

SUMMARY

Australian Grotesque Today: Reading Contemporary Australian Novelss

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Artistic expression in Australia has been marked by an obsession with the “grotesque,” an aesthetic category originating from the revival of an ancient Roman mural style in Renaissance Italy, which has become an important category designating distortion, fragmentation, and a powerful emotionalism that leads viewers to a pre-moral and primordial state of being. Contemporary Australian novelists also use grotesque imagery to explore their historical concerns and the present global situation. This paper first summarizes the history of the “grotesque” in European and early Australian art forms, following which it takes up several contemporary Australian novels (Christos Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe* (2005), Janette Turner Hospital, *Orpheus Lost* (2007), Andrew McGahan, *Wonders of a Godless World* (2009), Wayne Macauley, *The Cook* (2011), Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (2005), Kim Scott, *Benang: from the heart* (1999), and Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (2006)) to demonstrate the ways in which contemporary Australian novelists from a variety of backgrounds are attracted to the “grotesque” and use it to enable them to explore past and present social issues.