Dark places: True crime writing in Australia
Abstract

The international genre of true crime writing has been adapted and reinvented in specific ways in an Australian context, where true crime has a particular cultural resonance in rhetorics of nation. The settlement of Australia as a penal colony, the violent and unresolved history of relations between settler and Indigenous cultures, and our national mythmaking surrounding criminal figures highlight the centrality of true crime and its narration to formations of national identity. True crime is a popular and growing contemporary genre, typically concentrating upon certain events and figures as kinds of cultural flashpoints, and it also has a long history, from colonial narratives to early twentieth-century pulp fiction. Yet it has been critically neglected in almost all its Australian forms. This article begins to explore what constitutes true crime writing in Australia, and the ramifications that examining this genre has for changing constructions of nation, culture and history. It is particularly interested in the way in which the genre exploits a narrative tension between story and discourse to mobilise the power of myth, superstition and affect. This fuels the genre’s exploration of cultural anxieties surrounding particular figures and events, and the paper uses the seminal text of to exemplify the narrative strategies at work in the genre and their effect on the terms and certainties of national formations.

Keywords

true crime; nationalism; genre; Azaria Chamberlain; Evil Angels

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