



Gargantuan Texts

Bakhtinian Theory in Dialogue With Six of Christina Stead's Novels

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Abstract

Gargantuan Texts: Bakhtinian Theory in Dialogue With Six of Christina Stead's Novels

This thesis sets out to explicate aspects of the narrative technique, characterisation and content in six of Christina Stead's novels through the use of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories, especially his concepts of carnival, polyphony, language, and the heterogeneous novel. The novels in question are: *A Little Tea, A Little Chat; Letty Fox: Her Luck; The Little Hotel; House of All Nations; I'm Dying Laughing;* and *For Love Alone*. The thesis argues primarily that Stead's novels can be interpreted as generic descendants of carnivalesque literature as it is perceived by Bakhtin in his study of François Rabelais, *Rabelais and His World*, and in his analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky's work in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Furthermore, there is an historical position in which it is claimed that Stead's dialogic approach is eminently suited to the tumultuous epoch in which the majority of her work is situated: the Depression to the 1950s. On a broader and more abstract level, it is argued that Stead's novels evince a Bakhtinian ideal of multiplicitous languages and forms. It is concluded that Stead's texts are valuable in their subversion of authoritarian and "monologic" discourses.