

Varieties of Experience: Views of the Two World Wars – University of Caen, 29-30th
November 2007

From WWI soldiers to WWII civilians: Images of conflict in government sponsored
French children's literature

The series *Les Romans de la mémoire*, edited by Nathan, is sponsored by the Direction Nationale de la Mémoire, du Patrimoine et des Archives du Ministère de la Défense. The fourteen novels in the series are aimed at children aged from eleven upwards. This paper proposes examining how the depictions of the two world wars differ in the works of this collection and what this might tell us about the teaching of history in French schools, and more generally about contemporary French memorial politics.

The paper will analyse the establishment of such a collection and what this reveals about the aims and objectives of the educational mission of the French Ministry of Defence. The main body of the paper will then move onto study several important questions regarding the composition of the series; why do the number of works devoted to the period of the Second World War and the Occupation vastly outnumber those about the Great War? Why are the stories of combatants privileged in the First War, but in the period of the Second World War it is the experiences of the citizen population that are emphasised? The role of colonial forces in both the colonies and in the métropole in both conflicts is widely featured, so can these children's novels be viewed as a precursor to *Indigènes* (Bouchareb, 2006) in the cultural arena?

Les Romans de la mémoire –

<http://www.nathan.fr/catalogue/resultat.asp?entite=¶m=romans+de+la+memoire>