

and bases her story on the comments and findings of others. Only on a few occasions does she slip into a subtle but vehement accusative tone, not so much against specific individuals as against a malfunctioning system and years of wrongdoings against Indigenous Australians. This is especially clear in a number of scenes, such as in her various descriptions of court proceedings and Hooper's impression of a police union rally, where highlighted comments or details make Hooper's writing transparent to the fury that underpins much of the narrative. But what *The Tall Man* may lack in absolute objectivity, it more than makes up for in its engaged and very personal investigation, where Hooper's burning need for answers firmly pulls the reader into the story. With only a few exceptions, Hooper continuously manages the delicate balancing-act of combining informative journalism with a profound personal response to the subject matter, without indulging in self-serving white guilt. Her portrait of Indigenous people is warm and respectful: even when she explores appalling details in her search for explanations, and she conveys a sense of genuine concern.

As such, this is highly effective journalistic writing: investigative and fact-laden yet deeply captivating and driven by an engaged narrator. It is testament to Hooper's writing skill that *The Tall Man* remains suspenseful to its very end, even though the outcome of the case

has long since been made public. *The Tall Man* is an important read that provides—through its extensive research and passionate approach — insights far beyond what most media coverage has offered of and to this Palm Island tragedy.



Jean-François Vernay

CAREY TAKES CENTRE-STAGE IN FRANCE

Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale d'une identité australienne, by Sue Ryan-Fazilleau. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007. Paperback, 26 Euros. ISBN 978-2-296-04550-7. pp.266.

Peter Carey, who has just released his tenth serious novel, *His Illegal Self* (2008), is well on the path of becoming Australia's most prolific and critically successful living author. No wonder that he comes under the close scrutiny of 7 monograph writers, Sue Ryan-Fazilleau included. The previous book-length study of the kind, which unfortunately indulged in pro-Careyism, was Andreas Gaile's *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey* (2005) — a reference Sue Ryan has left out of her bibliography. Similarly, she gives no mention of her praised doctoral dissertation on the playful reading of Peter Carey's

fiction, a piece of information listed in Gaile's bibliography.

Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale d'une identité australienne ["Peter Carey and the Postcolonial Quest for Australian Identity"] is a 260 odd page book-length study of Peter Carey's first six novels. *The Tax Inspector* (1991) only receives a sketchy analysis in Chapter Four because, according to Sue Ryan, the book does not fall within the ambit of Carey's "postcolonial project" (139). Fair enough; however, in her concluding chapter, she dismisses *The True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), *My Life as a Fake* (2003), and *Theft: A Love Story* (2006) on similar grounds. Ryan feels Carey's 2000 and 2003 novels belong to a "post-postcolonial" period while with *Theft* "Carey is apparently no longer concerned with Australian identity" (245). Should Australian identity be part and parcel of Sue Ryan's main focus — and the monograph's explicit title is in support of such a claim — her justification for ruling out *True History* and *My Life as a Fake* is contentious. The former narrative is based on Australia's notorious bushranger Ned Kelly enshrined as a national myth while the latter reads like a postcolonial rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankstein* drawing on the infamous Ern Malley jape which rocked the Australian literary community in the early 1940s.

If we take a closer look beyond the scope of the monograph, *Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale* contains a well-

documented biography of the Bacchus Marsh-born novelist and illuminating micro-analyses of Carey's narratives informed by a set of literary theories mainly borrowed from New Criticism (Genette, Ricoeur, Todorov). Sue Ryan pursues her literary demonstration with unflagging thoroughness.

Whatever its targeted readership, the (Carey) scholar or the general punter, *Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale* will unarguably appeal to French readers for its valuable insights into Australian culture. Sue Ryan covers various subjects ranging from Australian linguistics to sociology and history. Born and bred in Australia but currently lecturing Commonwealth Studies at the Université de la Rochelle, Sue Ryan has a privileged insider's perspective on Australiana and makes good use of it in her analysis of the Australianness of Peter Carey's oeuvre. Having said this, the monograph borders more on Literary Studies than on Cultural Studies. Inevitably, *Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale* follows a well-trodden path by tackling some obvious themes given prominence in the novels and studied by other scholars in the field: storytelling in *Bliss* had been examined by Antonella Riem, fictions in *Illywhacker* was pioneered by Helen Daniel, Kirsten Petersen explored chance and gambling in *Oscar and Lucinda*, Antonella Riem investigated the Australia/ United States analogy in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*, and the convict heritage in *Jack Maggs* had already been studied by Elizabeth Ho.

However, Sue Ryan has blended in her personal views which open up new vistas and bring a refreshing new light on the Carey novels. The occasional typo mars the text (quite annoying when it comes to misspelling Frank Moorhouse's name on page 11) while other mistakes are a mere giveaway that Sue Ryan expresses herself in her second language — a remarkable feat which begs for benevolent leniency.

CA Cranston stated in *JASAL* 7 (2007) that her "understanding is that European PhD candidates publish their theses as a matter of course..." I'm afraid this brash assertion is nothing like as accurate as she thought. Hats off to Sue Ryan for being part of the very happy few France-based Australianists who managed to develop their rewarding doctoral dissertation into a published critical work which is commendably well-researched. For all its strengths and faults, *Peter Carey et la quête postcoloniale d'une identité australienne* might well become a textbook in the near future (the same could be said for other monographs on prominent Australian writers) should the academic decision-makers be tempted to put Australian postcolonial writers down on the curriculum for the CAPES and Agrégation, two competitive examinations in France, both equivalents of the Diploma of Education. There was a fair attempt at one stage with Patrick White and since then Australian writers have been left marooned "at the far side

of the world." Sue Ryan has to be credited with allowing Peter Carey to take centre-stage.



Tony Simoes da Silva

ALICE, THE WORD-SPREADER

Alice Pung. *Unpolished Gem*. Melbourne: Black Inc, 2006. ISBN 9781863951586. RRP: \$24.95. pp.282.

Alice Pung begins *Unpolished Gem* (2006) by noting that "[t]his story does not begin on a boat" (1), a somewhat whimsical yet intensely political allusion to the period in which the book appeared. A story of refugees arrived in Australia long before former Prime Minister John Howard came to power, *Unpolished Gem* is the kind of book he may have contrived to stop from publication since boats and refugees loomed so large in his phantasmagoria. Yet, that Pung's memoir should open "in a suburb in Melbourne, in Australia, in a market swarming with fat pigs and thin people" (1) seems almost as ironic, for this is an uncannily un-Australian world these days. If the experts are correct, healthily thin people are in danger of extinction in contemporary Australia, but perhaps