

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of Peter Carey's portrayal of Australian history in his novels *Illywhacker* (1985), *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), and *My Life as a Fake* (2003), while also taking into consideration the travel memoir *30 Days in Sydney* (2001). Carey approaches Australia's past critically and offers a playful rewriting of the "official accounts", striving to give voice to the marginalised, thus offering alternative versions not only of Australian history, the resulting national identity. This thesis first locates Carey within the historical novel tradition, and considers his rewritings from the perspective of postcolonialism, postmodernism and transnationalism. From the point of view of postcolonialism, Carey's novels serve as a tool of asserting the former colony's independence from the power of the metropolitan Centre over discourse. Postmodernism and its relativisation of established concepts and the blurring of boundaries provide Carey with narrative strategies such as unreliable narrators, historiographic metafiction, and multiple perspectives, which are examined in terms of how Carey employs them to call attention to the unreliability of historical sources, and by extension meaning and reality itself, to inspire a critical approach to history and nationality. His novels thus provide the reader with multiple versions of history, without singling one out as the definitive one. This thesis further explores how this inclusive approach is mirrored in Carey's approach to Australian identity, in which he questions the nationalist rhetoric stemming from the Australian Legend. His novels reflect the transnational reality of Australian culture, which has from the beginning been formed by multiple cultural interactions, drawing on diverse cultural capital, as demonstrated by the capital Carey draws on as well as through his characters with foreign heritage. Through close readings of the selected novels within the aforementioned critical discourses this thesis comes to a greater understanding of Carey's strategies of subverting the established version of Australian history and Australian identity. By focusing on the historical, cultural, and literary context of his works, on his narrative strategies, the theme of lying, and the construction of national identity in his novels, this thesis presents Carey's view of Australia, which is quite critical, precisely because of Australia's inability to deal with its own past. Carey's novels are an attempt to aid in that process and help Australia come off age by fully accepting its past as well as its present.