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“The Representation of Hybridity in *Carpentaria*”

Key words

hybridity, *Carpentaria*, ambivalence, identity

Abstract

Australian Aboriginal literature, once relegated to the margins of Australian literary studies, now receives both national and international attention. Not only has the number of published texts by contemporary Australian Aboriginals risen sharply, but more importantly the work of Aboriginal artists and writers have been considered as an indispensable part of Australian literature tradition.

Carpentaria, which was published in 2006 by Alexis Wright, is an outstanding representative of the Australian aboriginal work and has drawn widespread attention and heated discussion. Contrary to some white critics' effort of making Wright indebted to western literary masters, the current paper re-explores the novel within the framework of “hybridity”. In this book, Wright combines the legends, myths, beliefs, and totems of the aboriginal culture with the internal contradiction within the aboriginal groups as well as the external contradiction between the indigenous and the white. Being “ectopic, anxious and marginalized” as an aboriginal writer, Wright crosses the boundary of the white and aboriginal culture and challenges the “stable identity” of the colonizer and the colonized as conceived by Edward Said and Frantz Fanon.

Rather than focusing on the facile binary oppositions and emphasizing the opposition between the white and the aboriginals, *Carpentaria* depicted the contact and influence between the both sides, be it hatred or friendship, and these border situations and thresholds are exactly the sites where identities are performed and contested. Many characters in Wright's book are neither pure white nor aboriginal, but live in an “interstitial space” and set up an ambivalent relationship with both sides. In Wright's literary imagination, the marginalized status of her fellow aboriginal is deconstructed and their legitimate existence is empowered, however, no group could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. Both the white and the aboriginal are highly interdependent and deeply embedded with each other, and the Australian national identity actually arises from the “hybrid” interaction of contending races and cultures. The novel can be actually seen as a challenge to the linear narrative of the nation with its claims for the holism of culture and community, as well as the aboriginal writers' endeavor of carving out a hybridized identity of the multi-cultural society of Australia.

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