



Booker Prize. I have enjoyed other historical novels by this gifted Australian author now living in New York City and was very happy to learn that his 12th novel features both a London horologist of today and another from the nineteenth-century Black Forest of Germany.

Incidentally, in agreeing to accept this review, our editor relayed to me that this is the first time in her memory that the *Watch & Clock Bulletin* has reviewed a work of fiction. Especially now that the 3D-film *Hugo*, based on a modern graphic novel, has spurred public interest in clockmaking, I hope we will see more such reviews as a way to make practitioners of our vocation or hobby come to life in story form.

This novel really is two stories in one, and its linking character is a highly sophisticated swan automaton fabricated in the 1800s and restored by a 2010 London museum conservator, Catherine Gehrig. Among the decaying automaton parts, she found a handwritten notebook by an Englishman who traveled to the German clockmaking region to have made a copy of Jacques de Vaucanson's famous 1739 duck automaton, which both ate and defecated.

We read of the ordeals of both the long-dead Englishman and the twenty-first-century horologist, who has just suffered the sudden death of her long-term lover. Both are eventually rewarded because the raving but brilliant Furtwangen clockmaker completed not a "digesting duck" but an astounding mechanical swan that plucked and swallowed artificial fish from its "pond." Catherine restores the life-size bird to its former glory, much to the joy of the administrators of the clock museum who employ her.

In a May 11, 2012, interview by the *Wall Street Journal*, Peter Carey reveals that the idea for the new book germinated with his obsessive interest in the internal-combustion engine. The June 2012 issue of *Antiquarian Horology* reported that Carey also was inspired by the real-world "Silver Swan of Bowes" project overseen by Matthew Read of England's West Dean College, one of the world's only remaining schools of horology. The author drew heavily on Read's technical expertise and descriptions of museum conservation practices.

Of course, the book is much more than a treatise on complicated automaton restoration, and its parallel tales are much more about the human characters than about a wind-up swan. It is modern literary fiction, not a straightforward mass-market narrative, and Carey's style can border on the surreal or mystical. So if one's usual bedtime reading is by Chris Bailey or Brian Loomes, then this one may not be appropriate. But if novels also are on the night stand, then this should join the stack.

—Bob Frishman (MA)