

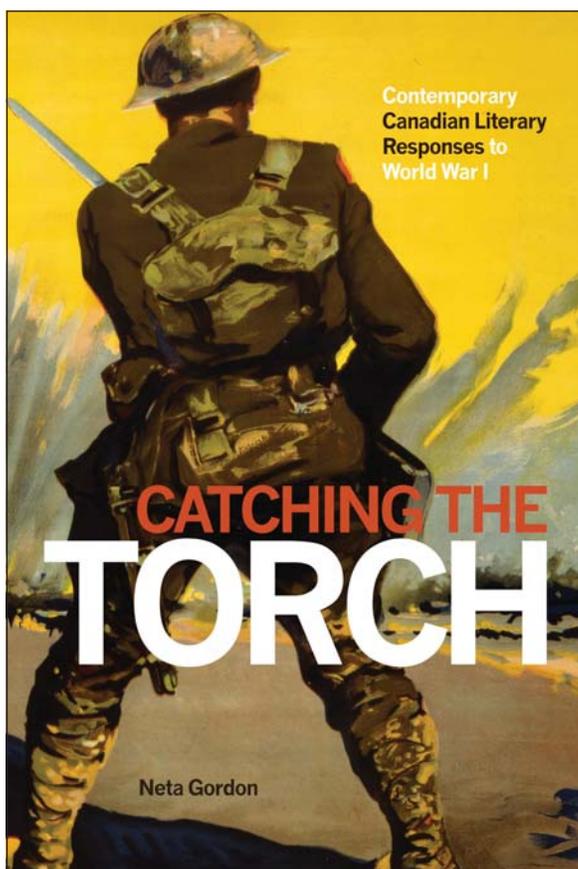
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Catching the Torch

Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I

Neta Gordon

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Catching the Torch, which examines numerous recently published novels and plays about Canadians' contributions to the First World War, underscores that war does not always take place during specific time periods or on specifically militarized fronts, but may require redefinition of temporal limits and settings to take into account the tales of traumatized veterans or, as was the case after the Great War, victims of influenza. It further insists that the stories of those previously excised from the canon, such as aboriginals, French Canadians, nurses, women volunteers serving on home fronts and battlefronts, and artists, are valid and valuable. Offering numerous insights into the ways contemporary Canadian writers commemorate their nation's participation in the Great War, this thoroughly researched and cogently argued book promises to be an invaluable resource for students and scholars of literature and history.

— **Donna Coates**, University of Calgary, editor (with Sherrill Grace) of *Canada and the Theatre of War*, vols. I and II

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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 WW I, 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."

Neta Gordon is an associate professor at Brock University, where she teaches courses on Canadian literature. She is a co-editor of *The Broadview Introduction to Literature (2013)* and has written on such authors as Barbara Gowdy, SKY Lee, and Ann-Marie MacDonald.

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