**Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey**

By Andreas Gaile


As we usher in 2006, the world these days is not so unlike a futuristic Peter Carey story: its borders expand and contract, coincidences abound, vast geographical expanses are traversed with ease, and beautiful women are everywhere. Carey's popular filmic and literary practice, formation and change today draw a sharp contrast with his earlier works and form a coherent and unique body of work. Carey is one of the most influential Australian authors of the last 20 years, both nationally and internationally, and his work has been widely translated and enjoyed by readers worldwide.

This book offers a comprehensive examination of Carey's work, exploring the ways in which his fiction engages with themes of migration, race, gender, and identity. Carey's use of postcolonial theory and cultural studies provides a rich framework for understanding his novels, and the book offers a fresh perspective on the author's work.

The book is divided into four sections, each containing essays by leading experts on Peter Carey's work. The first section, "Popular Music: Practices, Formations and Change - Australian Perspectives," explores the relationship between Carey's work and popular music, while the second examines the use of postcolonial theory in his novels. The third section, "From the Editor," contains a selection of essays by Carey himself, while the final section, "API Review of Books," includes reviews of Carey's work by leading scholars in the field.

Overall, this book offers a fresh perspective on Peter Carey's work and is essential reading for anyone interested in Australian literature, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies.
Pam MacIntyre's reading of Carey's children's story The Big Bazooey and Cornelia Shulze's look at Peter Carey's short stories are representative of the remarkable span that these critical pieces cover in Carey's oeuvre; this is a broad approach for which Gaile should be praised. Shulze's piece is a particularly welcome revisititation of Carey's early work in that genre. Convincing as her valuable transcultural reading is, however, Shulze does not attend as much as she might to the ambivalence of Carey's products, and the fact that Carey the 'ad-man' is never so far away from Carey the moraliser. Carey's stories are labyrinths, not just parables of labyrinths that might make his readers better humans for sojourning in them for a while. Bruce Woodcock's rigorous approach to Peter Carey's concerns with 'unsettling the illusions of capitalism' (267) makes for an interesting companion piece to Shulze, especially in its dual approach to capitalism and colonialism in Carey's work.

As Anthony J Hassall points out, through 30 Days in Sydney appears at first as a straight-talking celebrity travel-writing piece, Carey cannot be trusted as cultural tour-guide to Australia, or on any other matter: Carey is at his best in engaging in the beautiful lies of fiction. My Life as a Fake, as Robert MacFarlane explains, revisits Carey's longtime fascination with lies, hoaxes, and fakes, but with an uneasiness; using Frederic Jameson's notion of 'nostalgia for the present', McFarlane shows how this novel also grives for authenticity no longer locatable in the alienated playing fields of 'turbo-capitalism'. (344) Carolyn Bliss's analysis of Carey's approach to 'cultural masterplots' (276) also focuses on the 'Lies and Silences' in his writing, but does so to illustrate the moral dimension in Carey's quest to find an existential authentic selfhood. Brian Edwards 'Deceptive Constructions: The Art of Building in Illywacker' takes a similar postmodern, moral approach. Attending to Carey's penchant for parodic chronicles of trickery and deception, Edwards points to Barthes' definition of the pleasure of the text and Carey's penchant for playfulness and caricature, noting that Carey's use of the concepts of construction and bravado warns readers against interpretations that smash of completion, cohesion, and transcendence. Edwards draws upon Lentricchia's discussion of Derrida in After the New Criticism (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1980) to redeem a postmodern reading of Carey's vision of history against interpretations that smack of completion, cohesion, and transcendence. Edwards makes for an interesting companion piece to Shulze, especially in its dual approach to capitalism and colonialism in Carey's work.

Playful, current, and serious, this volume of twenty diverse critical essays on Carey by new and renowned Carey scholars is a must for serious readers who enjoy Peter Carey, and a valuable resource for undergraduates and postgraduates alike. Including a Carey interview, its added feature of the most extensive bibliography to date of Carey's corpus and growing body of general criticism is a boon for researchers and a veritable collective volumes form our varied international. As international scholars of the caliber that have contributed to this volume continue to pick up on Carey, and as Carey's work and reputation continue to grow, this collection will surely play an integral role in introducing new critical readers to the protean potential charges of apolitical and acultural existential vacuousness -- pointing to the seriousness of play (164) in this context. Two critical essays on sacredness and moralism in Carey will continue to pick up on Carey, and as Carey's work and reputation continue to grow, this volume of twenty diverse critical essays on Carey by new and renowned Carey scholars is a must for serious readers who enjoy Peter Carey, and a valuable resource for undergraduates and postgraduates alike. Including a Carey interview, its added feature of the most extensive bibliography to date of Carey's corpus and growing body of general criticism is a boon for researchers and a veritable resource for general readership has been captivated by his deadpan sense of humour, his unique narrative skills, his ability to spin a good yarn, and his global appeal. Carey is one of Australia's finest creative writers, much admired by both literary critics and a worldwide reading public. While academia has been quick to see his fictions as exemplars of postcolonial and postmodern writing strategies, his general readership has been captivated by his deadpan sense of humour, his quirky characters, the outlandish settings and the grotesqueries of his intricate plots. After three decades of prolific writing and multiple award-winning, Carey stands out in the world of Australian letters as designated heir to Patrick White.

Fabulating Beauty pays tribute to Carey's literary achievement. It brings together the voices of many of the most renowned Carey critics in twenty essays (sixteen commissioned especially for this volume), an interview with the author, as well as the most extensive bibliography of Carey criticism to date. The studies represent a wide range of current perspectives on the writer's critics. Contributors focus on issues as diverse as the writer's biography; his use of architectural metaphors; his interrogation of narrative structures such as myths and cultural master-plots; intertextual strategies; concepts of sacredness and references to the Christian tradition; and his strategies of rewriting history. Amidst predictions of the imminent death of 'postist' theory, the essays all attest to the ongoing relevance of the critical parameters framed by postmodernism and postcolonialism.

Andreas GAILE: Towards an Alphabet of Australian Culture: Peter Carey's My Life as a Fake

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Cultural Expressions of Evil and Wickedness: Wrath, Sex, Crime

Terrie Waddell, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, 226 Pages, Paperback, $US56.00

Reviewed by Catie Gilchrist in the February 2006 issue.

At the Interface/Probing the Boundaries publications are designed to be both exploratory examinations of particular areas and issues, and rigorous inquiries into specific subjects. This innovative volume belongs to the research project Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness (www.wickedness.net) and each chapter evolved from papers given at a conference in Prague in 2002. It is a broad and wide-ranging project that is dedicated to the exploration of evil, suffering, pain and the consequences of human actions. Embracing a multi and inter-disciplinary approach, the key themes are both historical and contemporary and it is this that makes Cultural Expressions such an interesting book, and one ... read more.