

THE PLACE OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL FOR YOUNG READERS WITHIN THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CANON

Laura Filardo Llamas
Universidad de Granada
Marta Gutiérrez Rodríguez
Universidad de Valladolid

Many issues are raised when authors set their stories in the past. First and foremost there is the balance that must be kept between the responsibility owed to historical truth and the need to write a story which in its emotional and narrative truth engages the modern reader. (Collins 2001: v)

1. INTRODUCTION

The historical novel has always enjoyed bad reputation among both literary critics and historians¹. The later group blames it for not (re)telling the past as it actually

¹ We should bear in mind that up to the nineteenth century, history and literature were not clearly separated. It is in this century that historiography claimed its independent status as a scientific way of knowledge in an attempt to separate itself from the subjectivity of literature. "In the nineteenth century, at least before the rise of Ranke's "scientific history", literature and history were considered branches of the same tree of learning. [...] Then came the separation that resulted in the distinct disciplines of literary and historical studies today, despite the fact that the realist novel and Rankean historicism shared many similar beliefs about the possibility of writing factually about observable reality." (Hutcheon 1988: 105) Despite all these efforts to separate both disciplines, they share an important element that, in our opinion, does not allow their final independence: their narrative form. There can be no history without narration, because history is a process made up of events that can not be (re)told without narration. Thus, history and fiction can only be differentiated by their contents. "History and fiction are alike stories or narratives of events and actions. But for history both the structure of the narrative and its details are

happened while the former considers that it gives too much weight to history and sometimes it neglects the artistic aspect. “The historical novel, as a genre, has never won the place it deserves in literary history and critical esteem because it possesses two salient faults in the eyes of most students of literature: impurity and vulgarity.” (Henderson 1974: xiv) Some authors even denied its status as a specific literary genre. Georg Lukács, for example, considers it as part of the European realist movement (Shaw 1983: 27). Thus, it can be considered a “peripheric” way of writing as regards the standard canons of history and fiction. We can even say that history is viewed as a “dominant” narrative whereas the historical novel is just a “counternarrative”². However, the historical novel deserves more attention than the one it has received:

Historical fiction merits such attention for a number of reasons, which include but transcend simple critical justice and the possibility of discovering new sources of aesthetic pleasure. The problems historical novels have with history and we have with historical novels are potentially instructive. They can help to reveal limits in the esthetic forms we most prize —knowledge that matters for those who employ imaginative forms to make sense of the world. A clearer understanding of the workings of historical fiction can also clarify certain aspects of the nature of history itself, and of our situations as historical beings. (Shaw 1983: 9)

Despite this bad reputation, nowadays we are living a literary boom of this type of works, with bookshops overflowed with all kind of historical novels.³ We can highlight several reasons for this success. First of all, current readers lack the historical formation that the ones of the nineteenth century had. Thus, historical fiction is used nowadays as an alternative to history handbooks in order to know the past. What readers of historical novels find in these works is a fresh and more vivid view of such past. Moreover, a kind of nostalgia for the past can be felt as well as a desire of finding in such a past an explanation for the events of the present. However,

representations of past actuality; and the claim to be a true representation in any particular respect. Even though much might be true in the relevant sense, nothing in the fictional narrative marks out the difference between the true and the imaginary.” (Mink: 212)

² For more information on dominant narratives and counternarratives see Solis 2004 and Canary 2004. For an application of counternarratives to the analysis of fictional elements in narratives about the Salem Witch Trials see Gutiérrez Marta & Laura Filardo, “Narraciones y contranarraciones: el caso de la novela histórica.” *AEDEAN 29th Proceedings*. Jaén: Universidad de Jaén [forthcoming].

³ There are authors that use the term “historical fiction” –or “documentary fiction” as Barbara Foley (1986) designates it - as an equivalent of “historical novel”. However, we should bear in mind that the historical novel is a kind of historical fiction, but not all works of historical fiction are considered historical novels. We can also find “pseudofactual novels”, “non-fiction novels”, “fictional (auto) biographies” and “metahistorical novels”. For more information on this division see Foley (1986), Jacobs (1998) and McHale (1987).

it is not only readers who take refuge in historical fiction; writers use this kind of works to express their dissatisfaction with the time in which they are living.

In addition to all this, if we limit the presentation of the past to works written for children and young adults —another kind of literature traditionally considered as “peripheric”— we find ourselves with a group of works that sometimes do not find their place neither in history nor in literature in general: historical fiction written for children and young adults. This type of literature intended for young readers is sometimes regarded as part of the “adult canon” and sometimes an independent genre not very highly considered, because of its linkage with didacticism, pedagogy and ideology. However, this kind of works provide a lot of benefits for young readers, such as enjoyment, knowledge about other ways of living and the appreciation of the artistic value of a literary work. Therefore, at the same time that they discover things about the surrounding world, they do the same about themselves. “Children around the world can benefit from stories that explain what life is like for those people whose lives are restricted by handicaps, politics, religion or circumstance, or whose lives are different from theirs because of culture or geography.” (Lynch-Brown 1993: 3)

After all the above said, what we intend in this article is to analyze the differences and/or similarities that can be found between history and historical novels intended for young readers in order to discover if they should be considered “peripheric” as regards history and fiction in general. To do so, we have selected a group of reference books and historical novels for children and young adults about the Salem Witch Trials in which we are going to focus our attention on the setting, on how historical places are presented in both types of works. We have selected the setting because of two reasons. On the one hand, it is one of the four elements most frequently analyzed within narration (Redondo Goicoechea 1995: 25). On the other, because what is represented in a novel takes its significance only in a historical context, i.e., characters and events—in the historical novel or in any kind of writing—happened in a time and a place, they cannot occur in a void. “A setting is the zero point where the *actual* story-events and story-states are localized. [...] It was understood as sequences of any informational items relating background material about characters and events.” (Ronen 1986: 423) Consequently, we have selected the city of Boston, and our intention is to analyze the image that we get about this city in the works under study to get an idea of how Boston was at the end of the seventeenth century, the role it played in the Salem episode and how it is portrayed in canonical and peripheral works.

2. THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

There are several definitions of a historical novel. Avron Fleishman (1971: 3-4) establishes several characteristics to define them, in particular, that they should be placed in the past, beyond forty to sixty years⁴, the plot must include a number of historical events and at least one historical character should be present.

The historical novel is distinguished among novels by the presence of a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person among the fictitious ones. When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel. (ibid: 4)

Harry E. Shaw (1983: 20-21) offers a definition based on probability –the extent to which it is possible that something had happened in the real world– in the sense of “fidelity to the external world that a work represents”. According to him,

[...] in historical novels history is, as the Russian Formalists would put it, "foregrounded." When we read historical novels, we take their events, characters, settings, and language to be historical in one or both of two ways. They may represent societies, modes of speech, or events that in very fact existed in the past, in which case their probability points outward from the work to the world it represents; or they may promote some sort of historical effect within the work, such as providing an entry for the reader into the past, in which case the probability points inward, to the design of the work itself.

Nevertheless, this definition does not take into account the importance that history plays within the literary work. Notwithstanding, even those authors that deny the importance it deserves to the historical novel have to accept that it is possible for historical and fictional worlds to collide or coexist within a literary work⁵. This may result in the existence of one historical world among multiple fictional worlds. The historical novel becomes one of the places where this combination is better performed.

In the following paragraphs, we are going to present a short overview of the evolution of the historical novel and the “peripheric” consideration it has received. The historical novel appeared during the period of the English Romanticism, after the French Revolution, when history began to be considered a massive experience

⁴ If the time span is less than forty years, we should talk about “novels of the recent past.” (Fleishman 1971: 3; Shaw 1983: 38)

⁵ This idea is further developed by “possible worlds” theorists such as Lubomir Dolezel (1986; 1988; 1998), Thomas Pavel (1986; 2000), and Marie-Laure Ryan (1992), among others.

due to the works of Walter Scott⁶. Avron Fleishman (1971: 17) establishes the following reasons for the birth of this genre:

[...] The outcome of the age of nationalism, industrialization, and revolution: the age when the European peoples came to consciousness of and vigorously asserted their historical continuity and identity; the century when widening commerce, population shifts, and factory organization created a new pattern of day-to-day life and consequent nostalgia of the old; the time when the French Revolution and its successors precipitated out what we have come to call the modern world. As in most broad movements of literary culture, however, political-economic influence on the historical novel was effected through a cultural intermediary, in this case, the writing of history itself. Only when the changes in men's predominant activities had begun to reflect themselves in the ways in which they conceived history did the literary expression of a sense of history begin to burgeon, only then did it take the peculiar form of the historical novel.

This romantic historical novel is intended to develop a factual reconstruction of reality, using elements from other genres such as old romance, gothic novel and the socio-realist novel. All these elements were chosen to achieve a goal: obtaining a realistic representation of the historical past (Fernández Prieto 1998: 77). It intends to complete history, to provide readers with the information that they cannot get in history handbooks, such as details of the character's private life, secondary events, customs of that time, etc. However, this can cause a problem: its politicization, because the historical novel can be used as a vehicle of nationalism and as a propaganda tool⁷.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the validity of the historical novel was questioned due to its defects, i.e., the lack of psychological depth in its characters, an excess of information and the introduction of long descriptions and explanations that suspend the normal flow of the action. Moreover, the historical novel was accused of giving more importance to truth than to imagination and of moving away from the reader because of the different contexts they –literary work and reader– share. By the end of this same century, the separation between historiography and the historical

⁶ “Scott is the first historical novelist because he is the first to create a fictional world according to these clear historical principles, drawn partly from Enlightenment uniformitarianism and partly from Romantic historicism. He emerges precisely at the time of transitions between these ways of looking backward, and gains the power to go beyond both the thin consumery of previous historical romances, which dress up present-day characters in the trappings of the past, and the local-color and the Gothic types, which detail or embellish the past for its own sake and without reference to the present.”(Avron Fleishman 1971: 25)

⁷ Apocryphal history, creative anachronism and historical fantasy challenge its true-to-life compromise because the first one contradicts the official version of history, the second takes the contemporary state of affairs of the author to the past represented in the work and the third one mixes history and fantasy. For more information on these three types of historical fiction see Pulgarín 1995.

novel became more obvious. Historical novels offer an alternative version of the past in order to show the twistings that historians use to achieve their own goals (cfr. Fernández Prieto 1998: 124). From that moment on, the historical novel has been used in moments of great historical crises and it has been attributed a peripheral role by historians.

In the twentieth century there has been a revival of the historical novel, and the interest in it has been increasing up to the present. In the last two decades of the last century, there were two trends as regards the historical novel. On the one hand, one that follows the traditional novel of Scott. On the other, the postmodern historical novel⁸. The first one respects historiographic data, verisimilitude, the subjectivization of history and the disappearance of the temporal borderline between the past of history and the present of the telling (ibid: 150). As regards the second one, it is characterized by a twisting of historical materials⁹. Moreover, metafiction – or “theoretical fiction”, as Mark Currie (1998: 52) refers himself to this device¹⁰ – becomes the central element of the “new” historical novel:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground that claim has in historiography, and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (Hutcheon 1988: 93)

The historical novelist has more freedom to use the historical material in a flexible way. But this freedom can become a trap for the writer, because it needs to be kept within certain limits, and such limits are determined by its distortion.

Historical events and characters have a fixed, delimited, predetermined cast, which a historically orientated novelist has largely to respect if he is to use his material effectively. [...] Fictional events and characters, wherever they occur, do not have

⁸ “It has become more or less accepted in the world of literary and cultural studies that the postmodern novel is a philosophical novel, much better qualified than traditional discursive philosophy to address the question of the knowability of the past because it is stuck in the orbit of fiction and narrative.” (Currie 1998: 65)

⁹ This twisting is performed through three narrative procedures: apocryphal or counterfactual histories, intertextuality and anachronisms. For more information on these narrative procedures see Fernández Prieto 1998.

¹⁰ “The theoretical fiction is a performative rather than a constative narratology, meaning that it does not try to state the truth about and object-narrative but rather enacts or performs what it wishes to say about narrative while itself being a narrative. For this reason I prefer the term ‘theoretical fiction’ to the term ‘metafiction’, by which this kind of narrative self-contemplation has been named in the past two decades. Metafiction implies a difference between normal fiction and its metalanguage, even when that metalanguage is fiction itself. Theoretical fiction implies a convergence of theory and fiction of the kind Barthes describes.” (Currie 1998: 52 – 53).

this limitation. [...] These factual limitations leave, to be sure, wide scope for interpretation, reassessment, fictional invention, individualized characterization, in all of which functions there is a very close similarity with the non-historical novel. [...] no full mimesis of the past can be created; any recreation is tentative, incomplete, uncertain, illusory; and such a re-creation is subject to the exigencies of narrative discourse.” (Ribbens 1993: 68)

Brian McHale (1983: 87-88) establishes the “dark areas” of history as the better places where the imagination of the writer can play an important role¹¹. He defines those areas as “those aspects about which the "official" record has nothing to report. Within the "dark areas," the historical novelist is permitted a relatively free hand.” These "dark areas" are normally the times and places where real-world and purely fictional characters interact in historical fiction. According to this, the aim of the historical novel is to fulfill a social demand that history can not accomplish: to fill the gaps that historiography has left about the past.

It retells history in order to make a truer story than has been written by historians, prophets, or other artists. The story is not truer to the facts, as we have seen, but is “intellectually more acceptable” – suggesting a universal implication of the historical particulars” (Fleishman 1971: 10)

Nevertheless, we should always bear in mind that the historical novel is fiction and its value should not be considered as regards its historical rigor but according to its artistic value.

The historical novel is an aesthetic contemplation of history. [...] The aesthetic function of historical fiction is to lift the contemplation of the past above both the

¹¹ The history of the Salem Witchcraft Trials is full of such “dark areas”. Most “versions” of this historical event have used the transcriptions of the preliminary examinations held in Salem during the witchcraft outbreak. Nevertheless, such transcriptions are fragmentary – containing only data related to some people – and incomplete – since it does not include the actual transcripts of the trials, only those of the preliminary examinations. Consequently, since those days at the end of the seventeenth century, lots of works have been written on this topic, each one trying to fill in the “gaps” left by historiography. Historians have developed different interpretations using other disciplines outside historiography such as: anthropology - John Putnam Demos (1982) *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* -, psychology - W. S. Nevins (1982) *Witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692*; Marion L. Starkey (1949) *The Devil in Massachusetts*; Chadwick Hansen (1969) *Witchcraft at Salem* -, sociology - Paul Boyer y Stephen Nissenbaum (1974) *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*; Bernard Rosenthal (1993) *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692*- and medicine - Linda Caporael (1976) “Ergotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?”; Nicholas P. Spanos y Jack Gootlieb (1976) “Ergotism and the Salem Village Witch Trials”; Nicholas P. Spanos (1983) “Ergotism and the Salem Witch Panic: A Critical Analysis and an Alternative Conceptualization”; Laurie W. Carlson (1999) *A Fever in Salem: A New Interpretation of the New England Witch Trials*. This indeterminacy is what leads authors of historical fiction to use their imagination in those areas where historiography can not tell us what happened.

present and the past, to see it in its universal character, freed of the urgency of historical engagement (ibid: 14)

3. LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

Many authors place the origin of literature for children and young adults¹² in the eighteenth century and they link it with the birth of the novel. We should bear in mind that in England, during the Victorian era, reading was a family activity. Thus, the novels of Fielding and Richardson were considered as moral examples for the education of the younger ones.

During the seventeenth century, schooling and literacy increased and, thus, the publication of didactic works raised. However, the book industry did not develop until mid nineteenth century, when childhood began to be considered as the most important stage in human development. Nevertheless, the real interest for this kind of literature does not appear until the second half of the twentieth century, after World War II. Despite many attempts for the independence of this literature intended for young readers, its birth was subordinated to general literature –the one intended for adults– and it is not until the decades of 1960s and 1970s that its independent study began. According to Cervera (1992: 9) children and young adult’s literature, has been low-considered for a long time and its existence has even been denied because it was viewed as a by-product of pedagogy and didacticism¹³. Currently, nobody dares to refuse its existence. One reason that supports its consideration as an independent kind of literature is that if an adult is different from a child then, literary works intended for each of them cannot be placed under the same category.

We sometimes forget that literature for children can and should provide the same enjoyment and understanding as does literature for adults. Children, too, seek pleasure from a story, but the sources of their pleasure are more limited. Since their experiences are more limited, children may not understand the same

¹² Although there are some differences between children, and young adult’s literature, for the purposes of this paper we are going to consider both of them as literature intended for young readers. For a division between them see Lukens 1995.

¹³ “Didacticism is the function of textbooks. Some literature gives a great deal of information without letting it take over from a suspenseful and exciting plot, or from well-developed characters. Other narratives are so filled with teaching details about a historical period, a geographical area, a social inquiry, or a physical disability that conflict, character, and theme are lost in “what the reader ought to know.” If the information displaces the understanding, then didacticism has won out. Literature, on the other hand, does not teach; it helps us understand.” (Lukens 1995: 101).

complexity of ideas. Since their understanding is more limited, the expression of ideas must be simpler – both in language and in form. (Lukens 1995: 7)

There are many clichés as regards the definition of children and young adult's literature. One of the false beliefs held over the years is the idea that this kind of literature is the one in which the main role is played by children, the one that children like or the one in which the young public is used as an excuse for the publication of works with scarcely any literary value. Generally speaking, it is true that, in most cases, the main characters of books written for young readers –especially in the case of historical fiction– are people of their same age –either fictitious or real. They play an active role in the development of the events and they are vantage witnesses of what happens in the story.

Due to these false beliefs, two criteria have been established to identify literary works intended for young readers. The first one is that those works should reflect the children's point of view. The second one is that it should be good literature. Taking the above said into account, we can say that "children's literature is all good-quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children of those ages." (Lynch-Brown 1993: 1)

Once we have seen the general characteristics of children and young adult's literature, we are going to focus our attention on “reference books” – in this case, books of history – and historical fiction.

3.1. REFERENCE BOOKS

We will call “reference books” all those non-fiction works written for young readers. However, a clear separation between fiction and non-fiction within children and young adult's literature is not easy to obtain¹⁴.

The content emphasis of children's nonfiction is documented fact; its primary purpose is to inform. In contrast, the content of fictional literature is largely, if not wholly, a product of the imagination, and the purpose is to entertain. (Lynch-Brown 1993: 152)

¹⁴ “Sometimes the writer tells the story of the life of an individual. Sometimes the writer uses a chronological arrangement of some kind, a narrative, that makes the nonfiction resemble fiction. Sometimes the writer speaks of “you” and “we” to make the explanation personal of like a story. However, the fact remains that the functions of fiction and poetry are pleasure and understanding, while the purpose of nonfiction is the discovery of factual or conceptual information. That the two purposes mingle in one book is of course possible, but we look at the two somewhat differently.” (Lukens 1995: 270)

That is the reason why authors also use the term “informational literature” to refer to this type of non-fiction writing. Moreover, there is a new literary trend that has distinguished an intermediary “genre” between these fiction and non-fiction works called “faction.”

Mogens Jansen, president of the Danish National Association of Reading Teachers, describes faction as “‘nonfiction’ the presentation of which is mainly sustained by ‘fiction elements’: the well-told nonfiction which has fictional overtones, but is nonfictional – and absolutely correct” (Jansen 1987: 16 apud. Lynch Brown 1993: 152)

The origin of these non-fiction works can be placed in the seventeenth century and for more than two hundred years, their function was more didactic than informative. Nowadays, their focus is on events and they try to demonstrate that children can learn while enjoying reading.

When we discuss nonfiction, we are really less interested in how suspense is built and more interested in how facts are presented, less interested in character and more in discovery of the relationship and application of concepts to society or the natural world. (Lukens 1995: 270)

Events should be real and they must be updated. In addition, they should provide their readers with a love of learning. Moreover, the information should be accurate and additional elements such as footnotes and reference citations should be avoided; the reason is that these elements make the book less readable and less attractive for the younger ones.

Adults often seek opinion books because they wish to know a particular expert’s opinion or attitude toward a subject. The child, however, not knowing that the facts surrounding a social problem can be interpreted through the individual perspectives of various kinds of experts, approaches a book expecting to find facts and objectivity. The child will then be less likely to detect bias. It seems reasonable to say that children’s books that inform should not be propaganda. Freedom to draw our own conclusions from the facts is a precious right. If a writer has a bias, we should expect it to be stated openly at some point. (ibid: 287)

Information is normally presented from what is known to the children to what will be considered as new information. These works are also very helpful for adults, as they can use them for teaching their children. Illustrations are also frequently present, in the form of photographs, graphics and drawings.

They convey meaning and feeling by helping the reader visualize the physical settings and the characters’ appearance and actions. They also provide an aesthetic dimension to books by offering the readers additional pleasure and insights beyond the message within the text. Thus, the role of pictures in children’s books is both to reflect the text and to extend and enrich the text without contradicting its message. (Lynch-Brown 1993: 27)

3.2. HISTORICAL FICTION

As regards historical fiction for young readers, we find the same prejudices than in the historical novel for the general public. We can define it as "realistic fiction set in a time remote enough from the present to be considered history." (Lynch-Brown 1993: 134) Thus, it contains actual historical events, authentic period settings, and real historical figures. This is why, as we have said before, it is accused of being neither history nor fiction and of being used as a political and ideological tool. Concha López Narváez presents three requirements that need to be fulfilled by any historical novel: historical rigor –more in quality than in quantity– attractive characters, and the establishment of a link with the present through universal feelings such as love, friendship or royalty. (cfr. Lage Fernández 1993: 22)

What benefits do young readers obtain from historical fiction? First, young readers realize that their lives are influenced by what other people have done before them. Second, they are also aware that their ancestors were people just like them. And finally, they have the possibility of learning how life was at other times. Thus, what historical fiction for young readers does is to

[...] bring history to life by placing appealing child characters in accurately described historical settings. By telling the stories of these characters' everyday lives as well as presenting their triumphs and failures, authors of historical fiction provide young readers with the human side of history, making it more real and more memorable. (Lynch-Brown 1993: 137)

We can distinguish three main types of historical fiction. First, we may find a story in which the main characters are imaginary and only some secondary characters may be actual historical figures. Second, we may encounter works in which the past is completely described, i.e., the social traditions, customs, values and morals of the time as well as the physical location are presented, but there is no reference to historical characters or events. Finally, we can also distinguish a third type in which the fantastic enters the realm of the historical; in this case we can talk of time-slip narratives (Hall 2001: 43–53) which include travels through time.

Historical fiction for young readers always occurs in a time and place which is described with some detail. Thus, the authentic recreation of the period is essential for the comprehension of the events developed in the story. (Lynch Brown 1993: 25) The main reason is that historical fiction can make the past come alive, make it become reality. For this reason, we need to know how the setting smelled, felt and sounded, how the buildings looked like, and how the quality of life and climate was, to be able to recreate the mood of the time. Consequently, we will understand the atmosphere in which the characters and the conflict of the story develop because

"historical fiction has a responsibility to show how environment, too, affects action". (Lukens 1995: 118).

According to Gerald Prince (1982: 73), a setting is "a set of propositions referring to the same (backgrounded) spatio-temporal complex". It can have a more or less important function depending on the story, i.e. it can clarify conflict, it can play the role of antagonist to the main character, it can illuminate character, it can settle the mood of the story, or it can act as a symbol. Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 66) states that "a character's physical surrounding (room, house, street, town) as well as his human environment (family, social class) are also often used as trait-connoting metonymies." Thus, if we change the setting, the story will be different.

According to Lukens (1995: 112 – 115), there are two main types of setting. On the one hand, there is the backdrop or relatively unimportant setting which just serves as temporal or spatial background for the story without any influence on its development. On the other, there is the integral or essential setting that affects action, character or theme and needs to be fully described. It is important to note that:

[...] historical fiction must present historical facts with as much accuracy and objectivity as books of history. This means that a setting must be described in sufficient detail as to provide an authentic sense of that time and that place without overwhelming the story. Details such as hair and clothing styles, home architecture and furnishing, foods and food preparation, and modes of transportation must be subtly woven into the story to provide a convincing authentic period setting. (Lynch-Brown 1993: 139)

4. ANALYSIS

Once we have shown the importance of setting in historical fiction for young readers, we need to establish the corpus of literary works that will be analyzed. We have selected a group of seven reference books and seven historical novels with the Salem Witchcraft Trials as their main theme and we are going to analyze the image of Boston that they present. The reference books, in chronological order are Shirley Jackson, *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* (1959); Marilynne K. Roach, *In the Days of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (1996); Lori Lee Wilson, *The Salem Witch Trials (How History is Invented)* (1997); David K. Fremon, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials* (1999); Geraldine Woods, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Headline Court Case* (2000); Marc Aronson, *Witch-Hunt: Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials* (2003); Chris Priestley, *Witch Hunt* (2003). As regards the historical novels, also in chronological order, they are the following: Ann Petry, *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964); Marion L.

Starkey, *The Visionary Girls: Witchcraft in Salem Village* (1973); Patricia Clapp, *Witches' Children: A Story of Salem* (1982); Ann Rinaldi, *A Break with Charity: A Story about the Salem Witch Trials* (1992); Kathryn Lasky, *Beyond the Burning Time* (1994); Dorothy Hobbler, *Priscilla Forster: The Story of a Salem Girl* (1997); and Kyla Marden-Steinkraus, *The Madness: A Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (2002).

In 1692, Salem people were accused of witchcraft by a group of girls. Many causes have been argued in an attempt to explain what happened and why. However, nobody has been able to give a definite answer. We should not forget that there was a hanging in Boston in 1688 –known as the Goodwin children case– that some authors have pointed out as the starting point for the madness in Salem. Thus, it is not strange to find that this city appears in novels about the Salem Witch Trials.

Both reference books and historical novels mention this episode of the Goodwin children case. In the case of reference books, Geraldine Woods (2000: 25) explains what happened as follows:

Mary Glover was not so lucky. She was one of about fifteen people executed for witchcraft between 1648 – when the first “witch” was executed in the colonies – and the Salem outbreak. In 1688, Mary Glover, and immigrant from Ireland, directed “very bad language” at Martha Goodwin. Soon Martha began to have fits, as did three other children in the family. When questioned, Mary Glover “had not power to deny her interest in the Enchantment of the Children.” Being Irish (and not having English as her first language), Glover may not have understood the questions put to her, or she may not have known how to defend herself in English. The magistrates did not know what to think; they wondered if she might be mad. However, after a doctor had testified that Mary Glover was sane, the magistrates handed down a death sentence.

But this author is not the only one who mentions the Goodwin children case. Marc Aronson (2003: 38-39) explains the effect that it had among the puritans:

For believing Puritans, the episode with the Goodwin children had been harrowing but ultimately a triumph. A witch had been discovered, led to confess, and killed; four children had been afflicted, but all were healed. A great minister had proven to be a caring man who could go to any lengths to help an anguished parent and four children trapped in invisible chains. Incontrovertible proof that evil was real, that the devil was present, and that witches were dangerous had played out in Boston, and yet those same events proved that stalwart ministers and fervent prayer could defeat the worst of the devil’s designs.

In the case of historical novels, six of them also refer themselves to this witchcraft case in Boston, always in connection with what was happening in Salem, just four years later:

In a village as small as Salem all that went on was common knowledge, and now the main concern of the people was our circle of young girls. Villagers recalled the family of God-fearing John Goodwin of Boston, whose children had fallen victims to just such seizures four years before, and had terrified everyone with their insane babblings and crazed antics. (Clapp 1982: 52)

After this explanation of the origin of the Salem Witchcraft Trials that authors attribute to Boston, we are going to focus on the physical descriptions of Boston that both reference books and novels provide. In the seven reference books, an especial emphasis is placed on the economic activities developed in this city. "By 1690 it was a busy city, the center of government and education." (Jackson 1959: 4) Within those activities, the most important are the ones related to the port, although Marilynne K. Roach (1993: 59) offers us an illustration of all the activities developed in this city.

In the 1690s, Boston also had nineteen booksellers and more kinds of craftsmen than anywhere else in Massachusetts. The merchants imported writing paper and silks, books and toys, chocolate and fine wines, sugar and molasses, bond servants or slaves. Bound for the Caribbean islands, their ships held Rhode Island riding horses or Maine lumber. Or they carried meat and fish preserved in salt to feed the island slaves who grew the sugar and processed it into molasses. Sometimes ships carried rum distilled from that molasses to Africa. There, slavers used it to barter for captured Africans whom they sold as slaves to Caribbean islands and elsewhere.

Another aspect that is frequently highlighted is its importance as the largest settlement of the colony of Massachusetts: "Three generations later, Boston, the "Metropolis of New England" and capital of the Province of Massachusetts Bay was the largest city in British North America, with more than 5,000 inhabitants. (The French called all New Englanders "Bostonaise.")" (ibid: 33).

In the case of historical novels, four elements recur in all of them. First of all, the importance of Boston's port: "It's a big city. It's a big port. All the ships from England and the West Indies land there. The mate says you've never seen such a sight as the wharf there in Boston." (Petry 1964: 15) This place was the focus of activity of the city and where the "cosmopolitanism" of Boston stemmed from. Due to the coming and going of ships, people and merchandise, as well as to the contact established with England and the West Indies, Bostonians were accustomed to see and accept things that were unthinkable in other rural places like Salem.

The ships come and go. They unload spices and silks and molasses and sugar. They ship out horses to the West Indies and they ship out fish, dried cod and herring. And they ship out timber. Sometimes a slaver pulls in with just a few slaves left aboard, and the fine rich ladies of Boston go down to pick one out. And the rich Boston merchants come down to watch the unloading, and some of them

have a king's ransom in gold coins in their money boxes. They ship out and they ship in there on the wharf in Boston, and it's a rare sight to see. (Petry 1964: 15)

Nevertheless, the port is not the only place of Boston closely described. We may also find references to "The Boston Common" (Rinaldi 1992: 81), "Harvard College" (ibid: 174), "The Town House on King Street" (Lasky 1994: 194), and to other places such as "Copp's Hill in the North End, Fort Hill in the South End, and the steep slopes of Beacon Hill toward the west." (ibid) Moreover, there are references to names of streets such as "Hannover Street". (ibid: 221)

The second element to be identified is related to the image of the port, i.e. the activities developed in Boston that were mainly connected to what the ships took from overseas or to agriculture. We should not forget that Boston, at that time, was surrounded by rural villages – Salem Village was one of them – whose products were manufactured in the "big city". The following quote from Kathryn Lasky's novel *Beyond the Burning Time* (1994) sums up the abovementioned commercial and industrial activities:

New mills had opened right here in the North End. A chocolate mill had just been built on the wharves for processing the cocoa brought into Boston from South America. Warehouses had been built for pickling and drying codfish and shad, which were fast becoming major exports. Shipbuilding was thriving, for there was money to be made in carrying dried fish, and tobacco from the south, and salt pork and grain and apples. (Lasky 1994: 220)

The authors of these novels have also used fictional elements to emphasize the commercial success of Boston. One of the most frequent of such elements is the girls' dream of marrying "a rich merchant. A rich Boston merchant." (Petry 1964: 127). This can be explained by looking at the situation girls endured at those times when marriage was their only option. Thus, marrying a Boston merchant could be compared to winning the lottery nowadays.

Leaving aside Boston's commercial image, the woods surrounding the city by the end of the seventeenth century are also very frequently mentioned. Thus, Boston's most "cosmopolitan" and "natural" sides appear hand in hand in these novels. During the colonial period, the woods were the incarnation of darkness and the unknown. Moreover, it was the Indian's refuge and the place from where all evil came. That is why these woods are represented in Ann Petry's novel *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964) as the place where Tituba, the Barbadian slave, recollected the herbs for her infusions and where she met with Judah White, another witch.

"I've never seen such woods," he said. "They go for miles. You could cut wood in there forever and never use it all up. All kinds of trees – big ones – the man with me said they were oak and hemlock, and there's a cedar forest and there are all kinds of birds. In some places there are so many trees that it is dark – daylight

doesn't reach in. Some of the trees are so big and so cold, they made me feel like praying." (Petry 1964: 24-25)

Finally, the description of Boston is completed with constant allusions to the weather. The winter's harshness is described in detail in Petry's *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964), and Rinaldi's *A Break with Charity* (1992) presents Boston as having a rainy and hot summer.

To sum up the references to the physical description of Boston, it is clear that historical novelists are more interested in this city than the authors of reference books. Apart from short mentions about its prominence as the capital of the colony and the very short overview of its economic activities—much more complete in the historical novels—reference books do not pay much attention to this city. In contrast, historical novels offer a more delineated picture of this city, even with references to real-historical places. Thus, the readers of these historical novels can get a more complete picture of this city than the ones who only read the reference books.

Along with the physical description of Boston, social and political aspects of the city are also shown. The political instability and preoccupation of the colonial period is clearly reflected in both kinds of works. It should be remembered that the Salem Witch Trials coincide in time with the restoration of the Massachusetts Charter in 1693, and with the appointment of Sir William Phips as governor of the Colony.

In the case of reference books, Boston is usually presented as a place of power and freedom of thought. This characteristic is clearly seen when Boston is compared with smaller places such as Salem Village or Salem Town:

Its people tended to be broader in their views than those in the smaller villages, although their religious discipline was almost as severe. In the smaller places, however, the church was the meeting house, the center of all village activity. In Boston there were government houses, Harvard College, shops, and taverns. People in Boston did not have to gather in the meeting house on Sunday to hear all the news, as people did in Salem Village. (Jackson: 4)

Shirley Jackson (ibid: 111) presents this aspect in relation to the opinions that the witchcraft trials awoke among people. Thus, Boston is viewed as the place where more thoughtful and less conservative people live:

There were people in Massachusetts, many of them in and around Boston, who had distrusted the witchcraft trials from the beginning. Some of these people were clergymen who disapproved of the narrow interpretation of scriptural texts which defined witchcraft. Some were thoughtful persons who could not believe that common justice or humanity would admit the use of spectral evidence against the accused. But most of these people, no matter how enlightened, did not attempt to dispute the existence of witches. Instead they tried, through writing sermons and

pamphlets, and using what influence they had, to make sure that the accused people had fair trials.

Moreover, in these historical works, Boston was also presented as the place where the majority of the opponents to the witchcraft accusations lived. According to historians, there are two major figures who opposed the proceedings: Thomas Brattle and Robert Calef. Both of them represent a group of men belonging to a new emergent merchant and scientific elite. The former expressed his opinions in a letter published as “Letter of Thomas Brattle” (1692) in which he criticizes the behavior of the accusing girls. In the case of Robert Calef, his accusations were directed to Cotton Mather –who strongly supported the prosecutions–, and they appeared in his work *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700). According to Shirley Jackson (1959: 112) “Calef devoted all his energy to the writing of pamphlets which were published and circulated around Boston and, eventually, throughout the whole colony.” As regards Thomas Brattle, Chris Priestley (2003: 127) describes him as follows: “Then a Bostonian merchant, Thomas Brattle, writes an open letter on the subject of the witch hunt. Brattle was also a mathematician and scientist, a member of the Royal Society.” Marc Aronson (2003: 182) describes Brattle’s campaign against the witchcraft trials in this way:

Brattle had been in touch with many who shared his distaste for the trials, and he listed them by name: from the honored ministers Increase Mather and Samuel Willard to the high government officials Thomas Danforth and Simon Bradstreet to Judge Saltonstall and “some of the Boston justices” who were resolved to give up their seats rather than have to prosecute these cases.

Religious freedom within the puritan community was also viewed as having its starting point in this city, whereas in other places, people who were not committed to the puritan way of life were considered as dissidents:

By 1692, people of other religions lived in Massachusetts, especially in Boston. There were Presbyterians and Baptists, members of the Society of Friends (everyone else called them Quakers), Huguenots from France, and even Anglicans – members of the Church of England which the Puritans had come so far to avoid. These groups disagreed on certain horned points, but all shared basic Christian ideas (and views of witchcraft). (Roach 1996: 11)

For all these reasons, Boston is portrayed in all these works as a place where an old way of life – Puritanism – was living its last days of glory at the expense of a new way of life based on religious freedom and commercial interests. Moreover, “by the late seventeenth century, the people of the Massachusetts colony – especially in Boston – had already shown strong tendencies towards independence.” (Jackson 1959: 4)

In the historical novels, Boston is portrayed as “a wicked city, a heathen city. He said that in many ways it resembled Babylon” (Petry 1964: 25) but also as “sober Boston” (Starkey 1973: 64). This diversity of opinions as regards the city depends on the character or the point of view from which the novel is narrated. This can be better understood by showing the great contrast that this “big city” marks with rural Salem. “Salem was already a pretty big town at that time. [...] Not as big as Boston, but had gotten crowded enough for some people to move farther away. They wanted more land to farm on.” (Lasky 1994: 4) It is important to know that there were two highly differentiated groups in Salem. There was a very conservative group for whom any progression or improvement in people’s way of life was considered a sin. In 1692, one of the leaders of this group was Reverend Samuel Parris, the one who thought that Boston was a “wicked city”. On the other hand, there was a progressive group who had invested their earnings in the cities (not only in Boston, but also in Salem Town) and for whom “Boston was a place of ideas. But ideas are never encouraged in Salem.” (Rinaldi 1992: 15)

However, Boston and Salem were not only different because of the activities – industrial and commercial in the case of Boston, rural in the case of Salem – developed in each place. Behavior and people’s attitudes were also different, as it is shown in Ann Rinaldi’s novel (ibid: 224):

It was hot in Boston, but the town’s rhythms seemed different from Salem’s. There was a gaiety everywhere, whereas in Salem people avoided each other on the streets, ducking their heads and going about their business like frightened cows, intent upon not attracting attention.

The idea implied in the quote is that in Salem people could not behave freely, as opposed to Boston. This description of Boston as a place of freedom is emphasized by the fact that those accused of witchcraft who managed to escape took refuge in Boston until they could go farther – mainly to New York. “Your father will be caught, eventually. But by then he hopes to have everything in order so we will both be in Boston. And we want you girls to come with us.” (ibid: 167)

As we have seen in reference books, Bostonians could also express their opinions more freely than in other smaller communities. Although those who opposed to the prosecutions at Salem run the risk of becoming accused themselves, as it happened in Salem with Martha Corey or John Proctor, it was from Boston that the strongest criticism came. Again, two names appear as the strongest opponents of the proceedings: “One name I had come to know was Thomas Brattle, a merchant and learned mathematician, who was about to be named treasurer of Harvard College. Another was Robert Calef, a merchant friend of Brattle’s, who was equally outspoken against witchcraft.” (ibid: 174)

Finally, in both kinds of works we find a continuous reference to the city of Boston through one of the accused of practicing witchcraft at Salem: John Alden. This man was a rich merchant and a very well-known soldier who fought against the Indians. However, when he arrived to Salem after being accused, he was known as the tall/black man from Boston.

5. CONCLUSION

After all the abovementioned, the first conclusion we should highlight is that there is more presence of the city of Boston in historical novels for children and young adults than in the reference books about the same topic. Although both kinds of works develop almost the same topics – with the exceptions of the description of the woods surrounding Boston and the references to the weather – it is clear that readers will get a more complete picture of the city from the novels than from the reference books. This result seems surprising in the sense that reference books are the ones intended to teach, while historical novels for young readers are usually considered a mere enjoyment and, just for this reason, they are despised by historiography. Moreover, it is in historical novels where more detailed descriptions are presented with the insertion of names of real historical places, such as those of streets and important buildings. Thus, in this case, historical novels offer a more detailed and real picture of the city of Boston in particular, and of the setting in general.

Leaving aside the difference in genre among these works, i.e., considering all of them as literature written for young readers, Boston's detailed descriptions help to understand the atmosphere of those times. Thus, readers of these novels and reference books can learn how people of the colonial times lived and felt and, what is more important, how that atmosphere influenced their behavior. For this reason, we have not found any reason that explains why this kind of literature has been low-considered as regards the “adult canon”. The fact that the young reader’s frame of reference is different from the adult’s one because of its limited knowledge is not enough for placing it outside the canon. Moreover, we have not detected any element in the presence of the setting that cannot be also found in any other work for the general public.

For all these reasons, we think that historical fiction for children deserves a better consideration and it should not be considered as “peripheric” when compared to either historiography or the general canon, because, as it has been demonstrated, it can equally fulfill the goals established for historiography, fiction and the works for the general public.

REFERENCES

- Aronson, Marc. *Witch-Hunt: Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials*. New York: Athenaeum Books for Young Readers, 2003.
- Canary, Sarah K. "Transcendent Stories and Counternarratives in Holocaust Survivor Life Histories." *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*. Eds. Colette Daiute & Cynthia Lightfoot. London & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004: 201–221.
- Cervera, Juan. *Teoría de la literatura infantil*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 1992.
- Clapp, Patricia. *Witches Children: A Story of Salem*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1982.
- Collins, Fionna M. & Judith Graham. *Historical Fiction for Children: Capturing the Past*. London: David Fulton Publishers, 2001.
- Currie, Mark. *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. New York: Palgrave, 1998.
- Dolezel, Lubomir. "Possible Worlds in Literary Fictions." *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences*. Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 65. Ed. Sture Allén. Nueva York & Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986: 221–242.
- "Mimesis and Possible Worlds." *Poetics Today* 9.3 (1988): 475–96.
- *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Fernández Prieto, Celia. *Historia y novela: poética de la novela histórica*. Pamplona: Eunsa, 1998.
- Fleishman, Avron. *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.
- Foley, Barbara. *Telling the Truth. The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Fremont, David K. *The Salem Witchcraft Trials in American History*. New York: Enslow Publishers, 1999.
- Hall, Linda. "'Time no Longer'—History, Enchantment and the Classic Time-slip Story." *Historical Fiction for Children: Capturing the Past*. Eds. Fionna M. Collins & Judith Graham. London: David Fulton Publishers, 2001. 43–53.
- Henderson, Harry B. *Versions of the Past: the Historical Imagination in American Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Hobblar, Dorothy. *Priscilla Foster: The Story of a Salem Girl*. New Jersey: Silver Burnett Press, 1997.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York & London: Routledge, 1988.
- Jackson, Shirley. *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*. New York & Canada: Random House Landmark Books, 1959 [1984].
- Jacobs, Naomy. *The Character of Truth: Historical Figures in Contemporary Fiction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.
- Lage Fernández, Juan José. "El relato juvenil de tema histórico". *Cuadernos de literatura infantil y juvenil* 50 (1993): 21-29.
- Lasky, Kathryn. *Beyond the Burning Time*. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1994.
- Lukens, Rebecca. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995.

- Lynch-Brown, Carol & Carl M. Tomlinson. *Essentials of Children's Literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993.
- Marden-Steinkrauss, Kyla. *The Madness: A Story of the Salem Witch Trials*. Baltimore: America Book Publishers, 2002.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1987 [2001].
- Mink, Louis O. "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument." *The History and Narrative Reader*. Ed. Geoffrey Roberts. London & New York: Routledge, 2001: 211–220.
- Pavel, Thomas G. *Fictional Worlds*. Harvard & London: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- "Fiction and Imitation." *Poetics Today* 21.3 (2000): 521–541.
- Petry, Ann. *Tituba of Salem Village*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1964.
- Priestley, Chris. *Witch Hunt*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003.
- Prince, Gerald. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. Berlin: Mouton, 1982.
- Pulgarín, Amalia. *Metaficción historiográfica: la novela histórica en la narrativa hispánica modernista*. Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1995.
- Redondo Goicoechea, Alicia. *Manual de análisis de literatura narrativa. La polifonía textual*. Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores S.A., 1995.
- Ribbans, Geoffrey. *History and Fiction in Galdós's Narratives*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London & New York: Routledge, 1983 [2001].
- Rinaldi, Ann. *A Break with Charity: A Story about the Salem Witch Trials*. Florida: Gulliver Books, 1992.
- Roach, Marilynne K. *In the Days of the Salem Witchcraft Trials*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.
- Ronen, Ruth. "Space in Fiction." *Poetics Today* 7.3 (1986): 421–438.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Solis, Jocelyn. "Narrating and Counternarrating. Illegality as an Identity". *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*. Eds. Colette Daiute & Cynthia Lightfoot. London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004: 181–199.
- Starkey, Marion L. *The Visionary Girls. Witchcraft in Salem Village*. Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1973.
- Wilson, Lori Lee. *The Salem Witch Trials (How History is Invented)*. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company, 1997.
- Woods, Geraldine. *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Headline Court Case*. New York: Enslow Publishers, 2000.

