

*'The White Distance', a Novel*

*And*

*Reframing the Past for the Present: Writing 'The  
White Distance'*

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This Novel and Exegesis are submitted together in satisfaction of the requirements for  
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## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **'The White Distance', A Novel**

'The White Distance' is a work of fiction set in Australia and Antarctica at the time of World War I. The story focuses on two lovers, Dora and Daniel, who are part of Australia's vigorous anti-war movement. Each of the lovers comes to the movement for different reasons. Dora's beloved brother has been killed in France; Daniel is a printer interested in the new left-wing ideas emerging in Europe, especially Russia.

Wanting to escape public pressure to join up and fight, Daniel takes a position with an Antarctic expedition and travels there with a small team from the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology to collect weather data. This was a time of major Antarctic exploration, with the Australian expedition led by Douglas Mawson taking place in 1913. In Antarctica, in the novel, the leader of Daniel's expedition suffers a nervous breakdown and becomes dangerously violent, believing his men are German spies. Daniel and his colleagues have to consider the possibility that the only way to stop their leader might be to kill him.

After Daniel leaves, Dora joins a more radical anti-war group led by the charismatic Malachy Mara. She is forced to reconsider what she believes when the group decides to place a pipe bomb in a railway station, which will kill many civilians. Worse for her, she is likely to be the one selected to put the bomb into position.

‘The White Distance’ is also a love story about two lovers who, after being very close, are separated by a great and unfathomable distance. Dora and Daniel struggle to keep their love alive by writing letters to one another, even though they cannot be posted, and keeping journals that will not be read until Daniel returns. Each confronts a deep personal crisis without the other there for support. They use their words to one another to draw the strength to hold on.

Although set in the past, the novel raises issues which are relevant to current international and national concerns such as the clash of ideals and personal morality, terrorism, public violence, war and pacifism, love and separation.

### **Exegesis**

The accompanying exegesis, ‘Reframing the Past for the Present: Writing ‘The White Distance’’, examines the research material and creative influences behind the development of the novel, ‘The White Distance’. It considers the issues which I confronted in writing an historical work of fiction, and concludes by placing the novel in the wider context of current debates about Australian historical fiction.

The purpose of the exegesis is to open up for examination the process of writing a novel which seeks to incorporate the constraints of historical fact into the creative text. The exegesis considers how the major issues of the past world of the novel (the clash of ideals and personal morality, terrorism, public violence, war and pacifism, love and separation) can be given relevance for present readers.