



Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I

Neta Gordon

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Catching the Torch examines contemporary novels and plays written about Canada's participation in World War I. Exploring such works as Jane Urquhart's *The Underpainter* and *The Stone Carvers*, Jack Hodgins's *Broken Ground*, Kevin Kerr's *Unity* (1918), Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding*, and Frances Itani's *Deafening*, the book considers how writers have dealt with the compelling myth that the Canadian nation was born in the trenches of the Great War.

In contrast to British and European remembrances of WWI, which tend to regard it as a cataclysmic destroyer of innocence, or Australian myths that promote an ideal of outsize masculinity, physical bravery, and white superiority, contemporary Canadian texts conjure up notions of distinctively Canadian values: tolerance of ethnic difference, the ability to do one's duty without complaint or arrogance, and the inclination to show moral as well as physical courage. Paradoxically, Canadians are shown to decry the horrors of war while making use of its productive cultural effects.

Through a close analysis of the way sacrifice, service, and the commemoration of war are represented in these literary works, *Catching the Torch* argues that iterations of a secure mythic notion of national identity, one that is articulated via the representation of straightforward civic and military participation, work to counter current anxieties about the stability of the nation-state, in particular anxieties about the failure of the ideal of a national "character."

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