Introduction

1. 'tis thirty years since...

AT THE TIME THIS COLLECTION IS BEING FINALIZED, Peter Carey's first published book, *The Fat Man in History* (1974), turns thirty. Its author's arrival on the literary scene in the mid-1970s coincided with a period of momentous change in Australian culture and, more specifically, in the world of Australian letters. While Australians made their first tentative attempts at extending citizenship to immigrants of non-European background on a considerable scale (institutionalized by the gradual demise of the White Australia Policy), and while the Vietnam War showed the country once again the dire consequences of getting involved in someone else's war, many of Australia's foremost writers followed the example of Patrick White, who was famously "determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism"[1] and led the way to a "'new wave'"[2] of Australian prose writing. Authors like Michael Wilding, Murray Bail, Peter Carey and Frank Moorhouse at the time seemed to find it increasingly hard to accommodate the experience of their changing environment to the narrative tradition of writers like Lawson, Furphy and Paterson. With their formal experiments and innovations in terms of subject-matter, the then literary avant-garde rebelled against the restrictions of the formulaic bush tales that had predominated in Australian fiction and overshadowed even the innovatory creative achievements of writers like White and Christina Stead. In order to overcome the creative impasse, they started to look abroad – to South America, for example, and the continent's magical realists and fabulists (García Márquez and Borges have been mentioned again

[1] Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son" (1958), in *The Oxford Book of Australian Essays*, ed. Imre Salusinszky (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1997): 127.

[2] Craig Munro, quoted in Ken Gelder & Paul Salzman, *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970–88* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989): 15.

and again), or to North America's postmodernists (Barth, Barthelme, Pynchon) and even back to Kerouac and the Beats.

Peter Carey was at the forefront of this movement of opposition against the "'well rounded tale' and the bush-realist 'nationalist' tradition in Australian fiction."[3] Reflecting on these years in a recent interview, Carey explained that at the time he found Australian literature "dull," hence "developed a strong passion to make it new and fresh."[4] The experimental fantasy and science fiction of his short stories, which – in terms of style and subject-matter – represented a clear departure from the established literary tradition down under also attracted critical attention and earned him mostly favourable, sometimes celebratory, first critical appraisals and reviews.[5] Craig Munro, for example, hailed him as "the most spectacular talent to emerge in the 1970s,"[6] while Brian Kiernan (who saw Carey writing "pure fictions à la Borges"[7]) and Bruce Bennett (who described Carey as a "true fabulator"[8]) praised him as a herald of the new Australian literature. Against the background of Australian literary history, the terseness and economy of Carey's early prose, the vague and apocalyptic settings that lack the recognizably Australian features of the traditional literature of the time, signified a radical departure from the "barren anecdotal realism of the local literature."[9] It also meant, significantly, a shift from the local to the international. Carey's closest literary kin at the time – Kafka, Proust, Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Pynchon – indicate a global literary lineage; and the characters that people his short fictions, the Timoshenkos, Jorges, Oongalas, Ho-Chins and Da Silvas, document Australia's transformation from a predominantly Anglo-Celtic society into a multicultural one.

While Carey abandoned the genre of short fiction after his second collection (*War Crimes*, 1979), the short stories do not stand apart from the rest of his fictions, for it is here that Carey first explores a wide range of concerns which have since reappeared again and again in his novels: we already find narratorial self-consciousness directed toward the writing process (eg, in "Concerning the Greek Tyrant"); an interest in the bizarre, the grotesque, the monstrous, which can be traced through *Illywhacker* (1985) and *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994) up to the recent *My Life as a Fake* (2003); a

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[3] Gelder & Salzman, *New Diversity*, 14.

[4] Carey, in Ginny Dougary, "The Chameleon," *Times Magazine* (London; 6 September 2003): 22.

[5] Morris Lurie's highly dismissive review paragraph in the *Nation Review* (29 November 1974): 204, stands out as an exception here.

[6] Munro, quoted in Gelder & Salzman, *New Diversity*, 15.

[7] Brian Kiernan, "Short Story Chronicle: 1974," *Meanjin* 34.1 (1975): 39.

[8] Bruce Bennett, "Australian Experiments in Short Fiction," *World Literature Written in English* 15.2 (1976): 359–66.

[9] Murray Bail, quoted in Gelder & Salzman, *New Diversity*, 15.

critique of the excesses of capitalism or 'late capitalism', as one would have to say, with an eye to Carey as a postmodernist writer (eg, in "War Crimes"); fictional investigations into topical political questions such as the effects of American cultural imperialism ("American Dreams") and of totalitarianism ("Kristu-Du," "*The Fat Man in History*"); and finally, stories like "'Do You Love Me?'" "Peeling," and "The Chance," which already contain a discourse on the frailty and constructedness of human identity.[10]

Carey's generic turn from short to long prose allowed him to enlarge his postmodernist narratorial instrumentarium, which he had given first and sometimes extensive test-runs in the short stories, in the more generous space of the novel. Metafiction, for instance, resurfaces in practically all of his full-fledged fictions, most notably in *Illywhacker*, *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *Jack Maggs* (1997), and *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). The possibilities afforded by the novel form permit Carey to explore fully the critical potential of this self-consciousness. It is through his narrators' self-awareness that he addresses such issues as the constructedness and arbitrariness of reality (past and present), that he puts doubtfulness in place of self-evidencies and old certainties, and that he constantly interrogates notions of truth and authenticity. And, in a context where linguistic constructs of all kinds are debunked, grand narratives (whether religion, imperialism, or ideologies such as the doctrine of racial superiority) are equally exposed as dangerous and oftentimes misleading.

These narratorial tactics serve a strategic cause; they help to prepare the ground for a critical interrogation of some of the most controversial issues in the Australian political fabric. There is, in fact, a political edge to practically all of Carey's writings. In the short stories, in whose vague settings Australia featured as an idea or a concept rather than as a concrete place, Carey dealt with issues of a quite general and frequently universal nature – Australia was often only metaphorically implied. In the novels, however, Australia is insistently true, and is heated by the same debates as its extra-fictional model. Careyesque features such as self-consciousness, playing with reader expectations, a concern with authenticity and fakery, an obsession about lies and truths, all fall into place as components of a fictional discourse on controversial issues of Australia's past and present – many of which are political pota-

[10] All of his fictions since *Bliss* can be read as explorations of personal and, by implication, national identity. This view is corroborated by Carey himself, who, in an interview with the BBC in 2001, said that "Almost everything I have ever written has been concerned with questions of 'national identity', a seemingly old-fashioned project that seems, to me, an alarmingly modern concern"; "Peter Carey: Australian Heavyweight," *BBC News Online* 17 October 2001: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/entertainment/arts/newsid_1550000/1550985.stm>.

toes of the hottest kind. Carey has proved to be a particularly astute observer of the political dimension of life. As Nicholas Birns rightly points out in his contribution to this volume, "few novelists, and very few of his level of quality, have registered the political developments of the last thirty years as keenly as has Carey." Political undercurrents even run through the most playful of his fictions. Seemingly harmless episodes take on wider significance vis-à-vis issues like history, identity, reconciliation, or tax evasion. The consumption of American movies (in a short story like "American Dreams"), for example, is not simply a form of light entertainment; in the moral universe of the fiction it appears as a symptomatic acquiescence to US-style cocacolonization. Likewise, the doctrine of *terra nullius* is not merely a discursive parade-ground for an exclusive group of historians who seem to be forever quibbling with each other; rather, this legitimized fiction keeps coming to the surface in the narrative present of several of his works. In *Illywhacker*, it forms an integral part of the texture of Australian politics. In *30 Days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account* (2001), the issue of Aboriginal firestick farming, which proves that the land was tended by its native inhabitants at the time of white arrival, heats up the "political climate" (41) of Carey's Sydney and serves as an argumentational foil to his comments on reconciliation and Prime Minister Howard's refusal to say "sorry."

As one of Australia's most outspoken critics, Carey regularly lives up to his creed that "No country wants writers who are brown-noses; you want writers who are critical, who are in some way at war with society,"[11] launching broadsides against what he sees as his compatriots' complacency, philistinism and small-mindedness. While such novels as *The Tax Inspector*, *Illywhacker* or *My Life as a Fake* indeed come across as intensely critical of what Carey, even after fifteen years in New York, still calls his home, there is, conversely, also a celebratory aspect to Carey's oeuvre. Australia is always uppermost on his poetic agenda. In the words of fellow novelist Claire Messud, Carey's "mission [...] is no less than the writing of his beloved country, the voicing of Australia."[12] Where Carey leaves the continent in his fictions, heading for the USA (rather: Voorstand in *Tristan Smith*), England (in *Jack Maggs*), or Malaysia (in *My Life as a Fake*), it is not for the sake of literary or imaginary tourism. Rather, experiences abroad serve to highlight problems or conditions in Australia. His characters' trips to the metropolitan centres of Voorstand or England, for instance, give the reader a better understanding of the mechanisms of colonization. In a similar manner, the exotic setting of his

[11] Carey, in Richard Conrad Glover, "Peter Carey's Sydney Babylon," *Sydney Morning Herald* (26 July 1991): 35.

[12] Claire Messud, "The Voicing of Australia," *LA Weekly* (3 May 2002): B2.

2003 novel can be read, by analogous conclusion, as a further comment on the Australian experience. The notorious poisoner Dato's story of the Japanese invasion, for instance – "thinking how stupid we had been to rely on foreigners to protect us. I now understood that it was Malaya we should have trusted"[13] – sounds remarkably like Herbert Badgery grappling with his compatriots' gullibility: "It is why we believed the British when they told us we were British too, and why we believed the Americans when they said they would protect us."[14]

Since Carey departs for new fictional terrain every time he sets out to write a novel, he has covered much of the geography of the Australian experience. His fictions chronicle his country's history from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first and focus on key issues such as the convict system, the doctrine of *terra nullius*, the Kelly Outbreak, colonialism in its various stages, and national identity. Readers interested in the cultural history of Australia may therefore well read his eight novels as a fictional biography of his home country. In addition to the events in the unusual life of his biographee, there are deep probings into the nation's trauma-ridden consciousness.[15] Carey's most recent novel, *My Life as a Fake*, for example, is concerned with the psychological effects of an unnatural birth, of contested parenthood, and of denied love – conditions all of which, by implication, also apply to Australian history. *True History* grants the readers glimpses into the psyche of a nineteenth-century Irishman, whose "brave parents was ripped from Ireland like teeth from the mouth of their own history,"[16] and who himself was driven to outlawdom by the injustices of the British colonial administration. Little wonder, then – as Nicholas Jose points out in his essay –that the fictional biographer Carey has, in the eyes of his worldwide audience, come to represent Australia as Salman Rushdie does India or Margaret Atwood Canada.

Carey at present is Australia's most widely-recognized contemporary writer. His long career, his popularity with reviewers and his appreciation by critics, along with his occasional involvement in current political debates, and perhaps his New York residence and the cosmopolitanism that is attributed to this, have all contributed to making him a literary heavyweight. When it comes to his fame, comparisons with Patrick White are unsurprisingly frequent. White, winner of the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, was the first

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[13] Peter Carey, *My Life as a Fake* (London & Boston MA: Faber & Faber, 2003): 192.

[14] *Illywhacker* (London & Boston MA: Faber & Faber, 1985): 186.

[15] Although the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* can really only be applied to the context of German history, it is this sort of systematic attempt at coming to terms with the traumas of the past that animates many of Carey's fictions.

[16] Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000; London & Boston MA: Faber & Faber, 2001): 87.

writer in Australia's literary history to achieve truly international fame. Carey can indeed claim to be the legitimate heir to White's standing in the world of Australian literature. Carey's reputation as one of the foremost Australian fiction-writers has likewise been made, or substantiated, to a considerable degree by literary prizes; he has won every major fiction award in Australia (the Miles Franklin three times), as well as major international prizes such as the Commonwealth Writer's Prize (for *Jack Maggs*) and the Booker Prize, which he even won twice (for *Oscar and Lucinda* and *True History*). In the public perception of the literary phenomenon 'Peter Carey' the Booker stands out. There is, for example, hardly an essay, review or news item on Carey that fails to mention his double victory. Apart from cementing his position as one of the most highly regarded writers in the Commonwealth, Carey's two Bookers have also greatly enhanced the reading public's awareness of Australian literature in general.

Carey, the Critics, and Carey Criticism

Throughout his career, Carey has received ample attention from literary critics.[17] There are four monographs, seven dissertations, dozens of chapters in academic publications, and a couple of hundred articles in scholarly journals and reviews in major world publications. Scholars from diverse quarters of the academy have dwelt on Carey (next to literary critics, mainly film critics, political scientists, historians, and fellow fiction-writers). Overall, his works have proved to be particularly approachable through late-twentieth-century critical theories, mainly postcolonial and postmodern. Scholars from postcolonial studies have been intrigued by his texts because of their decolonizing agenda. The novels critically examine political and cultural aspects of colonialism, consider the individual caught in the throes of coloniality, and bring up the issue of the genocide committed by white Australians against the indigenous population. Readings of Carey's novels along the lines of postcolonial theory have time and again focused on their subversive potential, and have endeavoured to examine how Carey tests the validity of Western grand narratives and cultural conventions, particularly narrative ones. They have accordingly scrutinized the writer's strategy of undermining Western conceptions of reality (for example, through what is commonly dubbed 'magical realism'), of the novel form (his parodic rewriting of a classic Victorian novel in *Jack Maggs*, for example), of conventions to do with point of view and nar-

[17] Apart from critical responses from within his home countries of Australia and the USA, his work has also been discussed in Britain, Canada, India, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France and Spain (for details, see the bibliography to this volume).

ratorial authority. Postmodern approaches have shared some of these interests, but have specialized in the element of playfulness that materializes in Carey's fictions in the figure of trickster narrators, in deceiving interactions with the reader, in the element of parody and intertextuality, in metafictional strategies, and in his use of historiographic metafiction, that specifically postmodern genre of historical fiction. With their focus on language and the linguistic constructedness of categories foundational to the Western world, poststructurally influenced analyses have considered the way Carey handles the dichotomies of reality and fantasy, truth and fiction, authenticity and fakery. One might think that a certain staleness nowadays permeates this preoccupation with truth and untruth, that the wars about linguistic essentialism and Western profundity have been fought – that such finely differentiating poststructuralist knowledge persists merely as an intellectual indulgence. But binary thinking in categories of true and false continues to be operative in the popular imagination, perhaps today more than ever.[18]

There is a conspicuous congruence between the ascendance of the aforementioned 'postist' discourses in literary studies and Peter Carey's emergence as a writer. His novels constitute a peculiar mix of both postmodern and postcolonial strategies, reminiscent of the 'pocomo blend' that has been detected in Salman Rushdie's novels.[19] Carey's fictions have, accordingly, often been discussed in critical terms that combine postmodern and postcolonial reading strategies.[20] While for critics the novels resonate with an awareness of postcolonial and postmodern concerns, the author himself is far less ready to subscribe to any such discourse. Although Carey has acknowledged his interest in postcolonial theory, explicitly so in the case of Edward Said's *Culture and*

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[18] A recent example is the war on Iraq where two unremitting regimes of truth clashed. Also, the reading public still seems to thirst for true stories and histories, as the popularity of this genre proves (Amazon.com lists several thousand 'true stories' and 'true histories').

[19] See Mita Banerjee, *The Chutneyfication of History: Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee and the Postcolonial Debate* (American Studies 95; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2002).

[20] See, for example, Paul Kane's influential article "Postcolonial/Postmodern: Australian Literature and Peter Carey," *World Literature Today* 67.3 (1993): 519–22; see also Heinz Antor, "Australian Lies and the Mapping of a New World: Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* (1985) as a Postmodern Postcolonial Novel," *Anglistik: Mitteilungen des Verbandes Deutscher Anglisten* 9.1 (1998): 155–78; M.D. Fletcher, "Peter Carey's Post-Colonial Australia I: *Illywhacker*: Lies, Dependence, and Political History," in *Australian Political Ideas*, ed. Geoffrey Stokes (Kensington, NSW: U of New South Wales P, 1994): 134–41 and "Peter Carey's Post-Colonial Australia II: *Oscar and Lucinda*: Misunderstanding, Victimisation, and Political History," in *Australian Political Ideas*, ed. Stokes, 143–51; Elizabeth Hardy, "Postmodernism vs Postcolonialism," *Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature* 14.1 (1997): 21–25.

Imperialism,[21] he certainly does not approach his literary subjects from the angle of theory. As Theodore F. Sheckels puts it aptly in his observations on postmodernism writing, "The term 'postmodern' [...] is not necessarily a concept writers have in mind when they compose a poem or write a novel. Writers do not say to themselves 'be postmodern' and proceed accordingly."[22] Carey illustrates just that: he is a writer of the postmodern age, with a postmodern intellectual's hyper-awareness of the dangers of master-narratives and totalizing rhetoric. The same holds true for his view of postcolonialism: Carey grew up in a former settler colony; his senses sharpened from personal experience, and endowed with the gift of absorbing and reflecting like few others the state of Australian affairs, he transforms into fiction the same problematic that postcolonial theory formulates in critical terms.[23] And while it is true that many of his novels address postcolonial issues in Australian culture, his fictions – as Bill Ashcroft argues with respect to *Tristan Smith* – enter critical discourse as writings that invite not only postcolonial readings, but also a "'reading' of contemporary cultural relations. It doesn't simply propose a reading; it is a reading and, as such, enters, rather than exposes itself to, the field of theoretical discourse."[24] Carey's membership among postcolonial writers remains ambiguous, though. If understood as a counterdiscourse aimed at resistance and change, the label 'postcolonial' would become problematic because of Carey's implication in the very system he sets out to criticize. Yet only a few postcolonial theorists (Aijaz Ahmad, for instance) operate from outside the Western system they write about. Even Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Abdul JanMohamed, Homi Bhabha, Peter Nazareth, all of whom were born in the former colonies, chose to teach and conduct research in the West. Hence, it is hardly contestable to classify Carey's writings as postcolonial – as part of a discourse *de facto* at home on Western campuses – especially if postcolonial discourse is understood as an activity of exploratory reading and writing that sets out to disrupt the Western master-narrative. Also, as Stephen Slemon argues in his 1990 essay "Unsettling the Empire," it is of little service to limit the idea of anticolonial resistance to the Third and Fourth Worlds, as

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[21] See, for instance, the interviews with Nicholas Birns ("The Power to Create for Oneself: An Interview with Peter Carey," *Writing on the Edge* 6.1 (1994): 88–96) and *Powells.Com*, www.powells.com/authors/carey.html

[22] See Sheckels, this volume.

[23] Birns, in his analysis of the short story "Kristu-Du" (see below), diagnoses the same reciprocal relationship with regard to postmodernism: "'Kristu-Du,' for example, is quintessentially postmodernist: Carey, who learned so much from postmodern theory in writing [...] *Tristan Smith* [...] here shows that postmodern theory could have learned a lot from him. All these [postmodern] concepts are latent in this short Australian story of the early 1970s."

[24] See Ashcroft, "Simulation, Resistance and Transformation," below, fn 1.

this would bring about "two forms of displacement": "First, *all* literary writing which emerges from these cultural locations will be understood as carrying a radical and contestatory content," and secondly, "the idea will be discarded that important anti-colonialist literary writing can take place *outside* the ambit of Third- and Fourth-World literary writing."[25] Slemon consequently lists Peter Carey among those writers from a postcolonial background whose work exemplifies the "necessary *entanglement* of anti-colonial resistances within the colonialist machineries they seek to displace."[26]

As a writer interested in questions that have animated postcolonial discourse ever since its inception in the mid-1980s, his intimate knowledge of three Anglo-Celtic cultures – the predominantly British one of his childhood and his days at Geelong Grammar, Australia's Eton; the Australian one of his early adulthood; the North American one since 1989 – makes him ideally suited to observe postcolonial relevance. It affords him a privileged perspective on British–Australian relations, but also, and importantly so lately, enables him to fictionalize neocolonial mechanisms of cultural imperialism as practised by the USA. The persistence of American cultural and political domination at a time when many of the decolonized countries of the former British Empire are slowly maturing into their postcoloniality makes the interrogative activity and thematic concerns of postcolonial criticism more relevant than ever. Amidst announcements of the imminent demise of postcolonialism,[27] this relocation of postcolonial concerns also proves the ongoing vitality and relevance of the discourse.

While Carey has explicitly acknowledged his approval of postcolonial approaches,[28] he has never explicitly done so with regard to postmodern or poststructural theory. This, of course, does not mean that postmodern approaches to his writings are less valid; nor does it mean that his writings are not postmodern. As outlined above, his writerly strategies and the style and form of his writings even make Carey's works quintessentially postmodern. Additionally, his complicity with the dominant discursive regimes of his society

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[25] Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World" (1990), in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (London & New York: Routledge, 1995): 106, first published in *World Literature Written in English* 30.2 (1990): 30–41. My thanks to Carolyn Bliss for the reference to Slemon's essay.

[26] Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire," 110.

[27] Among the recent challengers of postcolonial discourse are Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, in *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2000), and E. San Juan, Jr. – see especially his *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines–United States Confrontations* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

[28] For example, in an email to the author; see also the above-mentioned interviews by Birns and *Powells.Com*.

(Carey being male and white) suggests a sort of structural postmodernism. As Linda Hutcheon explains in her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, "Wilfully contradictory [...] postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within."[29]

In general, Carey seems wary of readings clotted with trendy, theoretical jargon, readings that fail to penetrate to the heart of the narrative achievement – as is often the case with analyses which use the primary text only to illustrate the mechanisms of a certain theoretical concept. In interviews, he again and again complains about critics who in their attempts at clever readings fail to see what he is actually doing artistically.[30] Given the present devaluation of literature, Carey's call for a "return to the old-fashioned close-reading of texts" might therefore not only be his rescue plan for "keeping literature alive,"[31] but also an attempt to protect himself from being appropriated by obfuscatory forms of academic discourse.[32]

The present collection of essays is the first of its kind. Despite the fact that much research has already been done on Carey, and although there are collections of critical essays on a good many of the major contemporary writers, no collection of critical perspectives has as yet been put together on Carey. *Fabulating Beauty: Perspectives on the Fiction of Peter Carey* is an international and interdisciplinary project that pays heed to the worldwide scholarly interest in Carey as well as to the eclecticism of scholarly approaches to his fictions. Contributors to *Fabulating Beauty* come from five countries on three continents and bring to this collection their specialist knowledge in fields as varied as contemporary cultural and literary theory, history, theology, film, and architecture. The aim was not to assemble a 'best-of' collection of thirty

[29] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988): xiii.

[30] See, for example, "The 'contrarian streak'," in the present volume, below.

[31] Carey, in Nathanael O'Reilly, "The Voice of the Teller: A Conversation with Peter Carey," *Antipodes* 16.2 (2002): 167.

[32] The same wariness towards academia also animates a number of the characters in his fictions. Herbert Badgery indulges in thumbing his nose at his academic readership repeatedly throughout the text (386, 490, 561) while the first-person narrator of "War Crimes" even engages in a sort of intellectual-bashing (310). It is in the same frame of mind that Carey's narrator in *Tristan Smith* parodies the scientific style of his academic colleagues by rigging up his narrative with footnotes and a critical apparatus attached to its end.

years of Carey criticism; rather, *Fabulating Beauty* wishes to acquaint its readers with *current* critical perspectives of a representative choice of critics who have left their mark on Carey criticism over the past three decades. All of the contributors share a long-standing interest in Carey, and most have already published substantial criticism on him. Of the four authors of monographs on Carey, three are represented here with new essays. Of the twenty essays, seventeen are hitherto unpublished; the remaining three (those by Nünning, Pierce and Edwards) were either translated (in the case of Nünning) or updated and revised (all three) for the occasion.[33]

As for the organization of this collection, the essays in the first two sections (Part I: *The Writer and His Work* and Part II: *Aspects and Overviews*) cover issues of a general nature, relevant to several or all of the author's fictions. The second part consists of readings that focus on individual works. All of Carey's fictions are covered; *The Tax Inspector* does not have a whole essay dedicated to it, but is discussed at some length by Christer Larsson and Carolyn Bliss.

In assembling this collection, care has been taken to present as broad an overview of Carey's oeuvre as possible. Part I considers the author and his work and takes cognizance of the fact that in the critical reception of Carey's fiction the figure of the real-life author has become increasingly prominent.[34] In the interview published here, I tried to cover as much ground as possible, presenting to readers Carey's positions on subjects that have long intrigued the author and his characters, but also his critics: his concept of history; the notorious denial of certain parts of the Australian self, especially those reflecting or arising out of the Australian past; the figure of Ned Kelly and his position as a national icon; British–Australian cultural relations; the writer's "contrarian streak" and connected issues such as unreliable narration (ie, taking liberties with historical facts and reader-expectations); and his relationship to literary criticism and reviewers. Karen Lamb, in her essay, continues the work begun in her monograph *Peter Carey: The Genesis of Fame*. She looks at the role of the Booker Prize in Carey's career and discusses how the media have presented him "as an enduring symbol of 'Australianness' (a 'postcolonial exotic')." But the Booker, although it has brought important 'ex-centric'

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[33] Susan K. Martin's essay appears with the kind permission of the editors and of Harvard University Press, who have published a longer version of it in *Imagining Australia*, ed. Judith Ryan & Chris Wallace–Crabbe (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2004).

[34] There are, for example, well over a hundred published interviews with the author (in major world publications and periodicals). Likewise, there is hardly a week without a news item on Carey; his New York residence alone being intriguing to journalists in Australia and in the USA.

writers to the attention of a large audience hitherto unfamiliar with writings by the likes of Keri Hulme, Thomas Keneally or Arundhati Roy, is not undisputed among scholars. There is, Lamb argues, a certain conservatism ingrained in the prize, for the revisionist and anti-imperialist fictional histories the Booker panel propagates actually "appeal to Booker-preferred notions of 'mythic' and 'epic' and 'experimental' – the [Malcolm] Bradbury formula."

Part III features essays on general aspects and themes in Carey's fictions. In my own essay contribution ("Towards an Alphabet of Australian Culture: Peter Carey's Mythistorical Novels"), I take up the author's lament that Australia essentially lacks culture, stories, myths. The novels under scrutiny (*Bliss*, *True History*, *My Life as a Fake*) are read as both comments on the state of mythogenesis in Australia and as ingredients of a nascent mythology progressing one step towards what George Steiner memorably called the "alphabet of culture": a country's stories, sagas, myths. Peter Pierce discusses one of the most conspicuous motifs in Carey's fictions (and in postcolonial literatures in general): that of captivity. While Pierce analyses the novels and the occurrence of various forms of captivity in them, Cornelia Schulze (in the next section) does so with regard to the short prose (mainly in "American Dreams," "War Crimes," "Life and Death in the South Side Pavilion" and "Peeling"). Theodore F. Sheckels' essay concentrates on the postmodernity of Carey's fictions and the problems this entails for film adaptations (namely, of *Bliss*, the short story "Crabs," and *Oscar and Lucinda*) – which, because of the visual imperatives of their medium, necessarily reflect a different aesthetic. Christer Larsson, in his careful reading of several Carey novels (among them *The Tax Inspector*, *Bliss*, *Illywhacker*, *Oscar and Lucinda*), shows that Carey's novels, upon closer inspection, are more firmly rooted in the Christian tradition than the author's self-conception as "'an atheist'" and the postcolonial condemnation of totalizing, essentialist narratives would lead one to believe.

Part III starts out with two essays on the short stories, which – although much praised by everybody who does study them – have been somewhat neglected in Carey criticism. Schulze, as mentioned above, considers situations of confinement, laying special emphasis on Carey's strategy of entrapping his readers in narrative labyrinths, a manoeuvre she sees as having a didactic purpose: that of increasing one's awareness of linguistic manipulation. Like Schulze, Nicholas Birns examines a theme that has continued to play a role in the fictions far beyond the short stories: architecture. In "'A Dazzled Eye': 'Kristu-Du' and the Architecture of Tyranny," he considers the "concrete political circumstances of both setting and production [of Carey's fictions]" and accordingly analyses the architect Gerrard Haflinger's eponymous dome,

the "Kristu-Du," as the author's real and metaphoric illustration of political repression.

Bliss (1980), Carey's first novel, is the subject of Nicholas Jose's essay. Jose, as fellow novelist, considers Carey's position in the world of Australian letters, recalling the cultural atmosphere of the early 1980s, when *Bliss* was first published. From Jose's critical appraisal Carey emerges not only as a "literary Houdini" but also as a writer whose fictions "broke new ground" at the time, signifying a "break from the shackling domination of literary London."

Illywhacker, Carey's *tour-de-force* sweep through roughly 150 years of Australian history, is – like all the fictions that followed – radically different from its predecessor in terms of subject-matter and narrative form and style. With its emphasis on building and architectural metaphors as well as its narratorial self-consciousness, the novel offers itself for a reading in poststructurally influenced terms, as Brian Edwards does in his contribution to the volume. In his essay, he considers the novel as "an exercise in bricolage," a demonstration of postmodernist playfulness, where history "receives a deconstructive shot" and established notions about authorship are delicensed.

Carey revisits quite a few of the literary-theoretical concerns of *Illywhacker* in *Oscar and Lucinda*, but packages them in an entirely different narrative form. Lyn McCredden and Ansgar Nünning both address concerns in *Oscar and Lucinda* that had already animated *Illywhacker*'s potential for cultural criticism: namely, the question of how European discourses fare when transplanted to the Antipodes. While Nünning explores the postmodern and postcolonial concept of history underlying the novel and shows how Carey, through formal, thematic and theoretical manoeuvres, renews the genre of the historical novel as such and re-examines received notions of Australian history, McCredden analyses how Carey handles 'sacredness' in the context of a novel that is largely informed by the postcolonial view of Christendom as an essentially alien presence in the Australian context.

The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith – considered by some critics as Carey's best novel to date – is of central importance in this collection of essays with its emphasis on issues turning on the repercussions of colonialism within the settler-colonial context of Australia. As Bill Ashcroft explains in his contribution, "Simulation, Resistance and Transformation," *Tristan Smith* is Carey's "liveliest and most unrelenting reflection on the postcolonial dilemma of Australian society. No other contemporary novel addresses so many postcolonial issues in Australian culture." Ashcroft focuses on the postcolonial struggle over representation as it is played out in the novel and presents a reading in Baudrillardian terms, looking at the novel's "consuming cultural thesis [...]

that all culture, identity, and the power relationships they invoke are a product of simulation."

The Big Bazoohley (1995), Carey's excursion into children's literature, is discussed by Pam MacIntyre, who explores new terrain in Carey criticism; except for Anthony Hassall's essay on the book and the odd paragraph in monographs (eg, in Woodcock and Larsson) and other critical articles, this genre has been left to reviewers. McIntyre shows how Carey, in what upon closer inspection turns out to be a "remarkably complex" children's book, traces many of the determinants that make up the life of his adult figures in the world of children. The protagonist Sam's 'normality', for example, "involves acceding to what capitalist, imperialist society decrees." The world of children emerges as no less haunted by such curses as "rapacious capitalism," "deceptive appearances," and acts of colonization (in a transferred sense, the Perfecto Kiddo competition can be read as the "symbol of colonized childhood") than that of Carey's adult characters.

The 1997 novel *Jack Maggs* is one of Carey's most popular fictions. The general public delights in it as a Victorian-style page-turner, while the critical establishment enjoys the novel's intertextual dialogue with Dickens's *Great Expectations* (and the writer's biography) and its explorations of cultural trauma. Barbara Schmidt–Haberkamp and Annegret Maack's essays are companion pieces; both explore the relation between Carey's "twentieth-century, postcolonial Dickens novel" (Maack) and the nineteenth-century pre-text. Maack, in her essay, demonstrates how the postcolonial writer Carey appropriates the imperial narrative and transforms it by an act of postcolonial rewriting into "an Aussie story." Schmidt–Haberkamp takes a different tack through Carey's intertextual strategies. In her reading of the novel, she shows how in Carey's novel the sequence of original text and postcolonial reaction to it, which is central to the writing-back paradigm, are inverted. The third essay in this section, "Unsettling Illusions: Carey and Capital in *Jack Maggs*" by Bruce Woodcock, is also dedicated to intertextual relations, this time between *Jack Maggs* and Karl Marx's *Capital*. Woodcock demonstrates how Carey (as he so often does) "goes to the heart of the contradictions of industrial capitalism" and in so doing explores the "relationship with colonialism and the paradoxical retaliation of the colonies [...] in terms that are analogous to the vivid imagery of Karl Marx's classic."

True History of the Kelly Gang, the novel that won Carey his second Booker, is the focus of essays by Carolyn Bliss and Susan K. Martin. As a novel that claims to offer the 'true history' of Australia's most legendary outlaw, *True History* has intrigued critics and reviewers alike, and has brought Ned Kelly back onto the agenda of general cultural and identity-related discourse in Australia. Carolyn Bliss approaches the novel on a well-trodden

path of Carey criticism, that of storytelling and narrative, but sets off to explore new ground by analysing how cultural master-plots (narrative patterns which inform a culture's identity and understanding of itself) function in the novel. Susan K. Martin reads the novel as an exemplar of a particular subset of Australian historical fiction, novels that stage a search for white male heterosexual heroes. Kelly is a particularly interesting example, because his whiteness and maleness, along with his heterosexuality and his heroism, have been more or less vehemently contested (and continue to be so in the novel).

In Carey's oeuvre, the fictional memoir *30 Days in Sydney: A Wildly Distorted Account* (2001) stands out as the book in which the author Peter Carey is more directly graspable than anywhere else in his fictions. The narrator "Peter Carey" in *30 Days* offers his views on issues such as the problematic of the Stolen Generation, *terra nullius* and other aspects of Australian history and identity directly attributable to the real-life author behind the book (that is, to judge from Carey's public utterances). But the reader once again must heed Herbert Badgery's *caveat lector* from *Illywhacker*, for – as Anthony J. Hassall shows in his essay – Carey in *30 Days* once again engages in the "intricacies" of the lie; he thus explores "aspects of Australia's story [...] via distortions which defamiliarize his subjects, thereby enabling his readers to see them free of those other distortions naturalized by habit and convention."

My Life as a Fake, despite the fact that it presents a departure in terms of setting and theme, still feels familiar, not least because, as Robert Macfarlane explains, there is a good deal of "epistemological blurriness" in the novel regarding notions of authorship and originality. In this respect, Macfarlane argues, "*My Life as a Fake* represents the climax of a conceit with which Carey has long been fascinated: that lies, hoaxes, and fakes are, at their most successful, deeply creative forms of expression." *My Life as a Fake*, the critic points out, thus not only sums up some of Carey's writerly preoccupations. Its literary-philosophical thesis – that "under careful scrutiny the apparent opposition between 'making' and 'faking' collapses into near-identity, that fakery of some sort is a normative and necessary condition of literary creation, and that repetition is the first making and plagiarism the unoriginal sin" – is also at the heart of a "mini-tradition of recent anglophone fiction."

The bibliography, which features over 1,300 items, is the most comprehensive to date. It considers publications from Australia and New Zealand, the USA, Canada, India, South Africa, several European countries (Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden) and South America. In compiling it, I have considered academic and non-academic sources: monographs, dissertations, articles in scholarly periodicals and journals, and reviews in major world newspapers. The amount of critical response here assembled attests to the importance of

Carey both as a writer for the general audience (virtually all of the major English-language newspapers review his novels) and for a more highbrow academic readership. Firmly settled in the canon of contemporary fiction, and taught at high schools and in university English departments worldwide, Carey today is the most widely commented-on living Australian author.[35]

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[35] That is, to judge from the number of items listed in databases such as the MLA, AustLit, Lexis-Nexis or a search engine like Google. AustLit, for example, lists almost 300 items of criticism on Carey. Patrick White, with more than 800 critical items in AustLit, is still unrivalled, though. Thanks to Robert Zeller for his help with the research here.

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