

but its storyline is perhaps a bit too spare to hold *all* its readers. Those readers who are enchanted by its remarkable character studies and by its revealing and insightful portrait of masculinity will stick out the long build-up to the swimming race and dénouement, and they will be rewarded. But I'm unconvinced that this book will not let some of its readers float out to sea.

Nonetheless, *Jamaica* is topical and well-written. Just as the recent film adaptations of *Atonement* and *Brideshead Revisited* do, it addresses two hot topics: masculinity and the upper classes. It seems the pendulum of cultural studies has begun to swing the other way. While five years ago the buzzwords were "oppression," "marginality," "minorities" and the "working classes," the more nuanced understanding of the internal conflict and stratification of group-identity that attention to these concepts has brought means that group affiliation within the upper echelons of society is equally complex and worthy of attention. As comedy TV shows like *Summer Heights High* (ABC) demonstrate, the self-righteous pieties involved in regarding minorities as human equivalents of endangered species that require benevolent protection by the majority is truly laughable. Knox's novel brings into focus heterogeneity within class-based and gender-based cultural groups, and its particular attention to a uniquely Australian group of privileged men is a welcome counterpoint to the

usual stock-in-trade matey working class folk-hero.



Erik Boman

DEATH AND LIFE ON PALM ISLAND

Chloe Hooper. *The Tall Man*. Maryborough: Penguin, 2008. ISBN 9780241015377. RRP: \$32.95 AUD. pp.276.

The custodial death of Palm Islander Cameron Doomadgee in 2004 resulted in a lengthy inquest, massive media attention and Australia's first trial of a police officer for a death in custody. Aboriginal activists soon became entrenched in a bitter war of words with the Queensland police union, with courtrooms and the media providing the battlegrounds. Officer Christopher Hurley was ultimately cleared, but not before the case had triggered riots, violence, and lingering suspicions.

Chloe's Hooper's *The Tall Man* traces in detail the events that led up to Doomadgee's death in custody and unpacks the bitter, confusing, and grief-stricken aftermath of the subsequent investigations. Drawing heavily on statements from witnesses, relatives, and other people linked to the case, Hooper's own investigation

instigates a journey that is both literal and metaphorical. As the author visits the origins of those involved in the death and delves into the history of these locations, her experiences offer the reader a deeply personal insight into the nature and background of Doomadgee, Hurley, and Palm Island itself. The story that unfolds is gripping and disturbing; and, in the end, it raises far more questions than it answers about the origins and history of a place such as Palm Island, about Indigenous and Anglo-Australian relations, and about the resonances of the unsurmounted past in contemporary Australian society.

In a tranquil yet vivid opening scene, Hooper is guided in Cape York to a remote but recent rock painting of a large man, covered in symbols traditionally used by Aborigines to curse or doom someone. The disquieting tone with which Hooper's book begins connects to the theme it subsequently elaborates. The large man reappears throughout the text in the shape of furred giants, elusive spirits, oppressive settlers and towering policemen, fusing ancient terrors from Indigenous legends with contemporary conflicts between Indigenous- and Anglo-Australians. These tall men cast long, haunting shadows through the text that cannot be ignored. Making deft use of her extensive research and interweaving the narrative with anecdotes, details and reflections rather than listing facts and statistics, Hooper traces the roots of the conflicts she details both

spatially and laterally, visiting places which have shaped those involved in the case and searching history to find explanations for prejudices and tensions. These roots are then pulled out of the earth of the past and spread before us, as if Hooper wants us too, to ask the questions she seems to pose herself: *How could this have happened? How can we let this go on?*

By carefully highlighting details from proceedings, environments and people, the custodial death case becomes a lens which magnifies cultural distances until the brief stretch of water between Townsville and Palm Island turns into an immeasurable rift of prejudice and misunderstanding. Chapter by chapter, locations and people become dots joined by dark strokes of history with the lines converging on Palm Island. In this way, Hooper paints a damning portrait of Palm Island as a cul-de-sac of despair, marred by decades of poor management. The picture that emerges is a community in a cycle of hopelessness, trapped in an unending struggle for motivation where there are rare moments of joy and hope. Descriptions of the vibrant beauty of Palm Island emphasise this impression, as they are juxtaposed with the horrific conditions of its inhabitants. *The Tall Man* is an expressive clash of light and dark, and Hooper's references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are apt and unsurprising.

Throughout the narrative, Hooper by and large refrains from outright blame

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