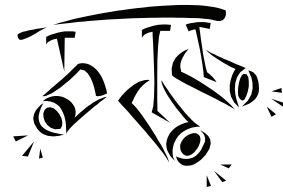


# Special Feature



## Spotlight on Brian Caswell

Brian Caswell's most recent novel *Double Exposure*, reviewed below, confirms his status as one of Australia's most innovative and challenging writers for young people. This novel, chosen as one of *Magpies Picks of 2005* (Vol. 20 No. 5 November 2005 p. 20), is certain to surprise and captivate both teenage and adult readers and will stimulate classroom discussion about Caswell's narrative technique.

Born in Wales in 1954, Brian spent his early childhood in Wales and in England before emigrating, with his family to Australia when he was twelve. Growing up loving words and reading, through the encouragement of his parents, Brian began writing stories and poems around the age of five, and at ten pursued his interest in songwriting and singing. In the seventies, Brian left a successful career in the music industry to take up teaching, which he enjoyed for over a decade. Realising that many students in his English classes failed to engage with the set texts, he decided to try writing a novel himself. Although Brian's first novel was flawed and never published, an editor at University of Queensland Press recognised his talent and his second attempt, *Merrill of the Stones* (1989) won critical acclaim as an Honour Book in the CBCA Book of the Year Awards, and remains in print. Since then, Brian's books for both older and younger readers have achieved literary praise and popularity.

In 'Making the Connection – Writing for the Post-Spielberg Generation', in *The Written World: Youth and Literature* edited by

Agnes Nieuwenhuizen, Brian discusses writing for the young – especially adolescents, and connecting with his target audience. He maintains that after *Merrill of the Stones*, a 'traditional, third-person, limited perspective narration' (page 277) failed to engage a significant number of teenagers, he made a conscious attempt to experiment with narrative form and continues to do so. Brian began to use cinematic techniques with shifting perspectives, multiple settings and intricate plots to engage readers brought up in a digital, visual world. His young adult novels from *A Cage of Butterflies* (1992) to *Double Exposure* are a testament to his success as a ground-breaking author who does not underestimate the intelligence of his audience.

### REVIEW OF CASWELL'S LATEST NOVEL



**CASWELL, Brian. *Double Exposure*.**  
St Lucia, Qld : University of Queensland Press, 2005. 251 p.

ISBN 0 7022 3533 4

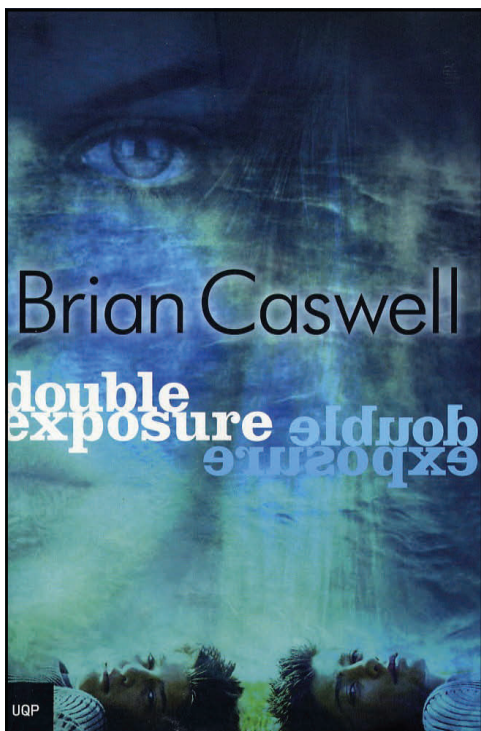
pbk \$18.95

SCIS No: 1225711

Age 14+ It is not often that you reach the closing pages of a novel, as totally unprepared as the characters are, for revelations that turn around the whole world that the narrative creates. This is a book that demands not only a reflection but also a second reading, in order to check the clues and signposts that point to such a stunning outcome.

(continued on page 8)

Despite a slow beginning, **Double Exposure** develops quickly into a thriller laced with mystery, involving twin brothers Cain and Chris. Their deepening relationships with a sole parent TJ and a prostitute Abby complicate their intersecting stories. Tension builds towards an inevitable confrontation with TJ's ex-partner who is threatening to kill her and abduct their son. Overshadowing this menace is a street murder that Abby believes she caused and is willing to be arrested for.



TJ and Abby are convincing characters who in telling their past and present lives, clearly identify the source of their abuse. On the other hand, Cain and Chris are elusive personalities and the reasons for their estrangement from their parents appear vague. The twins appear to live separate lives with Cain working at a cinema, while the talented Chris prepares for an exhibition of his photography and artwork. In retrospect the mystery of their family background can be seen as a deliberate construct.

The first person narratives alternate between the twins' and the girls' accounts. Adding to the texture of this complex

narrative are the third person sections, which read as detached observations. As well, an intimate second person voice takes the reader back to 1994 when Cain and Chris were only eight years old.

Such constant changes of voice, gaps in the stories and blurring of identity demand focussed reading. The explanations of Cain's condition of paramnesia don't detract from the sense of mystery and perceptive readers will admire Caswell's ability to manipulate the reader. **Double Exposure** is an intriguing and challenging read for teenagers and young adults.

*Pam Buselich, Iona Presentation College*

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(continued on page 10)

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*Rita Blackburn, CMIS, Department of Education and Training (WA)*

