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Second World War: Genre, Gender and Region

Australian Literary Studies

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Hatherell, William

Abstract: Australia has recently reached the end of a cycle of sixtieth anniversaries of the major episodes of the Pacific war that, coming on the heels of the fiftieth, shows

every sign of developing into a permanent 'anniversary culture'. While popular appetite for myth-making around events such as the fall of Singapore, the bombing of Darwin and the Changi POW camp appears undiminished, it is equally true that no single image or narrative has emerged for the second war to rival the power of 'Gallipoli' or 'national loss of innocence' for the first. This might be due to the sense of belatedness that characterises attitudes both to the second war itself and to the cultural products - poems, novels, memoirs, and more recently films and television documentaries and mini-series - that it has spawned. As Robin Gerster puts it, 'In Australia, the First World War - distant, but grandiloquently mythologised - has cast a gigantic obscuring shadow over the conflict that followed, a kind of cultural blackout to match the actual one of the war years' ('World Wars' 9). This article highlights on one neglected literary form that was a consequence of this new kind of experience of war namely 'The Home-front Novel'. It takes as its subject not the battles to the north, but the social and cultural life of the country which was the temporary base for its military defenders, as well as the suddenly transformed home of those not in uniform.



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