

A GIRL'S LIFE IN ENGLISH INTERWAR SUBURBIA: EVADNE PRICE'S *JUST JANE**

Begoña Lasa-Álvarez
Universidade da Coruña

ABSTRACT

Just Jane, the first of a series of books for young female readers written by the Australian-English writer Evadne Price, was published in 1928. The young heroine starring in the book and the members of her family represent the typical middle-class family living in an English suburban area, a type of neighbourhood which underwent an unprecedented growth during the 1920s. This article analyses Price's text in the light of the new lifestyle fostered in English interwar suburbia, as it illustrates how, together with the building of new houses and neighbourhoods, new values concerning family relations, gender roles, social networking and leisure activities were generated and promoted.

KEYWORDS: *Just Jane*, Evadne Price, 1920s, suburbia, children's literature, family.

LA VIDA DE UNA NIÑA EN LOS BARRIOS RESIDENCIALES
DE LAS AFUERAS EN LA INGLATERRA DE ENTREGUERRAS:
JUST JANE DE EVADNE PRICE

RESUMEN

Just Jane es el primero de una serie de libros para jóvenes lectoras que escribió la escritora australiana-inglesa Evadne Price y fue publicado en 1928. La joven protagonista del libro y los miembros de su familia constituyen la típica familia de clase media de las afueras de la ciudad, cuyos barrios residenciales crecieron de forma extraordinaria durante la década de los veinte del siglo pasado. Este artículo analiza el texto de Price a la luz del nuevo estilo de vida promovido en estas comunidades durante la época de entreguerras en Inglaterra, pues muestra cómo, junto a la construcción de nuevas casas y barrios, se generaban e impulsaban nuevos valores sobre las relaciones familiares, los roles de género, los contactos sociales y el ocio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Just Jane*, Evadne Price, años veinte, afueras de la ciudad, literatura infantil, familia.



1. INTRODUCTION

When addressing works for children and young adults published between 1910 and 1940, Chris Baldick claims, referring to the heroine of the book *Just Jane* (1928), that she is an appealing girl “who awaits rediscovery” (2004, 352). Indeed, the book is the first of a series, written by the Australian-English writer Evadne Price (1896/1901-1985) for young female readers. Observing the title of the book, *Just Jane*, it is evident that everything in the book is going to revolve around Jane, a feature that most children’s books share, their main characters habitually being children. However, although focusing chiefly on the heroine and her activities and whereabouts, the book also offers a very interesting portrait of family life in English suburbia. In fact, the very few studies devoted to Jane’s books address and mention the heroine’s family as one of the main components of her stories. The young protagonist and her family represent the typical middle-class family living in a suburban area, a type of neighbourhood which underwent an unprecedented growth during the 1920s. In a period of rapid changes and unstable social and political circumstances in the aftermath of the Great War, the modern suburban lifestyle had a great impact on the English household’s behaviour. In these new communities with more hygienic, healthier and more spacious homes, such amenities as electricity, hot running water or bathrooms were available for families in general. Together with the new houses, new values concerning family relations and child-rearing, gender roles and decorum, or new ideas about nutrition, hygiene and gardening were generated and promoted. Thus suburbia became very identifiable but also evocative literary and filming locations. Price does not devote much space to the description of setting, as she concentrates primarily on actions; however, some sentences and short paragraphs here and there, provide a fascinating background, which deserves further attention. Furthermore, this study intends to give a response to Baldick’s claim and introduce Jane to twenty-first century readers and scholars, focusing on the first book of the series. However, as a selection of stories from this book and the rest of the series were published in 1985 in a book entitled *Jane and Co.*, some details and contents of it will be used in order to illustrate the issues discussed in this article.

2. EVADNE PRICE (HELEN ZENNA SMITH) AND THE JANE SERIES

The author of the book, Evadne Price, was a writer and journalist, who also published under the pen-name Helen Zenna Smith. She is mostly remembered by her novel for adult readers *Not So Quiet... Stepdaughters of War* (1930). The idea for

* The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the following projects and institutions: Research project “Portal Digital de Historia de la traducción en España” (ref. PGC2018-095447-B-I00, the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities-State Agency for Research-AEI / ERDF-UE), and the Research Group of Modern and Contemporary Literature and Language (CLIN), University of A Coruña.

the book was suggested to Price by her editor, when he asked her to write a parody of the German novel by Erich Remarque *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929), which was translated into English as *All is Quiet on the Western Front*. Price, however, decided to write a first-person memoir of a woman ambulance driver during the First World War. As Acton notes, the war experience narrated by Price is “much more graphically brutal” than those depicted in other war memoirs written by women, such as Vera Brittain and Irene Rathbone (2004, 289). Price would publish more novels for adults; however, *Not So Quiet* is her only book still in print.

Regarding her publications for children, she wrote a series of books about Jane Turpin, which is considered a counterpart of the William series, created by Richmal Crompton, which was addressed chiefly to boys. However, while the William series has enjoyed a successful afterlife, the series starring Jane has fallen into oblivion. Price published 10 books about the young heroine: *Just Jane* (1928), *Meet Jane* (1930), *Enter – Jane* (1932), *Jane the Fourth* (1937), *Jane the Sleuth* (1939), *Jane the Popular* (1939), *Jane the Patient* (1940), *Jane Gets Busy* (1940) and *Jane at War* (1940). The books are composed of independent short stories, which can be read separately. *Just Jane* in particular includes 11. Years later, as mentioned before, 12 stories from the series were selected by Mary Cadogan to be published by Macmillan in 1985 with the title *Jane and Co.* The main protagonist is Jane, who is surrounded by some recurring characters: the members of her family, her friends and some neighbours. All of them remain the same in all the books; Jane, for instance, is always around 10 years of age. The young protagonist, being curious and possessing a particular view about justice, is going to mess everything up. Apparently, she is ruining conventional events and disturbing normal people; but at the end, in most of the stories she is actually doing things right. Indeed, thanks to her, two dangerous villains are exposed and caught in the first two stories of *Just Jane*. As occurs with most books for children, *Just Jane* and the rest of the series of books incorporate illustrations of some of the most striking events (Shavit 1985, Grenby and Reynolds 2011).

3. A SHORT APPROACH TO CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Seth Lerer begins his book about children’s literature with a meaningful statement: “Ever since there were children, there has been children’s literature” (2008, 1). Interestingly, the very term used for this specific genre of literature is defined by its target readers, children, which means that children’s literature is going to be inextricably linked to the history of childhood and will vary over time according to the transformations in the concept of childhood. Notions about children in any society are cultural constructs, which reflect in turn the dominant ideology of the epoch, affecting such aspects as the extension of childhood in people’s lives and education, among others, and indeed, the topics, purposes and form of the texts written for this audience.

In the history of children’s literature in Britain scholars have emphasised the relevance of the eighteenth century for its development, as it emerged and was



consolidated as an independent branch in print culture (Grenby 2011, Manuel 2015). At the end of this century, the Industrial Revolution played a decisive role in the evolution of the genre, as the values of the middle classes and the emerging bourgeoisie were observable in the texts for children by means of the promotion of merit, talent and hard work (Kramnick 205-6; O'Malley 2-3). In this regard, didacticism was considered a necessary ingredient in books for children in order to convey good examples for them. However, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, more entertaining fiction for children was also incorporated, following the steps of such narratives like *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe, which was starting to be marketed for children, chiefly through Robinsonnades (Knowles and Malmkjaer 2003, 4-5). Indeed, both these trends, didacticism and entertainment, coexisted during the nineteenth century and beyond.

According to Carpenter's book, the period from 1860 to the 1950s in particular was the golden age of literature for children, as many authors chose to write for children in order to portray their society and express their ideas and thoughts, including Lewis Carroll, Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling. In those years, two different directions can be distinguished in British children's literature: realistic and fantastic. Later on, in the interwar period, children's literature left behind more ideologically engaged topics, such as imperialism, patriotism and nationalism, which characterised the narratives previous to WWI, in order to concentrate on those stories that children would enjoy the most, particularly adventure, both realistic and fantastic, as seen before (Knuth 2012, 115). Indeed, alluding to the title of the book on interwar Britain *The Long Week End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (Graves and Hodge 1940), Hunt defines children's literature of the interwar period as a "long weekend" (1994, 106), meaning a moment of leisurely uncertainty between the two world conflicts. Furthermore, this scholar considers that a "sea-change" occurred in children's literature during this period, which implied that "the tone of voice, the mode of telling, and the narrative contract between narrator and implied child reader of the children's book that we recognize today were fully established" (106) during these years.

On the other hand, writers of children's books exploited the financial potential of small adventures, in which the focus was on action, this being a powerful source of undemanding enjoyment and thus, a certain escapism. This type of adventure stories were addressed to boys and girls alike. Nevertheless, the 1920s and 30s were defined by Kevin Carpenter as "the heyday of girls' fiction", in which a high-spirited heroine is at the centre of the narrative (qtd. in Hunt 1994, 107). This was particularly so in girls' public school stories, with series such as the "Chalet School" by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer and the "Abbey Girls" by Elsie J. Oxenham. The girls in these books, like the women of the period, were portrayed as more independent and active, showing that life outside the house was possible for them (Nelson 2011, 498; Knuth 2012, 119-120), Price's young heroine, Jane, being a clear instance of this trend.



4. JANE TURPIN AND HER SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT

The heroine of *Just Jane* is about ten years old; therefore, most of her life necessarily occurs within her family circle. However, as members of a particular neighbourhood, Jane and her family are in contact with friends and other acquaintances living nearby. Price's description of all these characters is full of irony and sarcasm, showing all their pettiness and snobbery, with which Jane's behaviour so starkly contrasts (Cadogan and Craig 2003, 248; Fox 2001, 390). Indeed, Jane's divergences with most of the characters around her, as she usually does not understand adults' behaviour, and the unfavourable consequences of her actions for them constitute one of the most attractive components of the book.

Jane lives in an imaginary village called Little Dupperry with her parents, Mr and Mrs Turpin, her elder sister Marjorie or Marge and her baby brother. They also have a cook and a nanny. In the same neighbourhood her best friends, "Pug" Washington and "Chaw" Smith, live in houses with such affected and weird French names as "Chez Moi" and "Mon Repos" (*JJ* 61),¹ which clearly suggest a nouveau riche attitude, also perceived in Jane's family, particularly in her mother and sister. Indeed, the physical and human environment in which Jane moves is going to be very influential not only in terms of the development of the stories, but also as an element which illustrates interwar suburban lifestyle, since, as Archer notes, "there is a necessary connection between the belief system (or ideology) of a culture and the material apparatus in which people conduct their daily lives" (2005, xvi).

The interwar years were crucial for suburban areas, as many families moved to semi-detached, detached and municipal housing (Whitehand and Carr 2001, 6; Scott 2013, 1). When WWI finished, in order to avoid any trouble with masses of demobbed troops, the social program known as "homes fit for heroes" was designed and developed to offer affordable housing to them (Jackson [1973] 2018, 90). However, the great expansion of suburbanization during the first decades of the twentieth century cannot be explained without mentioning some economic and technological changes, such as the growth and improvement of public transport, the rise of the motor car and the development of communication technologies, which connected cities and suburbs (Clapson 2003, 15). For the working classes council or municipal housing offered a great improvement, while the middle classes were able to buy their own house at a price they could afford (Jackson [1973] 2018, 93, 99). In both cases, they had to move to communities which were very different to those they had grown up with their parents in urban streets. The mass migration to suburban communities entailed important consequences for family life: "suburban estates were characterized by 'domesticated' lifestyles, encompassing a high standard of personal and domestic hygiene, family- and home-centred lifestyles even for adult males, and an increased commitment of material and psychological resources to the welfare and material advancement of children" (Scott 2013, 199).

¹ References to *Just Jane* will be abbreviated hereon in *JJ*.



Thus, there was also an aspirational component in the core of suburban expansion. The suburban aspiration is defined, according to Clapson (2003, 51-52), by three characteristics: First, an “anti-urban” sentiment that invaded people, mainly from the Industrial Revolution onwards, as cities had become overcrowded, unhealthy, dirty and dangerous. Secondly, a desire for a house with a garden. Historically, the single-family house is particularly prominent in Anglo-American culture because of various reasons, including the early rise of a mercantile economy, the growth of a prosperous bourgeoisie and the intense political and philosophical enquiry into the notions of self and property from the end of the seventeenth century onwards (Archer 2005, xviii). In the third place, there is also people’s aspiration for a “high-quality residential environment” (Clapson 2003, 52), which implies not only attractive houses, gardens, streets and roads, but also the appropriate social tone of the neighbourhood.

According to Clapson (2003, 2), who takes as a basis the sociologist David C. Thorns’ criteria, suburbs can be defined as follows:

- They are within the orbit of a town or city.
- Their geography is intermediate between the city centre and the countryside.
- They are habitually at a commuting distance of the city centre, as they were built as residential spaces.
- They are usually dependent on city centres as the source of goods and services, particularly, for shopping.

Little Dupperry in particular is near London, as Jane’s family can go by train to spend the day there (*JJ* 135). During the nineteenth century and especially in the second half, many Londoners moved to the city’s outskirts, a tendency which increased during the first decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, according to the General Register Office, if the population of London’s Outer Ring in 1881 was 936,364, by 1939, the figure more than quadrupled to 4,601,650, which implied that there were more people living in suburban areas than in Greater London (Georgiou 2014, 176). In the story “The Council of Three” in *Jane and Co*, Price describes how these areas were expanding more and more:

Whittington Avenue [...] was a new part of Dupperry recently opened up by an enterprising firm. Red villas of a peculiarly nauseating shade presented their awful newness to acres of muddy fields, ornamented with piles of bricks and corrugated iron roofing. At intervals a solitary tree brooded among its fallen fellows. But the allure of an efficient hot-water system and modern bathrooms was not to be withstood; the Avenue was populated as fast as the desirable residences were fit for habitation; almost before, in fact. (7-8)

Jane’s parents embody the new roles assigned to men and women in the suburban communities. Her father, being the breadwinner, barely appears in the stories, since, like the rest of men, he spends very little time at home, as he has to work long hours and spend more time in daily commuting to work. Mr Turpin, in fact, is



one of the many white collars who represented most of the male population in those residential areas (Jackson 2018, 166). On one of the rare occasions he participates in *Just Jane*, once he arrives home, “Mr. Turpin immediately buried himself behind the weekly edition of the local paper” (*JJ* 186), offering the traditional image of the *pater familias* who does not want to get involved in trivial everyday family matters. For women life was completely different in this new environment, the majority of them feeling bored and lonely, as they had to spend most of the day alone with their children. Hence, they ended up suffering from depression and anxiety. Indeed, Jane’s mother, as a housewife in such a suburban environment, displays symptoms of what is known in medical terminology as “suburban neurosis”, a term coined in the 1930s by a doctor who worked in South London (Clapson 2003, 126). This illness was said to be caused primarily by women’s lack of social contacts in those residential neighbourhoods; however, Jackson also mentions worries about money and the home, and even false expectations (2018, 168). As expected, Jane is the main cause for Mrs Turpin’s anxiety, as she is not able to make Jane behave properly, and on the first page of the book, she is described as a “long-suffering mother” (*JJ* 14-15). Indeed, at the end of *Just Jane*, Mrs. Turpin becomes physically sick, she is “utterly prostrated with a nervous headache which the presence of Jane had aggravated since breakfast” (209).

Families that moved to suburban areas were strangers to each other; however, leisure activities favoured social networking. Recreation was “an integral part of suburbia’s *raison d’être*”, as suburban areas were not just “the dormitory satellite of the productive city” (Georgiou 2014, 179-180). Activities such as sports, dinners and dances, and other minor gatherings and tea parties were habitual, the latter in particular being a pleasant break from women’s isolation and loneliness. Housewives in Little Dupperry seem to support each other thanks to these small events, as one of the mothers of Jane’s friends explains: “The Turpins have arrived home a week before they were expected, and as nothing is prepared for them, I just ran across and brought them back to tea” (*JJ* 63-64). They also have regular gatherings, such as “Mrs Turpin’s monthly ‘At Home’ to the socialites of Little Dupperry” (*JCo* 153).² This type of events were also used by women to involve themselves in charitable activities and share information on less favoured groups, but from far-away places, such as the “Keffir Babies” in South Africa (*JJ* 71), since for snobbish middle-class women like them, getting involved with poor people around them was not considered appropriate.

As Georgiou notes, religion was also central in creating social networks among suburban inhabitants (2014, 179) and Mrs Turpin along with the rest of women organized festivals to raise money for the Church, Jane’s mother being “the Queen of Ceremonies” with the celebration of an “Eccentric Fête” (*JJ* 125). Some members of the community, including the Vicar, are still commenting on the party some days later, sharing diverse opinions about the activities prepared by Mrs. Turpin,

² References to *Just and Co* will be abbreviated hereon in *JCo*.



which include: an “Ankle Competition”, “guessing the number of threepences in the cake”, and a “Letters from Celebrities’ stall” (125-127). Such recreational activities took place in an integral part of the suburban houses, the garden, which represented a great advancement when compared to the limitations of the open-air spaces in houses and flats in urban neighbourhoods.

Young people in Little Dupperry, such as Jane’s sister, Marjorie, and Pug’s brother, William, attended Club dances and birthday parties (107-108), in which they could meet other young men and women. Marjorie Turpin is 18 years and, like other middle-class girls like her, who had finished school, was at home “in elegant idleness” (Cadogan and Craig 2003, 241), waiting to get married and become a housewife, like their mothers. She is starting a relationship with Willy Washington, who is 21 and is already working at an office (*JJ* 110). Young people could engage in other activities, such as sports, as mentioned earlier, which is exemplified in the book by Marjorie, who plays tennis (209), and by William, who fondly remembers how he had enjoyed skating with Marjorie, his “beautiful red-haired siren”, during last Christmas holidays (110), as they are members of the “Dupperry Skating Society” (*JCo* 191). They also could participate in cultural associations, such as the dramatic society, in which Marjorie was going to read a play (103).

Families in such suburban communities shared forms of social behaviour based on consumption and material values. They had to come up to some standards regarding domestic service, clothing, furniture, and appliances. Hence, shopping was crucial for the inhabitants in Little Dupperry, particularly for women. Mrs. Turpin is arranging everything to go next day to London for the day: “Nana and Baby and Marjory and I will go on the early train”; however, as Jane has behaved badly and she “cannot curb [her] tongue”, she would stay at home (*JJ* 135). Apparently, their main purpose is shopping, as can be inferred from Jane’s reaction: “I don’t care. I don’t want to go with that Marje, seeing her spend threepences, when I’ve got nothin’” (135).³ As observed, money and consumerism was not an interest only shared by adults, as Jane and her friends appear continually thinking how to obtain money for their activities and favourite things.

In the chapter entitled “Letters from celebrities”, Jane is deprived for some time of her pocket money and she appears as a miserable girl: “Without threepence a week you have no social life. You are despised pauper among you fellows” (131), a statement that suggests the importance of money for all the inhabitants of Little Dupperry, even the youngest ones, and particularly for their social life. As Cadogan explains, children at that time could buy quite a lot with threepence (1985, vii). Without money, Jane cannot buy sweets and share them with her friends either: “you can’t eat people’s sweets when you’ve none to offer them in return for the simple reason that they won’t let you” (*JJ* 131). On another occasion, Jane is helping her sister Marjorie to give back a present to William Washington and the girl is going to obtain

³ When Price reproduces Jane’s speech, as well as the way of speaking of other characters, such as the cook and the gardener, she wrote their discourse as it sounded.



threepence for the errand. With the money Jane is going to be able to buy some of Chaw Smith's guinea pigs, as he "was selling his pets cheaply in order to buy a new kind of air-gun he had found in the catalogue of a big London store" (109). Hence, not only are adults entrapped in the capitalist economic system, which encourage them to acquire new products constantly, but children too, as the advertisement methods used by companies reached all. Furthermore, Jane's main financial feat is described in a chapter entitled ironically "A question of high finance", as she designs a "Great Accident Syndicate" in order to fool Locky Wall, one of the main objects of her mischiefs. It is a kind of insurance scheme, in which the children of Little Duppery have to pay every week 1d. and when they have an accident, Locky has to pay them a certain amount depending on its seriousness (*JJ* 73). Locky embarks on the business and, obviously, everything turns out badly for him at the end, as all the boys and girls in the neighbourhood pretend to have accidents and they are even able to bring a witness with them to prove it.

Together with her pocket money Jane is also deprived of "the Saturday matinee at the movies" (*JJ* 130), which means that she has to experience Mickey Mouse's adventures second-hand, which is regrettable for her, as "The comedy loses in the telling" (131). With the opening of picture houses in the 1920s in suburban neighbourhoods, cinema became a social institution. Most people went to the cinema at least once a week, keeping Saturday matinee for children, who watched "selections of cowboy, cartoon and comic films, shouting themselves hoarse the while" (Jackson [1973] 2018, 176). Going to movies was one of the main leisure activities of young people in residential areas, but not the only one, as Jane and her friends attended the performance of "Uncle Tommy Silver – The Greatest Revivalist in the World" (*JJ* 171). Obviously, they were not allowed to participate in such event; however, being free, it was particularly attractive for them. Besides, they do not want to miss it because Jane mistakenly thinks that a revivalist is a kind of mesmeriser, who "puts you to sleep ... An' once a Revilist gets you fixed with his eye ... you gotter do what he says all your life" (172). For the rehearsal, the revivalist uses a tent that the children think at the beginning it might be a circus tent, another type of entertainment already known by Jane and her friends; however, they are completely disappointed when they do not see "the customary wild animals, the clowns, the short-skirted bareback riders in tarlatan and spangles, the ring-master complete with black moustache, the gentleman with the tame snakes, and all the other ingredients that help to make up the thrills of a travelling circus" (170).

Clothing was another sign of status in Jane's neighbourhood and one of the aspects most visible to the rest of the people there. Hence Jane's mother struggles to keep her well dressed and clean: "I'm sure *I* don't deserve it, ... Do other mothers ... have a filthy dirty child like you? No. I slave from morning till night to keep you clean and tidy, but do *you* care? No" (*JJ* 40–41, italics in the original). For a naughty girl like Jane, it is really uncomfortable, but she has to dress properly for parties: "Little Jane Turpin, an unwilling prisoner in a blue frilly taffeta party frock trimmed with dainty pink rosebuds" (125). Later on, Jane is also said to be dressed according to fashion: "Little Jane Turpin, suitably attired, as the fashion experts might say, in a reefer jacket adorned with flat brass buttons" (208). The description



of her external appearance is very relevant in the stories, as it is totally the opposite of her behaviour. Jane has golden curly hair and beautiful blue eyes: she is described as “the angelic-looking Jane” (15), “this dear little golden-headed girl” (58), “Just like a Botticelli angel” (126), “a golden fairy girl” (127). Nevertheless, this portrayal is deceiving and some characters in the stories discover that her external appearance is a sort of “camouflage” (20) and they describe Jane as “that awful Turpin girl” (22), “little horror” (46), “wild tomboy” (64), “small savage” (152). Furthermore, in an “indignation meeting of the mothers”, one of them even says that “she’d rather see her wee ones playing with a stick of dynamite” than with Jane (42). In any case, Jane does not want to behave like a girly-girl, a sweet little lady, or better said, like a “soppy” kid, as she repeatedly says in the stories.

Keeping a suburban lifestyle like the one depicted in *Just Jane* was expensive and many families had to struggle to keep up with their mortgage repayments. This is the case with the Washington family, as can be read in the story entitled “Letters from Celebrities”, in which Jane and her friends put letters from their family members on sale. Thanks to the letters that Pug Washington, one of Jane’s friends, is selling, Miss Baldock, the village gossip, discovers that: “the Washington’s furniture is on the hire purchase system, and they owe money everywhere. Fancy selling their unreceipted bills, and threats to summons them, too. ... Would you believe it, dear. After all the airs she gives herself” (*JJ* 140). Evidently, not only did isolation cause anxiety among the inhabitants of such neighbourhoods, but also the necessity to achieve “the suburban dream of aspirational respectability” (Scott 2013, 140), which proved to be beyond the means of some of them. As Jackson notes, in the second half of the twenties, the cheapest houses in suburban areas were £600-£800 for semis, while detached houses were around £1,200 ([1973] 2018, 188). Over 75 per cent of them were bought by mortgage, meaning that the purchaser had to make an initial deposit of at least 20 or 25 per cent of the price of the house and to be able to pay regularly from 15s to £2 or more per week. Frequently, this plan came to be a heavy burden for many purchasers, who had to take additional loans from other sources (194). Jane’s family, however, seems to be doing well, as they are able to afford long journeys and to rent a house on the coast for summer holiday. Nevertheless, the general circumstances in Britain during this period are described as rather gloomy when Jane attends a show in the theatre. There, a magician says during his performance that “times are hard and money is tight” (*JJ* 200). Indeed, by the mid-1920s the prosperity of the post-war period was over: the interest rates rose, the investment levels fell, and more imports were needed, which led to economic depression in Britain (Jackson [1973] 2019, 101).

Hence, the dissatisfaction of many British citizens was also observable on the streets and in *Just Jane* one of the stories has as a backdrop a Bolshevik parade, which does not take place in Little Duppery, the suburban village where Jane lives, but in a bigger and older town, Coshington, where Jane’s Grandmother Pilk lives, and possibly with a more working-class population. The story is entitled “Jane the Bolshevik”, as her curiosity drives Jane to desperately want to see the parade, although middle-class children like her were forbidden even to go near it (*JJ* 89). The parade is on a Sunday afternoon, when Jane and her friends have to go to the Sunday school,



while other children attend the Red Sunday School, before marching round the town. These parades were organized by the Communist Party, which during the interwar period acquired a notable force in Britain due to social discontent. The parade is described in the book as:

a strange procession headed by a gentleman with a walrus moustache carrying a Red Banner with a strange device. Behind him marched a band of boys and girls in red sashes and a number of men and women adorned with red rosettes and determined expressions, chanting a doleful melody beginning “Then rise the Scarlet Banner eye.” Several yards in the rear a little girl in a red fancy dress wobbled precariously on a red-enamelled bicycle. A placard informed the observer that she represented “Red Liberty.” (89)

Jane wants to know why the Reds are called Bolshies, and another girl, the daughter of the Vicar, tells her what her father says about them: “Cause they want to take all the money off people and give it to themselves” (90). Jane’s response is very shocking for the other girl, but according to Jane’s logical reasoning and idea of justice, it is a rather common-sense remark: “I don’t see much different in Bolshers an’ your father. He wants to take all their money off people an’ give it to the heathens. I’d sooner give it to the Bolshers than the heathens, I would. That’s if I can’t keep it myself” (90). Additionally, she is informed by a boy about another attractive component of the Red parade, that children are paid threepence if they march in it. Jane’s comment is obvious, due to her interest in getting money: “An’ our ole vicar he makes us pay him to go to his ole Sunday school ... Fancy the Bolshers paying you” (91).

5. CONCLUSION

The stories in *Just Jane* and the additional examples from *Jane and Co* offer remarkable features of the suburban lifestyle of the 1920s as a background, and, interestingly, most of these details are expounded thanks to the intervention of the heroine and her particular view about what happens around her. As with other similar books for young girls, the book focuses on an independent and resourceful heroine, who does not understand how the adult world works. Indeed, Jane’s idea of justice is not mistaken: “She was always on the side of the oppressed” (*JJ* 30); however, her behaviour fails to comply with the social conventions in her pretentious neighbourhood. Thus, the results are often shocking and not the expected ones, and this fact is the source of much of the humour in the book.

Although children in the book are not so different from boys and girls in other adventure stories for young readers, the adults represent the new roles assigned to men and women in the new suburban lifestyle, which are indeed demanding. Thus, men seldom appear in the stories, as they have to work hard, while women are described as lonely housewives, who, thanks to service and new appliances, have a lot of spare time. They appear as individuals who are just interested in external appearances, trivial parties and shopping. Leisure time and social networking was



also crucial in suburban neighbourhoods, in which cinema was the main recreation, sports and cultural associations being more and more frequent. However, some episodes in Jane's stories also display other characters who are not so fortunate as Jane and her family and who are the victims, among other things, of unstable economic circumstances and consumerism.

Reviews sent to the author 21/10/2021
Revised paper accepted for publication 02/11/2021



WORKS CITED

- ACTON, Carol. 2004. "Price, Evadne." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 45, edited by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 289-290. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ARCHER, John. 2005. *Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690-2000*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- BALDICK, Chris. 2004. *The Oxford English Literary History 1910-1940: The Modern Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CADOGAN, Mary. 1985. "Introduction." In *Jane and Co*, by Evadne Price, vii-ix. London: Macmillan.
- CADOGAN, Mary & Patricia CRAIG. (1976) 2003. *You're a Brick, Angela! The Girls' Story 1839-1985*. Coleford: Girls Gone by Publishers.
- CARPENTER, Humphrey. 1985. *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. London and Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- CLAPSON, Mark. 2003. *Suburban Century. Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the USA*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- FOX, Geoff. 2001. "Just Jane." In *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, edited by Victor Watson, 309. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GEORGIU, Dion. 2014. "Leisure in London's Suburbs, 1880-1939." *The London Journal* 39 no. 3: 175-186. <https://doi.org/10.1179/0305803414Z.00000000047>.
- GRAVES, Robert & Alan HODGE. 1940. *The Long Weekend. A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939*. London: Faber and Faber.
- GRENBY, M.O. 2011. *The Child Reader, 1700-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GRENBY, M.O., and Kimberley REYNOLDS, editors. 2011. *Children's Literature Studies: A Research Handbook*. London: Palgrave.
- HUNT, Peter. 1994. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- JACKSON, Alan A. (1973) 2018. *Semi-Detached London. Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900-1939*. London: Routledge.
- KNOWLES, Murray & Kirsten MALMKJAER. 2003. *Language and Control in Children's Literature*. London: Routledge.
- KNUTH, Rebecca. 2012. *Children's Literature and British Identity. Imagining a People and a Nation*. Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press.
- KRAMNICK, Isaak. 1980. "Children's Literature and Bourgeois Ideology: Thoughts on Culture and Industrial Revolution in Late Eighteenth-Century England." In *English Politics and Culture from Puritanism to Enlightenment*, edited by Perez Zagorin, 203-240. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- LERER, Seth. 2008. *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- MANUEL, Carme. 2015. "Introduction." In *The Enlightened Child: Eighteenth-Century Literature for Children*, edited by Carme Manuel, 11-77. Valencia: JPM Ediciones.
- NELSON, Claudia. 2011. "Jade and the Tomboy Tradition." In *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, edited by Julia L. Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone, 497-517. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



- O'MALLEY, Andrew. 2003. *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge.
- PRICE, Evadne. (1928) 1938. *Just Jane*. London: Robert Hale and Co.
- PRICE, Evadne. 1985. *Jane and Co*. Introduced and selected by Mary Cadogan. London: Macmillan.
- SCOTT, Peter. 2013. *The Making of the Modern British Home. The Suburban Semi & Family Life between the Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SHAVIT, Zohar. 1985. *Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.
- WHITEHAND, J.W.R. & C.M.H. CARR. 2001. *Twentieth-Century Suburbs. A Morphological Approach*. London: Routledge.

