (1796) and sustained with a discussion on the slow evolution witnessed during the 1870s, followed by Talbot Baines Reed's untested experience of the public school education in *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's* (1881). Musgrave's engaging account also shows the evolution of the genre based on the changing social structure of Britain, which ultimately led to a serious lack of interest in the genre after the Second World War. In 1988, Jeffrey Richards narrows the analysis of nature, role and function of the public school story to the British territory in *Happiest Days: The Public School in English Fiction*. His critical guide focuses on the idea that stories not only reflect, but also generate public opinion, therefore, managing to convey various reactions of high and popular culture connected to public schools. In terms of historical lenses, he begins by illustrating the influence of the genre on the social scene with Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* up to the extraordinary appeal of Frank Richard's Greyfriars stories in the 1930s. Similar to Isabel Quigly, Richards selects Rudyard Kipling and P. G. Wodehouse as case studies which contain relevant material, but he also includes surveys on the works of authors such as Dean Farrar (*Eric, or, Little by Little*, 1858), E. M. Forster (*The Longest Journey*, 1907) or James Hilton (*Goodbye Mr. Chips*, 1934). The historical view is well balanced against the social impact, Richards offering a wider perspective on the shift from reality to fiction that the school story suffered, and, furthermore, influenced the public's perception.

Four years later, Rosemary Auchmuty interrogates the popularity amongst so many readers of the school story genre with girls as protagonists in *A World of Girls: The Appeal of the Girls' School Story* (1992) [4]. The case studies that she selects are comprised of female authors that are highly representative for the school story genre (as it will be further demonstrated in the following pages) such as Elsie Jeanette Oxenham, Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Enid Blyton. Thus, Auchmuty does not deny the guilty delight of immersing into this "girlish" genre, but rather critically questions in a lively and controversial manner the attraction towards this powerful world where independent young women find it easier to be and, also, evolve outside the masculine constraints. A highly regarded pioneer of women's studies, while also focusing on feminist legal surveys of higher education in Britain, Auchmuty concludes that works such as the *Chalet School* series, *Nancy*, *Springdale* and *Dimsie* tales and, last but not least, *The Malory Towers* series are not only seminal to the school story genre, but they also illustrate positive images that inspire girls and women alike in choosing genuine role models.

In 1996, cultural criticism is applied to the school story by Beverly Lyon Clark in *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tattling Tomboys*, where she relies on Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gayatri C. Spivak among others. This study significantly contributes to children's literature criticism, arguing that marginalised genres such as the school story may generate cultural contradictions, since men write stories for girls and tales for boys are written by women. Clark indicates that genres, as well as culture, are also influenced by these cultural contradictions and invites us to discover a cross-gendering of the school story based on the gender-age junction. She particularly negotiates this intersection due to the fact that age and children's literature are generally "marginalised" by theorists of marginality who rather focus on race, class and gender. Clark believes that, in terms of children's literature and the poor number of critical lenses that are applied to it compared to adult literature, the school stories and the politics of schooling are paramount in grasping the connection between pedagogy and literature. Due to significant factors such as the continuing appeal and amount of novels based on the school story genre, school novels have recently been granted their own reference guides in a two-volume *Encyclopedia of School Stories* [5], edited by Rosemary Auchmuty and Joy Wotton and encompassing Sue Sims and Hilary Claire's *The Encyclopedia of Girls' School Stories* and Robert J. Kirkpatrick's *The Encyclopedia of Boys' School Stories* (2000). These volumes offer a valuable and comprehensive overview of the history of these stories and their roots dating back from the eighteenth century. The critical references are designed to provide insight into a two-

[1] Queen Victoria is said to have enjoyed this collection three months prior to her coronation, while William Thackeray mentions it in his famous novel *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848).

hundred-year-old literary genre, mapping the most significant authors, important topics and, last but not least, the critical reception of the boys' and girls' school stories and their subsequent expansion.

The school story, Genesis and evolution

Nobody can deny that generations of colonial leaders have attended boarding schools as part of their inherent upbringing as moral, intellectual human beings. Yet, the privileged part must not slip this discussion – only a minority of the upper-middle class parents could afford this type of character-forming education for their offspring. Nevertheless, money was not the only reason for those who did not follow this path in life. Some of us are probably aware that British public schools used to be (and still are) expensive private schools. Moreover, they were founded in a highly stratified society, therefore enabling them to keep the characteristic of limited enrolment based on gentry and aristocracy prioritisation. Therefore, equal access to education for all seemed judicious, albeit unattainable(a well-known fact which does not differ much from the contemporary society). In Britain, middle schools or traditional preparatory schools usually serve eleven to fourteen-year-old children. These schools prepare them to later attend "public" schools, which are also called "independent". However, they are, in fact, privately funded schools which continue to charge high fees. Each of these independent "public" schools[2] is associated with a top administrator who has membership in the National Headmasters Conference. On the opposite side, there are the state-sponsored schools which are also called "maintained". Conversely, in the United States, American teenagers can attend private boarding high schools, also called "prep schools". Since in England there are less than two hundred and fifty still operating "independent" schools and only a third of these are exclusively boarders, approximately three to six percent of the total secondary school population in England attend boarding schools nowadays. Among the thirty percentage of boarding schools, there are sixty all-boys schools, independent all-girls schools and, also, co-educational ones [7].

Naturally, there are some aspects that may come as surprising, or even disturbing to the rest of us, who are unaware that real boarding schools[3] in Britain and the United States have got strict rules when it comes to succeeding both academically and socially (in sports, to be more specific), while simultaneously allowing little privacy and keeping children away from their families for long periods of time. Not only are there less people who send their children to this kind of schools, but there is also a shift in relation to their high-ranking status. Both parents and children have chosen to value their "home" instead of being completely and continuously separated from their families. Naturally, in some countries, where we still encounter this form of education, the boundaries are lessened, with pupils being allowed to go home at weekends. Australian critic Philip Hensher claims that British children are all but unacquainted with the boarding school story conventions. First of all, the school story emerges quite prominently in British children's literature while barely seen elsewhere. Its reflection in the literary field may owe a lot to "the way in which education developed in Britain, with the *public* schools leading the way. It may also owe something to the island mentality of the British; a boarding-school setting is a useful way of bringing together a group of young people who have to learn to get along with each other while adults hover in the background, providing some kind of disciplined framework" [8].

Thus, there is no doubt that the boarding school setting proves to be a context that the British are more inclined to grasp than most Americans. Furthermore, the real public schools were segregated by gender, so there is no surprise that writers found inspiration in writing either boys' school stories or girls' school tales, thus encouraging gender division in readership as well. Sheila Ray also highlights in her "School Stories" essay that even if we generally refer to school stories as novels set exclusively in boarding schools, this is neither a complete, nor a valid perception. She proves her statement by mentioning two novels, *Chris and Some Others* (1920) and *The New Girl at Graychurch*(1939), written by Winifred Darch, who concentrated on fictional day schools to sustain the strong plots and her detailed accounts of school plays.

Therefore, we should first familiarise ourselves with the history of the school story genre. Critics such as Robert J. Kirkpatrick [6] and Peter Hunt [8] state that the tradition dates back to mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries novels with school story settings developed by Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749) and by Charles and Mary Lamb's *Mrs Leicester's School* (1808). Still, according to Mary Thwaite the first genuine story of school life is depicted in Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1841), because Martineau narrates the events from the child's point of view [9]. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the school stories were not gender biased in terms of authorship. But when Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was published in 1857, men began to write about boys' schools, while women focused on stories about girls' schools. Moreover, Hughes' semi-autobiographical novel about the Rugby School established the public-school story as a genre in its own right and, also set the pattern for the subsequent authors who

[2] There are seventy-five overseas schools who belong to the National Headmasters Conference and most of them are in British Commonwealth countries.

[3] "The hothouse society" is the designation used by British sociologist Royston Lambert when referring to the boarding school life and its abovementioned characteristics.

followed closely into this traditional school story[4]. Only a year after Thomas Hughes' success, F. W. Farrar's[5]*Eric, Or Little by Little* (1858) also depicted fragments of the author's own school life and Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.*(1899) was regarded more as a "literary" than a "popular" school story, because "it was the first to transcend the boundary between juvenile and adult fiction, while being so authentic that it attracted both criticism and praise in almost equal measures." [6]. Also classified as a "literary" school story for children, P. G. Wodehouse's *Mike* (1909) is the author's last book in this genre, before turning to adult comic fiction.

The boys' school story acknowledged its heyday from the 1890s especially due to the 1870 Education Act (promoting "universal" literacy in Britain), which enabled children's books and magazines to become cheaper, thus more accessible. The most famous were periodicals such as the *Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*) (1879) and the *Girl's Own Paper* (*GOP*) (1880). Gathorne-Hardy highlights how these periodicals were simply devoured between the Second and the First World War by English schoolboys who discovered the different public-school life before the twentieth century. Talbot Baines Reed (*The Fifth Form as St. Dominic's* – 1881) established himself as one of the most successful writers of school stories at that time. Surprisingly enough, (partly due to the gender inconsistencies for long stretches of time and somewhat social inequalities from a cultural point of view) traditional girls' school stories follow in similar ways the themes presented in the boys' stories. Perhaps Karen Manners Smith is right to assume that "this robust, androgynous quality may help to explain their persistent popularity" alongside "the comfortable predictability of the school story genre, rather than the appeal of actual boarding school attendance […]." [6]. There are also late nineteenth-century writers for girls who referred to schools that were established in ordinary urban houses (such as Sara Crewe in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little* Princes – 1905) in complete opposition to the turreted castles that afterwards became the preferred setting. Other examples include Charlotte Yonge's *The Pillars of the House* (1893), Mrs. Moles worth's *The Carved Lions* (1895), Mrs. George de Horne Vaizey's *Pixie O'Shaughnessy* (1903), but these works cannot be regarded as school stories, because their authors scarcely rely on school to narrate the heroines' experiences. As such, the most prominent school story women writers of the early twentieth century are believed to be L. T. Meade –*A Madcap* (1904), *The School Favourite* (1908) – and Angela Brazil – *The Fortunes of Philippa* (1906), *The Nicest Girl in The School* (1909), *Bosom Friends: A Seaside Story* (1910), *A Popular School-Girl* (1921). Constantly flourishing under the aegis of the aforementioned female authors, with subgenres not found in boys' school stories (such as the ballet school story or the riding school story), the school story became by 1920, the most popular genre for girls. One of the most popular boys' school stories was H. A. Vachell's *The Hill* (1905), portraying how two schoolboys try to earn a third's friendship.

The early twentieth century also distinguishes itself by a subgenre of school novels written particularly for adults and mainly contemptuous towards the boarding school experience and the British Empire. Examples include novels such as E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907), Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* (1917), Hugh Walpole's *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* (1911) and also appear during the mid-nineteenth century in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1959) or David Benedictus's *The Fourth of June* (1962). There was not only school story fiction written for adults, but also school memoirs that were published by ex-servicemen and statesmen in the twentieth century and also by well-renowned British authors such as H. G. Wells, Roald Dahl, Robert Graves, C. Day-Lewis or Graham Greene. Angela Brazil's popularity did indeed diminish, but her place was shortly taken by Elsie Jeanette Oxenham's *Rosaly's New School* (1913) and her long sequence of the *Abbey* stories (1914-1959). At the same time, Dorita Fairlie Bruce's series featuring Nancy Caird and the Scottish boarding school interestingly met the expectations set by the author's Scottish roots and the times when they were created. The record of public-school stories that were published as a series of novels was probably set by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer whose *Chalet School* stories (1925-1970) reached the fifty-ninth volume. Although this last sequel was published posthumously, the entire series is set in the Austrian Tyrol and has enjoyed a wide readership, while Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* books (1941 and 1946) are considered some of Blyton's[6] best works (beside the *St. Clare's* series of girls' school stories, among her over thirty books that use the boarding-school location). Other prolific and outstanding female writers include Mabel Esther Allan, Mary K. Harris, Antonia Forestand Elfrida Vipont, who, despite publishers' and librarians' views of rejecting boarding-school manuscripts, gladly fulfilled the continuing demand later on paperback versions (1967). Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) features what could easily constitute the archetype of a (Scottish) schoolmistress.

Among male authors, James Hilton's *Goodbye Mr. Chip* (1934) portrays one of the most famous archetypes of an inspiring and kind teacher. Not only librarians, but also educators and literary critics started to dismiss the school story genre as being irrelevant and obsolete because it ran against the modern syllabus and the more complex issues in a

[4] Not only is Hughes's book regarded as the traditional school story, but it is also the most famous school story ever written, in Richards's opinion (Richards, 1992: 3).

[5] Another novel depicting school life written by the popular English author is *St. Winifred's, or The World of School* (1862).

[6] Nowadays, there are Brazil, Oxenham, Brent-Dyer and Blyton fan clubs and journals. Moreover, some of their books are still in print and academic interest was particularly seen back in 1994 in Brent Dyer's *Chalet School* stories, when the series became the subject of a scholarly conference.

child's life[7]. Although interest in school stories began to fade after the Second World War, due to a co-educational secondary school system being publicly funded for all the British children, the school story genre never ceased to appeal to the young readership. Between 1960 and 1970, writers start focusing on day school stories, instead of choosing a boarding school setting. The drawbacks encountered in the 1960s by this parochial genre are obliterated with Penelope Farmer's *Charlotte Sometimes* (1969). The novel is seen as a revival of the genre, closely followed by Barbara Willard's *Famous Rowena Lamont* (1983), Michelle Magorian's *Back Home* (1985) and Ann Pilling's *The Big Pink* (1987) – all bound to use the conventions of the boarding-school story, but also deviating from the well-known pattern.

However, the British school story was not yet ready to change the pattern in terms of inclusiveness and the triumph of good over evil. Thus, there were two books in the USA which broke the norm in the 1970s, specifically Rosemary Wells's *The Fog Comes on Little Pig Feet* (1972), where the protagonist eventually returns home and Robert Cormier's controversial book *The Chocolate War* (1974), where the triumph of evil over good exceeds all conventional children's literature. At the same time, the 1970s witnessed British authors who started to examine racial attitudes and sex roles within their newly fashioned primary school setting (Gene Kemp's *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler* – 1977), contemporary issues such divorce and conservation or gender roles (Anne Fine's *Goggle-Eyes* – 1989 and *Flour Babies* – 1992) or means of raising money versus charity (Allen Sadler's *Sam's Swop Shop* – 1993). Other writers still mirrored that some problems are perennial with Aidan Chamber's *The Present Takers* (1983) and Jan Dean's *Me, Duncan and the Great Hippopotamus Scandal* (1993) serving as examples that portray the problematic bullying theme. Other cases of recent school stories include Philip Redmond's *Grange Hill* stories (also a children's television drama series broadcasted on BBC) which portray present-day issues such as severe illness, death, shattered homes, teenage pregnancy, smoking and drugs, all happening in a comprehensive day school or Anthony Horowitz's *Groosham Grange* (1988).

Thus, all school stories have gradually shifted (mostly pressured by the increasing issues that youngsters are confronted with nowadays) towards a more mature and worldly-wise tone, while still maintaining school as a familiar background for conventional themes. Even so, critics kept ignoring school stories until nearly the end of the twentieth century, at least those which focused primarily on boys' tales such as Isabel Quigly's*The Heirs of Tom Brown* (1982), P. W. Musgrave's *From Brown to Bunter* (1985) [11] or Jeffrey Richards's *Happiest Days* (1988). The 1990s introduce Adèle Geras's *Egerton Hall* trilogy, with heroines that illustrate fairy-tale prototypes such as Rapunzel in *The Tower Room* (1990), Sleeping Beauty in *Watching the Roses* (1991) and Snow White in *Pictures of the Night* (1992). These literary works represent an obvious manifestation of how ancestors are never lost, but reinterpreted. At the same time, the trilogy illustrates that the two-hundred-year-old traditional school story can raise awareness about contemporary issues such as growing sexuality and impending adulthood.

Last but not least, there is no greater proof than J. K. Rowling's tremendously popular *Harry Potter* novels that the boarding-school genre is, by no means, dead (even if critics have regularly claimed its gradual slump in the latter half of the twentieth century). A considerable number of critics, fans and other unbiased audiences have questioned the British writer's motifs for choosing the parochial and eccentric boarding school story in creating one of the greatest literary phenomena of the past decades. Julia Eccleshare claims that "to set a book in such an institution runs strongly against the current vogue for social realism. In general, children's books from the mid-1970s onwards have moved towards inclusiveness, reflecting the lives of as many children as possible." [12]. Nevertheless, Eccleshare also points out that even if "boarding school is an alien experience for the majority of children everywhere, the idea of it has long appealed in fiction" [12], as we have already demonstrated at the beginning of this study. Therefore, the lack of any personal experiences from a real school of this kind might be another significant factor for Rowling to use this untested, yet long envisaged, milieu for creating the co-educational Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in 1997. While the popularity of the boarding school setting may owe a lot to the island mentality of the British, it appears that German girls were also thrilled by this genre. Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* books were translated between 1960 and 1972, while German writers had to develop sequels to meet the high readership demands [13]. At the same time, Paul Berna's *La Grande Alerte* (1960) uses the boarding-school setting to demonstrate that Château-Milon School plays both a didactic role in the wonderful area of Anjou and a changing one as a rite of passage for boys.

An extremely significant detail that should be mentioned at this point of the discussion refers to Townsend's wise observation on the dichotomy between the British writers' inclination towards infusing fantasy in the school stories, as in children's fiction in general, and the American authors' predilection for a more realistic approach [14]. As such, Rowling is not the first author to incorporate magic into a school-story format. Jill Murphy's *The Worst Witch* (1974) and Diana Wynne Jones's *Witch Week* (1982) are still exceptionally popular, featuring school-story conventions (that will shortly be presented and detailed in this study) infused with magical elements. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy – *The*

[7] It is worth mentioning that the genre of school stories emerged in Britain during the 19th century. Most of them were set in a boarding school becausethe majority of writers and publishers reflected the background and ideals of about three percent of the school-going population [10]. After the popularity of boarding schools decreased, so did school stories in general.

Golden Compass (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) – also features the significant role of Jordan College, Oxford, in Lyra's life, while the girl's mysterious destiny is associated with many different worlds, including the world of the dead.

Generic patterns in school stories

Although critics such as Jeffrey Richards, Isabel Quigly and John Rowe Townsend have commented on the death of the traditional school stories since the 1960s, their critical works greatly contribute to illustrating the patterns of this genre. Generally speaking, the school story closely follows young adolescents' life, with school playing a central role in their development. As lessons are interwoven with more abstract themes such as friendship and animosities, loyalty and bullying, or bravery and academic achievement, authors most commonly choose a boarding school for a more natural blending of these familiar elements. Thus, it seems that the boarding school represents merely a setting that facilitates the writers' goal to portray school as a microcosm of the larger world rather than a particular subgenre.

Mavis Reimer also acknowledges this fact in his study published in 2009 in *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, arguing that school is usually portrayed "as a «little world» preparing its students for other, larger spheres of action" [15]. School stories have also been infused with elements found in genres such as mystery and spy fiction, or historical settings (especially novels set in the First or Second World War). As literature mostly illustrates current social, political or cultural values, many school stories that were published at that time portray strangers or foreigners as protagonists, or racism and xenophobia as major themes. According to Robert J. Kirkpatrick's critical overview of the history (and not only) of boys' school stories over the last two hundred years, horror and fantasy elements have recently imbued the traditional genre. Additionally, in his recent study entitled *The Other in the School Stories: A Phenomenon in British Children's Literature* (2017), Ulrike Pesold states that the subgenre of witch school story derives from the traditional one and analyses selected works by Thomas Hughes, Rudyard Kipling, Enid Blyton and J. K. Rowling to prove the transition.

The setting is generally a public school or other boarding school and features a hero (or a heroine) with his best friend (or two best friends, as the "rule of three" was adopted in girls' stories as a matter of safety, while in boys' tales played a more controversial role of discouraging "unnatural" closeness, specifically homosexuality). Although friendship is a common theme, a strong feeling of isolation is frequently experienced by the pupil that simply does not "fit in". As companions, children generally break rules, but are also unfairly blamed for misdemeanours and suffer unjust punishments in their typically detective-fashioned quest to catch thieves or deal with vandalism of school property and personal belongings. Nevertheless, the protagonists are at some point promoted, whether they seek this or not, and acquire a higher role with authority such as Head Boy (or Girl), or games captain. This is partly accomplished by sticking together with one's peers, thus complying with codes of honour and loyalty. It is not easily achievable, because school stories often feature protagonists dealing with moral dilemmas such as cheating, tattling, smoking, drinking, gambling, or skipping classes. Consequently, it is also common in many stories for a hitherto disagreeable or incorrigible type to be gradually reformed by the main character.

In addition to friendship, the virtue of sportsmanship is another common theme in all school stories. Generally, the hero is not a great athlete, but still, the author always underlines the significance of the sport (whether it is the boys' brutal football or the girls' hockey) for the school and, also for the protagonist. Competition has to be encountered in team sports (or "games" as they are called in England) as well as in other segments of school life – houses, dormitories, even other schools. Basically, rivalry appears each time the author provides a new opportunity to accumulate points towards an annual championship. Inter-dorm, inter-house and inter-school conflicts result in depictions of a bully (and his friends) in most traditional school stories. Whether the bully is an older boy, a schoolmaster, or a prefect, the act of persecution is mostly a reflection of delicate issues such as jealousy, vengefulness, snobbery or bigotry. Heroes and heroines are not the only ones being generally harassed in the school story genre. Besides looking out for themselves, they also have to protect weaker companions from bullies and bigots. Among the protagonists' friends (though not bullied), there is typically a pair of identical twins that often provide comic relief as well as bewilderment.

Teachers and headmasters become indispensable characters mainly because the genre conforms to the hierarchical system of school itself and, secondly, because they are often the only representatives of the adult world in this setting. As such, the stories explore collaboration between students and headmasters or headmistresses. With remarkably few exceptions, they are models of wisdom, kindness and integrity, just as teachers may vary from the jovial to the merciless, the dull to the malevolent. Although headmasters and headmistresses of school fiction portray inspiring and fair-minded characters, they also ignore the regulations, ultimately demonstrating that authority can and should be used when life-threatening situations occur.

Besides sports, food represents a continuously (if not obsessively) narrated theme in classic boarding-school stories. It seems that food and feeding feature in several canonical works of literature (such as Shakespeare's plays or Jane

Austen and Charles Dickens's famous literary works), serving varied functions such as an expression of feelings or a way of establishing and strengthening friends and family bonds. The popular Enid Blyton (and her stories about St. Clare's and Malory Towers), together with Roald Dahl (author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – 1964) and J. K. Rowling are identified by critics as "the famous three" [16], with food playing a central role that enriches the narrative significance of the stories. While memoirists[8] write about their experience of deprivation and famine from various institutions, school story authors portray how students' cravings are satisfied with parcels from home, secret midnight feasts (especially in girls' stories), informal dining parties, or trips to a nearby village where they rejoice at buying all sorts of sweets to alleviate either a mundane necessity or an emotional one.

The typical school story follows the protagonist throughout the whole school year, though there are examples (Anthony Buckeridge's schoolboy Jennings and Charles Hamilton's Greyfriars boys) which portray children who never grow older. Additionally, some series can portray a single term in each book. Either way, a school story usually begins with the protagonist's departure from home, the inherent separation from the family, the journey to the school, the arrival in a new and, sometimes, frightening location and the return home for the long summer holiday. Again, there is a discrepancy between public school memoirists' notes regarding homesickness and anxiety that filled their hearts and the literary reflections which tend to shift these feelings to secondary characters. Thus, the protagonists frequently experience joy or relief to be removed from parents' expectations. By applying this technique, authors imply that homesickness should not be experienced by a strong and emotionally stable fictional student, rather it is perceived as a sign of weakness and oversensitivity that should be dealt with swiftly or not dealt with at all.

CONCLUSION

In our attempt to investigate the genre/gender connection in the school story genre, we learnt that it is not necessary to dissociate traditional boys' school stories from the girls' category, because they resemble each other to a significant degree. By exploring noteworthy critical studies provided by Jeffrey Richards, Isabel Quigly and John Rowe Townsend, we have managed to discover some of the most familiar tropes of the school story genre and prove their salient position through their repetitive use in other notable scholarly analyses.

With respect to the authors' incorporation of public school life in their fictional texts, we observed that some educational institutions are similar to the British public schools that have inspired this literary genre, but the selection criteria do not always follow the model from the Victorian Era. Hence, Rowling's incorporation and transformation of these key elements in one of the most iconic schools in children's literature – Hogwarts – should appear as a reminiscence mediated through fiction and, most importantly, a literary genre which has also been perceived, until recently, as a vanished representation. Therefore, literary texts certainly prove their continuity across time not only in their connection to one another, but also in their relation to readers and writers.

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[8] Geoffrey Walford's *Life in Public Schools* (London: Methuen, 1986) offers interviews, observations and documentary sources over an extended fieldwork in two major public British boarding schools that considerably contrast the rose-coloured lenses usually applied by novelists who depict school stories for children.

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